

# Unisa's 7th International **VOICE COMPETITION**

20 - 31 January 2026

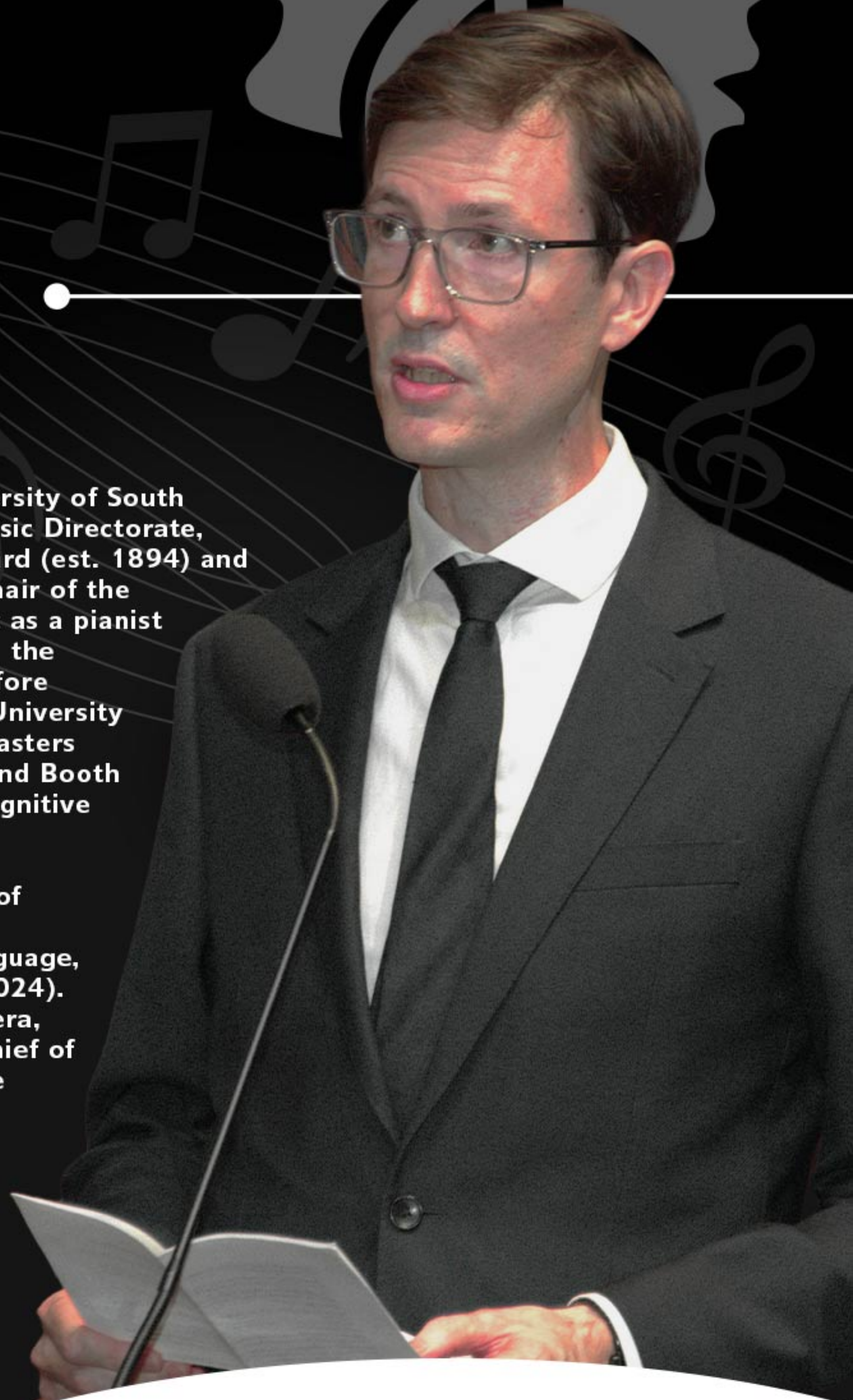
ZK Matthews Great Hall

*The Jazz Jury*

**Thomas Pooley**

(Non-voting chair)

Thomas Pooley is Professor of Music at the University of South Africa (UNISA) and the Acting Director of the Music Directorate, managing both the Unisa Music Examinations Board (est. 1894) and the UNISA Music Foundation. He was formerly Chair of the Department of Art and Music. Pooley trained first as a pianist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal where he won the Undergraduate Piano Scholarship Competition before pursuing graduate studies in musicology at Wits University on a National Research Foundation Prestigious Masters Scholarship. He was awarded Benjamin Franklin and Booth Ferris Fellowships for a PhD in musicology and cognitive music theory at the University of Pennsylvania. Pooley is an NRF-rated researcher, author of *The Land is Sung: Zulu Performances and the Politics of Place* (Wesleyan University Press, 2023), and co-editor of *The Music of Mzilikazi Khumalo: Language, Culture, and Song in South Africa* (Bloomsbury, 2024). He has published widely on African art music, opera, and indigenous musics, and served as Editor-in-Chief of *Muziki: Journal of Music Research in Africa* before founding the open-access journal, *Analytical Approaches to African Music*.





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*The Jazz Jury* •

## **Jasmine Chen**

Jasmine Chen is a renowned jazz vocalist and songwriter from Shanghai who rose to international prominence after performing in the 2018 film *Crazy Rich Asians*, with three of her songs featured on the movie's soundtrack. As an influential ambassador for jazz music and culture, Jasmine frequently appears at events such as TEDx, where she shares her insights on jazz, music, and cultural exchange. She actively supports social causes, collaborating with charities like Educating Rural Girls in China, The Renewal Project, and the Cambodian Children's Fund. Initially trained as a classical pianist, Jasmine discovered her passion for jazz at the Leeds Conservatoire in England before returning to China in 2005. She is celebrated for blending Western jazz with Chinese musical traditions, using original Chinese lyrics and melodies to bridge cultures. Jasmine has performed on prestigious stages from Shanghai's JZ Club to Rotterdam's Northsea Jazz Festival, and has collaborated with international artists including Jeff Peterson, Filo Machado, Jeremy Monteiro, and Béla Szakcsi Lakatos. She is currently developing a new Chinese jazz album with Danish pianist Nikolaj Hess.





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## *The Jazz Jury*

### **Greg Jasperse**

In world-wide demand as an educator, performer, guest conductor, and workshop leader, Greg Jasperse is honored to serve on the jury for the 7th UNISA International Voice Competition. Having recently completed a residency at Wits University as a Fulbright Specialist in vocal jazz, he is delighted to return to South Africa. Recently he was honored to serve as the guest artist for the Tokyo Vocal Jazz Workshop and also the Deutscher Musikrat Vocal Jazz Workshop in Weikersheim, Germany.

Greg is a member of vocal group Vertical Voices and has toured extensively with the New York Voices as a sub. He has performed with Adele, Dianne Reeves, Joe Williams, Chico Pinheiro, Rosemary Clooney, Imogen Heap, Jennifer Holiday, Bobby McFerrin, Chris Potter, säje, Helen Sung, and more. Jasperse currently serves as the Director of Vocal Jazz in the Irving S. Gilmore School of Music at Western Michigan University.





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## **Olatunji Majid Onabulé**

Ola Onabulé is a British Nigerian Singer, songwriter and producer. An independent artist with his own label, Rugged Ram Records which is distributed via Orchard/Sony. Ola recently released his ninth album, POINT LESS which has been critically reviewed worldwide and featured on the DownBeat list of Best Albums of 2019.

Onabulé has since forged an international career via his relentless program of recordings and concerts. Appearing at many of the most respected international jazz festivals including Montreal, Vancouver, San Sebastien, Istanbul, London, Edmonton, Umbria, as well as concert halls and jazz clubs worldwide. His songs about love, loss, and the human condition have been performed all over the world with his quartet/quintet. 28 of Ola's songs have been arranged for Big Bands and Orchestras. Ola has featured with Grammy® Award-winning WDR Big Band, SWR Big Band, HR Big Band, Babelsberg, and other symphonic orchestras.

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## *The Jazz Jury*

### **Melanie Scholtz**

Melanie Scholtz is a multi award-winning South African jazz singer and composer. She began piano at age five and graduated Cum Laude from The University of Cape Town Opera School in 2000. Melanie has released seven solo albums and was named the Standard Bank Young Artist for Jazz in 2010. In 2012, she won all three prizes at the Jazz Revelations competition at the Jazz à Juan Festival in Nice, France. Her collaboration with anti-apartheid poet James Matthews, *Freedom's Child*, brought apartheid-era poetry to a new generation through music. Melanie has performed internationally, including in South Africa, the US, Europe, and Scandinavia. She recorded *Sweet Nancy*, inspired by Nancy Wilson, in New Orleans, co-produced by Grammy winner Adonis Rose, and released in March 2025 on The Ropeadope, AfrikArise label. Melanie has taught at the University of Cape Town, led jazz workshops in the Czech Republic, and currently resides in New York City, teaching and writing curriculum for the cultural organisation 92 NY.





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## *The Jazz Jury* •

### **Song Yi Jeon**

South Korean modern jazz singer and composer Song Yi Jeon is known for her hypnotic voice that is likened to a malleable wordless instrument, as well as for her incomparable improvisations. She studied classical composition at the University of Music and Fine Art in Graz, Austria, and jazz vocals at the Academy of Music in Basel, Switzerland, and Boston's Berklee College of Music in the US where she developed her unique sound. At Berklee, she was the inaugural Quincy Jones CJ&E fellow and was also awarded the Billboard Endowed Award. Among the many clubs and festivals where the Song Yi Jeon Quintet has performed is New York's famous Blue Note.

Song Yi Jeon released her mini-album *Straight* with her Quintet in 2015, followed by her debut album *Movement of Lives* in 2018. In November 2022, Jeon released the duo album *Home* with guitarist Vinicius Gomes on Dave Douglas' Greenleaf Music label receiving the ratings of 4.5 by the *downbeat* magazine, and most recently in August 2023 she released a piano voice duo album with LA based pianist Vardan Ovsepian. Song Yi is the 2023 – 2024 Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative protégée to Ms Dianne Reeves.





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## *The Jazz Jury*

### **Natasha Patamapongs**

Natasha Patamapongs is a Thai-American jazz vocalist, producer, entrepreneur, and educator whose work bridges performance, music industry policy, and research. Recognized by CNN Travel Asia as one of Bangkok's "Top 20 People to Watch," she has released multiple albums with Warner Music Thailand and performed at more than 30 major festivals across Asia. Beyond her artistic career, she has held senior roles across the music and creative industries, including overseeing record label operations at Love Is Entertainment and founding the Technology & Creative Innovation graduate program at Carnegie Mellon-CMKL Thailand.

Natasha is currently a Doctor of Education candidate at the University of Southern California, where her research centers on equitable compensation, labor dynamics, and organizational change within the music industry. She holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees from Carnegie Mellon University and has taught jazz performance and music business at Mahidol University and Rangsit University.





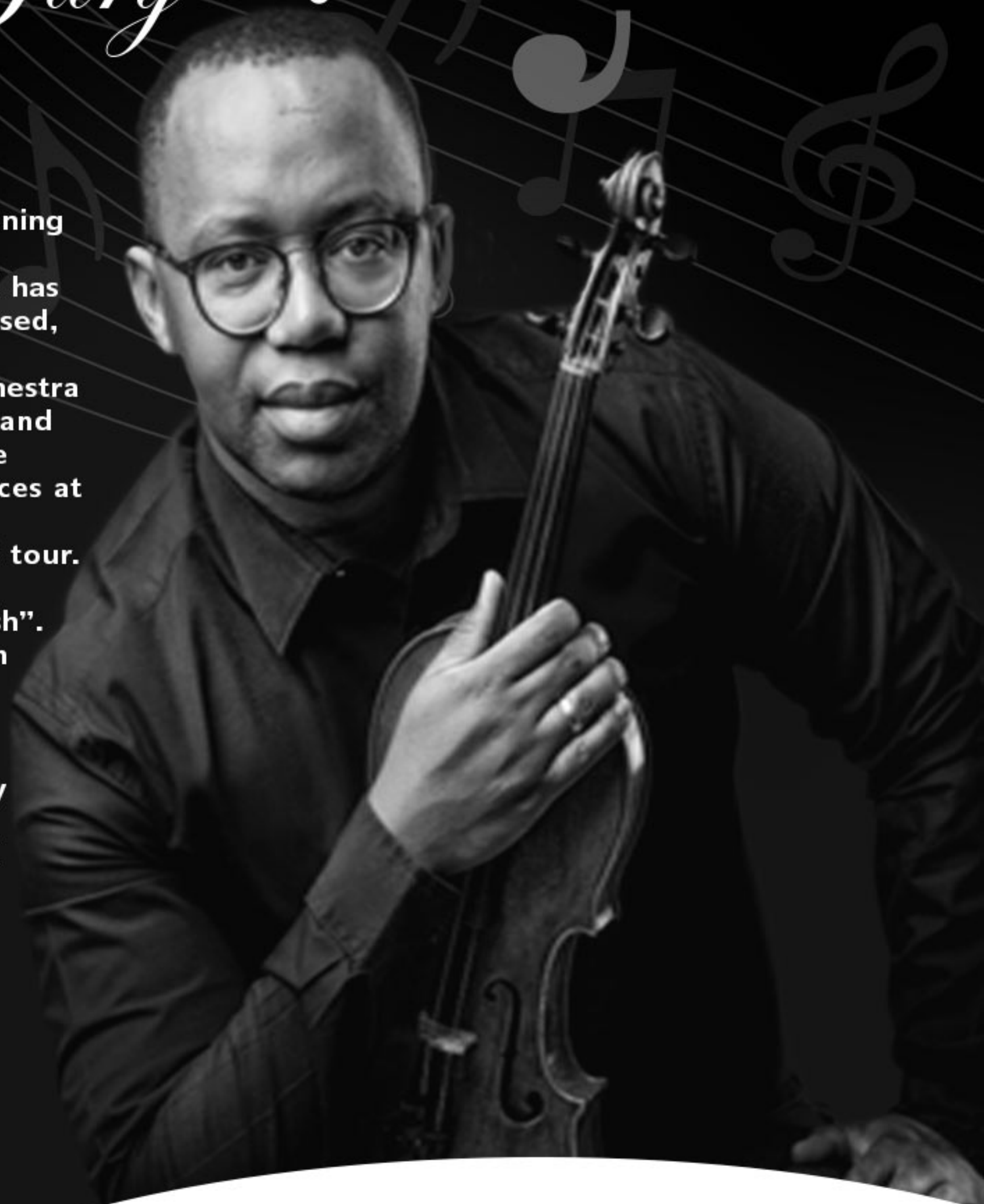
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## *The Classical Jury*

### **Samson Diamond** (Non-voting chair)

Samson Diamond is a multi-faceted award winning violinist and Unisa Music Foundation Deputy Director. Since its inception in 2015, Diamond has maintained an association with the London-based, Chineke! Orchestra. Among other invitations, Diamond was concertmaster for Chineke! Orchestra during their inaugural tours in Europe (2019) and North America (2023). In September 2024, he joined Chineke! Orchestra for their performances at the Lucerne Festival and BBC Proms. In 2025, he led the Chineke! Orchestra for their UK/US tour. His musicianship has been characterised as "exquisite" and his leadership hailed as "stylish". As associate concertmaster, Diamond enjoys an association with the Mzansi National Philharmonic Orchestra, where he also serves on the Artistic Planning Committee. Dr. Diamond is newly appointed as the Deputy Director of the Unisa Music Foundation and serves as the non-voting chair for the classical jury of the 7th Unisa International Voice Competition.





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## *The Classical Fury*

### **Eva Mei**

Eva Mei, daughter of an Italian family of musicians, studied at the conservatory "Luigi Cherubini" in Florence. For her interpretation of Konstanze in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* she received in 1990 the Caterina-Cavelieri-Prize at the International Mozart Competition in Vienna. Shortly after she debuted with the same role at the Vienna State Opera which marked the beginning of her international career. In the last 3 decades she appeared in the most important opera houses all over the world.

She has worked with many prestigious conductors such as Nicolas Harnoncourt, Claudio Abbado, Zubin Metha, Riccardo Muti, Colin Davis, Daniel Barenboim, Daniele Gatti, Myung-whun Chung and Antonio Pappano.

Eva Mei was guest professor in Teatro alla Scala Academy and in Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Academy. She served as a Jury member in competitions in Italy and Japan.





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## *The Classical Fury*

### **Sunhae Im**

Called “a splendidly bright soprano” (The New York Times) and “one of the great singers of our time” (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), the Korean soprano Sunhae Im has been showing versatile musicality and deep dramaturgic understanding. She had great success in early music repertoire with conductors such as René Jacobs, Philippe Herreweghe, Fabio Biondi, Ton Koopman, and Diego Fasolis, with ensembles such as Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, Europa Galante, and Akademie für alte Musik Berlin.

She was also acclaimed for later repertoire with Manfred Honeck, Iván Fischer, Myung-Whun Chung, Kent Nagano, and Zubin Mehta, at Verbier Festival, Carnegie Hall, Philharmonie de Paris, and Elbphilharmonie Hamburg. She enjoys innovative projects including The Creation by La Fura dels Baus atnd La Finta Giardiniera in La Scala Opera's Shanghai tour. She will join the world premiere of Songs of Nature, a staged Handel project touring from Amsterdam to Asia and the U.S. in 2021. Sunhae has made about 30 recordings, including operas by Handel and Mozart and both passions by Bach, and received numerous awards. Her solo album Orfeo[s] was awarded the Elly Ameling Prize by Académie du Disque Lyrique, and her CD Didone Abbandonata was nominated in three categories for Opus Klassik v2020.



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## *The Classical Fury*

### **Musa Ngqungwana**

The "powerful bass-baritone" (Wall Street Journal) Musa Ngqungwana, a native of Gqeberha, South Africa, has been hailed for his "rich, glowing voice and elegant legato" (The New York Times) and his "voice of such jaw-dropping beauty, richness, and power" (Opera Today).

After a triumphant 2025 summer return to Garsington Opera, UK, in Beethoven's *Fidelio* as the "impressively nasty" (The Arts Desk) "viciously vindictive prison governor" (Gramophone), Don Pizarro, Musa also recently portrayed the title role in Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* with the Sacramento Philharmonic & Opera and King Amonasro in Verdi's *Aida* with the Royal Danish Opera.

Musa graduated with a BMus Honours in Performance (First Class) from the University of Cape Town and is a graduate of the prestigious Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia. He is an MPhil candidate at the Africa Open Institute, Stellenbosch University, and author of the memoir *Odyssey of an African Opera Singer*, published by Penguin Random House South Africa.





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## *The Classical Fury*

### **Boris Orlob**

Following first ambitious attempts as a drummer in a hard rock band, Boris Orlob early discovered his enduring enthusiasm for opera and singing. After passing his A-levels at the German School in Barcelona and graduating in Business Studies, Media Studies and Cultural Management at the Freie Universität Berlin, Boris Orlob worked as head of the singers' department with the concert agency Matthias Vogt in Munich. In 1997, he established his own business in Berlin (Boris Orlob Management) which he today co-manages with his sister, Natascha van Randenborgh, and which represents a wide range of singers, conductors and stage directors.

Further, Boris Orlob is deputy chairman of the IAMA (Int. Artist Managers Ass.) and the DOKA (Deutschsprachige Opern- und Konzertagenturen) and has given lectures at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin, HMDK Stuttgart, Hochschule für Musik Karlsruhe. He is a frequent guest at the Internationale Meisterakademie Neumarkt as well as the Bertelsmann Foundation's 'Neue Stimmen – Creating Careers' program for young, aspiring singers and advisor to the Fondazione Mascarade Opera.





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## *The Classical Jury*

### **Claudia Visca**

Born in New York, soprano Claudia Visca graduated from the acclaimed Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia where she studied with Anna Moffo's teacher, Eufemia Giannini and Wagnerian soprano, Margret Harshaw. A Fulbright Scholarship took her to the Hochschule fur Musik Wien where she finished her education under the guidance of Ks. Hilde Rossel-Majdan and Anton Dermota.

Claudia Visca has worked with renowned conductors, stage directors, and artists, including Eugene Ormandy, Gustav Kuhn, Istvan Kertesz, Miguel Gomez-Matinez, Sandor Vegh, Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos, Pina Bausch, Christine Mielitz, Marcel Prawy, Bruno Canino, Rudolf Serkin, members of the Guarneri Quartet, Edith Mathis, Agnes Baltsa and Placido Domingo. A highlight of Claudia Visca's career was to sing Maria in West Side Story conducted by the composer, Leonard Bernstein.

During her long stage career, Claudia Visca guested in more than 25 opera houses in Europe, among them those in Amsterdam, Berlin, Cologne, Geneva, Vienna, and Zürich. In over 2,000 performances, she appeared in more than 75 roles in operas, operettas, and musicals as well as in concerts.

From 1998 to 2003, Claudia Visca was voice professor at the Hochschule fur Musik Cologne. In 2003, she became a professor at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. Claudia Visca has given international masterclasses in vocal technique and interpretation in Australia, Austria, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United States.





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## *The Classical Jury*

### **Alberto Triola**

With master's degrees cum laude in Music and Performing Arts and in Civil Engineering from the Politecnico di Milano, he has been a leading figure in Italian theatre and music management since 1990. His recent roles include Superintendent and Artistic Director of Fondazione Toscanini in Parma, General Director of Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, and Artistic Director of the Festival della Valle d'Itria. After beginning his career at Teatro alla Scala, he served as Artistic Secretary of the Spoleto Festival dei Due Mondi and later as Artistic Director of Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa, Teatro Ponchielli in Cremona, and the Monteverdi Festival.

Former President of the "Nino Rota" Conservatory in Monopoli, he founded and directed the Scuola dell'Opera Italiana in Bologna. He teaches at the Universities of Bologna and Milan, and at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Academy. Internationally acclaimed as an opera director, he has published widely on performing arts management.

