

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **NJSO to perform George Walker's *Lyric for Strings* on opening weekend to honor Pulitzer Prize-winning composer**

**Walker, a Montclair resident, passed away Aug 23**

**Opening program features Beethoven's Ninth Symphony  
and US premiere of Kate Whitley's *Speak Out***

**Music Director Xian Zhang conducts**

**Oct 5 and 7 at NJPAC in Newark  
Oct 6 at State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick**

NEWARK, NJ—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra will perform George Walker's *Lyric for Strings* on its opening-weekend program in memory of the late Pulitzer Prize-winning composer. A longtime Montclair resident and former chairman of the music department at Rutgers University, Walker passed away on August 23 at the age of 96.

The NJSO's 2018–19 opening performances take place October 5–7 in Newark and New Brunswick. Led by Music Director Xian Zhang, the program features Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the US premiere of Kate Whitley's *Speak Out*.

Zhang says: "Mr. Walker was very connected with the NJSO. Being the first African-American composer to win the Pulitzer Prize, and a longtime Montclair resident, he was an important figure for the arts in the state of New Jersey and far beyond. It is fitting that we will honor his memory on our opening weekend by presenting one of his most enduring works, *Lyric for Strings*."

The NJSO commissioned and performed multiple works by Walker, including the world premieres of *Pageant and Proclamation* for the opening of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark in 1997 and *Sinfonia No. 4, "Strands,"* through the New Jersey Roots Project in 2012.

NJSO President & CEO Gabriel van Aalst says: "George Walker was a pioneering American composer and pianist. The NJSO was honored to premiere multiple commissions that bore the hallmarks of his unique artistic voice. The 1997 premiere of his *Pageant and Proclamation* for the opening of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center was a proud moment for the arts in New Jersey. We are saddened at his passing and celebrate his legacy."

Performances take place on October 5 at 7:30 pm and October 7 at 3 pm at NJPAC in Newark and October 6 at 8 pm at State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick.

Concert tickets start at \$20 and are available for purchase at [njsymphony.org](http://njsymphony.org) or 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

## **CONCERT PROGRAM**

### **Zhang Conducts Beethoven 9**

Fri, Oct 5, at 7:30 pm | NJPAC in Newark

Sat, Oct 6, at 8 pm | State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick

Sun, Oct 7, at 3 pm | NJPAC in Newark

Xian Zhang, conductor

Mary Elizabeth Williams, soprano

Elizabeth Bishop, mezzo-soprano

Lorenzo Decaro, tenor

Reginald D. Smith Jr., baritone

Montclair State University Singers | Heather J. Buchanan, director

Montclair State University Chorale | Heather J. Buchanan, director

Newark Voices | Heather J. Buchanan, conductor

New Jersey Youth Choruses | Trish Joyce, artistic director

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

WALKER *Lyric for Strings*

KATE WHITLEY *Speak Out* (US Premiere)

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9, "Choral"

Additional concert information and artist bios are available at [njsymphony.org/beethoven9](https://njsymphony.org/beethoven9).

*Newark Voices performs Oct 5 and 7 only.*

## **NJSO ACCENTS**

### **#ChoraleYou – Oct 7 after the concert**

Join with other concertgoers and members of the massed choirs to sing Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," conducted by Heather J. Buchanan. [njsymphony.org/choraleyouth](https://njsymphony.org/choraleyouth)

## **OPENING NIGHT CELEBRATION GALA**

The NJSO hosts an Opening Night Celebration on October 5 at NJPAC. The gala evening includes a pre-concert cocktail party with hors d'oeuvres and an open bar at 5:30 pm; a post-concert dinner offers opportunities to meet and mingle with Xian Zhang, musicians and special guests. Complimentary valet parking will be provided for all gala attendees. *The gala is sponsored by Investors Bank.*

Full gala information is available at [njsymphony.org/openingnight](https://njsymphony.org/openingnight).

## **MUSIC DIRECTOR XIAN ZHANG**

Xian Zhang's contract as Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra has been extended until the 2023–24 season, to include the Orchestra's 100th anniversary in 2022.

Of her final concerts in 2017–18, conducting Mahler's First Symphony, NJ.com wrote: "From the opening bars, Zhang imbued the work with majesty, creating the alpine atmospheric that the score calls for. The off-stage horns sounded perfect and the deep pull of Mahler's music was in full effect. Zhang made the swooping waltzes of the second movement come to life and gave the bluesy, jazzy third movement an elegant light touch. The final movement was big and bold; the horns stood up in the grand finale and made beautiful, clarion sounds. The brass section of the NJSO has never sounded better. The NJPAC audience was on its feet at the end. This is now Zhang's orchestra—how far can she take it between now and 2024?"

Since September 2016, Zhang has held the position of Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, becoming the first female conductor to hold a titled role with a BBC orchestra. She also holds the post

of Conductor Emeritus of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, following her tenure as Music Director from 2009–16.

Last season included returns to Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Belgique, Orquesta Nacional de España, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, San Francisco Symphony and NAC Orchestra, Ottawa. 2018–19 sees her debuts with Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Sydney Symphony and the orchestra of Royal Stockholm Opera.

Born in Dandong, China, Zhang made her professional conducting debut at the Central Opera House in Beijing at the age of 20. She was appointed as the New York Philharmonic’s Assistant Conductor in 2002, subsequently becoming their Associate Conductor and the first holder of the Arturo Toscanini Chair.

### **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.

Music Director Xian Zhang—a “dynamic podium presence” *The New York Times* has praised for her “technical abilities, musicianship and maturity”—continues her acclaimed leadership of the NJSO. The Orchestra 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 State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick, Count Basie Center for the Arts 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; NJSO Youth Orchestras family of student ensembles, led by José Luis Domínguez; and El Sistema-inspired NJSO CHAMPS (Character, Achievement and Music Project). NJSO musicians annually perform original chamber music programs at community events in a variety of settings statewide through the NJSO Community Partners program.

For more information about the NJSO, visit [njsymphony.org](http://njsymphony.org) or email [information@njsymphony.org](mailto:information@njsymphony.org). Tickets are available for purchase by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra’s website.

*The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra’s programs are made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, along with many other foundations, corporations and individual donors.*

### **PRESS CONTACT**

Victoria McCabe, NJSO Senior Manager of Public Relations & Communications | 973.735.1715 | [vmccabe@njsymphony.org](mailto:vmccabe@njsymphony.org)

###