



## Champions of Sound

**Rafael Payare and the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal return to the UK with a compelling Barbican Centre programme**

**London concert, given in company with Javier Perianes, celebrates the OSM's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in style**

**Orchestra launches eight-concert tour of Europe with Iman Habib's *Jeder Baum spricht*, a searing reflection on the unfolding climate catastrophe, Beethoven's First Piano Concerto and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique***

"Beyond Payare's in-the-moment direction, his preparation came through in the excellent pace, dynamics, and balances within and through the orchestra," review of OSM's Carnegie Hall performance of Mahler's Fifth Symphony, *New York Classical Review* (9 March 2023)

Critics have been swift to praise the vibrant creative partnership between the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and its Music Director, Rafael Payare. The Venezuelan conductor and his musicians marked the start of their first season together two years ago with an extensive European tour, crowned by a thrilling performance at the Royal Festival Hall in London. They are set to return to Britain's capital this autumn to launch an eight-concert tour of Europe at the Barbican on Tuesday 19 November 2024, a significant milestone in the OSM's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary season. Their Barbican programme's first half comprises the London premiere of *Jeder Baum spricht* ('Every tree speaks') by Iranian Canadian composer Iman Habibi and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.1 in C major Op.15, with Javier Perianes as soloist. The post-interval focus shifts to the impassioned drama of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, an ideal showpiece for the OSM's legendary sound.

"London has been a special place for me since I came to the BBC Proms in 2007 as a member of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra," comments Rafael Payare. "I will never forget that experience. And being the Ulster Orchestra's principal conductor and working with the London orchestras and at the Royal Opera House means that I have this close connection to the UK and to British audiences. Having closed the OSM's last European tour two years ago in London, I'm so happy that we will launch our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary-year tour at the Barbican. It's fantastic! It will be my third season with this phenomenal orchestra and I'm looking forward to bringing them to eight beautiful halls in Europe and to great cities like London."

Payare has worked in depth to enrich the OSM's sound since they last visited London, a process enhanced by the magnificent acoustics of the Maison symphonique de Montréal. He has chosen a tour programme sure to display the tonal range and refinement produced by his Montreal musicians. "We're very lucky to have this jewel here in the Maison symphonique," he observes. "The hall's clear yet warm sound means the orchestra can express every detail and allows us to push all the limits. You can do these crazy things with tone colours without being overwhelmed by the sound. We will bring the results of these explorations to London with the *Symphonie fantastique*, with its feverish Romantic depiction of obsessive love, and also show what we've discovered in the German repertoire with Beethoven."

Composer and pianist Iman Habibi (b.1985) wrote *Jeder Baum spricht* to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Beethoven's birth in 2020. The work, which he describes as 'an unsettling rhapsodic reflection on the climate catastrophe', was conceived as a companion piece to Beethoven's Symphonies Nos.5 & 6. Rafael Payare has chosen to place it as the preface to Trifonov's performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.1. "Through his use of orchestral colours, Iman has created a score that offers a glimpse of what nature and the environment are like," the conductor notes. "And it gives us a fresh perspective from one of today's creative voices on something as timeless as Beethoven's music. From there we go into the opium-infused, kaleidoscopic madness of the *Symphonie fantastique*!"

Maestro Payare's vision of the *Symphonie fantastique* is consonant with his wider concern for cultivating orchestral colours as the building blocks of rich, expressive interpretations. It grows from a clear sense of the instruments of Berlioz's day and how their soundworld might be translated using the tonal shadings and refinement of the modern symphony orchestra. "Things can get mushed up if we try to replicate his written dynamics for instruments of the 1830s, which often sound in a different way to our instruments today," the conductor notes. "So we work hard to change those dynamics where necessary and create an updated version of the sound that Berlioz intended. That's exciting for us and, I hope, also for our audience."

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## Notes for Editors

### Orchestre symphonique de Montréal (OSM)

Founded in 1934 by Antonia Nantel, Wilfrid Pelletier and Athanase David, the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal (OSM) is a distinguished leader of musical life in Quebec and Canada. Recognized as one of the finest orchestras in the world, whose core activity is to perform the vast orchestral repertoire with conductors and soloists of the highest calibre, the OSM is an essential cultural ambassador. Under the direction of Venezuelan conductor Rafael Payare, the OSM perpetuates several rich traditions rooted in its long history of social involvement and embodied in far-reaching projects, world class tours, and a superb discography. Firmly anchored in today's world, the OSM's innovative artistic programming in both concerts and recordings brings modern-day relevance to the symphonic repertoire while strengthening the Orchestra's place at the heart of its home base in Quebec's metropolis. Over the years, the OSM has crisscrossed Canada and toured abroad, travelling to Quebec's Far North as well as to the United States, Latin America, and several countries in Europe and Asia. The OSM's discography totals more than a hundred recordings on the Decca, Analekta, CBC Records, ECM, EMI, Philips, Sony and Pentatone labels, earning more than 110 national and international awards.

### Rafael Payare

Rafael Payare's prodigious musicianship, technical brilliance and charismatic presence on the podium have made him one of the world's most sought-after conductors. A graduate of the Venezuela's celebrated El Sistema music education program, he began his formal conducting studies in 2004 with José Antonio Abreu. Since winning the prestigious Malko International Competition for Young Conductors in Denmark in 2012, Maestro Payare's career has advanced rapidly. He has served since 2015 as Principal Conductor of the Castleton Festival, founded by his mentor the late Lorin Maazel. He was Chief Conductor and Music Director of the Ulster Orchestra from 2014 to 2019 and took up the position of Music Director of the San Diego Symphony in 2019. In recent seasons, Rafael Payare has conducted many of the world's most prestigious orchestras, including those of New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Zurich, Berlin, Vienna, London, Munich, Chicago and Paris. He has also made important opera debuts at the Glyndebourne Festival, the Royal Swedish Opera, the Royal Danish Opera, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. In the 2022-2023 season, Payare became the ninth Music Director in the OSM's history.

#### For press enquiries, please contact:

Emma Curtis / Hamish James at Valerie Barber PR

[emma@vbpr.co.uk](mailto:emma@vbpr.co.uk) / [hamish@vbpr.co.uk](mailto:hamish@vbpr.co.uk)

Tel: +44 (0)20 7586 8560 / [www.vbpr.co.uk](http://www.vbpr.co.uk)

Ed Maitland Smith at Barbican

[edward.maitlandsmith@barbican.org.uk](mailto:edward.maitlandsmith@barbican.org.uk)

T: +44 (0)20 3834 1115

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**Tuesday 19 November 2024, 7.30pm**

**Barbican, London**

[Event page](#)

**Orchestre symphonique de Montréal | Rafael Payare conductor | Javier Perianes piano**

**Iman Habibi** *Jeder Baum spricht* (London premiere)

**Beethoven** Piano Concerto No.1 in C major

**Berlioz** *Symphonie fantastique*