

## **Curtis Appoints Four New Faculty Members for 2024–25 Centennial Year**

Alumni Nicholas Canellakis (Cello '06), Yumi Kendall (Cello '04),  
Christine Jeonghyoun Lee (Cello '13), and YaoGuang Zhai (Clarinet '09)

Join the School's Faculty of Renowned Artists This Fall

PHILADELPHIA, PA—August 26, 2024—With the start of its centennial year, **Curtis Institute of Music** proudly announces the appointment of four new faculty members. Soloist, chamber musician, and multifaceted artist **Nicholas Canellakis** (Cello '06); The Philadelphia Orchestra assistant principal **Yumi Kendall** (Cello '04); Boston Symphony Orchestra member **Christine Jeonghyoun Lee** (Cello '13); and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra principal clarinet **YaoGuang Zhai** (Clarinet '09) will join Curtis' celebrated faculty beginning this fall.

The addition of these new positions expands the faculty size in both departments, providing greater flexibility and more personalized learning opportunities. In the clarinet department, Mr. Zhai joins current faculty member Anthony McGill ('00), the school's William R. and Hyunah Yu Brody Distinguished Chair and principal clarinetist of the New York Philharmonic. Curtis students also work with the chamber music clarinet faculty: Mark Dover of the Imani Winds and Michael Rusinek ('92), Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra principal.

Says Mr. McGill, "I'm excited to work alongside my colleague YaoGuang Zhai at Curtis. We will continue to uphold the beautiful traditions we hold dear while looking toward the future of training the most talented young clarinetists in the world."

"It is truly an honor to return to Curtis as a member of the clarinet faculty, and especially to collaborate with such an exceptional musician as Anthony McGill," says Mr. Zhai. "I am both moved and motivated by this unique opportunity to guide and help shape future generations of clarinetists at such a prestigious institution. As Curtis celebrates its 100th anniversary it is exciting and at the same time humbling to be able to contribute to this rich legacy and tradition of excellence."

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In the cello department, Mr. Canellakis, Ms. Kendall, and Ms. Lee will join current faculty members Gary Hoffman—the Nina and Billy Albert Chair in Cello Studies—and Peter Wiley ('74)—the Bruce Jay Gould, M.D. Chair, in honor of Orlando Cole. Cello students also work with chamber music faculty, including Camden Shaw (Cello '10, '11, and String Quartet '14) of the Dover Quartet, the school's Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence. With the addition of Mr. Canellakis, Ms. Kendall, and Ms. Lee, the cello department will operate on a more collaborative studio model, enabling students to benefit from each teacher's unique expertise and perspective.

“Curtis' commitment to innovation is evident in this unique approach to the traditional studio structure,” says Yumi Kendall. “It empowers us as faculty to continually adapt to the needs of our students at an individual level, using our respective strengths and experiences to nurture the next generation of artists and leaders.”

Each with a distinctive career as active performers, these new faculty members bring to their Curtis students a lived understanding of what it takes to forge a personal path through today's field. They will join Curtis' celebrated faculty of world-renowned musician-teachers, mentoring the next generation of artists through intensive, personalized study.

“Curtis has meant the world to me since I first entered its doors as a student over twenty years ago, and I've taken its ethos, spirit, and musical traditions with me throughout my life,” says Mr. Canellakis. “I can't express enough how much pride and joy I feel to now be joining the school as a member of the cello faculty, alongside my mentor Peter Wiley, Gary Hoffman, and my fellow new faculty Yumi and Christine. I'm honored and humbled to be a part of Curtis's extraordinary legacy, and to carry on everything I've learned to the next generation of musicians.”

Since it first opened its doors in October 1924, Curtis has sought to equip its students with the inspiration and the tools to forge successful careers—now and in the future. In addition to their outstanding artistry, these new Curtis faculty members provide an array of examples of the entrepreneurial spirit, leadership, and adaptability, blazing their own professional paths and making a meaningful impact in their communities on and off the stage.

“I am thrilled to return to Curtis, a place that has profoundly shaped my musical journey,” says Ms. Lee. “Curtis is not just where my musical foundation was built; it is a treasured home of both tradition and exploration. This esteemed school has long been a beacon of excellence in music education, and I am excited to contribute to its rich legacy. I look forward to working with the talented students and collaborating with my distinguished colleagues and mentors, sharing my passion and fostering an environment of creativity and artistic growth.”

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## ABOUT THE NEW FACULTY

### **Nicholas Canellakis (Cello '06)**

A sought-after and multifaceted artist, Nicholas Canellakis has forged a unique voice combining his talents as soloist, chamber musician, curator, filmmaker, and composer/arranger.

Recent concert highlights include concerto appearances with the Virginia, Albany, Delaware, Stamford, Richardson, Lansing, and Bangor symphonies, the Erie Philharmonic, The Orchestra Now, the New Haven Symphony as artist-in-residence, and the American Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall. He performs recitals throughout the United States with his longtime duo collaborator, pianist-composer Michael Stephen Brown, and recent appearances have included Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, the Four Arts in Palm Beach, New Orleans Friends of Chamber Music, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and Wolf Trap near Washington D.C.

Mr. Canellakis is an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, with which he performs regularly in Alice Tully Hall and on tour internationally, including London's Wigmore Hall, the Louvre in Paris, the Seoul Arts Center in Korea, and the Shanghai and Taipei National Concert Halls. He is also a regular guest artist at many of the world's leading music festivals, including Santa Fe, Ravinia, Music@Menlo, Bard, Bridgehampton, La Jolla, Moab, Chamberfest Cleveland, and Music in the Vineyards. He was recently renewed as the artistic director of Chamber Music Sedona in Arizona, where he has made a major impact through his dynamic programming and educational and community outreach.

Mr. Canellakis' latest album (*b*)romance, featuring some of his original compositions and arrangements, was released by First Hand Records in 2023 and has received over one million streams on Apple Music.

Filmmaking and acting are special interests of Canellakis. He has produced, directed, and starred in several short films and music videos, including his popular comedy web series *Conversations with Nick Canellakis*. His latest films *Thin Walls* and *My New Cello* were nominated for awards at many prominent film festivals and are currently available to stream online.

Mr. Canellakis plays an outstanding cello by Jean-Baptiste Vuillaume, from 1840.

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## Yumi Kendall (Cello '04)

Yumi Kendall is a distinguished cellist, classical music ambassador, and changemaker, whose voice and vision are paving the way for future generations.

Since 2004, Ms. Kendall has been a dedicated and deeply active member of The Philadelphia Orchestra as assistant principal cello. She won the position at age 22, during her final year of studies at the Curtis Institute of Music. Over the past two decades, as a performer and pedagogue, Ms. Kendall has inspired, informed, and connected countless people as a passionate proponent of classical music. More recently, as a speaker, podcaster, and graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's Master of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) degree program, she has catalyzed conversations to help people and organizations thrive.

As an orchestral and chamber musician, Ms. Kendall has played on many of the world's prominent stages, including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Kimmel Center, Suntory Hall, and Musikverein. She has performed with the Marlboro Festival and tour, the East Coast Chamber Orchestra, and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and has been featured as a soloist with The Philadelphia Orchestra, and National Symphony Orchestra, among others. In 2013, she was selected by The Philadelphia Orchestra's Music and Artistic Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin to receive the Orchestra's C. Hartman Kuhn Award—given to “the member of The Philadelphia Orchestra who has shown ability and enterprise of such character as to enhance the standards and the reputation of The Philadelphia Orchestra.” She holds a Philadelphia Orchestra chair established for her in 2022 by supporters Elaine Woo Camarda and A. Morris Williams Jr.

Since graduating from UPenn with a MAPP degree in 2017, Ms. Kendall has appeared as a guest presenter and facilitator at conferences, retreats, and other events across various professional fields. By bridging music and positive psychology (and often bringing her cello), she offers a uniquely engaging perspective on topics such as intrinsic motivation, cultivating meaning at work, and social connections. Captivating as both a cellist and speaker, she is known for her authenticity, ebullience, and approachable style in communicating about classical music.

Exemplifying her role as a changemaker, in 2023 Ms. Kendall launched the *Tacet No More* podcast with her longtime friend, Philadelphia Orchestra colleague Joseph Conyers. Their podcast raises provocative, yet optimistic inquiries intended to shake up the status quo and reimagine the next era of classical music.

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### **Christine Jeonghoun Lee (Cello '13)**

Christine J. Lee joined the cello section of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in August 2023. Renowned for her unrelenting curiosity, Ms. Lee is an exceptionally versatile artist regularly performing as both soloist and chamber musician.

Among her many competition triumphs, Ms. Lee won first prize in the International Isang Yun Competition and was a top laureate of the Queen Elisabeth Competition. Her inaugural album, *Voyage*, was released in May 2021 on the label Outthere. With this album, she invites her listeners to embark on a journey of self-discovery and cultural exchange, building bridges through her musical expression. She launched *Christine's Notes* on YouTube and conducts live interviews with leading musicians of her generation on Instagram with the aim of revitalizing classical music's relevance in contemporary society. As the artistic director of the "We've got your Bach" project during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic, she facilitated the creation and performance of music online, providing solace and comfort to people in need.

Dedicated to using her musical talents for the benefit of her community, Ms. Lee has organized charity concerts and fundraisers, fostering a sense of togetherness through music. Among her recent endeavors, she raised funds for building a mobile library for underprivileged children in North Philadelphia, a community close to her heart.

### **YaoGuang Zhai (Clarinet '09)**

Principal clarinet of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra since 2016, YaoGuang Zhai has become a sought-after soloist, chamber musician, and educator. Prior to his appointment in Baltimore, he served as associate principal clarinet of the Toronto Symphony and principal clarinet of the Shanghai Symphony, as well guest principal clarinet with the New York Philharmonic, the Saint Louis Symphony, and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

As a soloist, in addition to performances with the Baltimore, Toronto, and Shanghai Symphony orchestras, Mr. Zhai appeared with the Victoria Symphony, Toronto Summer Music Festival Orchestra, Pacific Symphony, the American Academy of Conducting Orchestra in Aspen, and the Stellenbosch International Chamber Music Festival Orchestra, to name a few.

His participation as a chamber musician has taken him to many festivals around the globe, including Santa Fe, Stellenbosch, Hong Kong, Aspen, Angel Fire, Laguna Beach, and the Pacific Music Festival in Japan.

A highly respected educator, Mr. Zhai is associate professor at Boston Conservatory at Berklee and teaches annually at Interlochen Summer Music Camp. He has participated in the Master Players Summer Music Festival, National Youth Orchestra of China, Stellenbosch in South Africa, and summer programs at the Curtis Institute of Music.

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Mr. Zhai began studying violin at the age of three and switched to clarinet seven years later. He entered the China Central Conservatory in 1999 and in 2003 attended the Idyllwild Arts Academy on full scholarship, followed by admission to Curtis Institute of Music, from which he graduated in 2009.

While a student he won numerous competitions and awards, including the Hellam, Blount-Slawson, Aspen, Spotlight, and Pacific Symphony Competition. His teachers included such distinguished clarinetists as Yehuda Gilad, Donald Montanaro, Ricardo Morales, and Joaquin Valdepenas.

YaoGuang Zhai is a Buffet Crampon and Vandoren artist.

### **About the Curtis Institute of Music**

At Curtis, the world's most talented young musicians develop into exceptional artists, creators, and innovators. With a tuition-free foundation, Curtis is a unique environment for teaching and learning. A small school by design, students realize their artistic potential through intensive, individualized study with the most renowned, sought-after faculty. Animated by a learn-by-doing philosophy, Curtis students share their music with audiences through more than 100 performances each year, including solo and chamber recitals, orchestral concerts, and opera—all free or at an affordable cost—offering audiences unique opportunities to participate in pivotal moments in these young musicians' careers. Curtis students experience a close connection to the greatest artists and organizations in classical music, as well as innovative initiatives that integrate new technologies and encourage entrepreneurship—all within a historic campus in the heart of culturally rich Philadelphia. In this diverse, collaborative community, Curtis's extraordinary artists challenge, support, and inspire one another—continuing an unparalleled 100-year legacy of musicians who have led, and will lead, classical music into a thriving, equitable, and multidimensional future. Learn more at [Curtis.edu](https://www.curtis.edu).