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**ESA-PEKKA SALONEN AND SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY
ANNOUNCE FOUR NEW MUSICIANS JOINING THE ORCHESTRA
DURING THE 2023-24 SEASON**

New musicians include Second Violin Olivia Chen, Second Bassoon Justin Cummings, Associate Principal Flute Blair Francis Paponiu, and Assistant Librarian Matthew Searing

Chen, Cummings, Francis Paponiu, and Searing are joined by new SF Symphony musicians Principal Flute Yubeen Kim and Principal Harp Katherine Siochi, whose appointments were announced in August

SAN FRANCISCO, CA— Music Director Esa-Pekka Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony welcome four new musicians to the Orchestra's roster beginning with the 2023–24 season. Second Violin Olivia Chen, Second Bassoon Justin Cummings, Associate Principal Flute Blair Francis Paponiu, and Assistant Librarian Matthew Searing join the Orchestra in September 2023. Chen, Cummings, and Francis Paponiu will perform their first concerts as members of the Orchestra in the Opening Night Gala and All San Francisco concerts on September 22 and 23.

Principal Flute Yubeen Kim and Principal Harp Katherine Siochi, whose appointments were [announced in August](#), also join the San Francisco Symphony during the 2023–24 season.

Additional Orchestra Updates

Associate Principal Horn Mark Almond will be on leave from the San Francisco Symphony while he serves as Principal Horn of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Utility Horn Daniel Hawkins will also be on leave as he performs as Principal Horn of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

This season, the San Francisco Symphony welcomes two one-year substitutes: Jesse Clevenger, who joins the Symphony during 2023–24 as Acting Third and Assistant Principal Horn; and Michael Kemp, who joins the Symphony this season as Acting Assistant Principal Timpani and Section Percussion.

New Musician Bios

Olivia Chen, Second Violin

Olivia Chen joined the San Francisco Symphony's second violin section at the beginning of the 2023–24 season. Born in Houston and a longtime resident of Maryland, she began her violin studies at the age of four. She was a Tanglewood fellow for two summers, serving as concertmaster of the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra. She has also performed with the New York String Orchestra at Carnegie Hall and with the Baltimore Symphony. Ms. Chen pursued her undergraduate studies at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, where she won the Marbury Violin Competition, the Melissa Tiller Violin Prize, and the Sidney Friedberg Prize in chamber music. Her teachers include Herbert Greenberg and Victor Danchenko.

Justin Cummings, Bassoon

Justin Cummings joined the San Francisco Symphony bassoon section at the beginning of the 2023–24 season. He was previously principal bassoon of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra and a fellow of the New World Symphony under Michael Tilson Thomas. He has also performed as a guest with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. He is an alumnus of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he studied with SF Symphony Principal Bassoon Stephen Paulson. He went on to complete graduate studies with Richard Beene at the Colburn School in Los Angeles.

Blair Francis Paponiu, Associate Principal Flute

Catherine & Russell Clark Chair

Blair Francis Paponiu joined the San Francisco Symphony as Associate Principal Flute, holding the Catherine & Russell Clark Chair, at the beginning of the 2023–24 season. She previously held the Susan and Tom Brown Chair as assistant principal and second flute with the Naples Philharmonic in Florida, and performed with the New York Philharmonic as acting section flute for two seasons. She has also been a member of the Austin Symphony and has performed with the Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, and Oregon Symphony.

The recipient of numerous awards, Mrs. Francis Paponiu won second prize in the 2020 National Flute Association's Young Artist Competition. She has been an instrumental fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, Music Academy of the West, Sarasota Music Festival, and Brevard Music Center.

She received a professional studies certificate in orchestral performance from the Manhattan School of Music, a master of music from the University of Texas at Austin, and a bachelor of music from the University of South Carolina, where she graduated summa cum laude and received the Presser Scholar Award. Her teachers include Robert Langevin, Marianne Gedigian, Jennifer Parker-Harley, and Cynthia Hopkins.

Matthew Searing, Assistant Librarian

Matthew Searing joined the San Francisco Symphony as Assistant Librarian beginning with the 2023–24 season. He previously served as the assistant librarian for the Florida Orchestra and the Sarasota Orchestra. Mr. Searing studied horn at Montclair State University in New Jersey and was a library fellow with the New World Symphony under Michael Tilson Thomas. He has also worked in the libraries of the Subito Music Corporation, Brevard Music Center, Aspen Music Festival, Utah Symphony and Opera, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theater, National Symphony, New York Philharmonic, and Carnegie Hall's National Youth Orchestra.

About the San Francisco Symphony

The San Francisco Symphony is among the most adventurous and innovative arts institutions in the United States, celebrated for its artistic excellence, creative performance concepts, active touring, award-winning recordings, and standard-setting education programs. In the 2020–21 season, the San Francisco Symphony welcomed conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen as its 12th Music Director, embarking on a new vision for the present and future of the orchestral landscape. In their inaugural season together, Mr. Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony introduced a groundbreaking artistic leadership model anchored by eight Collaborative Partners from a variety of cultural disciplines: Nicholas Britell, Julia Bullock, Claire Chase, Bryce Dessner, Pekka Kuusisto, Nico Muhly, Carol Reiley, and esperanza spalding. This group of visionary artists, thinkers, and doers, along with Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony, have set out to explore and develop new ideas inspired by the Collaborative Partners' unique areas of expertise, including innovative digital projects, expansive and imaginative performance concepts in a variety of concert formats, commissions of new music, and projects that foster collaboration across artistic and administrative areas. Shaped by the dynamic partnership and shared vision of Mr. Salonen, the Collaborative Partners, and the Orchestra and Chorus, the San Francisco Symphony's 2023–24 season reflects a spirit of collaboration, experimentation, and renewed dialogue through live music.

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