

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra announces Xian Zhang as its 14th music director



Zhang next conducts the NJSO in April, begins four-year term as Orchestra's leader in September

NEWARK, NJ (November 16, 2015)—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra today announces Xian Zhang as the Orchestra's 14th music director, effective September 1, 2016. Zhang, the internationally renowned Chinese-American conductor who has been music director of the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi since 2009, will lead the Orchestra in seven subscription classical programs in her first season as music director.

Zhang, who joins the NJSO for a four-year term, succeeds NJSO Music Director Jacques Lacombe, who departs the Orchestra in June 2016 following a critically acclaimed six-year tenure. The announcement concludes an extensive search led by a special search committee comprised of NJSO musicians, board members, administrative staff and community leaders.

Zhang next appears with the NJSO in April, leading performances of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony and Barber's Violin Concerto with Jennifer Frautschi April 7–10 in Newark, Red Bank and Morristown.

The NJSO welcomed Zhang to New Jersey with a series of special events with patrons, media, Orchestra members, key artistic partners and state and community leaders yesterday and today.

We are thrilled to announce that Xian Zhang will join the NJSO as the Orchestra's next music director," NJSO Board of Trustees Co-Chair Ruth C. Lipper says. "The deep connection she already has forged with NJSO audiences and musicians has been palpable at each of her frequent guest conducting engagements with the Orchestra, and we are excited to bring her combination of world-class musicianship and powerful leadership to our concert halls and communities across the state."

Zhang says: "I remember there was an instant connection the first time I conducted the NJSO. And ever since then, every time we collaborated, these musicians impressed me with their commitment, intelligence and musicianship.

"I am proud to become the leader of an orchestra that shares my belief in the power of music to transform lives both in and outside of the concert hall. The NJSO's mission to bring music that touches the hearts and engage with communities and students throughout the state of New Jersey is one I fully embrace. I am looking forward to getting to know our musicians, patrons, artistic partners and the students in our education programs."

In a rave review of her latest guest appearance in New Jersey this May, *The Star-Ledger* praised Zhang's artistry and relationship with the NJSO, writing: "Zhang once again proved a thrilling leader who has already established a strong rapport with the orchestra. The program showed her interacting with the orchestra in a variety of contexts ... In each one, her innate musicality and ability to communicate intention with clarity invested every gesture. Nothing seemed extraneous or glossed over, even as her whole body seemed to contract and release with explosive energy."

"What can [hold an audience] is the way that Zhang infuses scores with vitality and detail and the highly engaged playing of the NJSO," the paper continued.

This April, Zhang leads performances of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony and Barber's Violin Concerto with Jennifer Frautschi. Concerts take place on Thursday, April 7, at 1:30 pm and Friday, April 8, at 8 pm at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark; Saturday, April 9, at 8 pm at the Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank and Sunday, April 10, at 3 pm at the Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown.

NJSO Board of Trustees Co-Chair Stephen Sichak Jr. says: "Xian Zhang is a world-renowned leader both on and off the podium, and we are proud to officially welcome her to the NJSO, where her guest appearances have captivated audiences, musicians and critics alike. She embodies and values the core tenants that stand at the heart of the NJSO mission—a passion for both artistic excellence and community engagement. She is eager to deepen her relationship with the Orchestra, our artistic partners, patrons and the many students our education programs reach; we know she will inspire them all."

"I am so happy that Xian Zhang has been appointed our next music director," NJSO Concertmaster Eric Wyrick says. "We strive to develop artistic connections at the NJSO, and during her many guest appearances, Xian has become quite an orchestra favorite. My performance of Brahms' Double Concerto with Principal Cello Jonathan Spitz under Xian last year was the artistic highlight of my season, and I believe we forged a bond that will flourish over the seasons we will play together."

Zhang was appointed the New York Philharmonic's Assistant Conductor in 2002, subsequently becoming their Associate Conductor and the first holder of the Arturo Toscanini Chair. *The New York Times* hailed Zhang's performances, writing in 2009: "Her incisive gestures elicit vivid performances from musicians who have seen it all, and her passionate musicality reflects the boundless energy that has propelled her improbable journey from a small town in China to the Philharmonic, where, as associate conductor, she is a rising star."

For more information on the NJSO's next music director, including a digital press kit with high-resolution photos, visit www.njsymphony.org/zhang.

Full concert information for Zhang's April appearances with the Orchestra is available at <http://www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/zhang-conducts-tchaikovsky-4>.

XIAN ZHANG

Xian Zhang, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's next Music Director, has served as Music Director of the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi since September 2009; highlights of her tenure include the orchestra's televised debut at the BBC Proms with Joseph Calleja in September 2013 and taking part in EXPO in May 2015.

Zhang next appears with the NJSO in April, leading performances of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony and Barber's Violin Concerto with Jennifer Frautschi in Newark, Red Bank and Morristown. She will take the helm as the NJSO's 14th music director in the 2016–17 season, leading the Orchestra in seven subscription classical programs.

A regular conductor with the London Symphony and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras, Zhang's recent highlights include her return to the BBC Proms with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, as well as performances with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and Gothenburg Symphony orchestras. This season, she debuts with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and Orquesta y Coro Nacionales de España, and she returns to the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and Orchestre National de Belgique. Zhang continues to work frequently in North America; recent performances have included a week of Chinese New Year concerts with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

This season's operatic performances include a return to English National Opera for *La bohème* and her debut with Den Norske Opera conducting *La traviata* in January. Following Zhang's hugely successful production of *Nabucco* with Welsh National Opera in June 2014, which subsequently transferred to the Savonlinna Festival, she returns to the festival in summer 2016 to conduct *Otello*, marking her debut with the opera company itself.

Zhang frequently returns to her native China, where she is a regular conductor with the China Philharmonic, Beijing Symphony and Guangzhou Symphony. A champion for Chinese composers, she recently conducted the world premiere of Qigang Chen's *Luan Tan*—a Hong Kong Philharmonic commission. She also conducted Qigang Chen's *Iris Devoilee* with the National Centre for the Performing Arts and BBC National Orchestra of Wales, as well as Tan Dun's *Resurrection Concerto* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, last season.

Working with young talented musicians continues to play a major part in Zhang's life. She has held the position of Artistic Director of the NJO, Dutch Orchestra and Ensemble Academy since 2011, and this summer, she made a hugely successful debut with the European Union Youth Orchestra, conducting them in Grafenegg, Amsterdam, Berlin, Rheingau and Bolzano.

Born in Dandong, China, Zhang made her professional debut conducting *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Central Opera House in Beijing at the age of 20. She trained at Beijing's Central Conservatory, earning both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees, and she served one year on its conducting faculty before moving to the United States in 1998. She was appointed the New York Philharmonic's Assistant Conductor in 2002, subsequently becoming their Associate Conductor and the first holder of the Arturo Toscanini Chair.

THE NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Named "a vital, artistically significant musical organization" by *The Wall Street Journal*, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra embodies that vitality through its statewide presence and critically acclaimed performances, education partnerships and unparalleled access to music and the Orchestra's superb musicians.

The NJSO presents classical, pops and family programs, as well as outdoor summer concerts and special events. Embracing its legacy as a statewide orchestra, the NJSO is the resident orchestra of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and regularly performs at the State Theatre in New Brunswick, Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank, Richardson Auditorium in Princeton, Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown and bergenPAC in Englewood. Partnerships with New Jersey arts organizations, universities and civic organizations remain a key element of the Orchestra's statewide identity.

In addition to its lauded artistic programming, the NJSO presents a suite of education and community engagement programs that promote meaningful, lifelong engagement with live music. Programs include school-time Concerts for Young People performances and multiple offerings—including the NJSO Youth Orchestras family of student ensembles and El Sistema-inspired NJSO CHAMPS (Character, Achievement and Music Project)—that provide and promote in-school instrumental instruction as part of the NJSO Academy. The NJSO's REACH (Resources for Education and Community Harmony) chamber music program annually brings original programs—designed and performed by NJSO musicians—to a variety of settings, reaching as many as 17,000 people in nearly all of New Jersey's 21 counties.

For more information about the NJSO, visit www.njsymphony.org or email information@njsymphony.org. Tickets are available for purchase by phone 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra's website.

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