



Classical Music

Meet Lina Gonzalez-Granados, one of the first Latin American women to conduct the Seattle Symphony

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1 of 3 | Lina Gonzalez-Granados, Seattle Symphony's conducting fellow for the 2019-20 season. (James Holt / Seattle Symphony)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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As a child during Colombia's protracted civil war, Lina Gonzalez-Granados' parents encouraged her to learn piano. "It was a way to keep me home and safe," she said. Her time on the piano bench might have kept her safer as a child, but it did not keep

her at home. Instead, it set her on the path to an international career as a classical music conductor.

When Gonzalez-Granados takes the podium for the “[Wonder Women](#)” family concert Feb. 22, she will be the first Colombian woman, and one of the first Latin Americans, to conduct the Seattle Symphony.

Fewer than 15% of U.S. orchestral conductors are female, and fewer than 10% identify as Latino/Hispanic, according to a League of American Orchestras 2016 survey (the most recent year for the survey). Gonzalez-Granados is motivated by music more than demographics. But even as an early-career conductor, she is already known as an effective, community-building advocate for Latino musicians.

As Seattle Symphony’s conducting fellow for the 2019-20 season, Gonzalez-Granados will spend several weeks with the orchestra, assisting the conductor and serving as the cover conductor, being prepared to take over at the last minute if a concert conductor is unable to perform, and giving feedback during rehearsals on how things sound from where the audience sits. She’ll lead her own performances (such as the Feb. 28 “[\[untitled\] 2](#)” concert) and participate in special projects like the Merriman Young Composers Workshop showcase.

“It’s really fluid,” said Gonzalez-Granados. This season, she also holds a fellowship at Philadelphia Orchestra, and completed the two-year Taki Concordia Fellowship for women conductors. She won the Solti apprenticeship with Maestro Riccardo Muti at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which begins this month. Her work is a little different at every orchestra. “In Seattle, I have more community engagement projects.”

An extroverted only child, Gonzalez-Granados was never satisfied playing piano. “I never felt quite in my element playing music alone. I want to be around people,” she said. Singing in a choir was an improvement, but when she started conducting, she knew she had found her element. She made her conducting debut in 2008 with the Youth Orchestra of Bellas Artes in her hometown of Cali, Colombia.

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“Conducting gives me a connection I never felt in other activities,” she said. “For me, it is a two-way conversation. I want to share always a dynamic communication with the orchestra.”

In 2010, she moved from Cali to New York for an undergraduate exchange year at Juilliard.

“It was so cold! I moved in January and I had to wear three jackets,” she said. The adjustment was hard, but she went on to earn graduate degrees in conducting and in choral conducting from New England Conservatory. She will take her final exams for a doctorate in orchestral conducting at Boston University this semester.

Last year, she joined more than 50 other young conductors competing for a position at Seattle Symphony. Six finalists were chosen to compete in a jury process similar to a conducting competition. In the end, two were hired. Lee Mills was chosen as assistant conductor, and Gonzalez-Granados as conducting fellow.

“First there was her artistry on stage,” Krishna Thiagarajan, president and CEO of Seattle Symphony, said of the selection of Gonzalez-Granados. “But also her ideas on the importance of reaching all communities, backed up by the work she’s already done, really aligned with what’s important to Seattle Symphony.”

Fellowships are important positions for early-career conductors, giving them performance opportunities and a chance to work with established music directors, learning from the inside how a large orchestra company works.

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“It is all about cultivating the next generation of musicians,” Thiagarajan said.

While the fellowship is largely a supporting role, Gonzalez-Granados already holds a place among the 9.2% of U.S. orchestral music directors who are female (a percentage that hasn’t really changed since 2006) as the founder of Unitas Ensemble, a chamber orchestra that specializes in works by Latin American composers.

“I wanted to level the field artistically and create jobs for my friends who are Latinos,” said Gonzalez-Granados. “I’m not shy. I’ve made a lot of composer friends along the way.”

Gonzalez-Granados is doing what she can to help the classical music of Latin America take its place on the world stage.

“Latin American composers are very strong,” she said. “In the last 10 years, Colombia has grown a young orchestra movement with a system of great teachers and universities.”

Public music education programs such as Batuta in Colombia and El Sistema in Venezuela have created a generation of classical musicians who are not afraid to borrow from other traditions.

“The music is multicultural. There is not only one style. For example, in the piece I’m bringing to Seattle Symphony, the instruments have to sing a little music of the Caribbean. We’re not afraid to blur the lines,” she said.

The piece she is referring to is “El Paraiso segun Maria,” by Juan David Osorio. The

world premiere will be performed as part of the Feb. 28 “[untitled] 2” concert Gonzalez-Granados will co-lead with Mills (who is also resident conductor of the Brazilian Symphony Orchestra). That concert will feature two world premieres and two U.S. premieres, all by Latin American composers.



“I had the honor to be asked to bring in a fellow Colombian. They trusted me enough to bring in a new composer,” said Gonzalez-Granados. “I told them, instead of an old piece that doesn’t fit [the program], how about one that was specially composed for me? I think it’s going to be really successful.”

“Wonder Women,” 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 22; Benaroya Hall, 200 University St., Seattle; \$15-\$25; 206-215-4747, seattlesymphony.org

“[untitled] 2,” 10 p.m. Friday, Feb. 28; Benaroya Hall, 200 University St., Seattle; \$18 (sold out as of this writing); 206-215-4747, seattlesymphony.org

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