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## The Dallas Opera Announces Four Participants for 2023/2024 Hart Institute for Women Conductors

Virtual Sessions Begin November 13, 2023  
Dallas Residency in January 2024



(DALLAS, August 24, 2023) [The Dallas Opera](#) announces the selection of the 2023/2024 participants in the [Linda and Mitch Hart Institute for Women Conductors](#): **Maria Benyumova** (Germany), **Micah Gleason** (USA), **Shira Samuels-Shragg** (USA), and **Jingqi Zhu** (China). These four talented musicians were chosen from a worldwide applicant pool of more than 75 conductors hailing from 27 countries on five continents. Applicants were reviewed by two distinguished panels of artists in a three-round selection process.

“We are eager to welcome these promising conductors to this year’s Institute,” said Ian Derrer, the Dallas Opera’s Kern Wildenthal General Director and CEO. “We are committed to providing unique and exceptional experiences for these talented conductors and hope our immersive program will help propel their artistry and their careers.”

The annual Institute begins in November (November 13-17) with a week of daily virtual sessions, many of which are livestreamed and open for the public to view at no cost on The Dallas Opera’s [YouTube channel](#). During an intensive ten-day residency in Dallas (January 19-28, 2024), participants will work with esteemed faculty and mentors in group and one-on-one

sessions, as well as in rehearsals for the annual [Showcase Concert](#) on Sunday, January 28, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. The performance features each Institute conductor leading the Dallas Opera Orchestra and guest singers in selections of opera excerpts featuring overtures, solo arias, and ensemble pieces from across the centuries of the canon.

In addition, a special panel discussion takes place this year on Monday, November 13 at 2 p.m., in partnership with the [Dallas Symphony Orchestra's Women in Classical Music Symposium](#). *Conducting the Way: Exploring Career Pathways for Conductors* features Hart Institute Alumnae Tiffany Chang, Kärin Hendrickson, and Natalie Murray Beale, joined remotely by the 2023/2024 Institute participants, in conversation with moderator and company culture consultant Quodesia Johnson.

To date, participating faculty for the 2023/2024 Hart Institute includes orchestra executive **Deborah Borda** (former President & CEO of the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics), **Louis Langrée** (former Music Director, Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center; Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony; Director of Opéra Comique National Theatre in Paris), **David Lomeli** (The Dallas Opera Artistic Consultant and Chief Artistic Officer at Santa Fe Opera), **Serge Dorny** (General Director, Bayerische Staatsoper), **Nicole Paiement** (Founder and Artistic Director, Opera Parallèle; Martha R. and Preston A. Peak Principal Guest Conductor at The Dallas Opera), **Emmanuel Villaume** (The Mrs. Eugene McDermott Music Director at The Dallas Opera), **Paolo Bressan** (conductor and artistic director of the LacMus Festival), and **Elizabeth Askren** (conductor and HIWC Alumna, 2016). The Institute's full faculty will be announced in the fall.

Adjudicators who participated in the selection of this year's Hart Institute participants were Stephanie Rhodes-Russell and Dr. Paul Phillips, Associate Professor of Music and Director of Opera at The University of North Texas and Retired Music Director and Conductor of the Meadows Symphony Orchestra and Meadows Opera respectively, for the preliminary round. The Institute's own master conducting faculty—Elizabeth Askren, Paolo Bressan, Nicole Paiement, and Emmanuel Villaume—participated in final rounds.

The Linda and Mitch Hart Institute for Women Conductors is an immersive program that builds and advances the careers of women conductors with the talent and drive to pursue major positions with national and international opera companies. The only initiative of its kind in the world, its mission is to address the existing global imbalance of leadership on the podium: of the more than 180 professional opera companies operating in North America, only a handful have music directors who are women.

### **About the Conductors**

Until 2022 **Maria Benyumova** (Germany) worked as a conductor and choral director at Theater Krefeld and Mönchengladbach. As a guest conductor and music promoter she conducted concerts with Jena Philharmonic, New Philharmonic Orchestra of Westphalia, and Beethoven Orchestra Bonn. Maria is part of the Britten Pears Young Artist Programme (2023-24), Mentee Conductor of the Taki Alsop Fellowship (2022-23), and Conducting Fellow of the Carlos Miguel Prieto Conducting

Fellowship (2023). She has worked with Choir Komische Oper Berlin, RIAS Chamber Choir, NDR Choir, and Bavarian Radio Choir. Maria has been sponsored by the Conductors' Forum of the German Music Council, the Bavarian Radio Choir Forum, the Alfred Toepfer Foundation, and the Liselotte- Klein-Foundation.

**Micah Gleason** (USA), Conducting Fellow at the Curtis Institute of Music, has been recognized for her diverse performance abilities as a conductor and vocalist. She holds two master's degrees, in Conducting and Voice, from Bard College-Conservatory of Music and is an alumna of notable training programs including the Aspen and Eastern Music Festivals. Interdisciplinary collaboration and community building are fundamental in Micah's music-making. At home in the worlds of symphonic music and opera, Micah has conducted notable ensembles including The Orchestra Now, Curtis Symphony Orchestra, and Eastern Festival Orchestra; and this season looks forward to working with Curtis Opera Theater, The Glimmerglass Festival, and Opera Philadelphia; and covering for Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Michael Stern, and Robert Spano.

**Shira Samuels-Shragg** (USA) will assume her new position as assistant conductor for the Spokane Symphony in August, while maintaining her current assistant conductor post with the Plano Symphony. Recently, Shira guest conducted interdisciplinary concerts with the Spokane, Corpus Christi, and South Bend symphonies. She is passionate about sharing the wonders of music with young audiences and has led education concerts with the Spokane and Plano symphonies for over 23,000 students, served as cover conductor for Young People's Concerts with the New York Philharmonic, and co-founded Plano Symphony's Summer Youth Orchestra Camp. In May 2022, Shira graduated with her MM in conducting from The Juilliard School, and she holds a BA in Music from Swarthmore College.

**Jingqi Zhu** (China) is a DMA conducting candidate at the University of Minnesota, where she conducts and assists nearly every orchestral, choral ensemble and opera. In the community, she guest conducts Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphony Orchestra and assists the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota's most highly regarded civic orchestra. She received the Music Director Fellowship with Spokane Symphony and was invited to masterclasses taught by Marin Alsop, Johannes Schlaefli, Carl St. Clair, James Ross, and James Lowe. As a pianist, Zhu performed with Indiana University Chamber Orchestra under Carl St. Clair as the winner of the concerto competition. She holds a double in Master of Music degree from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music in choral conducting and piano performance.

### **About The Dallas Opera**

One of the leading opera companies in the country, **The Dallas Opera** has an extraordinary legacy of world-class productions and thrilling premieres featuring the greatest operatic artists of our time. Inaugurated in 1957 with a concert featuring the incomparable Maria Callas, TDO is known for the notable U.S. debuts of a host of legendary artists including Plácido Domingo, Dame Joan Sutherland, Jon Vickers, Franco Zeffirelli, and Sir David McVicar. The company has long been an industry leader and innovator through groundbreaking initiatives including the Hart Institute for Women Conductors, free and low-cost digital streaming, public simulcasts, acclaimed art song recitals, the national vocal competition, special concerts, and outstanding family and award-winning education programs. TDO's home is the Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House in the Dallas Arts District. As one of the largest performing arts employers in North Texas, TDO is proudly committed to diversity, both onstage and off, and is a major contributor to the economic vitality and international cultural reputation of this region.

For more details, visit [dallasopera.org](https://dallasopera.org)

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