

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY YOUTH ORCHESTRA

CRITICAL ACCLAIM

“In the afternoon, Donato Cabrera and the teenage musicians of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra concluded their season with a formidable account of Mahler’s Fifth Symphony, bringing out all the tempestuous energy and expressive tenderness of the score...Sunday’s Mahler was a perfect example of how much these players are capable of. A savvy listener, after all, approaches a performance of a work this large and difficult with a certain amount of trepidation when the musicians involved are too young to vote. Yet this was an account that conjured up nothing but awe and admiration. The great funeral march of the first movement, blazingly launched by Daniel Santos’ opening trumpet solo, moved with a measured tread and a sense of intractability. The brass played with bravado and brilliance throughout (principal horn James Chen was a particular standout), and the strings produced a luxuriant sheen that could turn fierce on a moment’s notice. The famous Adagietto, which Cabrera paced without either haste or lassitude, cast a gorgeous spell.”

- *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2015

“Although the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra is composed of young musicians, nothing about their performance indicated that they were children — these seemed like full-grown artists, seasoned to perfection.”

-*Peninsula Review*, 2014

“[the SFSYO] provides a dazzling ray of hope that the venerable tradition of classical music will continue to delight future generations.”

-*San Francisco Classical Voice*, 2014

“It’s one thing to hear the members of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra tear through works of the standard orchestral repertoire with precision and dramatic flair - hugely impressive, naturally, but also par for the course. To hear them tackle new music just as fearlessly, as they did during Sunday afternoon’s season-ending concert in Davies Symphony Hall, is yet another level of artistry.”

-*San Francisco Chronicle*, 2013

“Maestro Donato Cabrera and his musicians, meanwhile, handled the score with inspiration and conviction. Their recently issued CD, which features a brilliant version of Mahler’s First Symphony, recorded live (and in a single take) at the Berlin Philharmonie, proves that they know their way around Mahler’s musical language.”

-*San Francisco Classical Voice*, 2013

“SFSYO has a long-standing reputation for delivering high-quality performances of some of the most ambitious works in the standard repertoire.”

-*Examiner.com*, 2013

"The appearance by the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra was a highlight of the past season. Under its Music Director, Donato Cabrera, it achieved a real triumph."

-*Berliner Morgenpost*, 2012

"The San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra appeared and immediately reduced popular notions of the capabilities of a youth orchestra to absurdity. They performed at the level of a professional orchestra...At this concert the listener was impressed by youthful perfection – and by the silvery clear sound of the ensemble. Hardly a wrong note spoiled this sound, which resulted in an extremely good-humoured, brightly shining Mahler First Symphony. It was as though the endlessly suffering Gustav Mahler had finally found his peace in the California sun, lying on the beach with a perfect tan. It is possible that this polished reading also had something to do with conductor Donato Cabrera, who organized the symphony cleanly and down to the last detail."

-*Berliner Zeitung*, Berlin, 2012

"Rarely have we heard a youth orchestra that behaves and plays with as much discipline as the large San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra under its extremely effective conductor, Donato Cabrera, at the Echternach Trifolion on Friday. Absolute reliability was the cardinal rule from the first note to the last...The instrumentalists' technical skill and their optimally organized and shaped ensemble playing guaranteed vivid sound of striking uniformity."

-*Luxemburger Wort*, 2012

"If there's anything more thrilling and heartening than hearing the young musicians of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra flaunt their considerable talents, it's hearing them do it in a virtuoso vehicle like Mahler's First Symphony."

-*San Francisco Chronicle*, 2012

"There were, in Sunday's concert, any number of moments when the future seemed to have arrived fully formed. In the last movement of the Prokofiev [Symphony No. 5], to choose one example, the violins fell into an intimate conversation with a limber, wryly inquisitive clarinet that charmed, beguiled, and haunted in equal measure. Caught up in the twittery pulse of the symphony's second movement, the woodwinds winked and smirked with a ripened sense of pungency."

--*San Francisco Classical Voice*, 2011

"With its series of character sketches of the seven known planets besides Earth...Holst's *The Planets* provides ample opportunity for everyone to shine. That's just what these young players did in Davies Symphony Hall, performing with gusto and finesse under Music Director Donato Cabrera. From the forceful stride of the opening "Mars" through the misty fade-out of "Neptune," the orchestra sounded sleek and strong."

- *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2011

"Given their performance of Hadyn's Symphony No. 84 in E-flat Major, there is no way that I would have recognized that this was being played by a youth orchestra. We are so very fortunate to have these young people in our community, and even luckier to have a symphony that nurtures their skills. When I hear the Youth Orchestra, I can rely on it the same way I rely upon their adult counterpart: for virtuoso musicians of the highest caliber who work together in presenting great works of art. I enjoyed this piece as much, if not more, than if it was played by any of the very capable baroque orchestras around today."

- *Stark Insider*, 2011

"The performance went beyond mere accuracy to project a miraculous emotional depth. Maturity abounded amid the various groups, and beautiful balances, as well. Over the years, I've experienced professional performances of this work that failed to reach such a level."

- *San Francisco Classical Voice*, 2010

"What was heard performed by the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra under the baton of Benjamin Shwartz in the Philharmonie sounded so phenomenal, that one must rank this ensemble among the top professional orchestras."

- *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Munich), 2008

"The performance presented by the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra cannot be rated highly enough. This ensemble of talented young musicians tackled two genuinely difficult highlights of orchestral literature and interpreted these works with an artistic maturity that was overwhelming."

- *Passauer Neue Presse* (Passau), 2008

"The combination of strict orchestral discipline and playing that was full of spirit and commitment was altogether impressive. The result was dynamic, fully styled music-making."

- *Ostsee-Zeitung* (Rostock), 2008

"When Americans tackle something, they do it right. The self-assured name of the ensemble—the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra—stresses the close relationship with the San Francisco Symphony. Old Europe could definitely learn a thing or two from this young group."

- *Abendzeitung* (Munich), 2008

"Well, the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra is ready, and good. They played as though every measure mattered—as indeed it does."

- *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2007

"This is an ensemble that can play with the sweep and vigor of any of its more experienced adult counterparts."

- *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2005

"Playing in Davies Symphony Hall, the Youth Orchestra's teenage players sounded splendidly ferocious. But there was more to the performance than mere roof-raising. The performance was delectable."

- *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2003

"The ensemble of young musicians tackled a demanding program and turned it into an astonishing display of group virtuosity. The brass gleamed and blazed heroically, the woodwinds and percussion offered piquant tendrils of color and the strings conjured up textures of extraordinary plushness and versatility. The overall effect was simply remarkable. I have heard orchestras of veteran adult professionals -- orchestras with recording contracts and national reputations -- play with less polish and vitality, and certainly with a less palpable sense of artistic commitment."

- *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2002

"This performance was filled with the deep philosophical understanding necessary to the concept of serious classical music. From the very beginning to the end of the concert, the audience was filled with utter amazement."

- *Kommersant* (Russia), 2001

"We should be jealous of their intense commitment, enthusiasm, and passion...This was playing of the truly highest level. Tonight's Moscow Conservatory audience witnessed an orchestra that combined the high quality of modern American symphonic playing with the traditional Russian art of performance."

- *Culture* (Moscow), 2001

"They are a truly fabulous ensemble, and not only in the sense of a youth orchestra. They work with discipline, seriousness and total devotion to music-making, which is pure joy. To watch and listen to these young musicians is simply a refreshing experience."

- *Wiener Zeitung*, 1998

"If at first one is tempted to say that they are really good for their age, one drops the reservation quickly: they are good, period."

- *Le Monde*, 1998

"Their interpretation of Ravel's *La Valse* can only be described with such words as 'astounding' and even then the vocabulary would prove utterly inadequate."

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