

Spotlight. Thrilling Power. Paul Bodine hears startling immediacy in the San Diego Symphony Orchestra's recording with Rafael Payare of Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony

 classicalmusicdaily.com/2026/08/shostakovich.htm

Paul Bodine



S P O T L I G H T

Thrilling Power

PAUL BODINE hears startling immediacy in the San Diego Symphony Orchestra's recording with Rafael Payare of Shostakovich's

Leningrad Symphony

'... this crack orchestra makes a confident case for itself ...'

With his new live recording of [Dmitri Shostakovich](#)'s Symphony No 7 in C major, 'Leningrad', San Diego Symphony music/artistic director [Rafael Payare](#) decisively advances his cred as an idiomatic Shostakovich interpreter. In February 2020, Payare led the San Diegans in an electrifying live recording of Shostakovich's Symphony No 11 in G minor, 'The Year 1905', released on Platoon in 2022. Across his work with San Diego, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and such august bands as the Royal Concertgebouw, New York Philharmonic, and Cleveland Orchestra, Payare's also conducted landmark Shostakovich symphonies from the Fifth and Eighth to the Tenth and Twelfth.

Now, his digitally released recording of the 'Leningrad' with the San Diego Symphony lets us gauge Payare's progress as an interpreter of Russia's greatest twentieth-century symphonist. Having witnessed one of the two 2025 performances on which the Delos release (due out on CD 11 September 2026) is based, I can vouch for its thrilling power. But how well did producer/recording engineer Shawn Murphy and team capture it for Delos?

Despite its sprawling seventy-five minutes, the 'Leningrad' is for many synonymous with its first movement, where a trivial march and snare-drum tattoo gradually become a visceral representation of mechanized Armageddon. Thanks to the impressively three-dimensional sonic space created by the Jacobs Music Center's DiGiCo Quantum5-based integrated recording system, we hear a studio-grade digital recording with the electricity and presence of a live account. Telling moments vividly foregrounded include flautist Rose Lombardo's sweetly floated pre-invasion solo, the brass's deliberately metallic glint as the invading Germans close in, and piccolist Lily Josefsberg's haunting post-invasion lament.

Listen — Shostakovich: *Allegretto (Leningrad Symphony)*
(DE3634 track 1, 10:37-11:15) © 2026 San Diego Symphony :

Not everyone will love Payare's expansive *tempi* - at 28:36 it's three minutes longer than Karel Ančerl's much admired 1957 recording with the Czech Philharmonic. And though Leonard Bernstein's famous 1988 recording with the Chicago Symphony is even longer, it's more in your face.

Where Payare and company clearly triumph, here and in the movements that follow, is in immaculately detailed and transparent playing, both collectively and individually. For Payare such clarity matters, as in his reading the two inner movements emerge as equal in weight and orchestral beauty to the more 'representational' outer movements. Just listen to the

attention lavished on the recapitulation of the second movement's opening (starting at *circa* 7:27), where Frank Renk's burbling bass clarinet yields to Lombardo's flutter-tongued alto flute, harmonically accompanied by harpist Julie Smith Phillips, all captured with crystal clarity. The intimate chamberlike sequence has startling immediacy.

Listen — Shostakovich: *Allegretto* (*Leningrad Symphony*)
(DE3634 track 2, 7:56-8:40) © 2026 San Diego Symphony :

In Payare's hands, the episodic eighteen-minute *Adagio* is as lovely and compelling as any Shostakovich's model, Mahler, composed, from the lower strings' pipe-organ-like unison in the opening bars, to the careening devil-on-the-loose *Moderato risoluto*, which gives way to the mournful opening's reprise.

Listen — Shostakovich: *Moderato risoluto* (*Leningrad Symphony*)
(DE3634 track 3, 7:22-8:22) © 2026 San Diego Symphony :

With meticulous control of dynamic range, dramatic pacing, and sensitivity to inner voices and hidden textures, Payare allows the orchestra to luxuriate in Shostakovich's orchestration. The recording quality helps make a compelling case that, first movement dazzle aside, these inner movements are the symphony's compositional and emotional heart.

This recording's sonic depth and transparency could well cast an unforgiving light, especially in the *Leningrad Symphony*'s final movement, which seems to grope before finding its way toward its undeniably powerful sprint to victory.

Listen — Shostakovich: *Allegro non troppo* (*Leningrad Symphony*)
(DE3634 track 4, 16:07-16:58) © 2026 San Diego Symphony :

Given Payare's on-the-brisk-side 17:03 pace, the San Diegans fortunately bring both a collective discipline and individual virtuosity that's just plain fun to listen to, uninspired score or not. As the Symphony's first-ever recorded demonstration of what a renovated Jacobs hall makes possible, this crack orchestra makes a confident case for itself - in full view.

Follow the links in this box for more information about [Delos Productions](#) and this release, [Shostakovich: Symphony No 7](#).