



THE NEW CRITERION

Vol. 42, No. 3 / November 2023

[LOGIN](#)

Alisa Weilerstein (cello) with Rafael Payare (conductor) & the San Diego Symphony at Carnegie Hall, October 13, 2023. Photo: Chris Lee.

[Dispatch October 17, 2023 11:30 AM](#)

Alisa Weilerstein (cello) with Rafael Payare (conductor) & the San Diego Symphony at Carnegie Hall, October 13, 2023. Photo: Chris Lee.

Husband & wife, Dvořák & Shostakovich

by [Jay Nordlinger](#)

On a concert of the San Diego Symphony in Carnegie Hall.

SHARE





concert in Carnegie Hall on Friday night. On the podium was the orchestra's music director, Rafael Payare, from Venezuela.

As I have noted before—it is notable—he has enormous hair. I'm not sure that Simon Rattle's was ever so big. And, as I made a sartorial note (or two) in a [review](#) last week, I will make one here: Maestro Payare wore a purple suit.

That is something new in concert-wear, I think, and it beats the black pajamas that people adopted after ditching tuxes and tails.

The San Diegans' program began with a new work by Carlos Simon: *Wake Up: A Concerto for Orchestra*. I will discuss this work in my next "chronicle" for the print magazine. Here and now, I will make another sartorial note. Mr. Simon was present in the hall. And he, too, wore a purple suit—lighter than Payare's. (I think of the phrase "deep purple," but that comes from rock.) When Simon took the stage for a bow, he pointed at Payare and pointed at himself, as if to say, "Did we plan this?"

Second on the program was the Dvořák Cello Concerto—one of the works with which the New York Philharmonic opened its season a few weeks ago. The soloist with the Philharmonic was Yo-Yo Ma. The San Diegans' soloist was Alisa Weilerstein. She and Maestro Payare are married.

Fred Kirshnit, the late critic, once told me a story about Lorin Maazel and Israela Margalit, who were married at the time. (Margalit, a pianist, was the middle of the conductor's three wives.) They walked out from the wings to perform a concerto. Before giving the downbeat, Maazel turned to his wife and said, "Do you know this piece?"

Alisa Weilerstein certainly knows the Dvořák concerto. She played the piece with authority, as usual. In the first movement, she was strong and marked. She played warmly—but with a streak of ice, too. She suffered a couple of intonation lapses, but



It seemed to me that she wanted to go faster than the orchestra now and then. I thought of Martha Argerich and Charles Dutoit (pianist and conductor), who were married briefly, and have performed together many times since. In a rehearsal, Argerich admonished, “You have to keep up with me, Charlie. These hands wait for no man.”

(I would bet that Dutoit was right, musically.)

Weilerstein, like all cellists worth their salt, is a singer—a singer on her instrument. Toward the end of Dvořák’s second movement, she sang beautifully, way up high. She also executed a wonderfully even trill.

And that finale? The cellist was disciplined and impetuous—which sounds like a contradiction but is what the music demands. She was rhythmically acute. (And Payare, on the podium, was right with her.) In the closing pages, Weilerstein was understated. Rarely are those pages so unmilky.

One of the greatest notes in all of music is a D natural—the D natural that Dvořák inserts into this sublime B-major music. Some cellists emphasize it. Weilerstein just played it (to nice effect).

There would be an encore, and the question was, Which Bach sarabande would it be? It was the D-minor. From Weilerstein, it was elongated, stretched out. I thought it lost its shape. But Weilerstein obviously did wonderful things in it, and she is one of the outstanding instrumentalists of our time.

After intermission, there was a single work: Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 5. Oddly enough, I have another sartorial note for you. Like a soprano in recital, Rafael Payare switched outfits. He now wore a black number.



what he wanted, and got it, I sensed. The end of the Largo was prayerful—I almost want to say “religioso.” This was one of the best moments of the performance.

I have one overall criticism, and it is not small: this performance was not Soviet enough, at least for me. I did not smell the fear, or enough of it. There was peppiness, vigor—and too little gravity, I thought. The ending was on the celebratory side. I wanted more of a grim, stricken slog. When this symphony is over, you should be wrecked. Throttled. Virtually traumatized. My impression was, the audience was energized. Up.

It would be wrong to expect Mravinsky and the Leningrad Phil. from the denizens of sunny San Diego. But . . .

Listen, there is subjectivity in music, and I have just dumped some on you.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Support our crucial work and join us in strengthening the bonds
of civilization.

Your donation sustains our efforts to inspire joyous rediscoveries.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT >

Jay Nordlinger is a Senior Editor at *National Review*. [His podcast with *The New Criterion*, titled “Music for a While,” can be found here.](#)

ADVERTISEMENT



SHARE THIS ARTICLE



Topics: [MUSIC](#), [CLASSICAL MUSIC](#), [NEW YORK](#), [RAFAEL PAYARE](#)

[PRINT](#)[DOWNLOAD](#)

[ADVERTISEMENT](#)

A monthly review *edited by Roger Kimball*

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

- [CURRENT ISSUE](#)
- [ARCHIVE](#)
- [MEDIA](#)
- [SUBSCRIBE](#)
- [STUDENT SUBSCRIPTION](#)
- [DONATE](#)
- [THE CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK](#)



- [ART](#)
- [POETRY](#)
- [MUSIC](#)
- [THEATER](#)
- [BOOKS](#)

- [ABOUT US](#)
- [BOOKSTORE](#)
- [EVENTS](#)
- [POETRY SUBMISSIONS](#)
- [ADVERTISE](#)
- [READER SERVICES](#)
- [RSS FEEDS](#)
- [CONTACT US](#)