

NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Xian Zhang brings two epics to life: Prokofiev's tour-de-force Violin Concerto No. 2 and R. Strauss' *A Hero's Life*

NEWARK, NJ—Music Director Xian Zhang, now in her 10th season with New Jersey Symphony, takes the podium for concerts that include Richard Strauss' epic tone poem, *Ein Heldenleben*, and the debut of young Italian American violinist Francesca Dego performing Sergei Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2.

Anton Webern's *Im Sommerwind* opens the program, inspired by the poem of the same name. It is a perfect musical depiction of summer day in bucolic surroundings, written in the late romantic style just before the composer changed course to less traditional forms.

Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2 is known for its melodic opening movement that leads to an exuberant finale, complete with castanets, triangle, and snare drum. Violinist Francesca Dego makes her New Jersey Symphony debut in these concerts and brings "playing that combines tonal purity, verve, and an evident delight in the unexpected" (*Gramophone*).

Concluding these concerts is Strauss' ambitious *Ein Heldenleben (A Hero's Life)*, an autobiographical journey highlighting the composer's personal struggles and successes. A monumental work performed in one movement, *Ein Heldenleben* provides multiple solo cadenzas for the concertmaster and concludes in a grand cathartic coda.

Performances take place on Friday, April 10, at 7:30 pm and Sunday, April 12, at 2 pm at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark; and Saturday, April 11, at 7:30 pm at the Count Basie Center for the Arts in Red Bank.

Tickets available at njsymphony.org.

EVENT DETAILS AND ARTIST BIOS

Xian Conducts Prokofiev & Strauss

Xian Zhang conductor

Francesca Dego violin

New Jersey Symphony

Anton Webern *Im Sommerwind*

Sergei Prokofiev Violin Concerto No. 2

Richard Strauss *Ein Heldenleben*

Newark → Friday, Apr 10, 7:30 pm

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[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.](#)

Francesca Dego

Violinist Francesca Dego is celebrated for her compelling interpretations and flawless technique. Recent engagement highlights include North American appearances with the Dallas Symphony a playing Beethoven's Violin Concerto with Fabio Luisi, St Louis Symphony Orchestra with John Storgårds, Houston Symphony with Andrés Orozco-Estrada playing Brahms Concerto, National Symphony at both the Kennedy Center in Washington and Wolf Trap Festival, Detroit Symphony, San

Diego Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Utah Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, and NACO Ottawa. On the world stage, Francesca has performed with NHK Symphony, Tokyo Symphony, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony, West Australian Symphony, Auckland Philharmonia, and Queensland Symphony. Recent European highlights have included Orchestre de Champs Elysées with Philippe Herreweghe, Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, Orchestre Philharmonique de Marseille, Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Orquesta de Castilla y León, Luxembourg Philharmonic, Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne, Brucknerhaus Linz, Swedish Radio Symphony, Bergen Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican Centre, Philharmonia (London), London Philharmonic Orchestra, Hallé (Manchester), City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as the top Italian orchestras.

Francesca's 2025-26 season includes debuts with Baltimore Symphony Orchestra performing Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2 conducted by Jonathon Heyward; Seattle Symphony and Austria's Erl Festspiele performing Busoni's Violin Concerto; New Jersey Symphony and The Phoenix Symphony with conductor Xian Zhang; Dortmunder Philharmoniker performing Brahms Violin Concerto; and Granada Symphony and Enescu Philharmonic performing Barber's Violin Concerto. She returns to Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony, Richmond Symphony, and Teatro Carlo Felice Orchestra. Francesca will be a resident artist at Wigmore Hall in the 2026-27 season where she will perform in recitals.

In 2023 Francesca made her recording debut with the London Symphony Orchestra as the first artist to be featured on Apple Classical in *A New Dawn* with Bologne's Chevalier de St Georges Concerto No. 2 with conductor Jonathon Heyward. Francesca plays an Antonio Stradivari violin on loan from J & A Beare.

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

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