

Esa-Pekka Salonen

Long Bio

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Esa-Pekka Salonen is known as both a composer and conductor. He is the Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony and Conductor Laureate for the Philharmonia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. As a member of the faculty of Los Angeles's Colburn School, he develops, leads, and directs the pre-professional Negaunee Conducting Program, which also houses his score collection. Salonen co-founded, and from 2003 until 2018 served as the Artistic Director of, the annual Baltic Sea Festival.

Salonen defined his tenure at the San Francisco Symphony with an impulse to expand and embrace the possibilities of the orchestra. In addition to an unprecedented leadership model joined by eight Collaborative Partners—whose diversity of expertise reflects the scope of experience he envisions as the future of classical music and its audience—Salonen established the California Festival, a two-week, inter-institutional statewide celebration which he conceived alongside Gustavo Dudamel and Rafael Payare; and led a series of collaborations across disciplines and practices which united the musicians and administration into a singular engine dedicated to engaging classical music in novel ways.

This season, Salonen leads the San Francisco Symphony in world premieres of works by Nico Muhly, Xavier Muzik, and Gabriella Smith, among many other programs. He also returns to the Philharmonia Orchestra—both in London and on tour in Italy—and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he leads wide-ranging programs including Bryce Dessner's Violin Concerto with Pekka Kuusisto and Boulez's *Notations* with Pierre-Laurent Aimard. With the Orchestre de Paris, Salonen conducts a reprise of his and Romeo Castellucci's staged production of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, "Resurrection," and a Boulez Centennial celebration with choreography by Benjamin Millepied, while a Salzburg Easter Festival residency with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra centers on a new Simon McBurney production of Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*.

Salonen's compositions are programmed with thirteen different orchestras this season. He conducts his own *Tiu, kìnēma*, and cello concerto with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra; he also conducts the cello concerto with The Cleveland Orchestra and San Francisco Symphony. With the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, he leads his Sinfonia concertante for organ and orchestra. His works, led by other conductors, also appear on programs at the Montreal and Aarhus symphony orchestras (Sinfonia concertante), Munich Philharmonic (*Insomnia*), Lahti Symphony Orchestra (*kìnēma*), Netherlands Radio and Magdeburg philharmonic orchestras (*Gemini*), Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra (*Nyx*), Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra (Cello Concerto), and Ensemble intercontemporain (*Meeting*).

Esa-Pekka Salonen has an extensive and varied recording career, both as a conductor and composer. With the San Francisco Symphony, he has released recordings of Bartók's three piano concertos with Pierre-Laurent Aimard on Pentatone, as well as spatial audio recordings of Ligeti's *Clocks and Clouds, Lux Aeterna*, and *Ramifications* on Apple Music Classical and the world premiere recording of Saariaho's *Adriana Mater* on Deutsche Grammophon. Other recent recordings include Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, recorded with Lise Davidsen and the Philharmonia Orchestra; Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* and *Dance Suite*, also with the Philharmonia; Stravinsky's *Perséphone*, featuring Andrew Staples, Pauline Cheviller, and the Finnish National Opera, and a 2018 box set of his complete Sony recordings. His compositions appear on releases

from Sony and Deutsche Grammophon, among others; his Piano Concerto (with Yefim Bronfman), Violin Concerto (with Leila Josefowicz), and Cello Concerto (with Yo-Yo Ma) all appear on recordings conducted by Salonen himself.

Salonen is the recipient of many major awards, including the UNESCO Rostrum Prize for his work *Floof* in 1992, and the Siena Prize, given by the Accademia Chigiana, in 1993; he is the first conductor to receive it. In 1995 he received the Royal Philharmonic Society's Opera Award and two years later, its Conductor Award. Salonen was awarded the Litteris et Artibus medal, one of Sweden's highest honors, by the King of Sweden in 1996. In addition to receiving both the Pro Finlandia Medal of the Order of the Lion of Finland and the Helsinki Medal, he was named Commander, First Class of the Order of the Lion of Finland by the President of Finland. *Musical America* named him its Musician of the Year in 2006, and he was elected an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2010. His Violin Concerto won the 2012 Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition. He was the recipient of the 2014 Nemmers Composition Prize, which included a residency at the Henry and Leigh Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University and performances by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Also in 2014, he was awarded the Gloria Artis Medal for Merit to Culture by Poland's Minister of Culture. In 2020, he was appointed an honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) by Queen Elizabeth II. Previously an Officier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Salonen was awarded the rank of Commandeur by the French government in 2024. In 2024 he received the Polar Music Prize. To date, he has received seven honorary doctorates in four different countries.