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SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY YOUTH ORCHESTRA WATTIS FOUNDATION MUSIC DIRECTOR RADU PAPONIU EXTENDS CONTRACT WITH THE SFSYO THROUGH THE 2028-29 SEASON

Paponiu joined the SFSYO as Music Director beginning with the 2024-25 season and leads the Orchestra in rehearsals and concerts throughout the year

To finish out the 2025-26 season, Paponiu and the SFSYO perform a program of works by Jennifer Higdon, Gustav Mahler, and Jean Sibelius on March 8 and a season-closing concert with pieces by Ludwig van Beethoven, Dylan Hall, and Dmitri Shostakovich on May 17

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra Wattis Foundation Music Director Radu Paponiu has extended his contract with the San Francisco Symphony through the 2028-29 season.

Paponiu became SFSYO Music Director in September 2024 and leads the ensemble in four concerts each season. Comprised of more than 100 musicians ranging in age from 12 to 21 and representing communities from throughout the Bay Area, the [San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra](https://www.sfsymphony.org/youth) is recognized internationally as one of the finest youth orchestras in the world. The SFSYO provides a tuition-free orchestral experience of preprofessional caliber to talented young Bay Area musicians, with weekly rehearsals led by Paponiu. Since taking on the role with the

SFSYO, Paponiu has programmed and conducted the Orchestra in a wide range of works, including Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Petite Suite de Concert*; Antonín Dvořák's Symphony No. 8; Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Symphony No. 35 in D major, K.385, *Haffner*; Richard Strauss's Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*; Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4; and works by contemporary composers including Gabriela Lena Frank, Anna Clyne, Gabriela Ortiz, and Takashi Yoshimatsu. He also leads the SFSYO in its annual performance of Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, a holiday favorite and regular part of the Orchestra's season since 1985.

During the 2025–26 season, Paponiu conducted the San Francisco Symphony in a Music for Families concert exploring the world through orchestral dance music, and led Symphony musicians in works by György Ligeti, Kaija Saariaho, and Nina Shekhar on SoundBox: Dream Awake, curated by violinist Alexi Kenney.

"I am delighted to continue this journey with the outstanding young musicians of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra," said Paponiu. "On every occasion, their talent, passion, and dedication have been a source of inspiration and a glimpse into a bright musical future. I am equally grateful to the extraordinary faculty and staff whose commitment makes this program possible. I look forward to building on our work together and continuing to nurture an environment where these remarkable young artists can thrive."

Upcoming performances by Radu Paponiu and the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra

On **March 8**, Paponiu leads the Orchestra in Jean Sibelius's tone poem *Finlandia*, a piece that inspired Finnish national pride and brought Sibelius personal fame and sweeping popularity, and Jennifer Higdon's *blue cathedral*, written in memory of Higdon's younger brother. Paponiu and the Orchestra are joined by soprano Hannah Cho in Gustav Mahler's expressive Symphony No. 4, in which the composer reflects on memories of his youth.

On **May 17**, Paponiu conducts Scherzo for Orchestra by Dylan Hall, a keyboardist in the SFSYO. He premiered the piece with the Orlando Philharmonic in 2024 after winning the National Young Composers Challenge. The program also includes Ludwig van Beethoven's energetic Symphony No. 1 and Dmitri Shostakovich's forceful and triumphant Symphony No. 5.

About Radu Paponiu, Wattis Foundation Music Director

Radu Paponiu joined the San Francisco Symphony as Wattis Foundation Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra (SFSYO) in the 2024–25 season. Prior to joining the SFSYO, he completed a five-year tenure as associate conductor of the Naples Philharmonic and a seven-year tenure as music director of the Naples Philharmonic Youth Orchestra. Additionally, he has served as music director of the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra. As a guest conductor, Paponiu has appeared with the Romanian National Radio Symphony, Teatro Comunale di Bologna Orchestra, Rhode Island Philharmonic, Transylvania State Philharmonic Orchestra, Banatul Philharmonic, Louisiana Philharmonic, Rockford Symphony, Colorado Music Festival Orchestra, North Carolina Symphony, California Young Artists Symphony, and National Repertory Orchestra. He has collaborated with notable soloists such as Evgeny Kissin, Yefim Bronfman, Midori, Vladimir Feltsman, Robert Levin, Charles Yang, Rachel Barton Pine, Nancy Zhou, Stella Chen, and the Ébène Quartet. Paponiu has served as cover conductor with the Dallas Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, and Konzerthausorchester Berlin, and he has assisted conductors including Iván Fischer, Fabio Luisi, Stéphane Denève, Andrey Boreyko, Hans Graf, Donald Runnicles, Cristian Măcelaru, Bernard Labadie, and Ludovic Morlot. Paponiu has served

on the conducting faculty of the Juilliard Pre-College, as well as conductor for the Summer Performing Arts with Juilliard in Shanghai, China, and the Southeast Asia Music Festival in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Paponiu completed his Master of Music degree in orchestral conducting at the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Hugh Wolff. While in Boston, he was also conductor apprentice with the Handel and Haydn Society. In the summer of 2017, Paponiu was appointed assistant conductor of the National Repertory Orchestra in Colorado, as well as conducting fellow for the Cabrillo Festival Workshop in California. He participated in the American Academy of Conducting at the Aspen Music Festival and School as the recipient of both the Albert Tipton Aspen Fellowship and the David A. Karetsky Memorial Fellowship. In Aspen, Paponiu furthered his studies under the guidance of Robert Spano, Larry Rachleff, Leonard Slatkin, Patrick Summers, and Federico Cortese.

Paponiu began his musical studies on the violin at age seven, studying privately with Carmen Runceanu and Ștefan Gheorghiu. After coming to the United States at the invitation of the Perlman Music Program, he completed two degrees in violin performance under the guidance of Robert Lipsett at the Colburn Conservatory in Los Angeles. As a soloist and chamber musician, he has appeared in festivals throughout Europe and North America, collaborating with artists such as Itzhak Perlman, Clive Greensmith, Martin Beaver, Merry Peckham, and Vivian Hornik Weilerstein.

Paponiu currently resides in San Francisco with his wife, Blair Francis Paponiu, SF Symphony Associate Principal Flute. In his spare time, he enjoys chamber music reading parties, fishing, biking, and playing tennis.

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