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Photo: SFS / Andrew Eccles

ESA-PEKKA SALONEN NAMED NEXT MUSIC DIRECTOR OF THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

**Salonen to Serve as Music Director Designate Effective Immediately, Will Lead the SFS in
Concerts this Coming January 18–20, and Begin His Tenure September 2020**

New Model of Leadership Includes Eight Creative and Artistic Partners

SAN FRANCISCO, December 5, 2018 — San Francisco Symphony President Sakurako Fisher and Chief Executive Officer Mark C. Hanson today announced that Esa-Pekka Salonen will become the Orchestra’s next Music Director, beginning in September 2020. As the San Francisco Symphony’s 12th Music Director in its 107-year history, Salonen will succeed Michael Tilson Thomas, who concludes his 25-year tenure as Music Director in July 2020. One of the most influential and creative forces in music, Salonen has, through his many high-profile conducting roles, work as a leading composer, and as an advocate for accessibility and diverse musical voices, shaped a unique vision for the present and future of the symphony orchestra.

Assuming his role as Music Director Designate immediately, Salonen will lead the SFS January 18–20, 2019 in a program featuring the SFS premiere of Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir’s *Metacosmos*, R. Strauss’ *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and Sibelius’ *Four Legends from the Kalevala*. He will return as Music Director Designate in the 2019–20 season to conduct at least two weeks of programs. In September 2020, Salonen begins his tenure as Music Director with an initial five-year contract, conducting the SFS in six subscription weeks and on a tour of Asia. Beginning in the 2021–22 season, Salonen will conduct 12 to 14 weeks each season. He will conclude his tenure as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor for London’s Philharmonia Orchestra in 2021.

“From the very first approach, the San Francisco Symphony leaders and musicians and I were buzzing with possibilities,” said **Esa-Pekka Salonen**. “The ‘what-ifs’ of the orchestra world were suddenly on the table in a real way. Here is a top symphony orchestra in the place in America where things start; where the ways things have always been done are interrogated, and where problems are first identified and then solved. In San Francisco itself and in the San Francisco Symphony, I see both the big ideas being thought and the actual work being done, and that, to me, is irresistible.

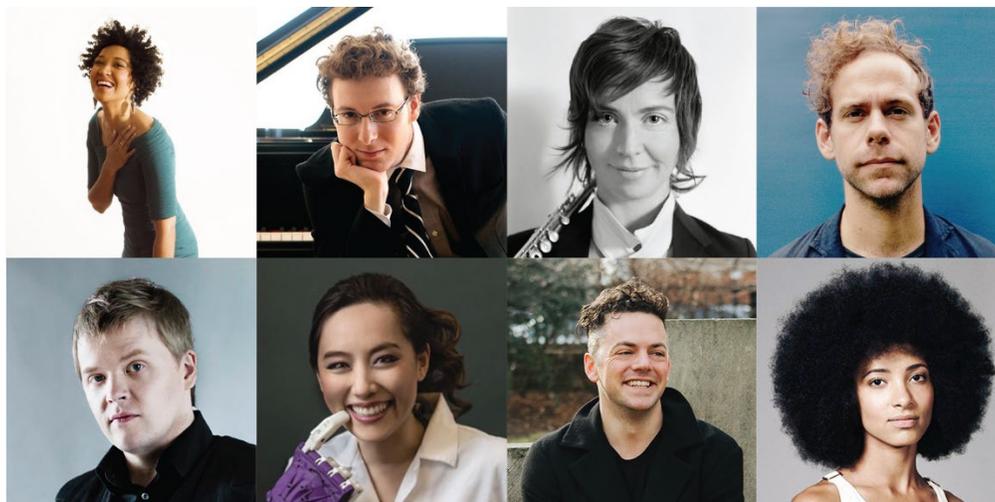
I wasn’t looking for another Music Directorship. I am so proud of the work we did together at the Swedish Radio Orchestra, at the LA Philharmonic, and at the Philharmonia Orchestra, and that those organizations where I’ve held music director titles thrive without me gives me great joy. But there was a ‘no brainer’ aspect to this that I’ve been fortunate to have experienced a few times before in my career, so I know it when I see it. The San Francisco Symphony is an ensemble and an organization at the top of their game, renowned for their interpretations of masterpieces and unafraid to treat new works the same way. They have had the powerhouse combination of Michael’s exacting musicality and freedom of spirit for 25 years: a legacy I’m privileged to inherit. “

“Esa-Pekka Salonen has a 360-degree view of the orchestra world and creative community,” said **Mark C. Hanson**, CEO of the San Francisco Symphony. “As one of the most sought-after conductors, composers, and creative thinkers, he is focused on making classical music more accessible, expanding the collaborative model, and reimagining the role of an orchestra in its community. We have found in Esa-Pekka a partner with whom we can build on the trajectory of artistic growth established under Michael Tilson Thomas and Herbert Blomstedt before him. In Esa-Pekka, the SFS has also discovered someone who shares our passion for inclusion and innovation. Just as the SFS family and Bay Area community embrace teamwork and risk-taking, Esa-Pekka values a collaborative approach to artistic leadership and diversity, and never stops thinking about how to strengthen our impact, relevancy, and community relationships.”

NEW ARTISTIC LEADERSHIP MODEL

As part of the appointment, Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony also look to evolve the orchestra from the inside out by introducing a new artistic leadership model, one anchored by a group of eight collaborative partners from a variety of cultural disciplines. This group of extraordinary artists, thinkers, and doers will join with Salonen and the SFS to embark on a future of experimentation by collaborating on new ideas, breaking conventional rules, and creating unique and powerful experiences in and around the concert experience. The group assembled comprises eight artists from varied creative realms: pianist, film producer, and composer of award-winning film scores **Nicholas Britell**; classical singer **Julia Bullock**, who has made social consciousness and activism fundamental to her work; flutist, educator, and advocate for new and experimental music **Claire Chase**; composer, new music curator, and guitarist of The National **Bryce Dessner**; violinist and one-of-a-kind musical director **Pekka Kuusisto**; composer and sought-after artistic collaborator **Nico Muhly**; artificial intelligence entrepreneur and roboticist **Carol Reiley**; and jazz

bassist, vocalist, and undefinable artist **Esperanza Spalding**.



"I am incredibly excited to be a part of this artistic coalition," said composer Nicholas Britnell. "Music is such a central element of our lives, yet the ways in which we interact with it are constantly shifting. Esa-Pekka's vision—to explore all the possibilities for the SFS as both an orchestra and as a doorway to the arts more generally—is something I am truly passionate about. With trends in science and technology increasing at an ever faster rate, it is crucial to have a dialogue about the profound importance of music and the arts in our lives, in our communities, and in our society. It is also essential that this dialogue incorporate a broad definition of what music 'is', that it reflects the fullness and diversity of those making music and art, and that it celebrates the many places in which music thrives in the world today. I am honored to get the opportunity to explore these ideas with Esa-Pekka, the San Francisco Symphony, and this phenomenal group of artists."

"I am so happy that my friend and colleague is coming to San Francisco," said Music Director **Michael Tilson Thomas**. "Our lives have been personally and musically intertwined for years and we share many musical values. We both deeply love music and the people who make the music. It will be a joy to collaborate with him on this bright future for the whole Symphony family. A warm welcome to EPS from MTT."

"As an Orchestra and as a community, we are about pushing the boundaries, about coloring outside the lines," said **Sakurako Fisher**, SFS President and Co-Chair of the Music Director Search Committee. "The visionary energy and collaborative thinking that Esa-Pekka brings will extend the incredible artistic and pioneering legacy that Michael Tilson Thomas and our musicians have already built. Esa-Pekka's curiosity, his creativity, and his willingness to ask 'what's next' will guarantee an exciting journey and future for the SFS."

"There has always been a tremendous chemistry between Esa-Pekka and the Orchestra," said violinist **Melissa Kleinbart**, head of the Orchestra's Players' Committee. "Our performances with him have been electric and quite memorable, each leaving both the orchestra and the audiences wanting more. Over the years we have expressed great interest in developing a closer working relationship with Esa-Pekka and are excited to begin this new chapter with such a dedicated musician and advocate for classical music. The incredible artistic foundation laid by our partnership with Michael Tilson Thomas will serve to ensure our continued commitment to be the best on a global scale and we all look forward to Esa-Pekka's arrival."

“It was clear from the start that Esa-Pekka and the Orchestra shared the same vision in growing what an orchestra can mean to its community and to think creatively about including many diverse cultural voices,” said **Matt Cohler**, SFS Board Member and Co-Chair of the Music Director Search Committee. “To strengthen our commitment to excellence and access, this orchestra requires an artistic and creative leader in the broadest sense. Esa-Pekka’s forward-thinking personality builds on the vision established under MTT and the significant aspirations of the SFS as a cultural leader.”

Salonen made his San Francisco Symphony conducting debut in 2004 and has returned to conduct the SFS on numerous occasions, most recently in 2015, leading a program including Stravinsky’s *The Firebird* and his own composition *Nyx*. Salonen was on the podium as the SFS celebrated its Centennial on December 8, 2011, in a program that included the SFS premiere of his own violin concerto.



Photo: SFS / Andrew Eccles

Esa-Pekka Salonen

Esa-Pekka Salonen’s restless innovation drives him constantly to reposition classical music in the 21st century. Known as both a composer and conductor, he is the Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor for London’s Philharmonia Orchestra, a position he leaves at the end of the 2020–21 season. Their award-winning RE-RITE and Universe of Sound installations have allowed people all over the world to step inside the orchestra through audio and video projections. Salonen also drove the development of a much-hailed app for iPad, *The Orchestra*, which gives the user unprecedented access to the internal workings of eight symphonic works. As the Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic (1992–2009), where he is now Conductor Laureate, Salonen was instrumental in opening the Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall, presided over countless premieres of contemporary work, began the Esa-Pekka Salonen Commissions Fund, and made the orchestra one of the best attended and funded in the United States. Salonen is in his third of five years as Artist in Association at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, where he will conduct his first full Ring cycle in future seasons and *Pelléas et Mélisande* this season. He is also Conductor Laureate for the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and co-founder of the annual Baltic Sea Festival, serving as its Artistic Director from 2003 to 2018. In 2015 Salonen addressed the Apple Distinguished Educator conference on the uses of technology in music education, and his Violin Concerto was featured in an international campaign for iPad.

San Francisco Symphony

Widely considered to be among the most artistically adventurous and innovative arts institutions in the United States, the San Francisco Symphony (SFS) has earned a global reputation for signature interpretations, boundary-

pushing concert experiences, and award-winning recordings and media projects. Now in its 107th season, the SFS presents more than 220 concerts annually and reaches an audience of nearly 500,000 annually in its home of Davies Symphony Hall, through its multifaceted education and community programs, and national and international tours. Since its inception and founding as “an orchestra for all,” the SFS has played a leading role in the musical life of its community, offering one of the most comprehensive music education and community programs of any orchestra in the world. Established by a group of San Francisco citizens, music-lovers, and musicians in the wake of the 1906 earthquake, the San Francisco Symphony played its first concert on December 8, 1911, revitalizing the City’s cultural life.

San Francisco Symphony Music Directors

Henry Hadley (1911–1915)

Alfred Hertz (1915–1930)

Basil Cameron (1930–1932)

Issay Dobrowen (1930–1935)

Pierre Monteux (1935–1952)

Enrique Jordá (1954–1963)

Josef Krips (1963–1970)

Seiji Ozawa (1970–1977)

Edo de Waart (1977–1985)

Herbert Blomstedt (1985–1995)

Michael Tilson Thomas (1995–2020)

Esa-Pekka Salonen (2020–)

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(High resolution images and biographies are available in the SFS’ [Online Press Kit](#))