



DALLAS OPERA'S Hart Institute for Women Conductors enters its second season this fall with six handpicked fellows from France, Greece, New Zealand, Romania and the U.S., joined by four American observers selected to audit the sessions. The program's initial success was shown in part by the number of highly qualified candidates—156, representing thirty-one countries—that lined up to apply for season two.

The IWC is the brainchild of Keith Cerny, Dallas Opera's general director and CEO, who personally designed the Institute's component parts, selected its faculty and—with music director Emmmanuel Villame and principal guest conductor Nicole Paiement—combed through the flood of applications to arrive at the ideal candidates. Cerny personally recruited Paiement as a lead faculty member. This season, the IWC welcomes Marin Alsop to its faculty.

The question of gender imbalance in certain fields has been on Cerny's mind since his teen years in Berkeley, where his mother and her friends were among the first women to be admitted to PhD programs such as astrophysics and chemistry. "I grew up with extremely bright women who had been trailblazers in their fields," he says. At Harvard Business School and early in his career, he became aware of a variety of barriers to women in leadership positions—"some overt, others more subtle," he says. Among the top opera

companies, "fewer than ten percent are headed by women, and twenty-five years ago it was the same. Alsop is the only woman music director among the top twenty-two American orchestras."

Mitch and Linda Hart, the program's name donors, have made a twenty-year commitment to the IWC. Linda Hart was "instantly intrigued" with Cerny's vision for the program. As the first female partner in any major Dallas or Houston law firm, Hart was aware of the "unspoken barriers for women" in leadership positions. "Before we signed on, we wanted to be sure the Board was committed to a long-term continuation of the program," she said. "We asked Keith what we could do to help."

Jessica Gethin, an IWC fellow from 2015, described the program's musical content, gaining experience conducting the Dallas Opera Orchestra in rehearsal and performance with oversight from top professionals—"a variety of technical things

we discussed and actually did on the podium"—as well as its collaborative aspect "with the other five conductors and the IWC faculty. We learned about visibility, branding, media, dealing with sponsors and donors, board interaction—things that are rarely discussed, and that you end up finding out on the job."

JoAnn Falletta, music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic since 1994, recalls a day when there was "nothing like this, no kind of program that would be a stepping-stone from conservatory to career." Falletta often gets calls from young women entering the field. "Women call with questions they might not be comfortable with asking a male colleague who has not encountered these problems. How can I be heard better? How can I be more demanding in a way that is acceptable to me?" When Falletta was coming up in the business, there was nobody to ask.

For orchestra players, the playing field was leveled with the introduction of blind auditions.

Alsop is the *only* woman music director among the top twenty-two American orchestras.

A reunion workshop session in Dallas led by Nicole Paiement (standing)



For conductors, this is not a possibility. It is more a case of wearing down what Cerny calls "the novelty factor. Because women are less common, audiences stay focused on the gender of the conductor rather than on the music being made."

And then there is confidence. Studies show women in general lagging behind in this crucial area—tending to be more self-critical, more likely to doubt their own qualifications than their male counterparts. Here is where the IWC really shines. The program makes a five-year commitment to each fellow, with reunions, master classes, spring and fall conference calls, and career-guidance seminars built into the plan. High-definition video of the fellows' podium work is available on Dallas Opera's website. Cerny is justly proud of being able to offer this valuable marketing tool, which required considerable union negotiation. The summer reunions will focus on imparting a greater understanding of the music business.

Carolyn Kuan, an experienced opera conductor, believes that female stereotyping itself may hold some promise for female opera conductors. "One of the essential skills of an opera conductor, in my opinion, is the ability to facilitate multiple visions without involving personal ego," she says, "especially when those visions don't align. This is where some of the female stereotypes are helpful—the belief that we are better listeners, more caring, more effective at multitasking. In opera, there are many creative powers at work. The conductor is the force that brings all the various aspects of a production together." ■

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Leading Women.

Dallas Opera creates opportunities for female conductors.

Clockwise from top left: 2015 IWC fellows Lidia Yankovskaya, Stephanie Rhodes, Jessica Gethin and Natalie Murray Beale

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