

2019 Spotlight Classical Instrumental Semifinal Panel

Dr. John Burdett is the Director of Instrumental Studies, Director of Bands, and Director of Graduate Music Education at Azusa Pacific University, where he leads the band division and teaches graduate students pursuing the Master of Music in Conducting. Previously, Dr. Burdett has held tenure track and adjunct appointments teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in conducting, music education, and ensemble direction at Mt. San Antonio College, Cal Poly Pomona, California State Universities at Fullerton and Los Angeles, among others. Dr. Burdett completed music education and conducting degrees at Azusa Pacific University and California State University, Los Angeles and earned a Doctorate of Music Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He conducts, plays and records throughout the LA area and has toured in the U.S. and Japan with a variety of classical, jazz and commercial ensembles, and was founding Music Director and Conductor of the Southern California Philharmonic.

Dr. Susan Helfter is an artist-educator known for her community engagement work through music. At the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music, Dr. Helfter is an Associate Professor of Practice, Chair of the Music Teaching and Learning Department and Director of the Thornton Community Engagement Programs. As a hornist, Dr. Helfter is a past winner of the Canadian National Music Competition and in her role with the Thornton Community Engagement Programs since 2004, she has been responsible for the direction, design, implementation and funding of these extensive music programs. Her current musical interests and pursuits lie in community and musician self-actualization through musical engagement, with research topics of musician identity, musician as facilitator and community partnerships. Dr. Helfter is called upon regularly by professional arts organizations to lead masterclasses, workshops and contribute to the development of young and emerging musicians.

Dr. Moni Simeonov is Director of String Studies at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at California State University at Long Beach. He also serves on the university's violin faculty. Mr. Simeonov is currently pursuing doctoral studies at USC's Thornton School of Music where he studies with Midori and serves as Adjunct Instructor of Violin and Chamber Music. An active member of the IRIS Chamber Orchestra, Mr. Simeonov also performs with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Opera, Master Chorale, Ensemble San Francisco, and serves as the acting Concertmaster for the Sacramento Philharmonic. His doctorate studies include minor fields in Viola Performance, Schenkerian Analysis, Japanese Language, as well an emphasis on the interpretation of Balkan folk music.

Dr. Louise Thomas is the Associate Dean for the College of Performing Arts and Director of Keyboard Collaborative Arts at Chapman University. She studied at Trinity College in Dublin and at the Hochschule für Musik in Hannover, Germany, and received her Doctorate of Musical Arts in piano performance from the University of Southern California. Louise Thomas has concertized extensively in her native Ireland and throughout Europe, North America and Asia at such notable concert venues as the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire in Moscow, the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing and Carnegie Hall in New York City. Dr. Thomas has made CD recordings in Germany, at the Banff Center for the Arts in Canada with the Irish Contemporary Music group Nua Nós, and has made numerous radio and TV broadcasts.

Daniel Wachs has guest conducted the Spartanburg Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Fort Worth Symphony, the Monterey Symphony, Orange County's Pacific Symphony, and New York City Ballet at Lincoln Center, among many others. Wachs has also been entrusted with preparing orchestras for Valery Gergiev and Vladimir Spivakov, and has served as Assistant Conductor to Osmo Vänskä at the Minnesota Orchestra and at the National Orchestra of France under Kurt Masur. Additionally, he has served as cover conductor for the Houston Symphony and for the Rotterdam Philharmonic on tour, and as assistant conductor at the Cincinnati Opera. An accomplished opera conductor and collaborative pianist, Wachs has led Gianni Schicchi, Così fan tutte, Le Nozze di Figaro, acts from La Traviata and Die Fledermaus and many others. He has accompanied tenor William Burden in recital and recently made his debut on the LA Philharmonic Chamber Music Series at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Committed to the cause of music education, Wachs leads the Orange County Youth Symphony Orchestra and is Music Director of The Chapman Orchestra at Chapman University.