Curtis
Institute of Music

2026/27 Season

November 8, 2026
Marian Anderson Hall
Kimmel Center







Curtis Symphony Orchestra

Yannick Leads Mahler 9



Save the Date for Curtis' 2027 Gala

May 13, 2027
Thursday at 6:00 p.m., The Bellevue Hotel

Join us for an unforgettable evening of music and celebrations, and honor Curtis' enduring impact. Proceeds from the event play a vital role in sustaining Curtis' unparalleled, tuition-free education. Your participation helps ensure that Curtis continues to shape the future of music for generations to come.

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Curtis
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Our mission is to educate and train exceptionally gifted young musicians to engage a local and global community through the highest level of artistry.

CURTIS INSTITUTE OF MUSIC
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

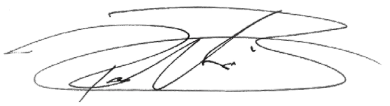
It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the second Curtis Symphony Orchestra concert of the 2026–27 school year. Alongside their colleagues, our young musicians have worked with Maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin to prepare one of the most monumental works in the repertoire—Mahler's Ninth Symphony, which the Curtis orchestra has presented only once before in our history. Not only that, but they also had the chance to discover a newer work that was premiered by The Philadelphia Orchestra on this very stage just a few years ago—Valerie Coleman's *Umoja*.

As a graduate of Curtis and a former member of Curtis Symphony Orchestra, I can say that these concerts are so exciting to prepare and perform. I remember rehearsing both cornerstone and rarer works like these, guided by world-renowned conductors, like Maestro Nézet-Séguin, creating memories that have echoed throughout my career as a violist. These experiences provided me with the most solid of foundations and the confidence to forge my artistic path.

There are still so many more Curtis performances ahead of us this year—we hope you can join us often! Next week, Curtis Opera Theatre performs Carlisle Floyd's masterful and haunting American opera, *Susannah*, at the Philadelphia Film Center. In March, Curtis Symphony Orchestra returns to Marian Anderson Hall for our third and final concert of the year, featuring Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony and a world premiere by conductor Osmo Vänskä. And throughout the coming months, we offer dozens of free recitals, new music concerts, and events at Curtis.

Of course, all of this is made possible thanks to the generous support of friends like you. We are immensely grateful for the time and resources that you invest in our students and our school. Thank you for all you do for Curtis.

Warmly,



Roberto Díaz (Viola '84)
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CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA PRESENTS

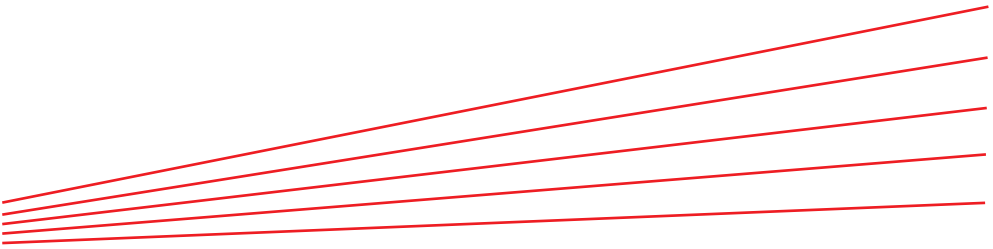
Yannick Leads Mahler 9

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2026, 5:00 P.M.
Marian Anderson Hall, Kimmel Center

Yannick Nézet-Séguin, conductor

Yiran Zhao, Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellow

Curtis Symphony Orchestra



Orchestral concerts are supported by the Jack Wolgin Curtis Orchestral Concerts Endowment Fund.

Guest conductor appearances for each Curtis Symphony Orchestra performance are made possible by the Rita E. and Gustave M. Hauser Chair in Conducting Studies.

Curtis received funding from Pennsylvania Creative Industries, powered by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts.

VALERIE COLEMAN

Umoja (Anthem of Unity)

Yiran Zhao, Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellow

INTERMISSION

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 9 in D major

Andante comodo

Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers

Rondo. Burleske: Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig

Adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend

Yannick Nézet-Séguin, conductor

This concert runs approximately two hours, including one 20-minute intermission.

Umoja (Anthem of Unity) by Valerie Coleman presented under license from Coleman Page Music, LLC.

Symphony No. 9 by Gustav Mahler presented under license from Boosey and Hawkes, Inc.

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Umoja (Anthem of Unity)
Valerie Coleman (b. 1970)
14 minutes

With *Umoja (Anthem of Unity)*, Valerie Coleman became the first African American woman to receive a commission from the Philadelphia Orchestra. Yannick Nézet-Séguin led its premiere with the ensemble in September 2019, kicking off what became a fruitful ongoing partnership. In the years since, Nézet-Séguin has led the premieres of Coleman's *Seven O'Clock Shout*, which saluted frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, *Eternal Flame*, which featured soprano Angel Blue, and Concerto for Orchestra (*Renaissance*), about the Harlem Renaissance and the Great Migration.

Umoja is an expansion of a short piece that Coleman wrote in 1997 for women's choir and later adapted for Imani Winds, the wind quintet she co-founded and performed with as a flutist until 2018 (since 2021 it has been Curtis' faculty wind quintet). Its title means "unity" in Swahili, and the word is linked to the first of the seven days of Kwanzaa. In a program note, Coleman writes that the first version of *Umoja* evoked the "tribal unity" of a drum circle in which participants share oral histories in call-and-response fashion. When she expanded the piece for orchestra, it grew in sophistication, beginning with sustained ethereal passages that feature a bowed vibraphone and the introduction of a solo violin melody. That sweetly singing theme, she said, is "an earnest reminiscence of Appalachian-style music."

But tension arrives in dissonant brass and percussion interruptions, signifying "the clash of injustices, racism and hate that threatens to gain a foothold in the world today." There is an aggressive exchange between the upper winds and percussion before a return to the opening melody, reminding listeners of kindness and humanity. "Through the brass-led ensemble tutti," Coleman concludes, "the journey ends with a bold call of unity that harkens back to the original anthem."

Symphony No. 9 in D major
Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)
4 movements | 81 minutes

Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony is the middle work of what is sometimes regarded as his farewell trilogy. It began with *Das Lied von der Erde*, a work he refused to label Symphony No. 9 out of a superstitious fear of death (Beethoven and Bruckner, among others, died after writing their ninth symphonies), and ended with the Tenth, which was left unfinished when he died of pneumonia two months before his 51st birthday (effectively affirming the superstition).

As Mahler's last completed score presented to the public, the Ninth is often read as his farewell to life—a long goodbye. But some historians and musicians have discouraged a too-facile reading of this, arguing that Mahler was more interested in the *idea* of a farewell than in delivering a *personal* farewell. To suggest otherwise would make the Ninth an exercise in sentimentality while ignoring its sharper edges.

Still, there is a strong biographical subtext to the Ninth Symphony. When Mahler began composing it in the spring of 1909, he'd recently experienced a series of personal ordeals: the sudden death of his four-year-old daughter Maria from scarlet fever, his forced resignation from the Vienna State Opera, and the diagnosis

of a serious heart ailment, which would be the underlying cause of his own death in 1911. More than ever, he savored his summertime retreats to the countryside and composed much of the Ninth at a rented farmhouse in the Dolomites.

At roughly 25 minutes, the first movement is as long as many four-movement symphonies, and yet Mahler sustains a taut musical argument through continuous variation and expansion (loosely speaking, it's a sonata form). Leonard Bernstein (Conducting '41) famously compared the halting opening rhythm to the irregular pulse of Mahler's heartbeat. Other commentators have discerned nods to Beethoven's "Farewell" Piano Sonata (in the falling two-note figure) and Johann Strauss II's waltz *Freut euch des Lebens* ("Enjoy Life"). The nostalgic opening theme appears in at least a dozen different guises, gathering force as it travels through sections of the orchestra.

The second movement finds Mahler returning to one of his favorite musical forms, the Austrian ländler. But the jolly rustic mood doesn't last, giving way to a sinister and increasingly disorienting waltz—a "dance of death," according to the theorist and philosopher Theodor Adorno. This is followed by a second ländler theme, this one more lilting and sentimental. The three dances intertwine and then break down in the coda, suggesting a farewell to the innocence of Austrian peasant culture.

The inner tensions of the first two movements erupt in the stormy third movement, which Mahler calls a Rondo-Burleske, and asks to be played "very defiantly." The composer unleashes a thicket of counterpoint (rooted in his studies of Bach), and while the prevailing mood is harsh and tumultuous, there are quieter moments too: one phantasmagorical passage foreshadows the fourth movement.

The main theme of the finale is built on a simple *gruppetto* (a four-note ornament) that was previewed in the middle of the third movement. With this daringly simple building block, Mahler sets up a great, spacious hymn, led by the horn and expanded by the full string choir. But a dark tension appears too, as a contrabassoon-led countersubject arrives about five minutes in and intervenes at several points. After an echo of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* (*Songs on the Death of Children*), the muted string theme disintegrates in the coda, and by the end, only the *gruppetto* remains, increasingly hesitant.

Bruno Walter, who in 1912 conducted the Ninth's posthumous premiere with the Vienna Philharmonic, became one of the piece's leading advocates. He also made a case for the symphony as autobiography, describing the last movement as Mahler's peaceful "farewell to the world... like the melting of a cloud in the ethereal blue."

—Brian Wise



YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN, conductor

A member of the school's faculty since 2013, Canadian-born Yannick Nézet-Séguin is head of conducting at the Curtis Institute of Music. Yannick is music and artistic director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, music director of New York's Metropolitan Opera, and artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal's Orchestre Métropolitain. Widely recognized for his consummate artistry, he has established himself as a musical leader of the highest caliber and one of the most thrilling and sought-after talents of his generation. His collaborative style, deeply rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm, paired with a fresh approach to orchestral programming, have been heralded by critics and audiences alike.

Yannick's talents extend beyond symphonic music into the world of opera and choral music. His critically acclaimed performances at New York's Metropolitan Opera, the Vienna State Opera, Milan's La Scala, London's Royal Opera House, and Dutch National Opera demonstrate that he is an artist of remarkable versatility and depth. He enjoys close collaborations with the Berlin Philharmonic, the Vienna Philharmonic, the Bavarian Radio Symphony, and notable European festivals including the BBC Proms, Edinburgh, Lucerne, Salzburg, Berlin, and Grafenegg. Throughout Europe and North America, his appearances have left indelible marks on the international classical music scene.

Yannick has shown a deep commitment to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers and by performing and recording the music of underappreciated composers of the past. His concerts of diverse repertoire attract sold-out houses, and he continues to make connections within the diverse communities of Philadelphia, showing his commitment to engaging music lovers of all ages across the region.

He is a five-time Grammy Award winner and records for Deutsche Grammophon. His recent recordings include projects with The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Orchestre Métropolitain, Berlin Philharmonic, soprano Renée Fleming, and mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, as well as the soundtrack for *Maestro*, and his first solo piano album.

A native of Montreal, Yannick studied piano, conducting, composition, and chamber music at the Conservatoire de music du Québec. His honors include *Musical America*'s Artist of the Year, Royal Philharmonic Society Award, Canada's National Arts Centre Award, the Virginia Parker Prize, the Prix Denise-Pelletier, and Prix Oskar Morawetz. He holds honorary doctorates from the University of Québec in Montreal, Westminster Choir College, the University of Pennsylvania, Curtis Institute of Music, and many others.

YIRAN ZHAO, Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellow

Conductor, composer, pianist, and soprano Yiran Zhao, from Beijing, studies conducting at Curtis with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and James Ross as the Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellow and entered Curtis in 2025.

Zhao serves as assistant conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra for the 2026–27 and 2027–28 seasons. She was a 2025 conducting fellow at Tanglewood, where she conducted in 15 concerts leading the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, vocal fellows, and chamber

ensembles through a variety of repertoire including numerous world premieres. She made her conducting debut with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra's Mendelssohn Academy in June 2026, and with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in April 2026. In summer 2027 and spring 2028, she will return to the Koussevitzky Music Shed and Boston Symphony Hall to lead the orchestra in full subscription concerts.

As a composer, Zhao is published by Hinshaw Music and was a national winner of the 2024 American Prize for Composition. She holds a Master of Music degree in choral conducting from Yale School of Music, and a Bachelor of Music degree in piano and theory and composition from Westminster Choir College. During the 2024–25 season she taught courses in music theory and conducting at the Eastman School of Music and served as assistant conductor of Eastman Musica Nova.

Zhao performs as a soprano with the Grammy-winning vocal ensembles The Crossing and Apollo's Fire, and she was a VOCES8 US Scholar during the 2023–24 season. She served as a church organist and music director for five years, and is currently a staff pianist at the University of Pennsylvania. She was an assistant conductor of the NYO-USA and NYO2 in summer 2026.

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Combining outstanding talent with unparalleled enthusiasm for making music together, Curtis Symphony Orchestra is a cornerstone of the Curtis Institute of Music experience and an essential part of Philadelphia's brilliant cultural landscape. For over 100 years, our extraordinary students have honed their skills and expanded their musical horizons as they prepare for professional careers with the world's leading orchestras and chamber ensembles. Under the mentorship of internationally renowned conductors, including Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Osmo Vänskä, Marin Alsop, Simon Rattle, and Robert Spano, Curtis students present audiences with an array of inspiring programming, ranging from the time-honored to dynamic new works.

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