

NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Jersey Symphony Celebrates 100 Years with Steven Mackey's world premiere, *RIOT*

- World premiere of Steven Mackey's *RIOT* with lyrics by former U. S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith is sponsored by Linda K. and William T. Walker
- Program also features Mozart's Overture to *Don Giovanni* and his Symphony No. 25, and Bruckner's *Te Deum*
- Soloists mezzo-soprano Alicia Olatuja, soprano Meigui Zhang, mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnson Cano, , tenor Sean Panikkar, bass-baritone Nathan Berg, electric guitarist Steven Mackey and the Princeton University Glee Club join for *RIOT* and *Te Deum*
- Xian Zhang to conduct
- April 21–23 in Princeton, Newark and New Brunswick
- njsymphony.org

NEWARK, NJ– On April 21-23, Steven Mackey's *RIOT* receives its world premiere with the New Jersey Symphony led by Music Director Xian Zhang featuring the Princeton University Glee Club Choir, directed by Gabriel Crouch, joined by mezzo-soprano Alicia Olatuja and Mackey himself on electric guitar. The large-scale work, written in collaboration with former U. S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, was composed in honor of New Jersey Symphony's centennial season. The performance will also feature Mozart's Symphony No. 25 and his Overture to *Don Giovanni* as well as Bruckner's *Te Deum*.

A longtime resident of New Jersey and a professor of composition at Princeton University for nearly four decades, Mackey is a frequent collaborator with the New Jersey Symphony, and serves as Director of the symphony's Edward T. Cone Composition Institute.

Mackey states: "My daydreams about what I might do for such an auspicious occasion were grand: my friends in the New Jersey Symphony joined on a packed stage by a vocal soloist, a chorus and myself on guitar, all singing and playing with abandon." He asked poet Tracy K. Smith (who was a colleague at Princeton) to provide text, as "she knows how to make words sing."

As Mackey and Smith began to work on the piece in summer 2020, what began as a celebratory work shifted following the death of George Floyd to a piece that "foregrounds race and resilience." The first line written by Smith is a dark, personal statement that Mackey describes as setting up "the interplay between personal and communal, the soloist and the chorus": "Sometimes I feel / the Black in my heart / like a map / made of tar. You need / only part your lips / to mar what isn't yours." This is followed by a series of six texts that "trace a trajectory that culminates in positive affirmation and a celebration of hope, perseverance, commitment, and community. The music aspires to honor that trajectory."

Composed in 1773 when Mozart was only 17 years old, Symphony No. 25 is considered by critics to be his first fully mature work. While Symphony No. 25 is known for its dramatic and intense nature, his overture to *Don Giovanni* is more complex and musically intricate. The overture displays Mozart's mastery of musical form, with contrasting sections and a subtle interplay between the different instrumental sections. In contrast, Symphony No. 25 has a more straightforward structure and relies on its emotional intensity to captivate the listener. Both works, however, showcase Mozart's genius and his ability to create memorable musical themes that have stood the test of time.

Anton Bruckner called his joyful work, *Te Deum*, "the pride of my life." Composed in 1881, *Te Deum* is regarded as one of his most significant choral works, showcasing his skill in orchestration and use of rich harmony. It is a grand and majestic composition that reflects the composer's deep religious faith and his admiration for the music of Richard

Wagner. New Jersey Symphony is joined by soprano Meigui Zhang, mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnson Cano, tenor Sean Panikkar, bass-baritone Nathan Berg and Princeton University Glee Club for these performances of *Te Deum*. Performances take place at the Richardson Auditorium in Princeton on April 21 at 8 pm, New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark on April 22 at 8 pm and at State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick on April 23 at 3 pm. Tickets are available online at [njsymphony.org](https://www.njsymphony.org) or by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476).

More information is available at <https://www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/steven-mackey-mozart>

Steven Mackey & Mozart

Friday, April 21, 8 pm | Richardson Auditorium in Princeton
Saturday, April 22, 8 pm | New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark
Sunday, April 23, 3 pm | State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick

Xian Zhang conductor
Meigui Zhang soprano
Jennifer Johnson Cano mezzo-soprano
Alicia Olatuja mezzo-soprano
Sean Panikkar tenor
Nathan Berg bass-baritone
Steven Mackey electric guitar
Princeton University Glee Club | Gabriel Crouch, director
New Jersey Symphony

Mozart Symphony No. 25
Steven Mackey *RIOT* (World Premiere, New Jersey Symphony Commission)
Mozart Overture to *Don Giovanni*
Bruckner *Te Deum*

The world premiere of Steven Mackey's RIOT is sponsored by Linda K. and William T. Walker

Xian Zhang

Grammy Awards-Winning Conductor Xian Zhang's recording with Time for Three and The Philadelphia Orchestra, *Letters for The Future* (on Deutsche Grammophon), won awards in both the Best Contemporary Classical Composition (specifically Kevin Puts' *Contact*), and Best Classical Instrumental Solo categories in 2023.

Xian Zhang is currently in her seventh season as Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony, who mark their 100th anniversary season in 2022–23. She is also Principal Guest Conductor of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Conductor Emeritus of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano, following her tenure as their Music Director 2009–2016. With New Jersey Symphony, Zhang has commissioned composers such as Wynton Marsalis, Jessie Montgomery, Qigang Chen, Chen Yi, Steven Mackey, Thomas Adès, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Christopher Rouse, Vivian Li, Gary Morgan, Christian McBride and Paquito D'Rivera. She is also responsible for introducing their annual Lunar New Year celebrations.

2022/23 US engagements include Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Festival and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Xian Zhang remains a popular guest of Detroit, Montreal, NAC Ottawa and Toronto Symphony orchestras.

Beyond the US, this season Zhang conducts Singapore Symphony, Orchestre National de Lille, having recently conducted the London Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra, Spanish National Orchestra, Komische Oper Berlin, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Orchestre National de Lyon and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

Zhang previously served as Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales, the first female conductor to hold a titled role with a BBC orchestra. In 2002, she won first prize in the Maazel-Vilar Conductor's Competition. She was appointed New York Philharmonic's Assistant Conductor in 2002, subsequently becoming their Associate Conductor and the first holder of the Arturo Toscanini Chair.

Steven Mackey

Bright in coloring, ecstatic in inventiveness, lively and profound, Steven Mackey's music spins the tendrils of his improvisatory riffs into large-scale works of grooving, dramatic coherence.

As a teenager growing up in Northern California obsessed with blues-rock guitar, Mackey was in search of the "right wrong notes," those heart-wrenching moments that imbue the music with new, unexpected momentum. Today, his pieces play with that tension of being inside or outside of the harmony and flow forward shimmering with prismatic detail.

Signature early works merged his academic training with the free-spirited physicality of his mother-tongue rock guitar music: *Troubadour Songs* (1991) and *Physical Property* (1992) for string quartet and electric guitar; and *Banana/Dump Truck* (1995), an electrified-cello concerto. Later works explored his deepening fascination in transformation and movement of sound through time: *Dreamhouse* (2003), a rich work for voices and ensemble was nominated for four Grammy awards; *A Beautiful Passing* (2008) for violin and orchestra on the passing of his mother; and *Slide* (2011), a Grammy award-winning music theater piece. In 2021, the LA Philharmonic, Gustavo Dudamel, and trumpet soloist Thomas Hooten gave the world premiere of *Shivaree*, a fantasy for trumpet and orchestra. Mackey further expanded his theatrical catalog with his short chamber opera *Moon Tea* about the 1969 meeting between the Apollo 11 astronauts and the Royal Family, premiered by Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in 2021, as well as with his 2022 music theater work *Memoir*, based on the pages of his late mother's memoirs.

The 2022–23 season sees three world premieres: *Concerto for Curved Space* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Andris Nelsons; *Red Wood*, a new environmentally concerned work for The Soraya's Treelogy Project; and *RIOT* with mezzo-soprano Alicia Olatuja, Mackey on electric guitar, New Jersey Symphony, Princeton University Glee Club and conductor Xian Zhang.

Today, Steven Mackey writes for chamber ensemble, orchestra, dance and opera—commissioned by the greatest orchestras around the world. He has served as professor of music at Princeton University for the past 35 years, and in fall 2022, he joined the composition faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music. He has won several awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Kennedy Center Friedheim Award. He continues to explore an ever-widening world of timbres befitting a complex, 21st-century culture, while always striving to make music that unites the head and heart, that is visceral, that gets us moving.

Meigui Zhang

The powerful yet ethereal soprano of Meigui Zhang has been captivating audiences across the globe. Zhang's 2022–23 season features an exciting role debut as Euridice in San Francisco Opera's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, her Atlanta Opera debut as Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* and a return to the Metropolitan Opera covering Ilia in *Idomeneo*. She is also engaged as the soprano soloist in Mozart's Requiem with the North Carolina Symphony, Beethoven *Missa solennis* with Bard College's The Orchestra Now and Bruckner's *Te Deum* with New Jersey Symphony. This summer, she will represent China in the 2023 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

During her tenure in the Metropolitan Opera's Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, Zhang made her Metropolitan Opera debut as the Bloody Child in *Macbeth*, followed by Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro*. While attending the San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program, Zhang performed as Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress*, and at the Chautauqua Institute, she was seen as Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. Zhang earned her master's degree from the Mannes School of Music, where she was a recipient of the George and Elizabeth Award and completed her bachelor's degree at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Jennifer Johnson Cano

A naturally gifted singer known for her commanding stage presence and profound artistry, Jennifer Johnson Cano has garnered critical acclaim for both new and standard repertoire.

Highlights of Ms. Cano's recent season included performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin in a world premiere of Kevin Puts' *The Hours*; *Opera News* praised her performance as having an "impressive tone and dead-on pitch throughout a wide range, and a fierce command of words," calling her "a matchless interpreter of contemporary opera." She also debuted with the Chicago Symphony and starred in the New York premiere of Marc Neikrug's *A Song By Mahler* at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (CMS). She made operatic debuts in Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* with the Houston Grand Opera, the world premiere of Gregory Spears' *Castor and Patience* with the Cincinnati Opera and Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* with the Roanoke Opera.

This season she performs at the Metropolitan Opera in *Falstaff* and makes her company debut with the Atlanta Opera in *Don Giovanni* and appears with the New York Philharmonic, New Jersey Symphony and Atlanta Symphony. Jennifer returns to the CMS for Mahler's *Rückert-Lieder* and to the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society in an All-Bach Program with the Gamut Bach Ensemble.

Alicia Olatuja

Praised in *The New York Times* as "a singer with a strong and luscious tone" Alicia Olatuja has been astounding audiences with her exquisite vocals, artistic versatility and captivating demeanor. She first came into the national spotlight in 2013, whilst performing as the featured soloist with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir at President Barack Obama's Second Inauguration. Shortly thereafter, she assembled her own jazz based ensemble and recorded her first solo album, *Timeless* (2014), followed by "Intuition: Songs From The Minds of Women" (2019).

Originally from St. Louis, MO, Olatuja grew up immersed in a wide range of musical styles, including gospel, soul, jazz and classical. These influences have informed her artistic journey, and she later graduated with a master's degree in Classical Voice/Opera from the Manhattan School of Music. After appearing in numerous operatic and musical theater productions, she started to perform more regularly in gospel and jazz concerts and worked with such esteemed artists as Chaka Khan, BeBe Winans, Christian McBride, Dr. Lonnie Smith and Billy Childs. Some of her classical performances have included works by Steven Mackey ("Afterlife") and Caroline Shaw ("Narrow Sea"), both with Sō Percussion and Alejandro Golijov ("Oceana") with the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra (Marin Alsop, conductor).

Sean Panikkar

Sean Panikkar continues "to position himself as one of the stars of his generation..." (*Opera News*). The American tenor of Sri Lankan heritage achieved a break-out success in his 2018 Salzburger Festspiele debut as Dionysus in Henze's *The Bassarids* directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski under the baton of Kent Nagano and critically acclaimed the same year in his Los Angeles Opera debut as Gandhi in the company's new production of Philip Glass' *Satyagraha* directed by Phelim McDermott led by Grant Gershon.

Highlights of the 2022-23 season include the Metropolitan Opera premiere of *The Hours* by Kevin Puts and Greg Pierce in a new production by Phelim McDermott and led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, as well as a return to Komische Oper Berlin for a new production by Marco Štorman of Luigi Nono's *Intolleranza 1960* conducted by Gabriel Feltz. The tenor makes his Bayerische Staatsoper debut as Laertes in Brett Dean's *Hamlet* in the company's new production by Neil Armfield conducted by Vladimir Jurowski, and he returns both to the Wiener Staatsoper to sing Tambourmajor in *Wozzeck* led by Philippe Jordan and to the English National Opera as Don José for a revival of Calixto Bieito's production of *Carmen* conducted by Kerem Hasan.

Nathan Berg

A "tall, majestic bass" with "impeccable technique" and "a palpable presence on stage," Canadian bass-baritone Nathan Berg has enjoyed a career spanning a vast range of repertoire on the concert and operatic stage.

In the 2022-23 season, Nathan Berg will return to the LA Philharmonic and Melbourne Symphony for Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, will debut the role of Melisso in *Alcina* with Les Violons du Roy, join Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Orchestre de Metropolitan for Bach's Mass in B Minor, and the New Jersey Symphony for Bruckner's *Te Deum*. Mr. Berg also returns to the Metropolitan Opera to understudy the roles of Balstrode in *Peter Grimes*, Filippo in Verdi's *Don Carlos* and the Marquis de la Force in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*.

In the 2021-22 season, Mr. Berg made his Metropolitan Opera stage debut as The Father in the New York premiere of Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice* conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, returned to Theater Basel for his first King Philippe in *Don Carlos* and debuted the role of Kurwenal in *Tristan and Isolde* with the Taiwan Philharmonic.

New Jersey Symphony

The Emmy and Grammy Award-winning New Jersey Symphony, celebrating its Centennial Season in 2022–23, is redefining what it means to be a nationally leading, relevant orchestra in the 21st century. We are renewing our deeply rooted commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by championing new, and often local, artists; engaging audiences for whom the inspiring depth and breadth of classical music will be new; and incorporating the broadest possible representation in all aspects of our organization—all to better reflect and serve our vibrant communities. Since 2021, Music Director Xian Zhang has worked together with composer, violinist, educator and social-justice advocate Daniel Bernard Roumain, the orchestra's resident artistic catalyst, to offer programming that connects with diverse communities in Newark and throughout New Jersey.

Internationally renowned Chinese American conductor Xian Zhang began her tenure as the New Jersey Symphony's current Music Director in 2016. Since her arrival at the New Jersey Symphony, Zhang has revitalized programming with an industry-leading commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in mainstage concerts. The centennial season opened in October with concerts featuring Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto with soloist Yefim Bronfman; Jessie Montgomery's *Banner*; Nimbus Dance performing original choreography to Copland's *Appalachian Spring Suite*; Strauss' *Burleske* for Piano and Orchestra with soloist Michelle Cann; Brahms' Fourth Symphony; and Dorothy Chang's *Northern Star*. The centennial season will conclude in June 2023 with Zhang leading the orchestra and violinist Joshua Bell in Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and a commissioned world premiere by Daniel Bernard Roumain.

For more information about the New Jersey Symphony, 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.

Press Contacts

New Jersey Symphony / Local Press

Sarah Hornblower, New Jersey Symphony, Interim Director of Marketing & Communications
973.735.1715 | shornblower@njsymphony.org

Geoffrey Anderson, New Jersey Symphony, Vice President of Marketing & External Affairs
973.735.1713 | ganderson@njsymphony.org

Kirshbaum Associates / National & Classical Music Press

Beverly Greenfield, Kirshbaum Associates, Director of Public Relations
bgreenfield@kirshbaumassociates.com

Shirley Kirshbaum, Kirshbaum Associates, President
917.331.1888 | skirshbaum@kirshbaumassociates.com

Connect with Us:

njsymphony.org

@NJSymphony on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [TikTok](#)

@NewJerseySymphony on [YouTube](#)

Email: information@njsymphony.org

###