

## The Dallas Opera Celebrates 10th Anniversary of the Linda and Mitch Hart Institute for Women Conductors



### Groundbreaking Program Names Jingqi Zhu as its Inaugural Martha R. and Preston A. Peak Fellow

[DALLAS, May 29, 2025]— [The Dallas Opera](#) (TDO) marks a milestone in its 2025/2026 Season: the 10th anniversary of [The Linda and Mitch Hart Institute for Women Conductors](#) (HIWC). In 2015, to address gender imbalance on opera podiums, TDO launched the Hart Institute to train women conductors. More than 500 candidates from 40 nations have applied to be trained, advised, and supported by this extraordinary leadership initiative over the past decade.

In honor of the 10th anniversary, the Hart Institute takes a different format. Instead of the typical residency with a class of conductors, this year's program will celebrate the Institute's achievements in a special **Anniversary Showcase Concert on Sunday, January 25, at 3 PM** at the Winspear Opera House. The concert will feature six alumnae from the Institute's first decade—Elizabeth Askren, Tiffany Chang, Michelle Di Russo, Barbara Dragan, Tianyi Lu, and Shira Samuels-Shragg—and a guest host. Each conductor will lead The Dallas Opera Orchestra and guest singers in excerpts from operas significant to TDO's history. The evening will also

include video retrospectives and reminiscences from distinguished guests. A virtual reunion for all Institute alumnae will take place in this fall.

Additionally, during the 2025/2026 Season, the Hart Institute launches the new **Martha R. and Preston A. Peak Fellowship**. With a wide range of duties and responsibilities, this seasonal music staff fellowship will provide practical, firsthand experience as an assistant conductor, rehearsal pianist, offstage conductor, vocal coach, assistant chorus director, and more. TDO is proud to announce **Jingqi Zhu** (HIWC class of 2023) as the inaugural Martha R. and Preston A. Peak Fellowship recipient. Among her duties, Zhu will serve as the assistant conductor for TDO's season-opening production of *Carmen* in October.

“When the Hart Institute began 10 years ago, we knew it had the potential to create a significant impact,” said Ian Derrer, TDO's Kern Wildenthal General Director and CEO. “Now, we see how this program has made a huge difference in the lives and careers of many talented conductors. This new seasonal fellowship is a crucial step in deepening the contribution that Hart Institute alumnae, like Jingqi Zhu, will have in our field for generations to come.”

“Because there have been only a handful of pioneering role models for aspiring women conductors, and even fewer pathways to close the podium gender gap, this Institute seeks to balance the scales,” say Linda and Mitch Hart, who helped launch TDO's Hart Institute. “Since its establishment in 2015, the Hart Institute each year has singled out some of the most gifted women conductors from around the world. We are particularly proud of the fact that each woman's relationship with The Dallas Opera continues beyond the Institute. TDO continues to counsel them and, wherever possible, integrate them into the company's various programs. Adding the new fellowship role is a wonderful step in the training that the Institute will provide in the future.”

Applications for the 2026/2027 Season fellowship will open June 1 and are due by August 31. Four finalists will be selected to come to Dallas in February 2026 to audition for the position. The audition will include intensive work with The Dallas Opera Orchestra and Chorus, as well as individual coaching with singers.

In the 2026/2027 Season, the Hart Institute resumes its typical format—virtual training in the fall and 10 days of in-person intensive workshop sessions in January 2027 with renowned conductors, guest faculty, and arts administrators. Additionally, one of the four participants will be offered a future Peak Fellowship.

#### **More about the Hart Institute:**

The Hart Institute has been one of the brass rings for women conductors over the past 10 years, having already offered career advancement through advanced coaching and mentorship to 45

conductors. These alumnae have gone on to receive appointments as music directors, principal conductors, principal guest conductors, and guest conductors on some of the world's most prestigious stages, including Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Opera Theater, Opera Australia, Washington National Opera, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Musikverein in Vienna, New York Philharmonic, BBC Proms, LA Opera, Seattle Symphony, Lyric Opera of Chicago, West Australian Ballet, English National Opera, Delaware Symphony, São Paulo Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Opera, and many more.

**Lead image:** Jingqi Zhu leads The Dallas Opera Orchestra during the 2024 Showcase Concert. Credit: Kyle Flubacker/The Dallas Opera Archives.

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