American Composers Orchestra Appoints Melissa Ngan as President and CEO
Effective February 16, 2021

New York, NY – American Composers Orchestra (ACO), praised for its “robust and diverse commissioning program” by The New York Times, announced today that its Board of Directors has appointed Melissa Ngan as President and Chief Executive Officer, effective February 16, 2021.

“Melissa’s depth and breadth of experience are a tremendous asset to ACO and its various stakeholders,” stated Sameera Troesch, Chair of ACO’s Board. “She has worked with large orchestras and small ensembles alike to achieve world-class performances, cultivate new audiences and communities, and design an ecosystem that efficiently meets the needs of talented composers, regardless of race, sex, gender, socio-economic or any other status. Troesch continued, “Melissa’s most compelling strengths go well beyond her impressive background and experience. She is an empathetic, inspiring and inclusive leader with a track record of delivering outcomes in challenging times. We are delighted to welcome Melissa, and look forward to supporting her leadership and the ACO team.”

Ngan has over fifteen years of experience in programming and curation; arts administration; diversity, equity, and inclusion practices; professional development and entrepreneurship in the arts; and as a professional flutist. She will be responsible for ACO’s strategy, finances, and operations in New York City and nationwide. She succeeds Edward Yim. HC Smith Ltd led the six-month search for Yim’s replacement.

Ngan will also work in close partnership with ACO’s Artistic Director Bermel in evaluating existing activities and designing new programs that achieve and advance ACO’s mission. Bermel said, “Melissa is a true visionary, a brilliant musician and thinker who comes to ACO with a unique and innovative background in leadership. Her commitment to creating and nurturing opportunities for composers and performers aligns perfectly with ACO’s mission. I look forward with great enthusiasm to working together.”
“I couldn’t think of a more perfect moment to be joining the incredible team at ACO,” Ngan said. “In this time of reinvention for our field, I’m honored to be working alongside ACO’s community of co-creators to advance our shared values of diversity, disruption, and discovery – and to build on the enormous contributions ACO has made in broadening the definition and the role of the composer in shaping this important work. Now, more than ever, we need new ways to listen, and to be heard. I look forward to reimagining the future by investing in creativity in all its forms, and by cultivating emerging talent that reflects who we are today.”

Melissa Ngan comes to ACO from Fifth House Ensemble, the Chicago-based organization she founded and has led since 2005. As CEO of Fifth House Ensemble, Ngan has driven the organization’s creative and training partnerships and led curriculum design for the Fresh Inc Festival, which has commissioned more than 200 new works over 10 years and provided leading-edge artistic and professional development to emerging artists via more than 35 training programs annually.

Since 2013, Ngan has also served as a consultant for organizations including The Cleveland Orchestra and San Francisco Opera. With The Cleveland Orchestra, Ngan guided the creation of the Prometheus Project, which connected teaching artists, classroom teachers, and students at the Cleveland Institute of Art to explore Beethoven and Prometheus through the lens of the Hero’s Journey. At San Francisco Opera, Ngan led a design team that launched Earn Your Wings, a long-term initiative spanning advocacy, learning experiences, performances, and community-building that connected the company to two organizations serving individuals and families transitioning from homelessness in the Bay Area.

Additionally, Ngan has led long-term projects with universities and conservatories nationwide that redefine the training process for emerging artists, including those at DePauw University and the Cleveland Institute of Music. She currently teaches music entrepreneurship and leadership courses at DePaul University, DePauw University, and the Eastman School of Music, and has presented at TEDx Michigan Ave, the Colburn School, New England Conservatory, Chamber Music America, College Music Society, and Opera America. Her writing has been featured on The Huffington Post.

Melissa Ngan’s flute performance career has included collaborations with GRAMMY-winning guitarist Jason Vieaux, Mediterranean folk band Baladino, GRAMMY-nominated composer Austin Wintory, and masters of Tuvan throat singing Alash. She has performed at National Sawdust, MAGFest, the FORMA Festival (Moscow), Suntory Hall (Tokyo), the Kennedy Center, and Carnegie Hall. Ngan is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and Northwestern University. In her spare time, Ngan enjoys cooking her favorite dishes from her Brazilian/Cambodian heritage.

About American Composers Orchestra

Founded in 1977, American Composers Orchestra (ACO) is dedicated to the creation, celebration, performance, and promotion of orchestral music by American composers. With commitment to diversity, disruption and discovery, ACO produces concerts, middle school through college composer education programs, and emerging composer development programs to foster a community of creators, audience, performers, collaborators, and funders.

ACO identifies and develops talent, performs established composers, champions those who are lesser-known, and increases regional, national, and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting gender, racial, ethnic, geographic, stylistic, and age diversity. To date, ACO has performed music by 800 American composers, including over 350 world premieres and newly commissioned works. ACO recordings are available on ARGO, CRI, ECM, Point, Phoenix USA, MusicMasters, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World Records, InstantEncore, Amazon, Spotify, and Apple Music.

ACO offers an array of programs for emerging composers including its own annual New Music Readings in New York City, which has served over 150 composers since its inception in 1991, and EarShot Readings, which since 2008 have been offered in partnership with orchestras across the country in collaboration with the League of American Orchestras, New Music USA and American Composers Forum. These Readings provide the rare opportunity for emerging composers to hear their original works played by a professional orchestra; the residencies, performances and composer-development programs speak directly to the orchestras’ communities and leverage local resources. Annually, ACO-produced Readings support 15-20 emerging composers, who receive mentorship and a professional orchestra reading and recording of their
work. ACO’s New Music Readings in New York include a multi-performance commission awarded to the most promising participant through the Composing a New Orchestra Audience platform. Readings composers have gone on to win every major composition award, including the Pulitzer, Grammy, Grawemeyer, American Academy of Arts and Letters, and Rome Prizes.

Since 1999, ACO has brought composers and musical teaching artists into New York City public schools through Sonic Spark (formerly known as Music Factory). Sonic Spark aims to leverage composition as a platform for creativity, and creativity as a platform for achievement in all areas of student’s life. Students in Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan and Queens, work directly with professional composers to create and perform original music. ACO also offers the intensive Compose Yourself! seminars, during which high school and college composers participate in hands-on composition classes, culminating in a performance of student compositions played by ACO’s professional musicians.

ACO has received numerous awards for its work, including those from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and from BMI recognizing the orchestra’s outstanding contribution to American music. ASCAP has awarded ACO its annual prize for adventurous programming 35 times, singling out ACO as “the orchestra that has done the most for new American music in the United States.” ACO received the inaugural MetLife Award for Excellence in Audience Engagement, and a proclamation from the New York City Council.

More information about American Composers Orchestra and resources about American orchestral composers is available online at www.americancomposers.org.

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American Composers Orchestra
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