

Cuban-American composer and conductor honored as Tulane Trailblazer

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Conductor and composer Odaline de la Martínez credits her Tulane student experience with her success on the world stage. (Photo by Malcolm Crowther)

Odaline de la Martínez, who emigrated to the United States from Cuba as a 12-year-old and went on to become an internationally acclaimed composer and conductor, is

the newest Tulane University graduate to be honored as a Tulane Trailblazer.

Established in 2019, the Tulane Trailblazers initiative celebrates diverse alumni who have made a substantial and lasting impact on the Tulane community. Those honored as Trailblazers have also had a major impact on their respective professional fields and the world.

Lauded as one of the great personalities on the international music scene, Chachi, as Martínez is known professionally, is music director of the London Chamber Symphony and founder and music director of Lontano, a contemporary ensemble based in London. She has appeared as a guest conductor with the San Diego Symphony, New Zealand Symphony, Australian Youth Orchestra and Vancouver Chamber Orchestra, among others. A full bio and a complete list of her works are available [here](#).

Martínez's works have been showcased across some of the world's most prestigious classical music venues, including Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, St John's Smith Square and the Royal College of Music. In 2013, she presented the world premiere of her choral piece "The Crossing" at Tulane in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Martínez credits her Tulane experience for her success on the world stage. While at Tulane's Newcomb College, she immersed herself in all that the music department had to offer, from opera to orchestra.

"As a student I had a chance to sometimes conduct the choir and the string orchestra run by Dr. John Baron," Martínez said. "While on tour, I was invited to play piano solos and again, conduct the choir here and there. Years later, in 1984, Tulane premiered my first opera Sister Aimee: An American Legend. Since then, the opera has had other productions in the States and the UK."

"Both as a student and in her career, Odaline de la Martínez broke barriers and defied odds, rising to the top of her field to become an award-winning composer, conductor, record producer, event curator and the first woman to conduct the BBC Prom at the Royal Albert Hall," Tulane President Michael A. Fitts said. "Her impact on both the university and the international music community is truly extraordinary."

Brian Edwards, dean of the School of Liberal Arts, called Martínez an "inspiration to all Tulanians."

“What I particularly love about the creation of the Odaline de la Martínez Award is that it connects generations of Tulane musicians, composers and musicologists to the legacy of an extremely talented alumna,” he said.

As part of the Trailblazer honor, the Odaline de la Martínez Award will be awarded by the School of Liberal Arts’ Newcomb Department of Music to outstanding students in performance, composition or music scholarship in the Americas. Earlier this year, [Jessé Bateman](#), a graduate student whose composition work is deeply tied to his Louisiana French heritage, received the inaugural Odaline de la Martínez Award.

Martínez said she is thrilled to be part of such an important initiative. “It is a part of a continuing drive to a more inclusive and diverse academic community. I came to the States at a young age, so I know a little bit about discrimination, but at Tulane I was given every opportunity to thrive and succeed.”

She said she is proud to see students like Bateman, a native of St. Amant, Louisiana, enjoy similar success as a Tulanian.

Bateman, who is pursuing a master’s degree in composition, was nominated for the award by Edward Maxwell Dulaney, an associate professor of music, composition and theory in the Department of Music. Bateman’s works include salon-style art songs using text about New Orleans and Cajun culture as well as chamber compositions that incorporate swamp pop rhythms and other regional styles. A former elementary music educator, he is also an accomplished oboist, pianist, flautist and vocalist.

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