

# NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **New Jersey Symphony Announces Concert Weekend Consolidation and Workforce Reduction**

**As the Symphony enters its second century, it is realigning its activities to account for changes in audience behavior and increased costs following the pandemic, positioning the organization for long-term sustainability.**

Newark, NJ—The New Jersey Symphony announced today that it has made the difficult decision to consolidate its concert program weekends for the upcoming 2023–24 season, which begins this October and continues through June, as part of an overall budget reduction plan. The Symphony has also made the painful decision to undergo a workforce reduction of its administrative staff by 15.4%, through a combination of layoffs and the elimination of open positions. Additionally, retained administrative employees will be required to take furloughs and senior leadership will take salary reductions. The musicians of the orchestra, who recently signed a collective bargaining agreement, will not see changes in compensation or benefits that were previously negotiated.

Gabriel van Aalst, President & CEO, says, “Our colleagues across the arts sector have all been feeling pain as we emerge from the pandemic. The New Jersey Symphony is, unfortunately, not immune from the impact of both recent cost increases of almost 30% and audience numbers that are only 75% of our pre-pandemic seasons. Donations from our loyal supporters, as well as an increase in state funding, continue to help us through these difficult times. However, even with this generous support, we cannot fully cover the deficits we face. With an already fragile business model, we are compelled to adapt to a new more sustainable future.

The changes we are making to this year's season and beyond are intended to be proactive adjustments to avoid contributing to a national trend and set us on a path to delivering our mission in a financially responsible way, while continuing to provide great music-making across the state of New Jersey and beyond."

Music Director Xian Zhang says, "It was such a joy to celebrate the centennial of the Symphony last year with patrons across the state. Today, we take the first steps toward becoming a more nimble and adaptable organization, allowing us to continue bringing engaging musical experiences to the residents of New Jersey for years to come."

As a result of macro- and microeconomic challenges, the Symphony is restructuring its budget and program offerings for the upcoming 2023-24 season and is consolidating the number of classical series concert weekends from 14 to 11. The Symphony will also increase the number of performances on some of the remaining 11 classical weekends, which will allow the organization to better amortize the cost of rehearsals and other operating expenses, resulting in an expected savings of \$650,000 in non-compensatory operating expenses.

As part of the consolidation, additional concert dates will be added for audience-favorites such as Beethoven's "Eroica," Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*, *Respect: A Tribute to Aretha Franklin* and more. A concert featuring New Jersey native Danny DeVito narrating the movie *Matilda* with the New Jersey Symphony performing the score live was previously postponed due to the ongoing Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) strike and is expected to be rescheduled.

The New Jersey Symphony will contact patrons affected by changes by September 12, and the Patron Services department will continue to provide all patrons with clear information and exceptional customer service to assist patrons with the changes. The Symphony appreciates its loyal patrons for their understanding and flexibility given the challenging operating environment that many nonprofit arts organizations are currently facing.

Despite the significant budget challenges, the New Jersey Symphony remains committed to its mission of connecting with the people and diverse communities of New Jersey through the power of live symphonic music to inspire, entertain and educate. Daniel Bernard Roumain, the New Jersey Symphony's Resident Artistic Catalyst, will have two of his works featured in the season, including a world

premiere on the season finale concert. The works of living composers Anna Clyne, Jessie Montgomery, Reena Esmail and Valerie Coleman take center stage across the season. Redoubling its efforts to redefine what it means to be a relevant 21st century orchestra, the Symphony spotlights conductors, soloists and repertoire that reflect the vibrant communities it serves.

In early February, a Lunar New Year Celebration concert and gala will celebrate Asian culture and heritage, welcoming all New Jersey residents to participate in the celebration. In May, a Family concert will take a deep dive into Beethoven's "Eroica"—in a format inspired by Leonard Bernstein's masterful approach to engaging young audiences in music-making.

Important and impactful education programs will continue as planned, including New Jersey Symphony Youth Orchestra, which offers qualified middle- and high-school students—especially Black and Latino youth in the Greater Newark area—unparalleled opportunities to achieve personal and musical excellence. The New Jersey Symphony and John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University recently announced a collaborative partnership aimed at creating dynamic and comprehensive pathways to higher education and careers for student musicians. This alliance places the New Jersey Symphony Youth Orchestra as the resident youth orchestra of the Cali School, seeking to further music education, making it more accessible and inclusive for youth from all backgrounds. As the state orchestra, the New Jersey Symphony remains dedicated to serving and reaching as many communities as possible throughout the state through its Community Partners program—annually offering more than 150 customized musical experiences in schools, community centers, healthcare facilities, senior living communities, houses of worship, parks and more.

The New Jersey Symphony recently celebrated its Centennial Season, which was a resounding success, bringing many outstanding classical music artists to five mainstage New Jersey venues. Considerable progress has been made in rebuilding audiences coming out of the pandemic, and the Symphony saw a 57% increase in concert attendance for its 2022–23 Centennial Season compared to the first post-pandemic season of 2021–22. Special concerts, including film concerts, have performed exceptionally well and consistently sell out. Despite the stellar successes of the past season, audiences for the Symphony's classical series concert programs have been slow to return to halls and audience attendance is approximately 25% below pre-pandemic levels.

The adjustments to the New Jersey Symphony's budget are being made to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization and to enable the organization to continue delivering on its statewide mission for many generations to come.

### **New Jersey Symphony**

The Emmy and Grammy Award-winning New Jersey Symphony is redefining what it means to be a nationally leading, relevant orchestra in the 21st century. The Symphony is renewing its 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 a new experience; 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. In its second century of bringing concerts to the people of New Jersey, the Symphony will present audience favorites including Dvořák's "New World" Symphony, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, violinist Joshua Bell leading the orchestra in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and pianist Daniil Trifonov playing Gershwin's Concerto in F. New Jersey Symphony co-commissions include works by internationally renowned living composers—Anna Clyne's Piano Concerto and Jessie Montgomery's *Snapshots*. Composers Rob Kapilow and Daniel Bernard Roumain will present world premieres.

For more information about the New Jersey Symphony, visit [www.njsymphony.org](http://www.njsymphony.org) or email [information@njsymphony.org](mailto:information@njsymphony.org). Tickets are available for purchase by phone 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra's website.

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Email: [information@njsymphony.org](mailto:information@njsymphony.org)

*The 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.*

**Press Contact**

Geoffrey Anderson  
Vice President of Marketing & External Affairs  
New Jersey Symphony  
973.735.1713  
[ganderson@njsymphony.org](mailto:ganderson@njsymphony.org)

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