NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Jersey Symphony announces 2026–27 season

Performances around the state: Newark, New Brunswick, Princeton, Morristown, and Red Bank

Season Opening: Beethoven's "Emperor" & Schubert's "Great" (Oct 23–25)
Xian Zhang, conductor, George Li, piano

Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* (Nov 19–22)
George Duke's *Dark Wood: Bass Concerto for McBride,* Christian McBride, double bass
Christian McBride's *Fried Bacon,* Chris Komer, horn

Mozart & Ravel (Jan 8–10)
Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5, "Turkish," Blake Pouliot, violin

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (Jan 22–24)
Tony Siqi Yun, piano

Gil Shaham Plays Dvořák (Feb 18–21)

Mahler's Fifth Symphony (Mar 19–21)

Xian Zhang Conducts Mozart (Apr 1–4)
Mozart's Symphonies No. 29 and 40, "Jupiter"

Neruda Songs* and Poulenc's *Gloria (Apr 15–18)

Dvořák's "New World" Symphony (Apr 29–May 2)

Xian Zhang Conducts Tchaikovsky (May 14–16)
Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4

Season Finale: Ravel's *Boléro* with Xian Zhang (June 10–13)

PREMIERES & COMMISSIONS

East Coast Premiere by **Allison Loggins-Hull** (New Jersey Symphony Commission) (Mar 19–21)
East Coast Premiere by **Steven Mackey** (New Jersey Symphony Co-Commission) (May 14–16)

JOSHUA BELL, PRINCIPAL GUEST CONDUCTOR

Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Symphony No. 7 (Mar 11–14)

SPECIAL EVENTS

Hollywood Hits: From *West Side Story* to *Spirited Away* (Oct 10–11)
Rick Steves' Europe: A Symphonic Journey (Nov 7–8)

GUEST ARTISTS (*indicates debut)

Conductors **Kedrick Armstrong***, **Keitaro Harada***, **Eric Jacobsen**, **Christoph König**, **Ludovic Morlot***, **Valentina Peleggi***, and **Naomi Woo***
Pianists **George Li**, **Sophia Liu***, **Gabriela Montero**, and **Tony Siqi Yun**
Violinists **Blake Pouliot*** and **Gil Shaham**
Solo instrumentalists: **Gabriel Cabezas*** (cello), **Chris Komer** (horn), **Gregory LaRosa** (timpani), **Christian McBride*** (double bass), and **Pablo Sáinz Villegas*** (guitar)
Sopranos **Liv Redpath*** and **Jessica Rivera***, mezzo-sopranos **J'Nai Bridges** and **Kelley O'Connor**, tenor **Martin Bakari***, and bass-baritone **Adam Lau***

HOLIDAY EVENTS & FAMILY CONCERTS

Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* with **New Jersey Ballet**
at **Mayo Performing Arts Center** in **Morristown** (Dec)
Handel's *Messiah* with the **Montclair State University Singers** (Dec 18–20)
Lunar New Year Celebration Concert (Jan 30)
Discover Concert Series for families (Jan 23 & May 15)
Movie nights with the Symphony performing the score live:
***Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* in Concert** (Feb 26–28) and
***Star Wars: A New Hope* in Concert** (May 20–23)

NEWARK, NJ—New Jersey Symphony announces its 2026–27 season with Music Director Xian Zhang. The Symphony has currently planned 54 mainstage programs in five New Jersey cities, concerts that will revisit well-loved works from Brahms, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, and Tchaikovsky, and celebrate two East Coast premieres. Principal Guest Conductor Joshua Bell, now in his second season, will lead an all-Beethoven program, and the popular annual holiday traditions return: Handel's *Messiah* and the Lunar New Year Celebration.

Says Zhang, "I'm particularly excited to share the impeccable artistry of our musicians with compositions written just for them. Principal Horn Chris Komer will perform a piece from Christian McBride, which premiered in 2022, and Principal Timpanist Gregory LaRosa steps into the solo spotlight playing a concerto by Joseph Pereira on our stages for the first time. We also celebrate the East Coast premiere of Resident Artistic Partner Allison Loggins-Hull's Cello Concerto."

Families can enjoy concerts with movies, including *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* in Concert and *Star Wars: A New Hope* in Concert, plus two interactive Discovery concerts presented in a relaxed format.

New Jersey Symphony's President & CEO, Terry D. Loftis, adds, "The work we do and the music we create is profoundly relevant, bringing world-class performances and artists across our state's premier venues, and resonating even further with the many programs we offer to serve our unique communities."

Season tickets are available to both renewing and new subscribers now. Complete details about same-seat packages and create-your-own options can be found here.

SEASON OVERVIEW

- **Season Opening: Beethoven's "Emperor" & Schubert's "Great" (Oct 23–25)**
  A new season begins with two of Classical music's most epic works. Music Director Xian Zhang introduced **George Li** to New Jersey audiences 10 years ago and he's since become a true local favorite, returning now for Beethoven's heroic "Emperor" Piano Concerto. Schubert's final symphony, also known as "The Great," was lost in a drawer and never performed during his lifetime—its songful grandeur is one of the wonders of the Romantic era.

- **Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* (Nov 19–22)**
  Jazz and classical meet in this genre-defying program full of color, rhythm, and fun. Montclair's own jazz legend and nine-time GRAMMY Award-winner, **Christian McBride** debuts with your New Jersey Symphony in a concerto tailor-made for him. **Eric Jacobsen**, hailed by *The New York Times* as "an interpretive dynamo," returns with the perfumed hues of Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* and Rachmaninoff's final orchestral work, written in New York City and full of longing for his Russian home.

- **Mozart & Ravel (Jan 8–10)**
  Podium powerhouse **Valentina Peleggi** debuts with a kaleidoscopic program of childlike wonder, symphonic muscle, and dizzying virtuosity—with enough warmth for the coldest January night. Plus, **Blake Pouliot**, "one of those special talents that comes along once in a lifetime" (*Toronto Star*), dazzles with Mozart's final and most beloved violin concerto.

- ***Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* (Jan 22–24)**
  Xian Zhang takes the podium for a program of fantasy and fairytale wonder. Zemlinsky's musical portrait of *The Little Mermaid* makes an orchestral splash in its first Garden State performance. **Tony Siqi Yun** tackles Rachmaninoff's final work for piano and orchestra. The overture to Wagner's only comedy, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, kicks things off with songful brassiness.

- **Gil Shaham Plays Dvořák (Feb 18–21)**
  Legendary violinist **Gil Shaham** makes a welcome New Jersey return, joining with Xian

Zhang for Dvořák's only violin concerto, brimming with Bohemian character. This virtuosic concerto is paired with a fizzing Dvořák overture and Brahms' most personal symphony–both bucolic and contemplative.

- **Joshua Bell Leads Beethoven (Mar 11–14)**
  Principal Guest Conductor **Joshua Bell** conducts performances marking the 200th anniversary of Beethoven's death. From the sublime eloquence of his only violin concerto to the rhythmic propulsion of the Seventh Symphony, you'll hear in this program why we continue to revel in Beethoven's wonders after all these years.

- **Mahler's Fifth Symphony (Mar 19–21)**
  Christoph König made his US debut in 2009 conducting your New Jersey Symphony in Mahler's Symphony No. 5. Now one of the orchestra's closest musical friends, he returns to this piece that started it all. Plus, be the first to hear an **East Coast premiere** from Resident Artistic Partner Allison Loggins-Hull.

- **Xian Zhang Conducts Mozart (Apr 1–4)**
  Xian Zhang is at the helm for a pair of Mozart symphonies, which she conducts with operatic fervor and boundless joy. Plus, Principal Timpanist **Gregory LaRosa** brings his drums front and center for a new concerto written especially for him by LA Phil's Principal Percussionist Joseph Pereira.

- ***Neruda Songs* and Poulenc's *Gloria* (Apr 15–18)**
  Ludovic Morlot brings his signature gallic flare to a radiant program that celebrates the sacred and the profane as Montclair State's top choral singers raise their voices in thrilling works by Poulenc and Ravel. Plus, vocal superstar **J'Nai Bridges** sings Peter Lieberson's exquisite settings of Pablo Neruda's love poems, a work of heart-wrenching beauty.

- **Dvořák's "New World" Symphony (Apr 29–May 2)**
  A musical tour around the world–Xian Zhang is your travel agent as we journey from the Nordic chill of Finland with Sibelius' nationalistic overture, to the warmth and fire of Latin America with **Gabriela Montero**'s thrilling concerto, coming home with Dvořák's love letter to America, the "New World" Symphony.

- **Xian Zhang Conducts Tchaikovsky (May 14–16)**
  Xian Zhang leads a program perfect for orchestral thrill-seekers. New Jersey's own **Steven Mackey** brings a brand-new piece written to highlight the strengths and individual characteristics of your Symphony musicians. Tchaikovsky's exhilarating Symphony No. 4 brings the program to a resounding conclusion.

- **Season Finale: Ravel's *Boléro* with Xian Zhang (June 10–13)**
  The season comes to a close with "the global ambassador of Spanish guitar" (*Billboard*), **Pablo Sáinz Villegas**, making his debut with one of the most beloved guitar concertos. Plus, Xian leads favorites by Bernstein and Ginastera, before Ravel's hypnotic *Boléro* brings the 104th season of your New Jersey Symphony to an ecstatic close.

Special events

- **Hollywood Hits: From *West Side Story* to *Spirited Away* (Oct 10–11)**
  Lights, camera, action! Rising-star conductor Keitaro Harada leads a program of thrilling orchestral music from classic movies. Movie-musicals *West Side Story* and *An American in Paris*, with their timeless tunes, are heard alongside Joe Hisaishi's score to the Studio Ghibli masterpiece, *Spirited Away*. Don't miss this festive performance with music that dazzles and delights—the perfect way to celebrate the start of the season.

- ***Rick Steves' Europe: A Symphonic Journey* (Nov 7–8)**
  Usually you'll find Rick Steves touring the great destinations of Europe. Now you can join him on a different journey: *A Symphonic Journey*. In this unique concert, Rick Steves teams up with New Jersey Symphony for a performance that combines Europe's most stirring Romantic-era anthems with beautiful high-definition cinematography and Rick's insights into European history.

Holiday events and family concerts

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- **Handel's *Messiah*** with the **Montclair State University Singers (Dec 18–20)**
- **Lunar New Year Celebration Concert (Jan 30)**
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  Star Wars: A New Hope in Concert (May 20–23)

About 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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New Jersey Symphony'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.

New Jersey Symphony Family Concerts: A Music Discovery Zone for performances of Discover Rachmaninoff *and* Discover Tchaikovsky *are presented in NJPAC's Prudential Hall prior to each concert.*

The November 19 & 22 concerts are part of the TD Moody Jazz Festival and in collaboration with New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

Presentation of Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl *in Concert is licensed by Disney Concerts*© All rights reserved. Rated PG-13. *The February 28 concert is presented in collaboration with State Theatre New Jersey.*

The March 13 & 14 concerts are presented in collaboration with New Jersey Performing Arts Center.

Presentation of Star Wars: A New Hope *in Concert is licensed by Disney Concerts in association with Warner/Chappell Music. The May 23 concert is presented in collaboration with State Theatre New Jersey.*