

May Festival conductor Kim among new wave of women on the podium

Commentary



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Eun Sun Kim is the first woman to conduct at the Cincinnati May Festival.

By Janelle Gelfand – Courier Contributor
May 17, 2018

Remember this name: [Eun Sun Kim](#). She's a brilliant rising star in the conducting world.

The Korean-born conductor will be the first woman to conduct the Cincinnati May Festival in its 145-year history when she leads Verdi's "Requiem" to open the festival on Friday.

For Kim, the Cincinnati May Festival – one of the world's most distinguished choral festivals – will provide an important debut. (She's stepping in to replace the disgraced [James Levine](#).)

She's been making a name for herself on the opera and concert stages of Europe. Her North American debut in October happened in less-than-optimal conditions, thanks to [Hurricane Harvey](#). With Houston Grand Opera flooded out of its home, she led a production of "La Traviata" in a makeshift setup at Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center. Despite that, she earned high praise.

It's remarkable that women are still achieving "firsts" on the conducting podium. Many are vastly talented musicians, but it's still an uphill battle for women to get to the top of the conducting world.

Traditionally, leading orchestras or opera has been a male domain. Today, board members and arts leaders recognize that women conductors also can inspire orchestras and audiences. But in 2016, just 9.2 percent of American music directors – the top orchestra job -- were female, according to the League of American Orchestras.

[Marin Alsop](#), a protégée of [Leonard Bernstein](#), broke the glass ceiling in 2007 when she became the first woman to head the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. She remains the only female music director at the nation's 24 big-budget orchestras.

Still, the odds may be improving. One of the brightest stars, [Xian Zhang](#), is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Among many firsts, she was the first woman to be named music director of the (smaller budget) New Jersey Symphony in 2016.

There are many others: [Sarah Ioannides](#) – the first woman on the conducting staff of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra – leads Symphony Tacoma. Mei-Ann Chen is music director of the Chicago Sinfonietta and conductor laureate of the Memphis Symphony. Jane Glover, an acclaimed Mozart specialist, leads Music of Baroque in Chicago. Susanna Mälkki is principal guest conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and chief conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic.

Now a new wave of talent is emerging. Last week, American Karina Canellakis, who wowed Cincinnati Symphony and Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra audiences, was named chief conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic.

Part of that new wave is [Eun Sun Kim](#), a maestra to watch. We can't wait to see what she has to offer.

Janelle Gelfand covers the arts for the Courier. Visit her blog, Janelle's Notes, at WGUC.org. Email janellesnotes@yahoo.com