

Jessica Tong, violinist

Canadian violinist **Jessica Tong** has garnered international acclaim as a soloist, recitalist and chamber musician, having been described as an "outstanding talent" (Performing Arts in Canada) with "keen sensitivity and receptivity" (Bloomington Herald Times), who "allow[s] us to savour her sense of ardour and intensity, but never at the detriment of her tonal beauty." (ClassiqueInfo France). A recipient of a Canada Council Grant for Musicians and a DAAD scholar, she has been a top prizewinner at the Eckhardt-Gramatte, Toronto Symphony, Canadian Music, and Yellow Springs International Chamber Music Competitions, as well as the recipient of the David Ouchterlony Award for Outstanding Artist.

A devoted chamber musician, Jessica's performances have taken her to Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Merkin Hall, les Invalides in Paris and the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, and led to collaborations with artists such as Pamela Frank, Leon Fleisher, Cho-Liang Lin and members of the Cleveland, Vogler, Brentano and Borromeo Quartets. She has served as the first violinist of the Vinca and Larchmere String Quartets, and recently held the post of Artist-in-Residence at the University of Evansville and concertmaster of the Evansville Philharmonic Orchestra in Indiana.

Dedicated to finding innovative ways to make the classical music art form relevant and understood by current society, Jessica is also a passionate advocate for music education and humanizing the concert experience. She has been an Artist-in-Residence for the Perlman Music Program in Florida, the Gorgeous Sounds Program in Oregon and a two time recipient of the ProQuartet Odyssey Residency Grant in France. She is the co-founder of the chamber music residency organization Music Beyond the Chamber, and currently serves as the Chamber Music Director for the Composers Conference at Brandeis University, as well as the Assistant Professor of Violin at the State University of New York Fredonia.

A pupil of Pamela Frank, Jessica has also studied with Kathleen Winkler, Donald Weilerstein, and Zhang Yun Zhang, and has been mentored as a chamber musician by members of the Alban Berg, Vogler, Artemis and Brentano Quartets.

Having completed her yoga teaching certification at the Kripalu Center in Massachusetts, she often leads masterclasses with high school, university and adult amateur musicians, that explore the art of mindful movement and body awareness in instrumental playing.

Michael Sheppard, pianist

Known as “a virtuosic soloist possessed of power, sensitivity, earthiness, and humor” (Whitney Smith, Indianapolis Star) with the “power to make an audience sit up and pay attention...thought-provoking for performers and listeners alike” (James Manheim, All Music Guide), **Michael Sheppard** was the winner of the prestigious American Pianists Association Classical Fellow Award-- a designation that led to the release of a critically acclaimed solo recording by Harmonia Mundi in 2007.

He has performed solo recitals and concertos around the world, including several solo Carnegie Weill Hall recitals and a debut at the Kennedy Center. As a funny little matter of fact, he happens to have given solo recitals in the hometowns of both Mahler (Jihlava, Czech Republic) and Elvis (Tupelo, Mississippi), and enjoys taking in the local culture wherever in the world he finds himself.

He gives masterclasses, teaches regularly and plays with some of the top singers and instrumentalists around the US, working at both the Peabody Institute of Music and the Baltimore School for the Arts, sharing his love and understanding of music and the artistic process with future generations. Sheppard is also a conductor and burgeoning actor.