

American Conductor and Pianist Donald Lee III is quickly gaining notoriety for his versatility and charisma both on the podium and at the keyboard. A recipient of a 2025 Solti Foundation Career Assistance Reward, Lee has appeared in concert with the Des Moines Metro Opera Orchestra, Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestra, Lyric Opera of Chicago Chorus, and members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Lee recently served as the assistant conductor for the world premiere of *She Who Dared* at Chicago Opera Theater. The summer of 2025 brought him to Chautauqua Institute, working closely with Denyce Graves, conducting scenes and playing selections from the new opera *Loving v. Virginia* and song cycle *Cotton* by Damien Geter, as well as preparing the chorus for a reading of Missy Mazzoli's new opera *Lincoln in the Bardo*, and to Jackson State University conducting members of the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra in a variety of operatic repertoire as part of the Inaugural S.O.S. Opera Bootcamp. In recital he collaborated with Lawrence Brownlee appearing with the Norwegian Opera and Ballet, and with Nicole Heaston and Justin Austin at Houston Grand Opera.

In the 2025-26 season Lee will lead the Bay Area Rainbow Symphony in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Damien Geter's *Sinfonia Americana* and Joel Thompson's *To Awaken the Sleeper*, joins the Reno Chamber Orchestra on the podium for their *All That Jazz* program featuring works by Florence Price, Claude Bolling, Arturo Marquez, and George Gershwin, and will be the guest conductor for the Charleston Gospel Choir presenting their annual Gospel Christmas Concert. He also joins the Washington National Opera serving as the cover conductor for *Treemonisha* and Virginia Opera as the harpsichordist and repetiteur for their production of *La cenerentola*. His season concludes with his return to Cincinnati Opera as the assistant conductor for *Carmen* and the world premiere of *Lalovavi*, for which he is also chorus master. Lee has also been engaged as a cover conductor with the Gateways Festival Orchestra and Des Moines Metro Opera, and served as the assistant conductor with the Oakland Symphony in the 2024-25 season. Recent productions include *Salome*, *Carmen*, *Champion*, and the world premiere of *American Apollo*. Additional highlights as a pianist include appearing as soloist with the University of Maryland Symphony Orchestra for Florence Price's Piano Concerto, recording works by underrepresented composers for broadcast on the Chicago radio station WFMT, and being the first pianist to record Francis Johnson's *A Set of New Cotillions*, the first published original work by a Black American composer.

As an advocate for the performance of new music by under-represented composers, Lee has conducted the music of Jasmine Barnes, Damien Geter, and Carlos Simon. Lee appeared as the guest conductor for Montgomery Presents the *Blacknificent 7*, part of the CSO MusicNOW concert series. He has also conducted the workshops of *In The Rush*, a new opera by Carlos Simon, Lynn Nottage, and Ruby Aiyo-Gerber at Cincinnati Opera and Indiana University. As a pianist, Lee has been a part of the creation of six new operas through Opera Theater St. Louis' New Works Collective. He was also the pianist for Will Liverman's *The Factotum*, improvising in multiple genres throughout the opera.

Lee holds degrees from James Madison University and University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Lee was the inaugural conductor/pianist member of the Ryan Opera Center, the training program of the Lyric Opera of Chicago.