Dinur Conducts Tchaikovsky 4 • October 23-25, 2026

It's time to pay attention to the bold music of Gabriela Ortiz. At age 61, more than four decades into her career, this tenacious and indomitable Mexican composer won three Grammys in 2025 with the release of *Revolución Diamantina*, an album of Ortiz's music recorded by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and conductor Gustavo Dudamel. The album, nominated for four awards, won three including Best Contemporary Classical Composition for the title track. Her compositions feature bright colors, vivacious rhythms, tuneful melodies and bold ideas. Her dazzling orchestral work *Kauyumari*, on the concert this weekend, is not to be missed.



Gabriela Ortiz

Gabriela Ortiz was born in Mexico City on December 20, 1964, into a musical cosmopolitan family. Her architect father and psychoanalyst mother had traditional careers, but both were also dedicated performing musicians who helped to found *Los Folkloristas*, a Mexican folk band popular in the 1960s and 1970s, which created outreach music learning centers for children. The family embraced all music, from classical to mariachi. Thanks to her father's talent as an architect, the family had a big house with a basement studio filled with instruments.

Ortiz's musical ambitions were evident from an early age. Her father introduced her to the works of Mahler, Beethoven and Mozart, but she also loved salsa, mambo, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. She began playing piano at the age of nine. Ortiz studied Bach on piano, but also played drums, charango and guitar. In sixth grade, when a teacher asked students to work together to compose a theme, Ortiz took charge and assigned instruments such as xylophone and maracas to her peers. "I discovered that just by playing and experimenting we could create a song." At 13, Ortiz changed to a new piano teacher, who Ortiz describes as a "Mexican Nadia Boulanger." The new teacher introduced her to the music of Béla Bartók and encouraged her to start composing. In that moment, Ortiz says she saw her future: she wanted to be a composer.

With the soaring popularity of *Los Folkloristas*, the teenaged Ortiz joined her parents on tours across Mexico and Europe but never appeared on stage. Her mother pleaded with her to choose a career outside of music. But her father, an aspiring



Gabriela Ortiz as a child

MASTERWORKS SPONSORS
The Edward C. & Ann T. ROBERTS
The Elizabeth M. and Harriette M. Landon Foundation

composer, encouraged her studies and composing ambitions. The renowned Mexican composer Arturo Márquez heard Ortiz play one of her compositions at a party when she was 17, and with his help and support, she went to Paris to study music. After just a year she returned home to donate a kidney to her mother, who had fallen ill. Sadly, Ortiz's mother passed away, but her father became even more committed to his daughter's professional goals, saying, "I can't be a composer, but my daughter can," and wholeheartedly endorsed Ortiz's career choices.

In Mexico City, Ortiz enrolled at the National Autonomous University of Mexico to study with Mario Lavista, one of the country's foremost composers. Lavista encouraged Ortiz to deepen her study of the classics, telling her, "You need to know the traditions before you can break them." But as a student, she hit an obstacle: her school did not have a full-size orchestra. Frustrated that she could not hear her first orchestral piece, *Patios*, she took her score to the offices of the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra and told the music director that she needed to hear the piece so she could learn. It was a bold move for a young student, but as testament to her persistence and unique sound, the piece was programmed within a few months. In 1990, Ortiz went to Europe to continue her studies, earning a master's degree at Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and a doctorate in composition and electronic music from London's City University.

The path forward for any composer is never easy, but for Ortiz, a woman from Latin America, it was exceedingly difficult. Teachers said her pieces were too exotic and many top orchestras rejected her. In 2001, she received an invitation from the LA Philharmonic to write a percussion concerto, which was premiered in 2003 under the baton of Esa-Pekka Salonen. The work was heavily criticized and Ortiz believed she would never get a second chance with a major orchestra. Ortiz continued to write orchestral works and even an opera which was performed in Mexico City. Then, in 2016, much to her surprise, the Los Angeles Philharmonic called again.

Music Director Gustavo Dudamel was looking for ways to elevate composers from Latin American and Ortiz rose to the occasion, producing *Téenek*, a work inspired by the Huastec people of Mexico. The work was a hit among musicians, critics and audience members. Dudamel quickly became a champion of Ortiz's music and a close friend. He helped her secure the British publisher Boosey & Hawkes, and when visiting Mexico City on tour with the Vienna Philharmonic in 2018, he went dancing with Ortiz and composer Arturo Márquez at the Salón Los Angeles, one of the city's oldest dance halls. (Ortiz, who loves dance, is still a regular at various clubs.)

In 2026, Ortiz won her fourth Grammy, Best Contemporary Classical Composition, for her cello concerto, *Dzonot*, written for cellist Alisa Weilerstein, premiered by the LA Philharmonic in March of 2024. The title is the Mayan word for 'abyss' and refers to the sacred underground water systems of the Yucatán Peninsula.



Gabriela Ortiz and her Grammy

Ortiz has paid her dues. After decades of work, Ortiz's music is now commissioned and performed by orchestras in the US and Europe, and she has collaborated with nearly every conductor, soloist and orchestra in Mexico. She has written scores for dance, film, and theatre and she has composed operas as well as orchestral works. In Mexico, Ortiz has become a cultural celebrity. During the 2024-2025 season she was the resident composer at Carnegie Hall, and she has now moved on to the same position at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. She is a faculty member at the Curtis Institute of Music as well as Mexico's National Autonomous University. Ortiz

lives in Mexico City with her husband, flute player and composer Alejandro Escuer, and their three cats, Saturno, Greco and Suki.

In 2019, as she was working on the orchestral piece *Yanga*, about an enslaved African who led a rebellion in Mexico, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. She underwent chemotherapy while her cancer is in remission, the experience, she says, brought more urgency to her life and music.

> ***"There is so much more that I want to say, so many more stories I want to tell. Music is part of me and it's bigger than me. It's what keeps me alive."***



Please join the HSO on October 23-25, 2026, to enjoy Ortiz's thrilling *Kauyumari*, plus Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 featuring guest artist Ying Li, and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4, all under the baton of HSO Music Director Finalist, Maestro Yaniv Dinur.

BONUS!

Reflections on the concert by Maestro Dinur:

On the Liszt Piano Concerto:

"Liszt was well known for his virtuosic skills and developing new ways of playing the piano. He could do things no one else could at the time, plus he was very handsome and had long hair, and the combination of all that made him a superstar. But for me, the most interesting and unique thing about his piano concertos are the parts that sound like improvisation. It's a challenge for the soloist, because the part is all written out, but the pianist has to play it as if it is improvised on the spot."

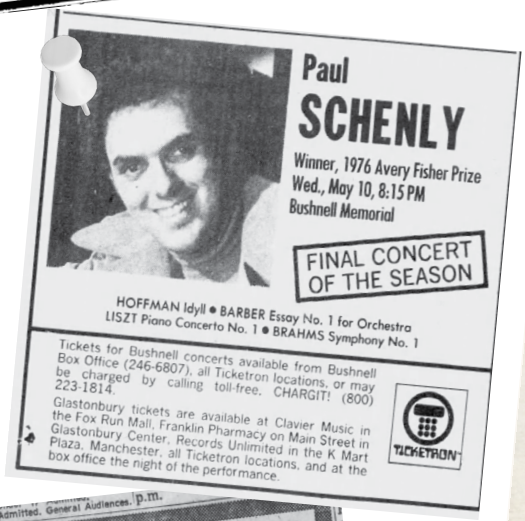
On the collaboration with pianist Ying Li:

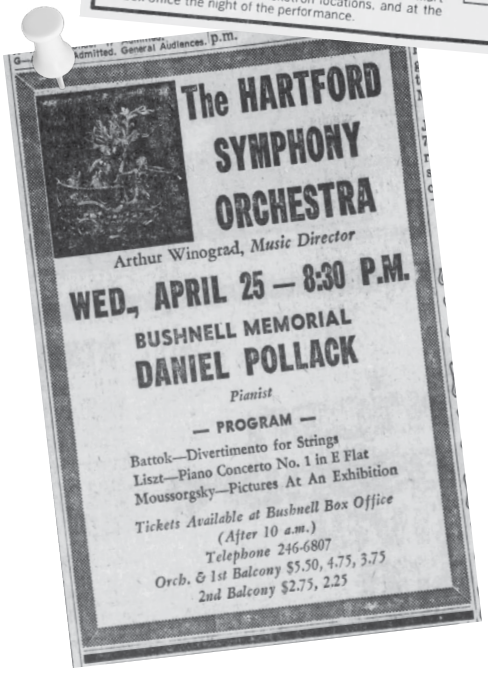
"It will be our first time working together. It's like a blind date that must progress into a steady relationship in a matter of minutes. There are a lot of unknowns. Are you going to have good chemistry? Are you going to agree on things? Are you going to have to make compromises? Sometimes it's wonderful and you feel that you almost have telepathy with the other person. In case of Ying Li, since I was the one who recommended her for this concert after listening to her performance of the first Liszt Piano Concerto, I am very excited to work with her!"

Insider tips for the audience:

"It's a blockbuster program that is guaranteed to bring the house down: amazing piano stunts in the Liszt Piano Concerto, exciting and emotional orchestral writing in the Tchaikovsky that pushes the orchestra to its limits, and I bet the audience is going to love the Ortiz. It is a Latin American piece, cool, rhythmic, and a great contrast to the lushness and Romanticism of Liszt and Tchaikovsky. Listen for the surprise triangle solo in Liszt, an entire movement in Tchaikovsky played entirely with pizzicato (plucking) by the strings and the backstage trumpets in the Ortiz. This is a program of fireworks!"


HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
FRITZ MAHLER, Music Director
SUZANNE DANCO, Soprano Soloist
TONIGHT—8:15 Bushnell Memorial
Program: Mozart: Symphony No. 36;
Berg: Three Excerpts from, "Wozzeck"
Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4
Tickets: $1.50, $2.00, $2.50, $3.00, $3.25
Bushnell Box Office: JA 5-8177





HSO Replays

Past performances of featured works by the HSO

ORTIZ
Kauyumari

- HSO Premiere

LISZT
Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major

- First performed by HSO on January 23, 1940, with Leon Barzin conductor and 10-year-old piano soloist Valdine Conde.
- Performed 10 more times between 1960 and 1999 under music directors Fritz Mahler, Arthur Winograd and Michael Lankester.
  - » The performance in April 1969 featured Andre Watts as soloist.
  - » The performance in April of 1970 was broadcast on CT public television.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphony No. 4

- First performed on May 14, 1936, conducted by Jacques Gordon.
- The full symphony was performed an additional 14 times between 1936 and 2017 by music directors Jacques Gordon, Fritz Mahler, Arthur Winograd, Michael Lankester and Edward Cumming.
- The performance in May of 2001, conducted by Ransom Wilson, was the last concert with Bernard Lurie, former Concertmaster.

Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy! Whether you're a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org. We'll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!

Interested in hearing the exciting music of Gabriela Ortiz? Try these suggestions:

Enjoy the first movement of Ortiz' cello concerto, *Dzonot*, performed by the LA Philharmonic:
Dzonot: I. Luz vertical.

We think you'll love this performance of *Téenek* by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, with Gustavo Dudamel:
Gabriela Ortiz: Téenek-Invencoines de Territorio_哔哩哔哩_bilibili.

This recording of *Antrópolis*, composed in 2019, will give you a broader idea of Ortiz's unique use of melody and rhythm:
Antrópolis by Gabriela Ortiz.

Enjoy this behind the scenes look at a rehearsal with Gustavo Dudamel and Gabriela Oritz:
Gustavo Dudamel and the LA Phil rehearse "Yanga" with composer Gabriela Ortiz.

And enjoy the performance of *Yanga* by the LA Philharmonic:
Tambuco, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Gustavo Dudamel / Yanga, by Gabriela Ortiz. World Premiere.

Ortiz's piano concerto, *Fractalis*, may be heard at this link:
Gabriela Ortiz, "Fractalis" para piano y orquesta con Ana Gabriela Fernández - Zoi Tsokanou/OSX.

To learn more about Gabriela Ortiz, listen to the composer herself in these two videos:
Gabriela Ortiz.
Meet Composer Gabriela Ortiz - YouTube.

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

Ortiz's *Kauyumari,* performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic led by Gustavo Dudamel, may be enjoyed here:
Kauyumari by Gabriela Ortiz.

The composer's explanation of *Kauyumari* may be heard here:
Gabriela Ortiz on Composing "Kauyumari".

While the video isn't perfect, this thrilling performance of Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E flat major by Martha Argerich will leave you breathless:
Franz Liszt: Piano Concerto in E-flat (Martha Argerich, 1981).

Delight in this performance of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 2 by the New York Philharmonic, led by the one and only Leonard Bernstein:
P. TCHAIKOVSKY - Symphony No.4, f moll, Op.36 [New York Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein] - YouTube.



See you soon!



Gabriela Ortiz

SOURCE MATERIAL

It's time to listen to the bold music of Gabriela Ortiz : NPR

Gabriela Ortiz | Official Website

Gabriela Ortiz — LA Phil

They Said Her Music Was Too Exotic. Now She's a Classical Star. - The New York Times

The composer Gabriela Ortiz | Berliner Philharmoniker

For Mexican composer Gabriela Ortiz, music is borderless : NPR

Composer Gabriela Ortiz Wins Performance Today's 2026 Classical Woman of the Year

An Interview with Gabriela Ortiz | Carnegie Hall