

Dr. Cynthia Johnston Turner, 2026 All-State Band Conductor



Odds were against **Cynthia Johnston Turner** becoming a musician let alone a professor of music and conductor in higher education. Born in a small town in Ontario, Canada, no one in her family played an instrument or sang, although there were rumors that her great paternal grandfather was an accomplished mandolinist. Cynthia asked for a piano for Christmas when she was 8 years old, and because it was all her parents could afford, she received a toy electric keyboard from

which she was pretty much inseparable until she started the ukulele in grade school. When she picked up the clarinet and saxophone in middle school, a love affair and a career were born.

The first in her family to attend university, Cynthia received her Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Education from Queen's University, a Master of Education at the University of Victoria, and a Doctor of Musical Arts (Conducting) from the Eastman School of Music. She has received numerous teaching, research, and leadership awards in Canada and the United States.

Cynthia was appointed Dean—Faculty of Music at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario July 1, 2021. She leads a school of approximately 400 undergraduate and graduate music majors with programs in traditional conservatory programming coupled with innovative undergraduate specializations in Community Music and Afrodiasporic Music, and graduate degrees such as the MMC3 (Masters of Music in Collaboration, Curation, and Creative Performance). The Faculty of Music at Laurier has the only Bachelors, Masters, and PhD in Music Therapy in the country. She also oversees the Laurier Academy of Music and the Arts, a community-based school serving approximately 1000 students ranging from 6 months to 95 years old in the region. In the fall of 2025 Laurier Music launched a new curriculum that dismantles the hierarchy between “classical” and “popular” music. During her tenure at Laurier Music, enrolment has increased by over 40% and fundraising efforts have approached \$11 million.

Before her appointment as Dean, Cynthia was Director of Bands, Professor of Music, and Artistic Director of the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble at the Hodgson School of Music, University of Georgia where she conducted the Hodgson Wind Ensemble, led the Master and Doctoral programs in conducting, provided strategic leadership in diversity, equity, and inclusivity initiatives as well as innovative curriculum, and oversaw the entire band program including the famed 400+ member Redcoat Marching Band. The Hodgson Wind Ensemble

performed at the College Band Directors National Association National Convention in 2017. Prior to UGA, Cynthia was Director of Wind Ensembles at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. The Cornell Wind Ensemble undertook multiple service-learning and performance tours to Costa Rica, Panama, inner-city Washington and Pennsylvania where they donated hundreds of instruments and led workshops with students and band directors. She was recently appointed as Artistic Director and Conductor of the Festival Winds of “Summer Music at Saugeen Shores” and the Wellington Wind Symphony, a semi-professional community band in Waterloo, Ontario.

Cynthia has guest conducted bands, new music ensembles, and orchestras professionally, at several universities and conservatories, and honor bands in the United States, China, Canada, Australia, Latin America, and Europe. She continues to actively promote commissions by today’s leading and emerging composers around the world. She has been invited to present her research with teaching and technology, innovative rehearsal techniques, and service-learning and music performance at numerous conferences nationally and internationally. She is published in such journals as *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, *International Journal of the Humanities*, *Music Educators Journal*, *National Association for Music Education* "Teaching Music," NewMusicUSA.org, *Journal of the World Association of Bands and Ensembles*, *Fanfare Magazine*, and *Canadian Winds*, and has recorded CDs with the Innova and Albany labels. In 2025, “An Evening with Michael Barry—from Showstopper to Encore” with Budapest Winds was released with Acis Productions. She is a frequent guest on numerous podcasts.

Cynthia has served as a board member with the World Association of Symphonic Bands and Ensembles (WASBE) and is a member of College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA), Conductor’s Guild, College Music Society, Humanities Education and Research Association, the National Association for Music Education, and the American Bandmasters Association. She currently serves on the board of the Western International Band Clinic (WIBC) and is faculty at the American Band College (ABC). She serves on the advisory boards of the Institute for Composer Diversity (composerdiversity.com), Lift Music Fund (liftmusicfund.org), and United Sound Music (unitedsoundmusic.org). She is an honorary member of Kappa Kappa Psi and a National Arts Associate member of Sigma Alpha Iota. Cynthia is a sponsored conducting and music education clinician with Conn-Selmer.