

NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Jersey Symphony and Montclair State University Chorale perform Mozart's final masterpiece

NEWARK, NJ—With just three programs remaining on the 2025–26 season, Music Director Xian Zhang conducts Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Requiem, the composer's final composition last performed by New Jersey Symphony in 2018. Mysteriously commissioned and incomplete at the time of Mozart's death, the Requiem is widely regarded as one of the composer's most accomplished works. Written for a funeral Mass, the music is intensely emotional, ranging from powerful drama to languid sorrow to serene tenderness.

Four outstanding soloists appear onstage with the following 2025–26 highlights: soprano Mei Gui Zhang (San Francisco Opera, *The Monkey King*); mezzo-soprano Taylor Raven (English National Opera, *Così fan tutte* and LA Phil, *Die Walküre*); tenor Eric Ferring (*Messiah* with Charlotte and Knoxville Symphonies); and bass-baritone Dashon Burton (Cleveland Orchestra, *Fidelio*). Complete biographies below.

The program opens with Gabriel Fauré's Pavane, getting its name from the Italian *pavana*, a short 16th-century court dance. Originally written for orchestra, the composer added an optional chorus so the work could be both danceable and singable. Gustav Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* also appears on the program—a cycle of songs written at a time when the composer was scorned by love and considered to be his first masterpiece. Bass-baritone Dashon Burton solos.

Performances take place on Thursday, April 16, at 1:30 pm and Saturday, April 18, at 7:30 pm at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark; and Sunday, April 19, at 2 pm at the State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick. The Thursday matinee will be a [Relaxed Performance](#), designed to accommodate the differing needs of patrons of all abilities, including individuals with autism, sensory sensitivities, or cognitive and physical differences. The Saturday evening performance includes a Concert Prelude at 6:30 pm featuring the New Jersey Symphony Youth Orchestra's Curtland E. Fields Ensemble.

Tickets available at njsymphony.org.

EVENT DETAILS AND ARTIST BIOS

Mozart's Requiem

Xian Zhang conductor

Mei Gui Zhang soprano

Taylor Raven mezzo-soprano

Eric Ferring tenor

Dashon Burton bass-baritone

Montclair State University Chorale Heather J. Buchanan, Director

New Jersey Symphony

Gabriel Fauré Pavane

Gustav Mahler *Songs of a Wayfarer*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Requiem

Newark → Thursday, Apr 16, 1:30 pm | [Relaxed Performance](#)

Newark → Saturday, Apr 18, 7:30 pm | Concert Prelude at 6:30 pm

New Brunswick → Sunday, Apr 19, 2 pm

[Event page](#)

Xian Zhang

2025–26 marks the GRAMMY and Emmy Award-winning conductor Xian Zhang's 10th season as Music Director of New Jersey Symphony, and her inaugural season as the Music Director of Seattle Symphony with whom she has been a long-term collaborator since her debut in 2008. Zhang has also been appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the NCPA Orchestra in Beijing, beginning this season. Following her tenure as Music Director of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano between 2009–16, she continues as their Conductor Emeritus.

2025–26 highlights include returns to The Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, St. Louis Symphony, and National Arts Centre Ottawa. In Europe, she returns to Netherlands Radio Philharmonic with a performance at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and makes her debut at Finnish National Opera conducting *Tosca*. This follows her huge success at The Metropolitan Opera in New York, where she recently conducted *Madama Butterfly* and *Tosca* to great acclaim. [Read full bio.](#)

Mei Gui Zhang

Chinese soprano Mei Gui Zhang, whose “voice literally floated past the space she stood in and ‘lived it’ and created remarkable, layered beauty” (*OperaWire*), is enjoying a burgeoning international career.

In the 2025–26 season, Ms. Zhang returns to San Francisco Opera for the world premiere of Huang Ruo and David Henry Hwang’s *The Monkey King* in the role of Guanyin. In concert, she will sing French arias with Xu Zhong and the Paris Philharmonic, Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 and “Ah! Perfido” with Eun Sun Kim and the Minnesota Orchestra, and two projects with Xian Zhang, the first with Seattle Symphony with Qigang Chen in *Iris Unveiled*, and Mozart’s Requiem with New Jersey Symphony. Finally, Mei Gui Zhang will sing Mozart’s Mass in C Minor with the North Carolina Symphony.

In the 2024–25 season, Ms. Zhang debuted the role of Oscar in *Un ballo in maschera* with San Francisco Opera, sang Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro* at The Metropolitan Opera, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* with the Atlanta Opera and Opera Carolina, and Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* with the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing; and in concert, she performed in C.P.E. Bach’s *Die Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Jesu* with the American Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall and Mahler’s Symphony No. 4 with the Allentown Symphony.

Ms. Zhang’s connection to her cultural roots is a hallmark of her career, bringing to life rarely performed works by Chinese composers, and offering audiences a fresh perspective that intertwines her rich heritage with her operatic prowess. These works have brought her to prominent stages worldwide, including the world premiere performance of Aaron Zigman & Mark Campbell’s *Émigré* with the New York Philharmonic and Shanghai Symphony, recorded with Deutsche Grammophon, and her debut as the lead role Dai Yu in Bright Sheng’s *The Dream of the Red Chamber* with San Francisco Opera.

Ms. 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.

Taylor Raven

Taylor Raven is a “vocal sensation” (*Washington Classical Review*) and quickly establishing herself in opera, concert, and recital. In the 2025–26 season, Taylor will make her house debut with the English National Opera for *Così fan tutte* (Dorabella) and returns to the LA Phil for a staged production of *Die Walküre* (Grimgerde). Highlights on the concert stage include returns to the Cleveland Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra for Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, New Jersey Symphony for Mozart’s Requiem, and her debuts with the North Carolina Symphony for Handel’s *Messiah* and Opera Omaha for their annual Opera Outdoors concert.

Last season, Taylor debuted with The Metropolitan Opera in the company premiere of John Adams’ *Antony and Cleopatra* (Charmian) and with Pacific Opera Victoria for *La*

clemenza di Tito (Sesto). On the concert stage, she debuted with the Minnesota Orchestra for Mozart's Requiem, Duisburger Philharmoniker for Julia Perry's *Stabat Mater*, The US Naval Academy for Handel's *Messiah*, Buffalo Philharmonic for Moravec's *Sanctuary Road*, and Quad City Symphony Orchestra for Giddens' *Omar's Journey* (Fatima). In recital, Taylor debuted with the Northwest Sinfonietta performing Jessie Montgomery's *Five Freedom Songs* and made her New York City solo recital debut with the Kaufmann Music Center.

Recent engagements include debuts with Houston Grand Opera for *Die Zauberflöte* (Dritte Dame), Washington Concert Opera for *Lakmé* (Mallika), and North Carolina Opera for Moravec's *Sanctuary Road*. On the concert stage, she made debuts with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Iowa, and returned to the LA Phil.

She is a graduate of the Young Artist Program at LA Opera where she was seen in *La clemenza di Tito* (Annio), *Don Carlo* (Tebaldo), the Kosky production of *Die Zauberflöte* (Zweite Dame) conducted by James Conlon, and *Hansel and Gretel* (Sandman). Taylor made her LA Phil debut as a soloist in the Hollywood Bowl performance of Beethoven's Choral Fantasy with Bramwell Tovey and made her debut with Seattle Opera in *As One* (Hannah After).

Taylor holds degrees from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the University of Colorado-Boulder.

Eric Ferring

Emmy-winning, Billboard-charting American tenor Eric Ferring is known internationally as "a prodigiously gifted lyric tenor" (*Opera News*) for his "fine, gleaming tenor" (*New York Classical Review*), as well as for having "a beautifully round and warm timbre, expressive, and with great finesse" (*Olyrix*). His expertise ranges from early bel canto repertoire and the music of Handel and Mozart to the origination of contemporary operatic roles.

Ferring's 2025–26 season includes return performances with Art Song Chicago, Tampa Oratorio Singers (*Elijah*), as well as debuts with the Knoxville Symphony (*Messiah*), Charlotte Symphony (*Messiah*), New Jersey Symphony (Mozart's Requiem), Opera Carolina (*Rinuccio*, *Gianni Schicchi*), and the Umeri Choir (Mozart's *Missa brevis* in F Major). Ferring will also record his third solo album in 2026 to be released with Lexicon Classics.

Ferring's 2024–25 season includes performances with conductor Emmanuelle Haïm and her ensemble Le Concert d'Astrée, for a program of Rameau and Handel in Paris' Opéra de Lille and at the LA Phil (debut). He also sang Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the

Portland Orchestra, Handel's *Messiah* with the Evansville Philharmonic, and Mozart's Requiem with the North Carolina Symphony. In New York City, he joined the Festival Orchestra of Lincoln Center (formerly Mostly Mozart), to perform Gomatz in Act 1 of Mozart's *Zaide*, conducted by Dame Jane Glover.

Eric Ferring was an Apprentice Singer at Santa Fe Opera, where he was awarded the 2017 Richard Tucker Memorial Scholarship. He also participated in the Académie du Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis' Gerdine Young Artist Program, receiving a career award from the Richard Gaddes Fund for Young Artists, and was a Studio Artist at Wolf Trap Opera.

He is a native of Dubuque, Iowa and graduated from Drake University with his Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance and The Boston Conservatory with his Master of Music in Opera Performance. Ferring is a graduate of the Lyric Opera of Chicago's Ryan Opera Center and the Pittsburgh Opera Resident Artist Program. Ferring is also an Assistant Regional Director at the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), the Executive Director of Art Song Chicago, and Project Curator for Lexicon Classics.

Dashon Burton

Hailed as an artist "alight with the spirit of the music" (*Boston Globe*), three-time GRAMMY Award-winning bass-baritone Dashon Burton has built a vibrant career with regular appearances across the US and Europe.

His 2025–26 season highlights include Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 and Don Fernando in *Fidelio* with the Cleveland Orchestra led by Franz Welser-Möst; Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* and Mozart's Requiem with New Jersey Symphony under Xian Zhang; Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Grand Rapids Symphony and Marcelo Lehninger; Britten's *War Requiem* with the Erie Philharmonic and Daniel Meyer; and Rossini's *Petite messe solennelle* with the Cincinnati May Festival.

Recent highlights include Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the LA Phil and Gustavo Dudamel at the Hollywood Bowl; Brahms' *Serious Songs* (arr. Glanert) and Mozart's Requiem with the St. Louis Symphony under Stéphane Denève, Mozart's Requiem with the Minnesota Orchestra and Thomas Søndergård; and a role as Artist-in-Residence with the Milwaukee Symphony, which included Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and Bach's *Ich habe genug*, both conducted by Ken-David Masur. He has collaborated regularly with Michael Tilson Thomas, singing performances of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the San Francisco Symphony, Copland's *Old American Songs*, and MTT's own *Walt Whitman Songs* with the Boston and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras. Highly regarded as a Baroque specialist, his performances of Handel's *Messiah* have included the National Symphony, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and The Philadelphia Orchestra.

A multiple award-winning singer, Burton won a GRAMMY in 2021 for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album with Dame Ethyl Smyth's *The Prison* with The Experiential Orchestra (Chandos). As a founding member of the groundbreaking vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth, he received his first GRAMMY in 2013 for their debut recording of new commissions, and his third in 2024 for *Rough Magic*.

Burton holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Oberlin College and Conservatory and a Master of Music degree from Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music. He is currently Assistant Professor of Voice at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music.

Montclair State University Chorale | Heather J. Buchanan, Director

Under the direction of Australian-born conductor Heather J. Buchanan since September 2003, the Montclair State University choral program has been recognized for successful collaborations with world-renowned artists and celebrated professional musicians in national and international venues, including Meredith Monk, Richard Alston Dance Company (UK), VOCES8 (UK), and Eric Whitacre. Montclair choirs appear regularly with New Jersey Symphony and have won critical acclaim for their "heartfelt conviction," "and vibrant sound," being a "marvel of diction, tuning, and rhythm," "eloquence," and for singing with the "crispness and dexterity of a professional choir." Pianist Gregory Stout is the Montclair choral accompanist.

The core choral ensemble in the Cali School of Music, Chorale is a 150-voice symphonic choir comprising music students majoring in performance, music education, music therapy, composition, jazz, and musical theatre, as well as auditioned non-music majors. With a focus on masterworks, recent season highlights include Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (with the MSU Symphony Orchestra/Ritenauer and New Jersey Symphony/Zhang) and Orff's *Carmina Burana* and Fauré's Requiem with New Jersey Symphony, as well as Immersive Residency performances of *Cloudburst* (Eric Whitacre) and *A Silence Haunts Me* (Jake Runestad). The 2021-22 season featured two regional premieres by living composers: *the breath of life* (Dan Forrest) and *Circlesong* (Bob Chilcott), integrating multi-media and live dance elements.

Established in 1908, Montclair State is a Research Doctoral Institution ranked in the top tier of national universities, with 13 degree-granting colleges/schools serving more than 24,000 undergraduate and graduate students. At Montclair's John J. Cali School of Music, students study with a world-class faculty drawn from the finest musicians and scholars in the New York metropolitan area and beyond. Professor of Music and Director of Choral Activities Dr. Heather J. Buchanan holds degrees from the University of New England (Australia), Westminster Choir College of Rider University (US), and the Queensland Conservatorium at Griffith University (Australia), and is a Licensed Body Mapping Educator. A vibrant teacher, dynamic performer, and passionate health

advocate for musicians, she is in demand as a guest conductor, somatic educator, and choral clinician in the US and abroad.

New Jersey Symphony

New Jersey Symphony is a GRAMMY and Emmy Award-winning orchestra. Under the direction of Music Director Xian Zhang, the Symphony performs more than 55 mainstage concerts across the state at venues in Newark, Princeton, New Brunswick, Red Bank, and Morristown, as well as at schools and public spaces statewide. Programming at the Symphony reflects an unwavering commitment to diverse communities throughout the state, while providing students unparalleled opportunities to achieve musical excellence through its Youth Orchestra and other education programs. In 2024, the Symphony announced it would continue to deliver its statewide activities from a new, permanent office, rehearsal, and concert space in Jersey City, set to open in 2027. For more information about New Jersey Symphony, visit our website at njsymphony.org or our [newsroom](#) for press releases and photos.

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The April 16 Relaxed Performance is promoted in partnership with Best Buddies New Jersey and the John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University.

The April 18 performance is presented in collaboration with the New Jersey Performing Arts Center.