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Kuan eager to continue 'musical journey' at HSO  
Music director's contract extended through 2027





Hartford Symphony Orchestra music director Carolyn Kuan's contract has been extended for three more years. Courtesy

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By Christopher Arnott Hartford Courant

The Hartford Symphony Orchestra announced Friday that it has extended the contract of current music director Carolyn Kuan for three more years until the spring of 2027.

Kuan has been leading the symphony since 2011. She is the 10th music director in the Hartford Symphony Orchestra's 80-year history and the first woman to hold the position. Her initial contract was for three years and has been extended multiple times.

Before the extension was announced, Kuan's contract only lasted through this current season.

Kuan's influence on the Hartford Symphony Orchestra has been considerable. She has strayed from the old classical canon and has highlighted the works of Black, female and Eastern composers whose works were unfairly downplayed in the past. Among these is the early 20th-century composer Florence Price, whose Symphony No. 1 in E Minor was performed in February and whose Violin Concerto No. 1 will be performed at the next Masterworks concert on Oct. 20. The violin soloist will be Melissa White, the second beneficiary of the Joyce C. Willis artist-in-residence grant, a new program that began during Kuan's leadership that is designed to bring fresh talent to the ensemble.

Guest soloists have included pianists who've mastered some of the most difficult pieces in the classical piano repertoire, as well as virtuosic players of the sitar, pipa and koto. This year's season-opening Masterworks concert starred a brass quintet made up of regular members of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra as well as a percussionist who dashed back and forth from a vibraphone to a rock-style drum kit.

Kuan has also embraced such popular events as having the symphony accompany screenings of the "Harry Potter" movies, and a Masterworks concert last season that featured hip-hop dancers. This year the Hartford Symphony Orchestra is accompanying "Elf."

The Hartford Symphony Orchestra holds dozens of events each year, including the nine-concert Masterworks series, a summer pops series held outdoors at the Simsbury Meadows, "neighborhood concerts" in downtown Hartford and elsewhere, "Sunday Serenades" in the galleries of the Wadsworth Atheneum and more.

"I am honored to continue serving the Hartford Symphony Orchestra in my role as music director," Kuan said in a statement on Friday. "HSO has been an incredibly important part of my life, and it is a privilege to work with our amazing musicians, our board and staff, and this incredible community.

"Being able to contribute to families, students, friends (and) individuals coming together to share moments of joy, discoveries and transcendence is such an inspiration to me, and I am looking forward to continuing our musical journey together," Kuan added.

While Kuan's contract has been renewed, the contracts of most of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra musicians, who are unionized through the American Federation of Musicians, are still being negotiated. The most recent contract for the musicians expired in August 2022, and negotiations have been ongoing for the past 17 months.

