

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra Music Director Xian Zhang extends contract for four years



New contract secures internationally renowned conductor's leadership of NJSO through 2023–24 season

NEWARK, NJ (June 10, 2018)—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra today announces internationally renowned conductor Xian Zhang has extended her initial four-year term as NJSO Music Director for an additional four years. The contract extension secures the acclaimed conductor's leadership of the NJSO through the 2023–24 season.

Zhang, the Orchestra's 14th music director, took the helm of the NJSO in 2016. The NJSO officially announces her contract extension on stage at today's final performance of the 2017–18 season at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark.

"Today's announcement of Xian Zhang's extension as NJSO Music Director propels the Orchestra into an exciting future," NJSO President & CEO Gabriel van Aalst says. "Xian has fully embodied the NJSO's mission to inspire and engage with New Jersey communities on and off stage, and her bold artistic vision has invigorated this organization. Musicians and audiences love her powerful musicianship and leadership, and as we approach the Orchestra's milestone 100th anniversary in 2022, I cannot wait to see where she takes the NJSO."

The announcement of Zhang's continuing tenure caps a busy season during which the Orchestra ratified a new five-year contract agreement with its musicians' union, Northern New Jersey Musicians Guild, Local 16-248 of the American

Federation of Musicians. The Orchestra also named José Luis Domínguez Artistic Director of the NJSO Youth Orchestras through the 2019–20 season.

“This is a proud moment for the NJSO and a bold statement for the Orchestra’s future,” NJSO Board of Trustees Co-Chairs Linda Bowden and David Huber say. “Xian’s extraordinary artistic talent and vision for this Orchestra have thrilled concertgoers and fostered meaningful connections with the NJSO’s many constituents. Coupled with the new contract extension with our musicians, Xian’s continuing leadership secures a strong path forward for the Orchestra.”

“I congratulate Xian Zhang for continuing her exemplary work as Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra,” says New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy. “Her incredible talent and contributions have greatly enriched New Jersey’s position as a vibrant hub for music and the performing arts. I’m confident she will continue in this role with the same commitment to leadership that she has demonstrated over the past few years.”

Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka says: “Xian Zhang’s decision to extend her contract with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra is another recognition of our city as a national leader in the performing arts. Ms. Zhang has been an outstanding conductor for the orchestra since taking the baton in 2016, adding power to its performances, the diversity of our musical community and luster to our city as a destination for the arts. Her vision, talent and commitment will lead the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra to greater heights, and we look forward to seeing and hearing the results.”

Zhang says: “It is both an honor and a privilege to be Music Director of such a wonderful group of musicians. Our concerts throughout the state, and the wonderful education and community work we do, means that we bring music to a lot of people! For me, therefore, to be at the helm of an orchestra soon to be celebrating 100 years of music making is truly inspiring.”

Concertmaster Eric Wyrick says: “Xian really knows how to stir up and spin a sound. She is all about energy and connection with musicians and audiences, and she is a wonderful human being. I’m very happy that she’s renewed her contract; it’s great for us to continue working together. We are just getting the benefit of what she has to offer us, and who we will be by the end of her tenure is an exciting question.”

Since assuming the helm of the NJSO, Zhang has revitalized NJSO programming with an industry-leading commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion in mainstage concerts. A full realization of Zhang’s artistic vision, the 2018–19 season features a diverse array of musical voices, from female composers (Kate Whitley’s *Speak Out* in its US premiere, Maria Schneider’s *Winter Morning Walks* with soprano Dawn Upshaw and Florence Price’s Piano Concerto with acclaimed jazz pianist Aaron Diehl) to composers performing their own concertos (Steven Mackey’s *Four Iconoclastic Episodes* for violin and electric guitar, Amjad Ali Khan’s *Samaagam* for Sarod, Concertante Group and String Orchestra) to classical masters (Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Tchaikovsky’s *Manfred* Symphony and Strauss’ *Also sprach Zarathustra*).

The NJSO’s inaugural Chinese New Year Celebration concert in 2019 reflects Zhang’s extensive outreach to New Jersey’s Chinese community; the East Coast premiere of Andrew Norman’s Cello Concerto (an NJSO co-commission) reflects her renewed commitment to the NJSO’s commissioning program. She brings world-class artists, including lauded pianists Daniil Trifonov and Emanuel Ax, to NJSO stages.

In the 2017–18 season, her inaugural Winter Festival—the Orchestra’s signature artistic event—was inspired by her own experiences in the United States. “America, Inspiring” celebrated foreign artists and composers whose experiences connect them to the nation’s legacy as a source of inspiration and beacon of ideals for people from all over the world.

In concert, Zhang has forged deep connections with New Jersey audiences through thoughtful and engaging comments from the podium and shaped the sound of the Orchestra through committed and inspiring leadership of standard repertoire works. Her advocacy for education and community engagement has included meaningful interaction with the student musicians of the NJSO Academy music-instruction programs; she has led NJSO Academy Orchestra performances on stage at NJPAC at NJSO concerts and conducted NJSO CHAMPS and #OrchestraYou. Off stage, she has demonstrated fundraising leadership in collaboration with the NJSO board and management.

NJ Advance Media praised the immediate effect of Zhang's leadership in the 2016–17 season, writing that in her first year with the NJSO, the Music Director “clearly made her mark. Now it's time to see how high [the Orchestra] can soar.”

“The dynamic performances Ms. Zhang led ... proved that hers is a name worth memorizing,” *The New York Times* wrote. “On the podium she is a pint-size bundle of energy, conducting with feet firmly grounded and big, purposeful motions of the torso and arms. In brief remarks from the stage, she also showed herself to be a natural communicator, brimming with enthusiasm and humor: a good choice for this orchestra, which takes its ambassadorial role seriously with concert series offered across the state and numerous outreach initiatives.”

MUSIC DIRECTOR XIAN ZHANG

In an acclaimed first season as Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Xian Zhang “clearly made her mark,” NJ Advance Media writes. “Now it's time to see how high [the Orchestra] can soar.” Zhang continues her tenure in 2017–18 with performances of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, Mahler's First Symphony and Dvořák's Ninth Symphony, among others.

In September 2016, Zhang assumed the position of Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales, becoming the first female conductor to hold a titled role with a BBC orchestra; the season culminated in a televised BBC Proms performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, anticipating the start of a two-year project devoted to the composer's complete symphonies. Her 2017–18 BBC NOW season includes a concert tour of Wales. Zhang is also Conductor Emeritus of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi, following completion of her tenure as Music Director from 2009–16.

Forthcoming engagements include return visits to the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Belgique, Orquesta Nacional de España and Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, as well as debuts with the San Francisco Symphony, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Vancouver Symphony, Royal Philharmonic and NAC Orchestra, Ottawa, plus concerts with the orchestras of Komische Oper and Royal Stockholm Opera. Zhang is invited regularly to the London Symphony and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras; recent highlights include her debut with The Cleveland Orchestra and a gala concert with Renée Fleming and the China NCPA Orchestra.

Born in Dandong, China, Zhang made her professional debut conducting *The Marriage of Figaro* at the Central Opera House in Beijing at the age of 20. She trained at Beijing's Central Conservatory, earning both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees and serving one year on its conducting faculty before moving to the United States in 1998. She was appointed the New York Philharmonic's Assistant Conductor in 2002, then became its Associate Conductor and first holder of the Arturo Toscanini Chair.

NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Named “a vital, artistically significant musical organization” by *The Wall Street Journal*, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra embodies that vitality through its statewide presence and critically acclaimed performances, education partnerships and unparalleled access to music and the Orchestra's superb musicians.

Music Director Xian Zhang—a “dynamic podium presence” *The New York Times* has praised for her “technical abilities, musicianship and maturity”—continues her acclaimed leadership of the NJSO. The Orchestra presents classical, pops and family programs, as well as outdoor summer concerts and special events. Embracing its legacy as a statewide orchestra, the NJSO is the resident orchestra of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and regularly performs at State Theatre New Jersey in New Brunswick, Count Basie Center for the Arts in Red Bank, Richardson Auditorium in Princeton, Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown and bergenPAC in Englewood. Partnerships with New Jersey arts organizations, universities and civic organizations remain a key element of the Orchestra's statewide identity.

In addition to its lauded artistic programming, the NJSO presents a suite of education and community engagement programs that promote meaningful, lifelong engagement with live music. Programs include school-time Concerts for Young People; NJSO Youth Orchestras family of student ensembles, led by José Luis Domínguez; and El Sistema-inspired

NJSO CHAMPS (Character, Achievement and Music Project). NJSO musicians annually perform original chamber music programs at community events in a variety of settings statewide through the NJSO Community Partners Program.

For more information about the NJSO, visit njsymphony.org or email information@njsymphony.org. Tickets are available for purchase by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra's website.

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra'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.

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