

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra names Tong Chen assistant conductor

- Chen to make NJSO subscription debut with performances of Jessie Montgomery's *Starburst*
- Chen and Xian Zhang to conduct the Orchestra's annual Lunar New Year Celebration this season

NEWARK, NJ—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra has named Tong Chen its assistant conductor for the 2021–22 season. Chen will make her subscription series debut with performances of Jessie Montgomery's *Starburst* on a November classical program. She will share the podium with Music Director Xian Zhang for the Orchestra's annual Lunar New Year Celebration in January.

A regular cover conductor with the NJSO for the past five years, Chen will serve as cover conductor for most subscription concerts this season. She will also serve as an artistic resource for the Orchestra and conductor for chamber programs.

Chen says: "I am thrilled to officially join the NJSO family in the 2021–22 season! This season will be exhilarating for me to deepen my relationship with the incredible musicians from the Orchestra; my dear mentor, Music Director Xian Zhang, the fantastic artistic planning team and staff at the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. I can't wait to start this great opportunity and collaboration!"

Zhang says: "I'm so excited to officially welcome Tong to the NJSO family as our assistant conductor for this season. In the five seasons she has been a cover conductor with us, I've come to know Tong as a conductor with a deep sense of musicality and tremendous potential. I am looking forward to introducing her to our audiences across New Jersey as we return to the stage."

Chen most recently led the NJSO Chamber Players in a performance of Ives' *The Unanswered Question* at The Newark Museum of Art in June. She previously led a series of education concerts with the NJSO in the fall of 2019.

Tong Chen

"[Tong Chen] masterfully presented the Mendelssohn's Fifth Symphony," described the *Leipzig Times*. A prizewinner of the prestigious International Malko Conducting Competition, Tong Chen has quickly established herself as one of the most promising and exciting young conductors of her generation.

In 2020–21, Chen made her debut with the Louisiana Philharmonic, conducting a program which included the world premiere of Ellis Marsalis' *The Fourth Autumn* arranged by Hannah Yim. 2019–20 season highlights include Chen's debuts with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Shanghai Philharmonic and Rutgers Symphony Orchestra, the latter featuring a program that included the world premiere of Allen Shawn's Concerto for Clarinet and Cello, one of the last pieces commissioned by Benny Goodman. She also returned to the Los Angeles Philharmonic to work with Gustavo Dudamel and to assist Iván Fisher with Budapest Festival Orchestra at the Hollywood Bowl.

Chen has worked with numerous orchestras across the globe, including the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, Mikkelin Kaupunginorkesteri, Besançon Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Symphony Orchestra, Alabama Symphony Orchestra, Charleston Symphony Orchestra and Richmond Symphony Orchestra. In 2015, she made her Lincoln Center debut at David H. Koch Theater with the Paul Taylor Dance Company and Orchestra of St. Luke's.

Born in Shanghai, China, Chen is also a regular guest conductor with orchestras throughout China, including the Shanghai Philharmonic, Xia Men Philharmonic, Qing Dao Symphony Orchestra, Guang Zhou Symphony Orchestra and Shanghai Opera House, where she worked as assistant conductor from 2004–09.

Chen's primary studies were with Gustav Meier at the Peabody Conservatory, where she received her master's degree in conducting; with Maurice Peress at the Copland School of Music at Queens College in New York City; and at the Shanghai Conservatory. She attended the Aspen Music Festival, where she worked with David Zinman as well as the Cabrillo Festival, where she studied with Marin Alsop. Chen was also a protégé of the former music director of the New York Philharmonic, Kurt Masur, and was awarded the Mendelssohn Scholarship in 2012, which allowed her to study the music of Mendelssohn and serve as the assistant conductor for Masur at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig.

This season marks Chen's sixth anniversary as music director of the Yonkers Philharmonic Orchestra. Chen is a strong believer that music is an important connection to bring people and the community together; during her first year as the music director of YPO she introduced a Beethoven Festival which sold out five years in a row. Due to the global pandemic in the 2020–21 season, she created YPO@Home, an online streaming music program to bring music to the community. Chen also started an online rehearsal and education program for local musicians and music students.

An avid advocate of education, Chen taught orchestral conducting and led the Copland School of Music orchestral program from 2012–18. Summer 2019 marked her second year as the director of the Queens College Conductor's workshop, founded by Maurice Peress in 2010. Additionally, she is a regular guest conductor at the Manhattan School of Music and Montclair State University, with the Mannes Pre-College Orchestra as well as with numerous All-State Youth Orchestras in New York State, and she is a guest lecturer at Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Chen lives in Jersey City with her family and a dog named Kimi.

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra connects with the people and diverse communities of New Jersey through the power of live symphonic music to inspire, entertain and educate. Internationally renowned Music Director Xian Zhang has garnered critical acclaim on the podium and has deepened the NJSO's commitment to presenting diverse voices that reflect the communities the Orchestra serves.

The NJSO embraces its legacy as a statewide orchestra through mainstage and chamber performances at venues across New Jersey, as well as partnerships with fellow Garden State arts organizations, universities and civic organizations. The Orchestra's education and community engagement programs promote meaningful, lifelong engagement with live music.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NJSO has made virtual performances and educational online programs available for free, reaching more than 10 million people across the Orchestra's digital channels. NJSO Concert Films pair world-class NJSO performances with stunning imagery of the people and cityscapes of New Jersey. The NJSO has presented innovative programs with fellow arts organizations, community ensembles and statewide partners. Musicians perform solo and chamber works from iconic New Jersey locations in NJSO Everywhere. NJSO at Home spotlights intimate at-home performances, instrument demonstrations, educational videos and hours of concert recordings.

The NJSO Youth Orchestras have expanded to a hybrid in-person/virtual design, introducing entirely new dimensions to the program, from composition and rhythm courses to an eclectic array of electives. In 2020–21, nearly 200 students collaborated on a yearlong creative composition project—a uniquely engaging opportunity to explore their own musical voices and shape new works drawing from all the genres that inspire them. The project culminated in *Our Voices*, an album of 25 original compositions.

The safety of our patrons, musicians and staff is of the utmost importance to the NJSO. Please visit njsymphony.org for constantly updated details focused on attendees' well-being at our performances.

The Orchestra's online hub for free musical content is njsymphony.org/virtual.

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