

## **CSUN Names the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts**

### ***Valley Performing Arts Center Renamed in Honor of Younes and Soraya Sarah Nazarian's Transformative \$17 Million Gift***

(NORTHRIDGE, Calif., July 18, 2017) — Dr. Dianne F. Harrison, president of California State University, Northridge, today announced the renaming of CSUN's Valley Performing Arts Center to the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts.

The California State University Board of Trustees approved the naming in recognition of a \$17 million gift from the Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation, the philanthropic foundation of Younes and Soraya Sarah Nazarian and their family. The gift will support the programming and operations of the award-winning performing arts center, which has become one of the cultural jewels of the region in the six years since it opened. The gift is one of the largest in the history of the California State University and the system's largest single gift to support the arts.

"Through this historic and transformational gift, Younes and Soraya Nazarian are investing in the elevating power of the arts and in the artists who enlighten and inspire us all," Harrison said. "The Nazarians' generosity is unlike any CSUN has ever experienced. The Nazarian family has made a profound and lasting impact on CSUN and the entire region. Younes and Soraya have ensured that we can continue to deliver the finest music, dance and theater events, engaging communities throughout Los Angeles and Southern California."

"Beyond the enormous benefit of their financial support, the Nazarians are so deeply intertwined with the fabric of Los Angeles, their support is a powerful statement about the role CSUN plays in our great city," she continued. "A vibrant performing arts center on CSUN's campus naturally connects to and extends the university's mission. It mirrors our commitment to diversity and international outreach, the vigorous exchange of ideas and expression and the overarching pursuit of excellence."

The center will officially be named the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts, with "The Soraya" its preferred shortened name. The new name will be used informally throughout the 2017-18 season and formally unveiled at the start of the 2018-19 season.

Soraya Sarah Nazarian noted that the arts have enriched her life and highlighted her desire to share that gift with others.

"CSUN's commitment to making the arts accessible, its inclusive approach to artistic programming, the university's deep diversity and its vital place in the community all contributed to our family's decision to make this investment," Soraya Sarah Nazarian said.

Businessman, investor and philanthropist Younes Nazarian and his wife Soraya, an internationally recognized sculptor, said they made the gift — one of the largest in Los Angeles arts history — because the mission of the center aligned seamlessly with the family's own values.

“At CSUN, we found the perfect opportunity to impact the entire region by supporting two of our family's most treasured values — education and the arts,” Younes Nazarian said. “My wife's name, Soraya, means jewel, and this center is a jewel as well. It is very fitting that her name will grace this building that is itself beautiful and contains such artistic beauty on its stage.”

The Nazarian family's support for CSUN started in 2014 when their son, David, a prominent businessman, philanthropist and CSUN alumnus, made a transformative gift that was recognized by the naming of CSUN's business college as the David Nazarian College of Business and Economics in 2014. In 2016, Younes and Soraya donated 50 laptops to deserving business students and were also title sponsors for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the David Nazarian College of Business and Economics, an event that capped a two-year, \$25 million fundraising drive for the college. Most recently, Soraya Sarah Nazarian, a renowned sculptor, created and donated a majestic and moving original sculpture, named “Unbound,” that will soon be installed at CSUN's Nazarian College.

CSUN Vice President for University Advancement and President of the CSUN Foundation Dr. Robert Gunsalus noted that “the Nazarian family's character runs deep, such that Younes and Soraya, their children, and now their grandchildren, do not rest on their tremendous personal and professional success. They not only give with extraordinary generosity. They also are vigorous champions for the causes they support, which furthers what was already a bright future for The Soraya.”

“The Nazarians are part of a growing number of savvy LA philanthropists who see the broad elevating force of the university and know that, through CSUN, their investments will have an amplified impact on the region,” Gunsalus said.

The Nazarians moved to the United States in 1979 with their four children, fleeing the religiously targeted violence and demonstrations that led up to the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Drawing on the entrepreneurial acumen he had in Iran — where he helped establish one of the largest import/export companies of construction machinery and equipment in the region — Younes Nazarian, soon after his arrival in the United States, became co-owner of Stadco, a tool and dye manufacturer of specialty parts in the aerospace industry. He was an early investor and served on the board of directors of San Diego-based Qualcomm, Inc., a leader in wireless telecommunications research and development.

While her husband built businesses, Soraya Sarah Nazarian pursued her passion for art, establishing her own studio in Los Angeles. She is a master in the medium of direct carving in stone. Her work carries themes of motherhood, family, spirituality and Iranian culture. It is distinguished by two major periods: a time of discovery and experimentation in the 1980s and 1990s, and a period of artistic self-confidence marked by the creation of large-scale pieces beginning in 2000.

In 2000, the couple founded the Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation, whose charitable giving focuses on supporting educational causes through a multipronged approach in academia, public policy and the arts. The Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation is led by Younes and Soraya's daughter, Dr. Sharon Nazarian, who,

as a respected academic and cultural leader, was well-equipped to shape the vision for this landscape-shaping investment.

“CSUN is one of the most diverse universities in the country, in one of the most diverse cities in the world. We are proud to support its commitment to the arts — and to work with The Soraya’s passionate, creative and innovative Executive Director Thor Steingraber to improve education and cultural life for generations of Angelenos,” Dr. Sharon Nazarian said.

In six years since opening its doors, The Soraya has grown to become one of LA’s most respected venues, and musicians often make it one of their regular stops on their North American tours. In the past three years, Steingraber has grown and diversified The Soraya’s programming to include Latin and Mexican regional music, jazz, and family programs in its exciting programming mix. In keeping with 20 years as a Los Angeles arts leader, Steingraber has also welcomed many Los Angeles artists and musical ensembles to create and present original work that might otherwise not find a home.

As the artists on stage have diversified, so have the audiences, growing to reflect one of the nation’s most diverse campuses, as well as the diversity of Los Angeles itself. The Soraya extends its impact to the K-12 schools of the San Fernando Valley, serving up to 10,000 students annually with its arts education programs.

“The Nazarians’ gift goes a long way to securing a future of great music and performances worthy of such an exceptional venue, and more so, their visionary leadership reflects the values of the arts in the 21st century, especially accessibility and inclusion,” Steingraber said.

More information about the Younes and Soraya Center for the Performing Arts can be found at [www.valleyperformingartscenter.org](http://www.valleyperformingartscenter.org). More information about CSUN can be found at [www.csun.edu](http://www.csun.edu).

## **About CSUN**

One of the largest universities in the country, California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is an urban, comprehensive university that delivers award-winning undergraduate and graduate programs to nearly 40,000 students annually and counts more than 340,000 alumni who elevate Southern California and beyond. Since its founding in 1958, CSUN has made a significant and long-term economic impact on California, generating nearly \$1.9 billion in economic impact and more than 11,700 jobs each year.

Serving more students on Pell Grants than any other institution in California, CSUN is also a social elevator and one of the most diverse universities in the country. CSUN ranks 13th in awarding bachelor’s degrees to underrepresented minority students and seventh in bachelor’s degrees to Latino students. It serves the 13th largest Jewish student population and enrolls the largest number of deaf and hard-of-hearing students of any U.S. state university.

The journal Nature recently named CSUN a “Rising Star” for scientific research, and the National Science Foundation ranks CSUN in the top five nationally among similar institutions for graduates who go on to earn doctorates in the sciences. The Hollywood Reporter ranked CSUN’s film and music programs in the top 25 in the country. Variety magazine agreed, ranking CSUN’s film program in its top 40 in the world.

## **About the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts**

Launching its seventh season in September, the mission of the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts, or The Soraya, is to present a wide variety of performances that not only includes new and original work from the Los Angeles region but also work from around the world that appeal to all of LA's rich and diverse communities.

The Soraya's 2017-18 season signals a new era for the premier event venue. Under the leadership of Executive Director Thor Steingraber, The Soraya expands its programming and outstanding multidisciplinary performances. Located on the campus of California State University, Northridge, The Soraya's season offers a vibrant performance program of nearly 50 classical and popular music, dance, theater, family and international events that will serve to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley, and further establish itself as one of the top arts companies in Southern California. The award-winning, 1,700-seat theatre was designed by HGA Architects and Engineers and was recently cited by the Los Angeles Times as "a growing hub for live music, dance, drama and other cultural events."

## **About the Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation**

In 2000, Younes and Soraya Nazarian founded the Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation in Los Angeles, The Foundation is driven by the core belief that the promotion and support of education is the most important catalyst for societal change. The Foundation is interested in planting seeds, building bridges, and enabling pioneering thinkers to imbue their knowledge into today's global community.

The Foundation has made investments at all educational levels — elementary, high school and university. The goals of the Foundation remain focused on enriching institutions of excellence through investments in capital campaigns and existing programs, as well as establishing and nurturing new programs with the goal of providing students with educational tools that enhance and enrich their learning experience.

The Foundation takes great pride in giving back to less privileged communities, both in Los Angeles and around the world. Enriching the lives of all through the arts and culture is an area of great importance to the family. Soraya Nazarian is an acclaimed sculptor in her own right: her direct carvings in stone have been praised for their exploration of the themes of motherhood, family and spirituality.

The cause is equally supported by her husband, acclaimed businessman, investor and philanthropist Younes Nazarian. For his many charitable works, in 2011 Younes Nazarian was awarded Ellis Island Medal of Honor for outstanding citizenship, individual achievement and encouragement of cultural unity.

Whether through investing in music and dance academies in Israel or inner-city art programs in Los Angeles, the Nazarians are committed to using the arts as a tool for learning, teaching tolerance and confidence-building for children. The Foundation intends to continue its extensive philanthropic endeavors in this arena in the years ahead.

Younes and Soraya reside in Los Angeles and have four children, Sharon, David, Shulamit and Sam, and nine grandchildren. In 2014, CSUN renamed its college of business the David Nazarian College of Business and Economics in honor of alumnus David Nazarian's \$10 million gift to the university and recognition of his leadership of a \$25 million fundraising drive.

Dr. Sharon S. Nazarian is the President of the Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation.

### **About The Soraya Executive Director Thor Steingraber**

Since his appointment in 2014, Steingraber has brought acclaim to the Valley Performing Arts Center, now to be known as The Soraya. The 1700-seat venue, located in the heart of the San Fernando Valley, has come to be known as home to many Los Angeles artists and arts organizations, and Steingraber's lifetime experience as a producer has brought to VPAC some of the most innovative and diverse programming in the region.

Previously, Steingraber was vice president of two of the nation's largest performing arts centers — The Kimmel Center in Philadelphia and The Music Center in downtown Los Angeles. In his time at The Music Center, Steingraber was responsible for opening Grand Park and establishing the vision that has made that park vital to LA, as the home to many celebrations and holidays.

Steingraber's artistic career spans more than 20 years, directing at major venues from Lincoln Center to theaters in Europe and Asia. But Los Angeles has always been his artistic home. He directed his first major opera production at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in 1996.

Steingraber is a graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School and was its first Fellow for Arts and Culture.

---

---

**Press Materials:** <http://www.valleyperformingartscenter.org/press/press-materials/>

**Press Contacts:** Tim Choy, Niki Blumberg, Davidson & Choy Publicity  
323-954-7510 | [t.choy@dcpublicity.com](mailto:t.choy@dcpublicity.com); [n.blumberg@dcpublicity.com](mailto:n.blumberg@dcpublicity.com)

Gary W. Murphy, Public Relations Consultant  
310-914-0178 | [gmurphypr@gmail.com](mailto:gmurphypr@gmail.com)

CSUN -- Carmen Ramos Chandler  
818-677-2130 | [carmen.chandler@csun.edu](mailto:carmen.chandler@csun.edu)