

A TEMPO



L-R: Robert Mundheim, Guna Mundheim, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Rita E. Hauser, and Roberto Díaz at New York's Lincoln Center last November.

The Maestra Behind the Conducting Program

With a \$10 million gift, Rita E. Hauser ensures the future of Curtis' conducting program.

BY BRIAN WISE

AS CURTIS SOUGHT to expand its training for conductors in the early 2010s, it received interest from a donor well versed in matters of leadership and diplomacy: Rita E. Hauser, a lawyer and philanthropist whose career brought her to the highest echelons of international relations, including to nonpartisan advisory boards for presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush.

In November, Ms. Hauser, president of the Hauser Foundation, committed \$10 million to endow the conducting program in perpetuity, capping a series of gifts to Curtis spanning more than 25 years. To be paid after her passing, the gift's size and timing—amid the celebration of Curtis's 100th anniversary—make it especially significant.

The conducting program has drawn support



from Ms. Hauser since 2013, when she and her late husband, Gustave M. Hauser, donated \$1 million to establish the Rita E. and Gustave M. Hauser Chair in Conducting Studies, which funds guest conductor appearances at Curtis. Since 2021, Ms. Hauser has made a pair of \$2 million donations that support the Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellows; the second gift expanded the program from two students to three, and from two years to three. It also funded the hiring of James Ross as director of orchestral studies.

Ms. Hauser's \$10 million gift was sealed just days after she attended the Curtis Symphony Orchestra's November 24 performance at David Geffen Hall. A longtime concertgoer and board member at Lincoln Center, she has been especially enthused by Metropolitan Opera music director Yannick Nézet-Séguin, who is also Curtis' head of conducting. "I am pleased with the support from Yannick, who has been instrumental in shaping Curtis' program, and for his enthusiasm for the next generation of conductors," she told *Overtures*.

Wide Philanthropic Interests

Ms. Hauser has been a generous donor in academia, health care, and the arts through the Hauser Foundation, which she and her husband created in 1988. The couple met in the 1950s at Harvard University, where she was one of the first women admitted to Harvard Law School. Her husband had graduated earlier and returned to Harvard Law School as a teaching fellow after his discharge from the military. She earned her law degree from NYU in 1959. Ms. Hauser was an international affairs and human rights lawyer and, for more than 20 years, was a senior partner at the New York law firm of Stroock & Stroock & Lavan. She has also served on numerous boards. Mr. Hauser died in 2021 at the age of 91 after a pioneering career in cable television and communications.

Ms. Hauser's most recent donation to Curtis illustrates how even the largest benefactors can begin with comparably modest gifts: Her first donation to Curtis, in 1997, was for \$1,000.

"The expansion of Curtis' conducting program is exciting for the future of leadership in our field," Mr. Nézet-Séguin said in a statement. "The idea that Curtis will help create conductors who are equally at home in the worlds of both operatic and orchestral conducting—as I am—is unique in this country."



Alan Morrison with Peter Richard Conte, the Grand Court organist, and students at Macy's in 2022.

An Inflection Point for Philadelphia Organ Lovers

Will the king of instruments continue to get the royal treatment?

The Center City Macy's closed its doors for the last time on March 23, silencing—for now—the legendary Wanamaker Organ in the store's Grand Court. Considered the largest fully functioning organ in the world, with more than 28,000 pipes, the 1904 instrument is a National Historic Landmark. The day before the store's closing, Macy's hosted a marathon sendoff concert featuring a parade of organists, including Mark Bani ('85), Monte Maxwell ('88), and Aaron Patterson ('22).

The Grand Court has hosted numerous Curtis performances over the decades, including those by participants in the summer organ camp led by organ faculty member Alan Morrison. In 1984, Curtis marked its 60th anniversary by holding a celebratory concert there.

The Macy's store, located at 1300 Market Street, was one of 66 branches slated to close in 2025 as part of a national downsizing effort. TF Cornerstone, the property's owner, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in January that it is committed to preserving the organ. According to CBS News, a tenant has already been identified for the Chestnut Street side of the building, while retail tenants are being considered for the Market Street side.

Meanwhile, Curtis is preparing to install a new pipe organ in Field Concert Hall this July, built by Dobson Pipe Organ Builders, their Opus 100. It replaces an Aeolian-Skinner Opus 1022 organ installed in 1941. The new instrument, whose voicing will be completed in 2026, has been funded by a portion of an anonymous \$20 million gift.

THE PLAYLIST

Benjamin Beilman



THE 2024–25 SEASON for faculty member Benjamin Beilman (Violin '12) brought some unexpected twists. On two occasions, he stepped in on short notice for an injured Hilary Hahn (Violin '99): first when the Chicago Symphony Orchestra needed a substitute for its season opener in September, and subsequently, when the Berlin Philharmonic needed a fill-in for its Washington, D.C. and Ann Arbor, MI dates.

The *Chicago Tribune* wrote that Mr. Beilman was thoroughly prepared, stating, “Every once in a while, a performance has such finesse, such *je ne sais quoi*, that it far exceeds the sum of its parts. Beilman’s Barber [violin concerto] was one of them.”

As Mr. Beilman’s regularly scheduled season winds down, he’s been enjoying some quality family moments, as he tells us in this rundown of his recent cultural discoveries.

Album: Murray Perahia’s *Complete Mozart Piano Concertos* recording with the English Chamber Orchestra. My wife and I welcomed our son Felix in January, and it’s been fun introducing him to my favorite music. This recording (especially K. 503 and 537) is grand yet human and a very welcome pick-me-up the morning after many sleepless nights.

Podcast: *Search Engine* is an excellent show hosted by PJ Vogt that tackles a little bit of everything (the show’s tagline is “no question too big or too small”). There’s a great mini-series on what it’s like to try to gain entry to Berlin’s famous techno club Berghain and all the ways one can experience rejection.

TV: *Severance* on Apple TV+. That show alone is worth the monthly subscription.

Book: *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro.

Gallery: The American Wing at the Met Museum in New York City. They’ve refreshed it in celebration of the gallery’s 100th anniversary, and it’s a gem. There’s a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed living room on display that I still think about often.

Place for a meal: Dizengoff is my go-to for a quick lunch in between lessons.

Quick Hits

■ Curtis Artist Management announced three additions to its roster this spring. Sarah Fleiss (Voice '23 and Opera '25) and Juliette Tacchino (Opera '25), both sopranos, become the first singers on the roster. Also newly signed is the Rosamunde String Quartet, an ensemble comprised of members of several top orchestras: Noah Bendix-Balgley, first concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic; Shanshan Yao (Violin '08), a member of the Kammerakademie Potsdam; Teng Li ('05), principal viola of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; and Nathan Vickery ('13), a cellist in the New York Philharmonic. Mr. Bendix-Balgley was also announced as Curtis’ first visiting faculty member, starting this fall. In this role, he will visit for one residency each semester.

■ Jessie Montgomery will be Curtis’ composer in residence during the 2025–26 season. One of today’s most in-demand composers, Ms. Montgomery will give lectures, masterclasses, and coachings as student ensembles present her music throughout the season.

■ The 2025–26 All-School Project will expand on this year’s theme with “Bold Experiments: Reflections on Democracy and Music.”

Curtis Scoops Up Art Alliance Building

Curtis purchased one of the prized properties of the shuttered University of the Arts in January as part of a bankruptcy liquidation auction. The school successfully bid \$7.6 million for the Art Alliance building, located on the southeast corner of Rittenhouse Square at 251 S. 18th Street—mere steps from 1726 Locust Street.

It was the first of nine buildings in the UArts portfolio to be sold since the school abruptly closed last June and filed for bankruptcy some three months later. Curtis outbid Temple University and a local real estate developer during the auction. The building, designed in the style of an Italian Renaissance palazzo, includes galleries and an outdoor space. Curtis will likely use the space for rehearsals, master classes, and workshops, as well as administrative needs.