

The Dallas Opera Announces Four Participants and Faculty for 2024/2025 Hart Institute for Women Conductors

Virtual Sessions Begin November 18, 2024
Dallas Residency in January 2025; Showcase Concert on January 25



(L-R): Jiannan Cheng, Virginia Déjos, Anna Castro Grinstein, CJ Wu

[DALLAS, August 13, 2024]—[The Dallas Opera](#) announces the selection of the 2024/2025 participants in the [Linda and Mitch Hart Institute for Women Conductors](#): **Jiannan Cheng** (China), **Virginie Déjos** (France), **Anna Castro Grinstein** (Spain/Argentina), and **CJ Wu** (Taiwan).

These talented musicians were chosen from a worldwide applicant pool of 94 conductors—the second largest group since the program’s inception—hailing from 28 countries. Applications were reviewed by adjudicators comprised of conducting faculty from Southern Methodist University and the University of North Texas as well as the distinguished HIWC faculty in a three-round selection process.

“We are excited to feature these talented conductors from all over the world in the 2024/2025 Institute,” said Ian Derrer, the Dallas Opera’s Kern Wildenthal General Director and CEO. “We are committed to providing unique and exceptional experiences that help boost their careers.”

The Master Conducting Faculty for the 2024/2025 Hart Institute are:

Emmanuel Villaume (The Mrs. Eugene McDermott Music Director at The Dallas Opera)

Nicole Paiement (The Martha R. and Preston A. Peak Principal Guest Conductor at The Dallas Opera; and Founder and Artistic Director, Opera Parallèle)

Visiting Faculty for the 2024/2025 Hart Institute include:

Elizabeth Askren (Inaugural Principal Guest Conductor, Hawaii Opera Theatre; Founder and Artistic Director, Transylvanian Opera Academy, and HIWC Alumna 2016)

Serge Dorny (General Director, Bayerische Staatsoper)

Gabriela Lena Frank, composer

Barry Green (former principal bassist of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and author of *The Inner Game of Music*)

Louis Langrée (Director, Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique)

David Lomelí (The Dallas Opera Artistic Consultant - principal, Lomelí Consulting)

Anna Skryleva (Music Director, Magdeburg Theatre in Germany and HIWC Alumna, 2015)

The annual Institute begins in November with a week of virtual sessions (November 18-22), many of which are livestreamed for the public to view at no cost on The Dallas Opera's [YouTube channel](#). During an intensive ten-day residency in Dallas (January 17-25, 2025), 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 Saturday, January 25, 2025 at 7:30 p.m. The performance features each of the four Institute conductors leading the Dallas Opera Orchestra and guest singers in selections from works from across the operatic canon.

Adjudicators who evaluated the first two rounds of this year's Hart Institute applicants were Clay Couturiaux, Assistant Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of North Texas; Dr. Paul C. Phillips, Emeritus Martha Raley Peak Professor of Conducting from Meadows School of the Arts at SMU; and David Lomelí, The Dallas Opera Artistic Consultant. Emmanuel Villaume and Nicole Paiement 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 in the international operatic arena. The only initiative of its kind in the world, its mission is to balance the leadership in the orchestra pit: of the more than 180 professional opera companies operating in North America, only a handful have music directors who are women.

About the Conductors

Jiannan Cheng is the 2nd Prize winner of the 2024 Romania Orchestra's Conducting Competition, a finalist in the Arthur Nikisch Conducting Competition, and a second prize winner of the 4x4 Competition for Composers and Conductors 2016. Her teachers and mentors have included such world-renowned conductors such as Riccardo Muti, Kurt Masur, and Marcus Bosch. In 2024/2025, Ms. Cheng will serve as a Cover Conductor with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Other past professional

positions include Conducting Fellow of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the Miami Symphony Orchestra. She studied conducting at the China Conservatory of Music in Beijing, the University of Washington in Seattle, Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and Hochschule für Musik und Theater Munich.

Virginie Déjos is a versatile musician with extensive experience as both a pianist and a conductor. Her most notable musical engagements to date include collaborations with Radio France, the Lübeck Opera, and the Staatsoper Stuttgart, where she served as a pianist and assistant conductor. Currently, she holds the position of Choir Director and conductor at the Opera House Heidelberg. She has performed widely in Europe as both a conductor of orchestras and operas, and as a pianist in recitals, as a soloist, and in chamber music. Her concerts have been broadcast by BR Klassik and LRT Lithuanian Radio and Television. Ms. Déjos earned her Master of Music in Piano Performance with high distinction from the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, and a conducting diploma from the cole Normale de Musique de Paris. She is a laureate of the international Scriabin Competition and the Piano Competition of Île de France; she also achieved success in the international Lied and Melodie competition in Gordes. As an avid ambassador for music by French composers, Ms. Déjos, in collaboration with the Institut Français Stuttgart, founded in 2021 a chamber music festival, and recorded French composers with members of the Stuttgart Staatsorchester.

Anna Castro Grinstein hails from Buenos Aires, Argentina. This year, she leads performances of *The Barber of Seville* as Opera Holland Park's young artist conductor, and will also return to London to lead Gothic Opera's production of Donizetti's rarely performed *Maria de Rudenz*. She was conducting fellow for the 2023 Aix-en-Provence opera festival, and was selected as a Britten Pears Young Artist. In 2022, she was sponsored by Barbara Hannigan's initiative *Momentum, our future now*, and served as artistic director of Colectivo Sonoro Ensemble 2015 to 2020. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in conducting in Buenos Aires and later pursued a Master's degree at the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg in Germany.

Taiwanese conductor **CJ Wu** began her musical career as a violinist. As a conductor, she has been invited to prestigious competitions and masterclasses including the Riccardo Muti Opera Academy, Järvi Academy, Cabrillo Festival with Cristian Macelaru, Chigiana Academy with Daniele Gatti, Britten Pears Academy with Antonio Pappano, BBC Concert Orchestra masterclass with Marin Alsop, and Rotterdam International Conducting Competition. In recent years, she was selected by Riccardo Muti for *Nabucco* opera academy in Milan, and stood in for Muti at performances in Ravenna and Rimini. Wu was also invited to assist Music Director Jun Märkl with the Taiwan Philharmonic. She has worked with leading Danish orchestras including Copenhagen Phil, Aarhus Symphony, Aalborg Symphony, Odense Symphony, Sønderjyllands Symphony, and Danish Sinfonietta under DKDM project. She won first prize at the BBKA competition in the UK and Progetto Johannes Brahms competition in Italy. She holds a Master's degree in Conducting from the Royal Northern College of Music in the UK, and is nearing completion of her Soloist Diploma at the Royal Danish Academy of Music.

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.

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