

NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY

XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Jersey Symphony to present *The Firebird* with Xian Zhang Featuring Nimbus Dance

NEWARK, NJ—New Jersey Symphony presents three performances of *The Firebird* with Music Director Xian Zhang conducting. The performances will take place Friday, March 7, 2025, at 8 pm, at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in Newark; Saturday, March 8, 2025, at 8 pm, at Count Basie Center for the Arts in Red Bank; and Sunday, March 9, 2025, at 3 pm, at NJPAC in Newark.

The program opens with Bach's Prelude from Cello Suite No. 2 with the Symphony's Principal Cello Jonathan Spitz soloing. The first half continues with Pulitzer Prize winner Caroline Shaw's *Valencia*. This short chamber work mixes harmonics, glissandi, minimalism, and rhythmic games throughout. The first act closes with the United States premiere of Qasim Naqvi's *God Docks at Death Harbor* (Piano Quintet Version) as Nimbus Dance joins the stage with choreography titled, "Dark Water" in Newark and Red Bank.

The program continues with Stravinsky's Divertimento from *The Fairy's Kiss*, which was drawn from a neoclassical ballet based on "The Ice Maiden," a tale by author Hans Christian Andersen. The second half of the program concludes with Stravinsky's Suite from *The Firebird* with Nimbus Dance appearing on center stage for both performances in Newark. Originally performed in Paris in 1910 by Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, the piece was then reduced for solo piano and extracted as a concert suite in 1911 and was ultimately re-orchestrated by Stravinsky in 1919.

A Classical Conversation will take place on Friday, March 7, at 7 pm and March 9, at 2 pm, at NJPAC in Newark before the performance. Concertgoers will be able to learn more about the music from Symphony musicians, guest artists, and other engaging insiders.

See the New Jersey Symphony Youth Orchestra's Academy Wind Quartet deliver a Concert Prelude. This pre-concert performance will be on Saturday, March 8, at 7 pm at Count Basie Center for the Arts in Red Bank.

***The Firebird* with Xian Zhang**

Featuring Nimbus Dance | New Jersey Symphony Classical

Xian Zhang conductor

Jonathan Spitz cello

Nimbus Dance | Samuel Pott, artistic director & choreographer

New Jersey Symphony

Newark → Friday, March 7, 8 pm, NJPAC

Red Bank → Saturday, March 8, 8 pm, Count Basie Center for the Arts

Newark → Sunday, March 9, 3 pm, NJPAC

Johann Sebastian Bach Prelude from Cello Suite No. 2

Caroline Shaw *Valencia*

Qasim Naqvi *God Docks at Death Harbor* (Piano Quintet Version)

Igor Stravinsky Divertimento from *The Fairy's Kiss*

Igor Stravinsky Suite from *The Firebird*

More information on concerts and tickets: njsymphony.org/events.

About Xian Zhang

2024–25 marks the GRAMMY and Emmy Award-winning conductor Xian Zhang's ninth season as music director of the New Jersey Symphony. Starting in 2025–26, Zhang will also hold the role of music director at Seattle Symphony. Zhang holds the position of conductor emeritus of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano, having previously held the position of music director between 2009–2016.

The 2024–25 season sees Zhang return to the Metropolitan Opera in New York to conduct David McVicar's acclaimed production of Puccini's *Tosca*.

Zhang is in high demand as a guest conductor, appearing regularly with Philadelphia Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic, returning to both in 2024–25. Her recording with Philadelphia Orchestra and Time for Three, *Letters for The Future* (released 2022 on Deutsche Grammophon), won multiple GRAMMY Awards in the Best Contemporary Classical Composition (Kevin Puts' *Contact*) and Best Classical Instrumental Solo categories.

Following a successful collaboration at Tanglewood Festival 2023, Zhang returns to Boston Symphony Orchestra this season. She remains a favored guest of the Orchestra of St. Luke's and recently stepped in for their Brahms Requiem concert at Carnegie Hall. Other 2024–25 highlights include Montreal Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, National Arts Centre (NAC) Orchestra, Belgian National Orchestra, and Milan Symphony Orchestra.

Zhang continues to enjoy good relationships with many leading orchestras worldwide, including London Symphony Orchestra, Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, Houston Symphony, St Louis Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra, and Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse.

Zhang previously served as principal guest conductor of the BBC National Orchestra & Chorus of Wales, the first female conductor to hold a titled role with a BBC orchestra and principal guest conductor of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. In 2002, she won first prize in the Maazel-Vilar Conductor's Competition. She was appointed New York Philharmonic's assistant conductor in 2002, subsequently becoming their associate conductor and the first holder of the Arturo Toscanini Chair.

About Jonathan Spitz

Jonathan Spitz has established himself as a leading cellist in the United States with his performances as a soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral principal. He is the recently-appointed head of string studies at the Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University and serves as professor of cello. He has been principal cello of the New Jersey Symphony since 1991, and he is a member of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and principal cello of the American Ballet Theater Orchestra.

Spitz has appeared as a soloist with the New Jersey Symphony on numerous occasions, performing many of the standard cello concertos. He has performed recitals at Carnegie Hall and at colleges and universities throughout the US. An active chamber musician, Spitz was a participant at the Marlboro Music Festival and currently serves on the artist faculty of the Brevard Music Center. A graduate of the Curtis Institute, he was a student of David Soyer.

He performs on a 2012 cello by Grubaugh and Seifert.

About Samuel Pott

Samuel Pott founded Nimbus in 2005 in support of a vision for dance, creativity, and the arts as a stimulus for growth and unity, both personal and communal. Pott's work as a performer, choreographer, educator, and arts leader is dedicated to the authentic, humanistic, and equitable engagement that emerges in individuals and in communities through deep exploration and learning in the dance and the arts.

Under his direction, the organization has toured nationally, built the Nimbus Arts Center at The Lively in Downtown Jersey City, developed the School of Nimbus which serves over 400 students onsite and many thousands in offsite community programs annually, and became the largest contemporary dance organization in the State of New Jersey. Pott's choreography has embodied the organization's endless fascination with exploration and engagement with important themes of the day, and collaboration with artists from many genres, among them: composers Daniel Bernard Roumain, Samson Young, Judd Greenstein, Aaron Parks, and Qasim Naqvi; visual artists Nicola

Lopez, Bryant Small, Laia Cabrera/Isabelle Duverger, Theda Sandiford; and writers Alysia Souder and Rashad Wright. Pott maintains a multi-year artistic partnership with the New Jersey Symphony. Pott's 20+ original works for Nimbus are complemented by his commitment to support the work of diverse, established, and emerging choreographers through commissions, including: Dawn Marie Bazemore, Sofia Nappi, Darshan Singh Bhuller, Yoshito Sakuraba, Pedro Ruiz, Vernard Gilmore, and Korhan Basaran.

As a performer, Pott danced as a soloist with the Martha Graham Dance Company, performing in iconic roles—the Husbandman in Appalachian Spring, Agamemnon in Clytemnestra, and Adam in Embattled Garden—and new choreographic works created by a range of leading contemporary choreographers including Larry Kegwin, Ann Bogart, Robert Wilson, and Lar Lubovitch. Prior to joining the Graham company, Pott performed as a lead dancer with American Repertory Ballet, Oakland Ballet, and Savage Jazz Dance Company, in a wide range of new and classical repertory. A recipient of Choreography Fellowships from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts in 2008, 2017, and 2023, and named a Distinguished Teaching Artist by the Council in 2012, Pott was one of 25 arts leaders nationally selected for the Association of Performing Arts Presenters' (APAP) inaugural Leadership Fellows Program, serves on the Dance Advisory Council for New Jersey Performing Arts Center, and is a co-founder of the Jersey City Arts Council.

About Nimbus Dance

Nimbus Dance is known for its evocative and captivating physical approach to dance and for its immersive visual aesthetic. Founded in 2005 by artistic director Samuel Pott (former soloist of Martha Graham Dance Company), the Jersey City-based contemporary dance company masterfully bridges world-class performances and community engagement. With a diverse repertoire of over 35 works by Pott and by international and acclaimed guest choreographers, Nimbus offers powerful performances that engage audiences of all ages and interests with dances that are narrative and relatable. Pott and his dancers capture resonant and timely topics with refreshing honesty, witty humor, and an enduring optimism, walking a fine line between concert dance, dance theater, and immersive communal arts experiences.

Nimbus reaches over 16,000 people annually, performing throughout the NJ/NY area and nationally, including recently with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood. The State of New Jersey's largest contemporary dance organization, Nimbus resides at and operates the Nimbus Arts Center in Downtown Jersey City, a 14,500 sq. ft. multi-arts facility which is Jersey City's leading hub for dance, theater, visual arts, and dance education. The School of Nimbus and outreach programs reach over 4000 youth each year, with scholarships available to ensure that no student is turned away for lack of funds. Nimbus is humbled by support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, The New Jersey Arts and Culture Renewal Fund, The Jersey City Arts Trust, and Foundations including the Geraldine R.

Dodge Foundation, the O'Donnell-Green Music and Dance Foundation, and others.

About New Jersey Symphony

New Jersey Symphony is a GRAMMY and Emmy Award-winning orchestra. Under the direction of the Music Director Xian Zhang, the Symphony performs more than 60 concerts at mainstage venues across the state, including Newark, Princeton, New Brunswick, Red Bank, and Morristown as well as schools and public spaces statewide. Programming at the Symphony reflects an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion while providing students across the state unparalleled opportunities to achieve musical excellence through its Youth Orchestra and other outreach programs. In 2024, the Symphony announced it would continue to deliver its statewide activities from a new, permanent office, rehearsal, and concert space in Jersey City, set to open in 2026. For more information about the New Jersey Symphony, visit our website at njsymphony.org or our newsroom for press releases and photos.

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