

# Helen H. Cha-Pyo, Clinician

Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the  
Wharton Institute for the Performing Arts



Photograph by Kimberly M. Wang

Helen H. Cha-Pyo, the current Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Wharton Institute for the Performing Arts, leads an organization that serves nearly 2,000 students from 12 New Jersey counties. Her impactful leadership spans across four key programs: the Wharton Performing Arts School, New Jersey Youth Symphony, New Jersey Youth Chorus, and the Paterson Music Project. In her role as the Principal Conductor of the New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJYS), she has led tours to Italy and France, championing the performance of works by women and BIPOC composers, effectively amplifying the voices of underrepresented composers. Under her guidance, NJYS had the distinguished honor of performing at the Juneteenth Celebration concert at Carnegie Hall (2022) and the Motif Award Ceremony at the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall (2023).

Prior to her role at Wharton Arts, Cha-Pyo served as Music Director and Conductor of the Empire State Youth Orchestra (ESYO) for 16 years. Her tenure was marked by the orchestra's transformative international tours to Germany, Czech Republic, China, Korea and Portugal. Her dedication to promoting works by American composers earned ESYO the prestigious ASCAP's Adventurous Programming Awards. Her positive impact extended to the founding of ESYO CHIME in 2015, a program dedicated to serving underprivileged youth in Schenectady and Troy, NY. In 2018, ESYO introduced the Helen Cha-Pyo Golden Baton Award and Scholarships to honor students who shared her passion for using music to uplift and enrich communities.

Cha-Pyo's contributions have been recognized with prestigious awards, including The Dove Leadership Award from the David & Dovetta Wilson Scholarship Fund in 2019, and the Angelos Artist Award from the Angelos Mission Ensemble in 2022. She was further honored with the Eastman Centennial Award from the Eastman School of Music in the same year.

From 1996 to 2002, Cha-Pyo served as Artistic Director and Conductor of the Riverside Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir, as well as Associate Director of Music at The Riverside Church in New York City. She released three recordings with the Riverside Choir (JAV Recordings).

Cha-Pyo's musical journey commenced in Seoul, South Korea, from where she immigrated to the United States at the age of 12. She has a Bachelor of Music in Organ Performance from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, as well as a Master of Music in Conducting and Organ Performance from the Eastman School of Music. She is a frequent guest conductor and clinician for All-State and Regional Festival Orchestras and has conducted orchestras and choruses in Europe, Africa and Asia. She held positions as a Visiting Associate Professor of Conducting at Montclair State University (NJ) and Rutgers University (NJ). Her commitment to the field extends to her roles as a board member for the Youth Orchestra Division and as a committee member for the Conductors Constituency Leadership with the League of American Orchestras. Additionally, she is an active member of the Korean Women International Network and serves as a mentor at Girls Who Conduct.



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