

Fresno Philharmonic's Theodore Kuchar to step down in 2016

By Donald
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Music Director Theodore Kuchar conducts the Fresno Philharmonic during a concert at the William Saroyan Theater on January 25, 2014. CRAIG KOHLRUSS — Fresno Bee Staff Photo | [Buy Photo](#)

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Theodore Kuchar, whose exuberance on the podium and strong personal connections in the world of international classical music has enlivened the Fresno Philharmonic for more than a decade, will step down at the end of the 2015-16 season, the orchestra announced Thursday.

By the end of his tenure as the orchestra's seventh music director since its founding in 1954, he will have completed 15 years at the helm of the orchestra.

The early announcement gives the orchestra a chance to make a smooth transition for the 2016-17 season. Because of the amount of time it takes to search for a music director, a nearly two-year notice isn't uncommon.

Kuchar keeps a busy schedule when the orchestra isn't playing. He is music director of the Reno Chamber Orchestra artistic director of the Nevada Chamber Music Festival, artistic director of the Orquesta Sinfonica de Venezuela and principal conductor of the Slovak Sinfonietta. He's recorded more than 100 compact discs for the Naxos, Brilliant Classics, Ondine and Marco Polo labels.



But Fresno has been home, Kuchar said, including the fruit trees he planted five years ago that are just beginning to give fruit at his Sunnyside house.

And he has high regard for the Fresno Philharmonic, which he said has delivered performances that are not typical of a regional American orchestra but “those of a standard to be expected in a major musical capital.”

A major reason for his coming departure, Kuchar said Thursday in an interview, is that he feels his role as music director has been diminished recently.

“I’m not interested in being just a conductor, because there are many people who can do that,” he said. “I have always seen my role and my greatest abilities as being an ambassadorial proponent for the organization’s health and existence. If that isn’t prioritized or necessary, there may be somebody better to fill my position.”

In every music directorship, on four continents, he has held until now, conducting has represented just part of the overall operation of those orchestras, he said. Other important duties of a music director include engaging guest artists, planning concerts, interacting with donors and audience members, and representing the orchestra as a public figure.

“The qualities, which I’m available to lend to the orchestra, as I did in the first 10 years, and with all my other orchestras, I feel are no longer prioritized in the present scheme of operations,” he said. “Because of that, I believe the organization is ultimately suffering.”

Stephen Wilson, executive director of the Fresno Philharmonic, said Thursday in response: “I’m surprised Ted would say that’s the reason for not renewing his contract. We all at the philharmonic have the highest professional regard for Ted.”

In terms of his musical legacy, Kuchar points to major performances of works by Beethoven, Bruckner, Dvorak, Mahler, Martinu, Nielsen, Revueltas, Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky as among the orchestra’s strongest musical moments. He’s proud to have brought big names in classical music — including Itzhak Perlman, Sarah Chang, Joshua Bell, Lynn Harrell and many others — to Fresno.

And, he said, there’s still great music to come with him at the podium: “We still have two more years.”

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