

NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Jersey Symphony Opens Season with Beethoven's 'Emperor,' Schubert's 'Great'

Music Director Xian Zhang and pianist George Li launch the 2026–27 season Oct 23–25 in Princeton, Newark, and New Brunswick

NEWARK, NJ – New Jersey Symphony opens its 2026–27 season Oct 23–25 with Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, "Emperor," and Schubert's Symphony No. 9, "The Great."

Music Director Xian Zhang conducts the [Opening Weekend](#) performances, which launch her 11th season with the orchestra. Pianist George Li, silver medalist at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition, returns as soloist.

Beethoven breaks with convention from the first bars, giving the soloist a cadenza at the outset instead of near the end. The slow movement, which Hector Berlioz called "the very image of grace," flows without pause into a jubilant finale. The "Emperor" nickname wasn't Beethoven's; it came later, inspired by the music's grandeur.

Schubert modeled the "Great" on the vast scale of Beethoven's Ninth, which had premiered in Vienna the year before he began it. Bold choices, including trombones in all four movements and a scherzo expanded well beyond the usual compact dance, give Schubert's "Great" an unmistakable voice.

On Saturday, Oct 24, Symphony musicians host an Instrument Discovery Zone in the lobby of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) at 6:30 pm. Concertgoers can try playing instruments themselves before the performance.

Opening Weekend performances are sponsored by Greenberg Traurig, LLP and PNC.

Event details

Xian Zhang conductor

George Li piano

New Jersey Symphony

Ludwig van Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5, “Emperor”

Franz Schubert Symphony No. 9 in C Major, “The Great”

Princeton → Friday, Oct 23, 7:30 pm, Richardson Auditorium

Newark → Saturday, Oct 24, 7:30 pm, NJPAC

New Brunswick → Sunday, Oct 25, 2 pm, State Theatre New Jersey

[Tickets and full event information](#)

[Program notes and artist Bios](#)

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 concerts each season at mainstage venues, as well as in schools and public spaces. Programming at the Symphony reflects an unwavering commitment to diverse communities of New Jersey, while providing students with unparalleled opportunities to achieve musical excellence through its Youth Orchestra and other education programs. The Symphony is embarking on an expansion into Jersey City, with a new, permanent office, rehearsal, and concert space called Symphony Center. For more information about New Jersey Symphony, visit our website at njsymphony.org or our [newsroom](#) for press releases and photos.

Connect with us

Follow NJ Symphony on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [TikTok](#), and [YouTube](#).

###

Press contact

Geoffrey Anderson, New Jersey Symphony, VP of Marketing & External Affairs
ganderson@njsymphony.org