



## **Rafael Payare**

### ***Conductor***

With his innate musicianship, charismatic energy, gift for communication, and irresistibly joyous spirit, conductor Rafael Payare has “considerable grace and considerable swagger, making the two go unusually yet inexorably together” (*Los Angeles Times*). The 2026–27 season marks his fifth as Music and Artistic Director of Canada’s Orchestre symphonique de Montréal (Montreal Symphony Orchestra/OSM) and his eighth as Music and Artistic Director of California’s San Diego Symphony (SDSO). Other current positions are Principal Conductor of Virginia’s Castleton Festival and Conductor Laureate of Northern Ireland’s Ulster Orchestra.

In the 2026–27 season, Payare and the SDSO perform Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony and Mahler’s Sixth, as well as releasing a recording – their first on the Delos / Outhere label – of Shostakovich’s Seventh Symphony, “Leningrad.” Other SDSO highlights include a European tour in the spring; and season finale concerts pairing Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with the SDSO and OSM co-commissioned Symphony No. 6, “Monarch,” by Jimmy López, at the conclusion of his two-year residency with both orchestras. The OSM makes a special appearance in San Diego’s Jacobs Music Center as part of a fall California tour and releases an album of Ravel and Stravinsky on Pentatone, before leaving for another international tour in winter. This adds to OSM’s rapidly growing and critically acclaimed discography that also includes a 2025 all-Berlioz album, a Strauss/Mahler and an all-Schoenberg album in 2024, and Mahler’s Fifth Symphony in 2023, named an Editor’s Choice by both *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*.

As a guest conductor in 2026–27, Payare leads the San Francisco Symphony, New York Philharmonic, and Orchestre de Paris, as well as making a guest-conducting appearance at Georgia’s Tsinandali Festival.

Since winning first prize at Denmark’s Malko Competition for Young Conductors in 2012, Payare has made debuts and forged longstanding relationships with many of the world’s preeminent orchestras. His U.S. collaborations include engagements with the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Houston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Minnesota Orchestra, while his notable European appearances include dates with the Bavarian Radio Symphony, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Staatskapelle Berlin, Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, and Vienna Philharmonic. Also a dedicated opera conductor, Payare has led productions at London’s Royal Opera House, Covent Garden; the Glyndebourne Festival; Staatsoper Berlin; the Royal Swedish Opera; the Malmö Opera; the Royal Danish Opera; and the Castleton Festival.

Born in Barcelona, Venezuela, in 1980, Payare first discovered classical music at the age of 14, when he began playing horn in the El Sistema program. From 2001 to 2012 he served as Principal Horn of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra. After receiving conducting training from El Sistema founder José Antonio Abreu and from subsequent mentors Lorin Maazel and Krzysztof Penderecki, Payare went on to lead all of Venezuela’s major orchestras. Today he is himself an inspiration to younger musicians, continuing his long-standing involvement with El Sistema and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra and enjoying a close relationship with London’s Royal College of Music. He has also led youth projects with the

Chicago Civic Orchestra, Orchestra of the Americas, and Filarmónica Joven de Colombia, and founded both the El Sistema OSM program in Montreal and the San Diego Symphony Conducting Fellowship. Payare resides in San Diego and Montreal with his wife, acclaimed cellist Alisa Weilerstein, and their two young children.

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