

New World Symphony & Beyond • October 2 - 4, 2026

This weekend's concert, which includes a trombone concerto featuring HSO's Principal Trombonist, Brian Diehl, will introduce you to British composer Dani Howard, a rapidly rising star in the music world. Howard's remarkable and vast body of work includes a percussion concerto written for Dame Evelyn Glennie (premiered by the National Orchestra of Wales in the 2023-24 season), a saxophone concerto written for British saxophone virtuoso Jess Gillian (premiered by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in the 2025-26 season) and an immersive soundtrack written for Antoni Gaudi's renowned architectural gem, Casa Batlló, in Barcelona. Called one of the most "sought-after British composers of the younger generation," Howard merits our full attention.



Dani Howard

Dani Howard was born in 1993 in Hong Kong, where she attended the South Island School. Her first musical instrument was the drum kit because, as she puts it, "I was five years old and wanted to hit things!" She credits her parents with allowing her to have a drum kit in their home, a controversial choice for a family that lived in an apartment. Her mother, an amateur clarinetist, felt that

it would be important for Howard and her siblings to learn piano. Howard wasn't a fan and, though she continued lessons, she also taught herself guitar and played in bands as a youngster. It was her policeman father who introduced her to the pop classics of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Elton John and Billy Joel. Her mother started a community charity to support teenagers interested in performing pop music.

At age 10 Howard began cello lessons with Richard Bamping, principal cellist of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, which she says, "changed my life. If I had become a performer, I would have pursued the cello. Playing it in the school orchestra gave me an

understanding of the physicality of the instruments, the density of the parts and how they intertwine with each other."

It was her piano teacher who opened the path in composition. When Howard asked if she could "rewrite" some of the music she was studying, her teacher suggested that rather than rewrite Mendelssohn, she should consider writing her own works. At the age of 12, Howard wrote a piano work called *The Masterpiece*. "It was only six bars long," Howard laughed, but at the same time, she began writing songs for the various music groups with whom she was involved. It was not until years later that she realized it was possible to study composition and that she could pursue it as a career.

For a long time, music was a hobby. Howard's other interest was sports and in her last year of school she was accepted as a member of Hong Kong's national women's basketball team, playing with them for a season. Her life choices shifted when she won a place at the Royal College of Music in London. Howard points out that the years she devoted to sports helped lay the groundwork for her career in music: "You don't turn around at 21 and say, 'I'm going to be a classical performer,' just like you don't turn around and say 'I'm going to be a professional football player.' Sport teaches you discipline." Applying that



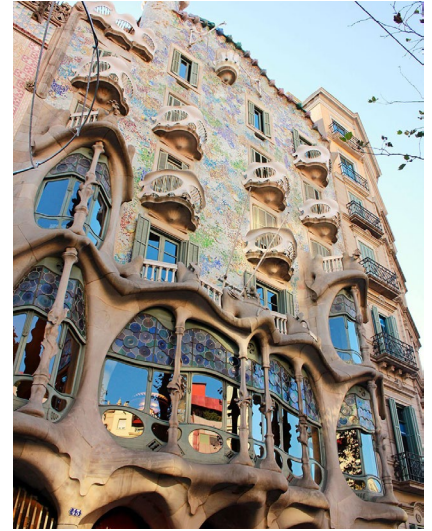
Dani Howard

same discipline to composition, Howard stresses that she forces herself to work a certain number of hours each day, even if she's not feeling inspired.

Hearing her cello teacher (Bamping) perform Strauss' *Don Quixote* with the Hong Kong Philharmonic was the moment that sparked her interest in writing for orchestra. After hearing the piece, she wanted to see the score to understand "how Strauss created that sound. He inspired me by showing me the possibilities of the orchestral palette." But, Howard admits, writing for orchestra terrified her for years, so she didn't write a single orchestral piece during her entire university degree. "I managed to avoid it by doing a piece for 24 percussionists instead." But Howard admits that when she got her first orchestral commission, she couldn't turn it down. That commission, from Orchestra Vitae, resulted in her composition *Arches*, written to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 2016. Working on that project, Howard realized that composing for orchestra was special. "I quickly got a sense of the textures and palettes that make me excited. I'm still more nervous at the premieres of orchestral works than I am for chamber pieces, because the audience is so much bigger. But, writing for orchestra is so unlimited and satisfying, I don't think I could ever run out of ideas."

The orchestral soundscape for the guided tour of Casa Batlló in Barcelona was a unique undertaking. Howard structured the music around the tour, identifying the three central themes of water, air and light. As is evident upon touring the premises, inspiration was drawn from Gaudi's oceanic

references, the flowing curves of the building and the mosaic patterns, creating a musical accompaniment that blends sharp staccato motifs with slow flowing lines. A short sample of the music may be heard here: [\(20+\) Facebook](#)



Casa Batlló in Barcelona

Her trombone concerto was conceived during the lockdown phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, which she spent in Mallorca with her Spanish conductor husband, Pablo Urbina. They met when both were students at the Royal College of Music in London and were married in August of 2022. Howard says she drew inspiration from the resilience of everyday heroes — bus drivers, refuse workers, and community organizers — whose quiet heroism she felt deserved recognition. The emotional arc of the work mirrors this theme, moving from initial detachment to realization, rumination, and finally illumination. The world premiere of the work was performed in June of 2021 by trombonist Peter Moore with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and won Howard a Royal Philharmonic Society award. As our audience will hear during the upcoming performance of the work, the concerto is cinematic, lushly orchestrated and has an approachability that

seems closer to the world of pop than classical music.

Howard still loves pop and hates pretension. She adores writing for orchestras, but is equally interested in collaborations with dancers, artists and filmmakers. She



Dani Howard Orchestral Works

candidly acknowledges that she is often inspired by pop music, particularly the “way that a drummer in a band might interpret certain rhythms.” She elaborated, explaining that she’d separated the popular music and songwriting of her younger days from her classical training, but, in the last few years, has come to the realization that “there is a wonderful space where they can meet.”



Brian Diehl

Brian Diehl, who will perform Howard’s Trombone Concerto in this weekend’s concerts, was happy to share his thoughts about the piece and the upcoming performance. He revealed that the opportunity was offered to him by HSO’s music director, Carolyn Kuan, and admitted that until that moment, he had never heard of the work. But his admiration for the piece

was instantaneous: “As soon as I listened to the piece, I fell in love with it.”

Peter Moore, the artist for whom the work was written, is a trombone phenomenon in Britain and beyond. Given Howard’s collaboration with Moore, the piece is clearly tailored to Moore’s specific virtuosic talents, such as multiphonics (singing a note while simultaneously playing it, creating a sound like a double stop on strings), and his remarkable proficiency in extreme and rapid changes in range. We asked Brian about his process and preparation for the concert:

“I’ve been practicing twice daily for this since last fall. My morning practice is a warm-up on the fundamentals, and my evening session is devoted to the piece itself and the techniques involved. There’s a lot of glissando (a slide from one note to another) much like on violin, which is not usually found in works for trombone. As the audience will hear, the work is technically demanding. As I instruct my students, my approach to the

work was to start at a slow tempo and move up the metronome tempo slowly until I felt completely comfortable at concert speed.

“Summers are usually down time for musicians, but with this performance coming up, I could not relax or take time off. This piece requires constant attention and work, whether it’s score study or work on a particular technique. There are such beautiful melodic lines in the concerto, but the work requires that I work nonstop on the techniques involved, such as a quick jump from a very low range to a high range. The trombone produces sound in three dimensions: changes in embouchure (facial muscles), the slide, and the keys so there are lots of moving parts involved in producing fast changes in sound. I even brought my bass trumpet (which is more compact than a trombone) on my summer camping trip.”

Brian has purchased a new instrument from Shires in Boston just for this performance. His interpretation of the piece, constructed in three distinct movements, is moving:

“The first movement, Realisation, is all about becoming aware, which I see as innocence coming to life. The second movement, Rumination, is equally divided between the trombone and orchestra, and I think of myself as a young man who becomes aware of being part of something bigger than himself. The final movement, Illumination, is the mature adult. Howard provides wonderful instruction to the soloist, instructing that something is to be played in a ‘cheeky’ or ‘impish’ fashion, at other times using words such as ‘stubbornly’ or ‘lyrically’.”

Everyone at the HSO is eagerly looking forward to the weekend’s performance. It’s a thrilling piece and we can guarantee that hearing it just once will not be enough! (Check the listening links below so that you’ll have the option of listening to the piece even before coming to the concert hall.)

Please join the HSO on June October 2 - 4, 2026, to enjoy Howard's exciting Trombone Concerto featuring HSO Principal Trombone Brian Diehl, along with HSO's Principal French Horn, Barbara Hill, performing Horn Concerto No. 1 by Richard Strauss, and the ever-popular *New World Symphony*, or Symphony No. 9, by Antonin Dvořák, conducted by HSO Music Director Carolyn Kuan.



Oct. 12, 1960,
The Hartford Courant

HSO Replays

Past performances of featured works by the HSO

HOWARD Trombone Concerto

- HSO Premiere

STRAUSS Horn Concerto No. 1

- Last performed April 15, 1962 (1st movement only) by David O'Hanian, winner of Aetna Life music scholarship contest), conducted by Fritz Mahler, in a televised performance.

DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 9, *The New World*

- Full work first performed by HSO on March 5, 1936, Jacques Gordon conductor, at Bushnell Memorial. Since then, the full work has been programmed 25 times by the HSO (which does not include multiple performances of the same concert, or performances of selected movements). The two most recent full performances were:

- » Oct. 1 - 4, 2015, Carolyn Kuan conductor, Belding Theater (opening of 2015-16 season)
- » Jan. 14-16, 2022, Jeri Lynne Johnson guest conductor, Belding Theater

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Interested in hearing more of the music of Dani Howard? Try these suggestions:

The first of Howard's orchestral works, *Arches*, was commissioned by Orchestra Vitae in 2016:

[**Arches - Dani Howard.**](#)

Another composition for orchestra is *The Butterfly Effect*, commissioned by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 2023: [**The Butterfly Effect - Dani Howard.**](#)

A performance of Howard's work *Coalescence* by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra:

[**Coalescence - Dani Howard.**](#)

Another orchestral work *Argentum* was commissioned in 2017 by Classic FM and the Royal Philharmonic Society:

[**Argentum - Dani Howard.**](#)

Howard's work *Blue Pavilion* was written for Brass Quintet and commissioned by the Royal Academy of Arts for an exhibit in 2014:

[**Blue Pavilion - Dani Howard.**](#)

Listen to a conversation between Peter Moore and Dani Howard about the creation of her Trombone Concerto:

[**Dani Howard and Peter Moore in conversation // Dani Howard Trombone Concerto.**](#)

To learn more about Dani Howard, listen to a wonderful interview with her husband, conductor Pablo Urbina, when both were in Texas for the US premiere of Howard's orchestral work, *Argentum*, by the Fort Worth Symphony: [**Composer Dani Howard and Conductor Pablo Urbina.**](#)



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND? Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Dani Howard's *Trombone Concerto*, produced by Rubicon, may be heard on Apple Music or Spotify, and can be found in its entirety here: [**Dani Howard: Orchestral Works | Rubicon Classics.**](#)

In the alternative, you can hear the first movement of the concerto on the following link:

[**Trombone Concerto: I. Realisation | YouTube Music.**](#)

Richard Strauss' *Horn Concerto No. 1* performed by soloist Radek Baborak with the National Philharmonic of Russia in a live concert from Moscow in 2014, may be enjoyed here:

[**Richard Strauss: Horn Concerto No. 1 - Baborak / Olivieri-Munroe / National Philharmonic of Russia.**](#)

Antonin Dvořák's iconic Symphony No. 9, known as *The New World Symphony*, may be heard here in a recording by Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, conducted by Paavo Järvi:

[**Dvořák: Symphony No. 9 From the New World | Paavo Järvi and the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich.**](#)



Dani Howard



Brian Diehl

SOURCE MATERIAL

www.danihoward.com

[Dani Howard: a guide to the young British composer - Classical Music](#)

[Dani Howard](#)

[6 things about the BSO's Celebrated Composer, Dani Howard](#)

[Dani Howard on writing for orchestra | Presto Music](#)

[Classical composer Dani Howard loves pop and hates pretension](#)

[Alumni Profiles | Royal College of Music](#)

[Trombone Concerto — Dani Howard](#)