



2026 STATE CONFERENCE

Crescendo!



October 30 - 31, 2026
University of Nevada Las Vegas
School of Music

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EVENING RECITAL

Doc Rando Recital Hall



Crescendo
presents

MTNA
MUSIC TEACHERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

Winners'
Concert

1st and 2nd place Winners
from 2024-2025 MTNA Competitions

Friday October 30, 2026 at 7:00pm

Suggested Donation:\$15

Sponsored by:
Steinway & Sons, Southern Nevada Music, and
UNLV School of Music

NMTA 2026 CONFERENCE GRAND FINALE!



SATURDAY 2:30 PM – 4:00 PM | HALLOWEEN SILENT FILM
CELEBRATION & FUNDRAISER SPEAKER/HOST: HEATHER SMITH
HFA 147 UNLV

A festive afternoon screening of Charlie Chaplin's *"The Rink"* and *"The Haunted House"* featuring live musical accompaniment by local students.

Trick-or-Treating for everyone!



2026 NMTA State Conference

CRESCENDO

Engage the Public • Sustain the Profession • Inspire our Members

October 30 – 31, 2026

University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV)

Locations: Beam Music Center (BMC) & Ham Fine Arts (HFA)

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

October 30th and 31st, 2026

Dear Colleagues:

I want to warmly welcome you to this historic NMTA State Conference. This *Nevada Day* Weekend, we are commemorating the 60th Anniversary of NMTA. It is the perfect weekend to refresh your teaching perspectives, celebrate our community's incredible artistry, and connect with colleagues past and present. Our committee has dedicated itself to ensuring this milestone event is deeply rewarding, and we look forward to welcoming you!

I want to thank the *Crescendo* conference committee for their outstanding work in putting together this two-day biannual event. I'm so thrilled to see the many wonderful presenters, sessions, recitals, and masterclasses from both local musicians, educators and the national MTNA leadership. I'm grateful for the collaboration between our state universities, affiliate organizations and associate members to bring you all together for a weekend of professional development, connection, and celebrating this incredible community.

Warm regards,

Dr. Spencer Baker

NMTA State President



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LEADERSHIP

2026-2028
NMTA State Board

President
Damaris Morales

President-Elect
Cindy Lee

Immediate Past President
Dr. Spencer Baker

1st Vice President - Membership
MTNA Foundation
Allison Olson

2nd Vice President - Local Associations
Jee K. Wong

3rd Vice President - Competitions
Bonnie Buhler-Tanouye

4th Vice President - Social Media
Cindy Won

Secretary
Polya Bankova

Treasurer
Dr. Nathan Carterette

MTNA Competition Co-Chair
Cindy Lee

Silver State Competition Chairs
Theresa Schmauder, Reno
Michelle Lee, Las Vegas

Silver State Competition Co-Chair
Marie Lee, Henderson

Certification Chair
Laurie Swain, Las Vegas

Piano Chair
Cindy Lee

String Chair
Young Won Na

Woodwind Chair
Dr. Ivan Ivanov

State Collegiate Chair
Dr. Spencer Baker

NNMTA President
Dr. Sally Wei

LVMTA President
Pierce Emata

UNRMTA President
Heinz Denoyo

UNLVMTA President
Tianran (Cameron) Gao

Newsletter
Karen Hudson, Reno

Community Outreach
Maire Lee, Henderson

Conference Organizing Committee

Damaris Morales, Spencer Baker, Jee K. Wong, Cindy Lee, Sonnet Johnson, Cindy Won, Sally Wei, Ivan Ivanov, Nathan Carterette.

List of Past Presidents

Howard Chase 1966-1968	Mallie Riecken 1996-1998
Margaret Presley 1968-1970	Suzanne Gillman 1998-2000
Wanda Wasden 1970-1972	Nancy Tedford 2000-2002
Betty Henderson 1972-1974	Doris Chase 2002-2004
Beth Burkiser 1974-1976	Kathleen Legere 2004-2006
Ronald Williams 1976-1978	Pierce Emata 2006-2008
James Stivers 1978-1980	Mary Straub 2008-2010
Kim Wynant 1980-1982	Cheryl Thornton 2010-2012*
Josephine Williams 1982-1984	Hanah Waterman Shields 2012-2014
Ruth Brewer 1984-1986	Farida Jamin 2014-2016
Sonnet Johnson 1986-1988	Lynette Cook 2016-2018
Kathleen Legere 1988-1990	Suzanne Clayson 2018-2020
Josephine Williams 1990-1992	Cheryl Thornton 2020-2022 *
Carol Stivers 1992-1994	Marie Lee 2022-2024
Brach Thomson 1994-1996	Spencer Baker 2024-2026

Certified Music Teachers

Spencer J. Baker	Valerie Bates	Margarita Bryant	Carol Coppola
Maren Daynes	Amy Jahn	Michele Johnson	Sonnet Johnson
Julian Lam	Kathleen Legere	Rayola McBride	Kathryn Mickey
Lindsey O'Connor	Bruria Perlberg	Ethelyn Peterson	Emma Pease-Byron
Betty Rich	Mallie Riecken	Denise Smith	Laurie Swain
Nancy Tedford	Chad Twedt	Karen Waltman	Meredith Whelan
Ronald Williams	James Winn	Jui Hsuan Won	Jee Wong
Cicilia Yudha			

FEATURED GUESTS



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Irish-born pianist **Peter Mack** built a distinguished academic foundation starting at the Dublin College of Music under Frank Heneghan and continuing at Trinity College, Dublin. He completed advanced studies with Bela Siki at the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music before earning his doctorate in piano performance from the University of Washington.

Today, Dr. Mack leverages his extensive academic training as a highly sought-after educator, clinician, and convention artist. His rigorous teaching pedigree is reflected in the success of his pupils, who are frequent winners of local, national, and international piano competitions. Mack is well known for his extensive repertoire, having performed twenty-five concertos with orchestras. He is equally in demand as a performer, clinician, convention artist, and teacher.



Heather Smith, MBA, CFRE, CAP is Chief Advancement Officer at The Frances Clark Center for Keyboard Pedagogy, where she works to support music educators and students worldwide. She has held national fiduciary and governance roles, including serving as National Secretary-Treasurer of Music Teachers National Association, and currently serves on the Finance Committee for AFP Global.

Her professional background also includes experience in tax and financial management, alongside a long career in music education and arts leadership. Heather holds advanced degrees in business and music and is a Certified Fund-Raising Executive (CFRE) and Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP). Her work focuses on advancing community engagement through the arts.

COMPETITION SCHEDULE

THURSDAY

Doc Rando Recital Hall

3:30 PM - 8:30 PM | Piano Competitors Rehearsal

FRIDAY

Doc Rando Recital Hall

8:00 AM – 2:00 PM | Piano Competition

BMC 160

8:00 AM - 4:00 PM | String Competitors Rehearsal

SATURDAY

Doc Rando Recital Hall

7:30 AM – 8:40 AM | Piano Ensemble Competition

BMC 160

8:00 AM - 1:30 PM | String Competition

MASTERCLASSES

FRIDAY

3:30 - 5:00 PM, Doc Rando Recital Hall

Piano Masterclass

Peter Mack

SATURDAY

1:45 PM - 3:15 PM, BMC 160

String Masterclass

Lina Bahn



2026 NMTA State Conference

SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

Morning Welcome & Competition

8:00 AM – 10:00 AM | Piano Competition

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

8:00 AM – 10:00 AM | Registration & Welcome Network

 *BMC 159*

Pick up your badges, view schedule brochures, enjoy breakfast, and connect with your colleagues.

Special Repeating Feature

9:30 AM / 10:30 AM / 11:30 AM | The Future of Music Education

Presenter: Southern Nevada Music - STEINWAY & SONS

 *HFA 214*

Teaching, Learning and Inspiring Students with The **Steinway Spirio** I r. Discover how this high-resolution player-piano and recording instrument acts as a powerful studio partner.

 southernnevadamusic.com

Presentation Block A

10:00 AM – 11:00 AM | Body Mapping FUNdamentals

Presenter: Stephen Caplan, D.M.A.

 *HFA 147*

An interactive workshop exploring simple movements to help you and your students sit, stand, and play without pain. *Please wear comfortable clothes!*

 oboemotions.com

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30

10:15 AM – 11:00 AM | Exploring Hidden Gems by Women Composers

Presenter: Cindy Jihyun Lee

 *BMC 159*

An introduction to the lives and distinctive keyboard/ensemble literature of Clara Schumann, Mel Bonis, Cécile Chaminade, and Amy Beach.

 cindyleepiano.com

10:30 AM – 11:20 AM | A Pianist's Guide to Studio Management

Presenter: Heather Smith

 *HFA 212*

Best business practices and strategies for managing your studio, covering accounting, taxes, and retirement planning.

 heathersmithpiano.com

Presentation Block B

11:15 AM – 12:00 PM | Teaching the Clarinet Section in the Wind Symphony

Presenter: Dr. Ivan Ivanov

 *BMC 159*

An interactive session showcasing advanced methods for developing a homogenous, mellow orchestral woodwind sound.

 ivanovivan.com

11:30 AM – 12:20 PM | Mindfulness & Stress Management for Aspiring Musicians

Presenter: Cicilia Yudha

 *HFA 147*

Learn practical wellness strategies to transform your studio into a safe space supporting musical excellence and emotional well-being.

 www.unr.edu/music

FRIDAY OCTOBER 30

Lunch Break & Early Afternoon Sessions

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM | Designing Studio Policies That Actually Work!

Presenter: Laurie Swain

 *HFA 212*

Leave equipped to communicate expectations warmly, protect your schedule confidently, and build a predictable environment.

 byu.edu

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM | Piano Romanticism in the Philippines

Presenter: Heinz Gilbert Denoyo

 *HFA 147*

A lecture-recital diving deep into the concert and pedagogical value of 20th-century Filipino piano literature.

General Assembly & Evening Events

2:30 PM – 3:20 PM | Keynote Address & 60th Anniversary Celebration

Keynote Speaker: Peter Mack

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

General Membership Meeting, Nomination and New State Board Certification, Featuring the NMTA President's Award and Past State Board Members presentation.

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM | Piano Masterclass

Master Teacher: Peter Mack

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

7:00 PM – 8:00 PM | Past Winners Recital

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

A special Steinway-sponsored recital honoring past MTNA State Competition winners, teacher recognition, and Southern Nevada Music.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

Morning Sessions

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM | The Transfer Student: When the Foundation is Laid

Presenter: Peter Mack

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

How to successfully accept, evaluate, and inspire advanced students who began their studies with another teacher.

10:30 AM – 11:20 AM | Fundraisers Round Table

Presenter: State Finance Committee (Conducted by Heather Smith)

 *HFA 263 Conference Room*

10:30 AM – 11:20 AM | Hearing Colors and Feeling Sounds

Presenters: James D'León & Alwen Yeung

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

An interactive journey and multi-sensory exploration into how the human brain experiences synesthesia.

 jamesdleon.com

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM | Building a Thriving Violin Studio via Ensemble Culture

Presenter: Shakeh Goukasian

 *HFA 147*

Discover how incorporating group performance experiences turns private string lessons into an empowering community.

 desertrootsrisingstars.org

Mid-Day Presentations

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM | The Art of Improvisation

Presenter: Uli Geissendoerfer

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

A creative exploration of stylistic awareness, rhythm, and ear training for classical vocalists and instrumentalists.

 bandcamp.com

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM | The Art of the Phrase

Presenter: Peter Mack

 *Doc Rando Recital Hall*

An entertaining talk on recognizing fundamental musical phrase types and interpreting them to instantly sound better.

 steinway.com

Grand Finale

2:30 PM – 4:00 PM | Halloween Silent Film Celebration & Fundraiser

Speaker/Host: Heather Smith

 *HFA 147*

A festive afternoon screening of Charlie Chaplin's *"The Rink"* and *"The Haunted House"* featuring live musical accompaniment. **Trick-or-Treating for everyone!**

MEETINGS

Friday 2:30pm, Doc Rando

General Membership

New Board members certification notes

Past board members recognition

Spencer Baker, David Skousen, Emma Pierce

Saturday 10:30am, HFA 263

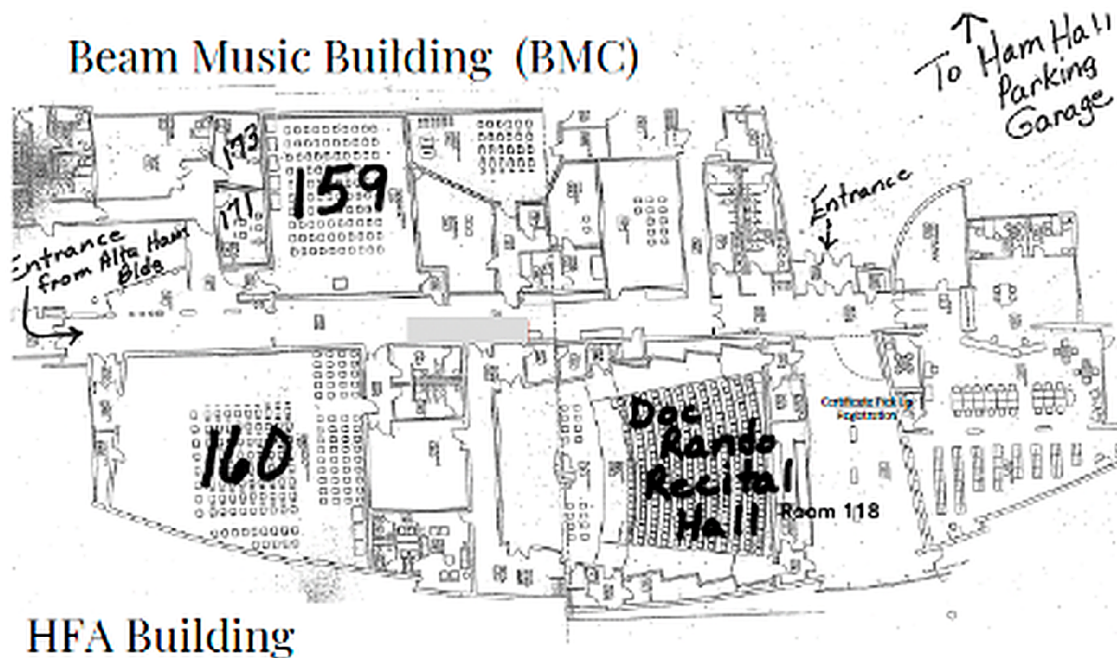
Conference Room

State finance committee meeting with Heather Smith

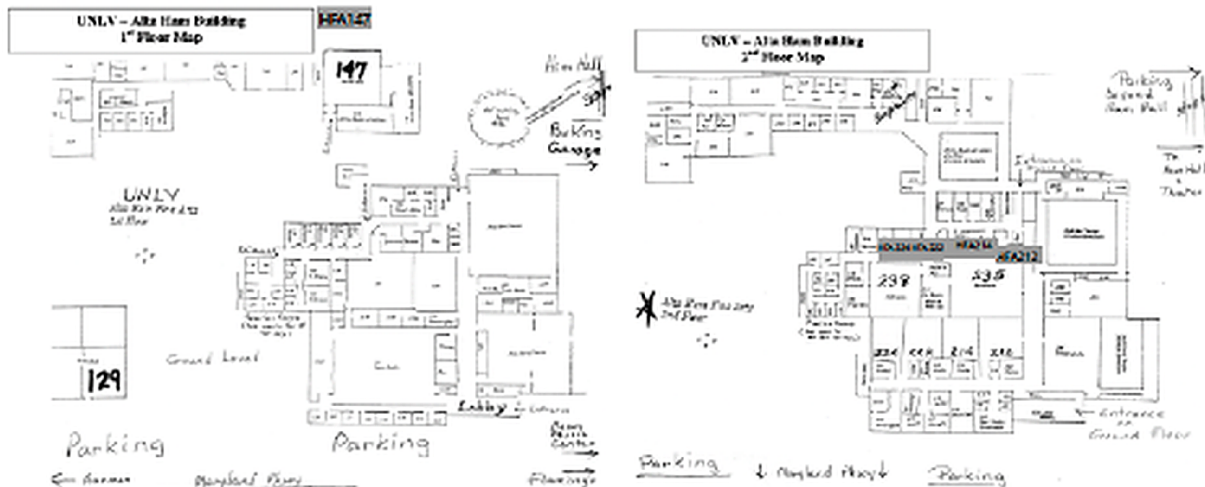
Spencer Baker, Damaris Morales, Nathan Carterette, Maren Daynes, Sally Wei

UNLV MAP

Find Your Way Around UNLV



HFA Building



PRESENTERS

Shakeh Ghoukasian

Founder & Executive Director / Desert Roots Rising Stars Music Festival & Summer Academy Violin Faculty.

Shakeh Ghoukasian is an accomplished violinist, master teacher, and visionary arts leader whose career bridges performance, music education, and community engagement. She is the Founder and Executive Director of **Desert Roots Rising Stars Festival & Institute**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization connecting emerging professional artists with young musicians through mentorship, performance, and educational opportunities.

Shakeh Ghoukasian has dedicated her career to inspiring the next generation of musicians while enriching her community through meaningful artistic collaborations. A native of Armenia, she immigrated to the United States in 1979 and has since become one of Southern Nevada's most respected advocates for music education and cultural engagement.

She is also the founder of **The String Connection**, a private teaching studio where chamber music, ensemble collaboration, and Suzuki-inspired education are integral to developing well-rounded musicians. A graduate of Armenia's Tchaikovsky Music School and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Ghoukasian has served as **Principal Second Violin of the Las Vegas Philharmonic since 1998**. Previously, she served for 13 years as Executive and Artistic Director of the Nevada School of the Arts, where she developed innovative programs and community partnerships. A respected educator, adjudicator, and clinician, Ghoukasian is passionate about cultivating artistic excellence, collaboration, and a lifelong love of music in the next generation.

Uli Geissendoerfer

Pianist, Composer, Educator

German American pianist, composer and educator, Uli Geissendoerfer moved from his spiritual home New York in 2009 as musical director for Cirque du Soleil's Viva Elvis production to Las Vegas. His current projects the *Uli Geissendoerfer Trio*, backbone of the Jazz Club, with their CD "*Long Way Home*", the "*Beregovski Suite*", a duo with award winning violin virtuoso Alicia Svigals dealing with a once lost Ukrainian Jewish archive, his World Music group *Colors* featuring Pascale Elia, and projects with Julian Tanaka.

A Jazz History textbook written with Robert Shipley for Kendall Hunt Publishing came out in 2022 and in 2023 the first in a series of five books "*The Natural Hand – The Art*

of Practicing” published by Innovative Ink. He has worked with, William Cepeda (Grammy nomination), Groove Collective, Giovanni Hidalgo, Blood Sweat & Tears, Leslie Uggams, Cirque du Soleil, Ute Lemper, David Cassidy, Tito Puente, several Symphonies, the Connecticut Opera, a bevy of jazz greats and many African Artists.

Aside from teaching at UNLV (part-time-teacher-of-the-year 2018) garnering many accolades with his Latin Ensemble, he founded the Jazz Club at the Dispensary Lounge (winning *Best of Las Vegas*), which revived the Las Vegas Jazz scene. He founded *Vegas Records* featuring over 30 releases, spearheaded by his seven releases as leader. His current projects include the *Uli Geissendoerfer Trio*, The *Tanaka-Geissendoerfer Quartet*, and his Quintet *Colors*.

Laurie Swain, Organ

Organist • Educator • NCTM Certification Chair

Laurie Swain is a distinguished organist, educator, and author recognized for her significant contributions to music pedagogy. She currently serves as an adjunct organ instructor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) and has spent decades teaching both piano and organ to students of all ages.

A recognized MTNA Foundation Fellow, Laurie holds a Master of Music and a Bachelor of Music in Organ Performance from UNLV, as well as a Bachelor of Science in Education (*magna cum laude*) from Brigham Young University. Her extensive leadership includes serving as the MTNA Certification Commissioner for the Southwest Division and the State Certification Chairman for the Nevada Music Teachers Association. Since 2015, she has contributed her expertise as an organ editor for the National Federation of Music Clubs (NFMC) Festival Bulletin.

Laurie is the author of *Organ for Primary*, a pioneering method designed to introduce students to the organ. A frequent presenter at festivals, conventions, and seminars, she remains a passionate advocate for music education. Beyond her professional achievements, Laurie draws inspiration from her family, including five children and eleven grandchildren. Her approach to teaching has been uniquely shaped by the musical successes of her children and the profound lessons in development learned from her second child who suffers from mental and physical disabilities.

Stephen Caplan, D.M.A.

Oboist, Emeritus Professor, UNLV School of Music

Stephen Caplan's performances have been heard at venues throughout the world, including the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall, and have been featured on several

recordings. His solo recording of American music for the oboe, *A Tree in Your Ear*, has received international acclaim.

Principal oboist with the Las Vegas Philharmonic, Caplan also plays in orchestras accompanying popular superstars on the Las Vegas Strip. His eclectic performance background includes professional affiliations with a baroque period instrument ensemble and a Sousa style concert band, as well as soundtracks for television and film. He has been a concerto soloist with numerous orchestras throughout the United States and in Europe. Caplan is the only performing artist to receive the Nevada Arts Council's prestigious Artist Fellowship Award three times, and was awarded the 2017 Fellowship Project Grant, resulting in a series of teaching and performance videos.

With the Sierra Winds, Caplan made six critically acclaimed recordings and was the recipient of numerous awards including the Nevada Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Caplan is author of two books, *Oboemotions: What Every Oboe Player Needs to Know about the Body*, and *The Breathing Book*. He has developed innovative coursework for music students incorporating a better understanding of the body in performance and has been a guest clinician for music programs internationally. He has a Bachelor of Music from Northwestern University and a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan and is a licensed Body Mapping Educator. Caplan is a *Buffet Group USA Performing Artist*.

James D'León

James D'León is an internationally acclaimed pianist, Steinway Artist, and co-founder of *Duo Fuerza. As Ensemble-in-Residence* at Georgia Southwestern State University, he and his duo partner, Alwen Yeung, perform, teach, and engage audiences through innovative programs that celebrate the expressive power of the four-hand repertoire.

Praised by critics as “a musical sorcerer with powerful emotion,” James D'León is an internationally acclaimed pianist, educator, and Steinway Artist whose career has taken him throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Born in South Korea, he began piano studies at age four and made his orchestral debut at fourteen with the Philadelphia Orchestra performing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2. He later earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Eastman School of Music and gained recognition in major international competitions, including the Bachauer, Leeds, Cliburn, and Naumburg competitions. Today, D'León is also widely recognized as one half of *Duo Fuerza*, the acclaimed four-hand piano ensemble he shares with pianist Alwen Yeung. *As Ensemble-in-Residence* at Georgia Southwestern State University, *Duo Fuerza* champions the rich four-hand piano repertoire through performances, educational residencies, and community engagement initiatives. Praised for its artistry,

sensitivity, and expressive power, the ensemble presents a diverse repertoire spanning classical masterworks to jazz-influenced contemporary works while connecting audiences to music through its innovative “Conversations from the Piano” programs.

Alwen Yeung

Alwen Yeung is an acclaimed pianist, chamber musician, and co-founder of *Duo Fuerza*. Praised for her sensitive playing, she performs internationally across Asia and the United States. With her duo partner, James D'Leon, they serve as *Ensemble-in-Residence* at Georgia Southwestern State University.

Praised for her “sensitive playing and touch,” Alwen Yeung is an internationally active pianist, chamber musician, and collaborative artist, and co-founder of *Duo Fuerza*, known for her expressive clarity and refined musical sensitivity. Born in Hong Kong, she began piano at age six and studied at The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts and The University of Hong Kong with Gabriel Kwok, before continuing her training in the United States, earning graduate degrees from Florida State University and Middlebury College in Vermont.

She has performed across Asia and the United States, including appearances in Hong Kong, Singapore, China, and Indonesia, and is recognized as a sought-after accompanist and award-winning chamber musician, with performances at major events such as the Hong Kong Music Festival and high-profile commemorative concerts. As co-founder of *Duo Fuerza* with pianist James D'León, she serves as *Ensemble-in-Residence* at Georgia Southwestern State University, presenting four-hand repertoire through concerts, residencies, outreach, and their “Conversations from the Piano” series.

Cindy Jihyun Lee, Piano

Pianist • Artistic Director • Educator

Cindy Jihyun Lee is a pianist, artistic director, and educator who performs as both a soloist and chamber musician. She earned her master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music. Following her graduate studies, she taught piano performance, accompanying piano, and music theory at several leading music colleges in Korea. She is frequently invited by venues and organizations to appear as a performer, artistic director, and clinician. Inducted into the Steinway & Sons Teacher Hall of Fame in 2023, Ms. Lee serves as Director of Piano Studies and Director of the Gifted Young Artist Program at the Nevada School of the Arts. She is the founder and artistic director of the *Music of Women Composers* and *Celebration of American Composers* concert series.

A dedicated leader in music education, she serves as State Piano Chair of the Nevada Music Teachers Association (NMTA) and Chair of the Roger Bushell Scholarship Competition. She also founded and chairs the LVMTA Teacher Recital, fostering collaboration and professional growth among music educators.

Ms. Lee has performed extensively across South Korea and the United States in major venues including Carnegie Hall, the Seoul Arts Center, and KBS Hall, and has appeared in the Steinway Concert Series. As a soloist, she has performed with orchestras such as the Prime Philharmonic Orchestra and the INSIEM Philharmonic Orchestra.

Heinz Gilbert Denoyo

Heinz Gilbert Denoyo is a DMA piano performance candidate at the University of Nevada, Reno, originally from the Philippines, serving as a piano department GTA primarily in collaborative roles, with research focused on Philippine music. Piano Romanticism in the Philippines: Filipino Piano Literature in Concert and Pedagogy.

Ivan Ivanov

Bulgarian born clarinetist Ivan Ivanov studied at the Sofia State Academy of Music "Pancho Vladigerov" and finished his bachelor's degree with distinctions. In 2004 Mr. Ivanov became a permanent member of the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra and worked with such conductors as Sir Neville Marriner, Jean Bernard Pommier, Rossen Milanov, Shungo Moriyama, Heinz Hellberg, and others.

In addition to his full-time employment at the National Orchestra, he collaborated with Radio Sofia, New Symphony Orchestra, Classic FM Radio, and National Opera as an orchestral player he has toured France, Germany, Spain, Austria, Netherlands, Japan, and more. Ivanov earned his master's degree of clarinet performance at Carnegie Mellon University from the studio of Michael Rusinek, principal clarinet of the Pittsburgh Symphony and his Doctor of Musical Arts at UNLV from the studio of Marina Sturm. He also studied with Ricardo Morales, principal clarinet of the Philadelphia Orchestra. At the Carnegie Mellon University Ivanov collaborated with the famous surrealist composer Leonardo Balada and recorded his music for clarinet in a CD called *Leonardo Balada Works for Clarinet*.

That collaboration inspired Ivanov to write his book *Leonardo Balada and Surrealism in Music*. Ivanov has numerous recordings also for the Bulgarian National Radio archive and Bulgarian Television, many of which have been broadcast. Ivanov is a substitute player with the Las Vegas Philharmonic and San Diego Symphony and serves as postdoc scholar at UNLV.