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Using music to build community



Tianhui Ng has won numerous awards for his conducting, including The American Prize in Orchestral Programming. Photo courtesy of the Pioneer Valley Symphony.

(<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/sites/default/files/Tianhui-Ng-%20Pioneer%20Valley%20Symphony.png>).

By [Sasha Nyary \(mailto:snyary@mtholyoke.edu\)](mailto:snyary@mtholyoke.edu)

For [Tianhui Ng \(https://www.mtholyoke.edu/people/ng-tian-hui\)](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/people/ng-tian-hui), associate professor of [music](#)

(<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/music>) at Mount Holyoke

College, conducting the Pioneer Valley Symphony is all about community.

His involvement with the organization dovetails well with his work at the College, said Tian, who directs the [Mount Holyoke Symphony Orchestra \(https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/music/orchestra\)](#) along with his teaching duties. For one thing, today's students are tomorrow's — and occasionally today's — Pioneer Valley Symphony musicians. Faculty past and present are members. Many musicians in the group come from the Five Colleges.

The College connection goes beyond musicians and singers. Several members of the College community also help run the organization, including personnel manager [Relyn Myrthil '19 \(https://www.mtholyoke.edu/admission/relyn-myrthil\)](#), who plays violin and viola, and the Office of Advancement's [Beckie Markarian '07 \(https://www.mtholyoke.edu/node/71249\)](#), who is president of the organization's board of directors and sings in the chorus.

He applied for the position because he was looking for community, Tian said.

“I'm an immigrant here — I grew up in Singapore. There's such a great community on campus, but I realized I was missing community outside of my work too.”

Tian was named music director of the [Pioneer Valley Symphony \(https://www.pvsoc.org/\)](https://www.pvsoc.org/) in July 2018, just as the organization began to celebrate its 80th anniversary.

“We're talking about deep, deep roots in the community,” Tian said. “This is one of the oldest community musical organizations in the country.”

The response to Tian's leadership of the symphony orchestra, which the Massachusetts Cultural Council has called one of the best in the commonwealth, has been very positive.

A [Masslive review \(https://www.masslive.com/music/2019/11/beethoven-emperor-concerto-highlight-of-pioneer-valley-symphony-performance-review.html\)](https://www.masslive.com/music/2019/11/beethoven-emperor-concerto-highlight-of-pioneer-valley-symphony-performance-review.html) of a recent performance noted "moments of exquisite artistry" and said that the maestro "drew a clean, luminous sound from his players, balancing fiercely energetic encouragement with refined, precise motion."

"It all starts with people loving the music," Tian said. "It's time to reinvest in sharing this music with everybody, to give people more access to it, to celebrate the exceptional musical talent in our area."

When he talks about his future plans for the orchestra, the key word is diversity, Tian said.

"I hear it when somebody tells me that they don't see themselves represented in music. For instance, we're going to talk about gracefully aging and playing an instrument. Are people supposed to just give up on music-making when their body changes and they're no longer at the age that this music was conceived for? We can commission music that supports that."

The orchestra's next program, titled "L'amour est dans l'air," features romantic music in celebration of Valentine's Day. Works include Bizet's "Carmen Suite No. 2" and "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun" by Debussy. The performance is on Feb. 15, 2020, at 7:30 p.m. at John M. Greene Hall on the Smith College campus in Northampton and [tickets are available in advance \(https://www.pvsoc.org/events/lamour-est-dans-lair\)](https://www.pvsoc.org/events/lamour-est-dans-lair).

Monday, January 13, 2020

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