USC Dornsife

Dana and David Dornsife
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences
Center for Music, Brain and Society

Art Education, Research, and Policy Symposium

June 9, 2025
Cammilleri Hall, USC Brain and Creativity Institute

Agenda

9:00 Registration + Coffee

10:00 Welcome & Opening Remarks

Host: Josh Kun — USC Vice Provost for the Arts
Introductory Remarks: Renée Fleming and Antonio Damasio

10:15 Session 1: Why Arts Education Matters Now More than Ever

Moderator: William Coppola — Associate Professor of Music Teaching & Learning, USC

Panelists:

- Dr. Assal Habibi — Associate Professor of Psychology, USC
- Dr. Thalia Goldstein — Associate Professor of Applied Developmental Psychology, George Mason University
- Dr. Beatriz Ilari — Professor of Music Teaching & Learning, USC Thornton School of Music

11:15 Break

11:30 Session 2: Educator Voices – What's Working, What's Not, and What We Need

Moderator: Candice Mattio — Assistant Professor of Psychology, USC

Panelists:

- Vincent Womack — Music Director, Foshay Learning Center (LAUSD)
- Dr. Alissa Chitwood — Music Teacher, Riverside, Alvord Unified
- Camille Delaney-McNeil — Vice President, Learning at Los Angeles Philharmonic
- Dr. Jim Wang — Coordinator Visual and Performing Arts, Santa Monica Unified

12:30 Lunch & Cross-Sector Table Discussions

Agenda

1:20 Welcome & Remarks - LA Opera & LA County Arts and Health Week

Dr. Andréa Fuentes — Vice President, LA Opera Connects

1:35 Session 3: From Research to Policy – Bridging the Gap

Moderator: Veronica Alvarez — Executive Director, Create CA

Panelists:

- Ed Honowitz — Chief Executive Officer, CDE Foundation
- Dr. Sharon Herpin — Senior Project Director, West ED
- Jesus M. Holguin — Past President, California School Boards Association (2015)

2:30 Break

2:40 Session 4: The Role of Funders and Philanthropy in Supporting Change

Moderator: Dalouge Smith, Co-Founder and former CEO, The Lewis Prize for Music

Panelists:

- Julia Rubio — Executive Director, NAMM Foundation
- Sarah Lyding — Executive Director, The Music Man Foundation
- Jeffrey Dollinger — Executive Director, Find Your Light Foundation

3:35 Remarks

Kristin Sakoda — Director, LA County Department of Arts and Culture

3:50 Reflections

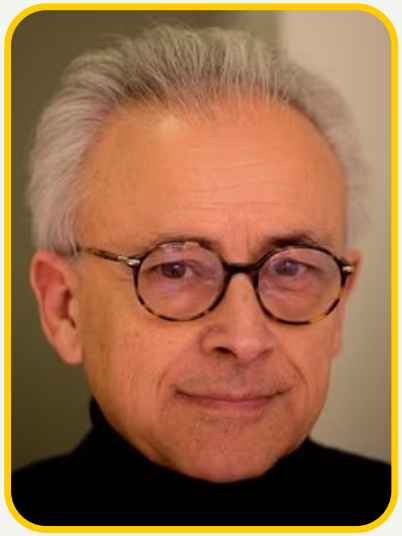
Renée Fleming and Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson in conversation with Josh Kun

4:20 Closing Remarks

Meet the Speakers

Josh Kun

Josh Kun is a cultural historian, author, curator, and music critic whose work examines the intersections of arts, politics, and society, with particular emphasis on popular music, migration, and cross-cultural exchange. He is Vice Provost for the Arts at the University of Southern California (USC), where he also holds the Chair in Cross-Cultural Communication at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism. In addition, he holds a joint appointment in the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity, directs the Popular Music Project at the Norman Lear Center, and co-curates CALA Crossfade Lab.



Antonio Damasio

Dr. Antonio Damasio is University Professor, David Dornsife Professor of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Philosophy, and Director of the Brain and Creativity Institute at the University of Southern California. A world-renowned neuroscientist, he has made pioneering contributions to the understanding of the neural basis of emotions, decision-making, consciousness, and the self. His influential books, including Descartes' Error, The Feeling of appointment in the Department of American Studies and EWhat Happens, and Self Comes to Mind, have been translated into over 30 languages. Damasio is a member of the National Academy of Medicine and the European Academy of Sciences, and his work bridges neuroscience, the humanities, and the arts.

Renée Flemming

Renée Fleming is a celebrated American soprano known for her sumptuous voice, artistry, and advocacy for the arts and health. Acclaimed for her performances in opera, concert, and recital, she has won multiple Grammy Awards and headlined at major venues worldwide, including the Metropolitan Opera, the White House, and Nobel Peace Prize ceremonies. In addition to her musical career, Fleming is a leading proponent of the intersection between music and neuroscience, who served as an advisor to the NIH's Sound Health initiative. Her work bridges science and the arts, highlighting music's role in health, healing, and the human experience.

Beatriz Ilari

Dr. Beatriz Ilari is Associate Professor and Chair of Music Teaching and Learning at the University of Southern California. Her research focuses on how musical participation supports development, cognition, and well-being in children, particularly within Latino and Latin American communities. A native of Brazil, she conducts cross-cultural research and collaborates with scholars in Brazil, Portugal, Spain, the UK, USA, and Hong Kong. She is a research fellow at USC's Brain and Creativity Institute and has published widely in leading journals. A trained violinist and former early childhood music educator, she is also co-editor of several volumes on music and development.

William Coppola

Dr. William Coppola is an Associate Professor of Music Teaching and Learning at the USC Thornton School of Music. His research explores humility, egotism, and elitism in the ethical development of musicians, educators, and arts institutions. His forthcoming book, Egotism, Elitism, and the Ethics of Musical Humility, is under contract with Oxford University Press. Dr. Coppola's work has been published in leading journals, including Journal of Research in Music Education, Psychology of Music, and Music Education Research. He serves on the editorial board of the International Journal of Music Education and previously taught elementary music in New York City Public Schools.

Assal Habibi

Dr. Assal Habibi is an Associate Research Professor of Psychology at the Brain and Creativity Institute at USC. Her research explores how music and the arts impact brain development, learning, and well-being across the lifespan. She specializes in neuroimaging and electrophysiological methods and has led longitudinal studies on music training in children, including a multi-year collaboration with the LA Philharmonic and YOLA. Her work is supported by the NIH, NEA, and GRoW @ Annenberg Foundation and has been widely published. A classically trained pianist, she brings both scientific expertise and personal passion to her work in music and child development.

Thalia Goldstein

Dr. Thalia Goldstein is an associate professor at George Mason University, where she directs the Play, Learning, Arts, and Youth Lab and previously led the Mason Arts Research Center. A fellow of the American Psychological Association and co-editor of Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts, her research explores how pretend play and the arts support social and emotional development in youth. She has published over 75 academic articles, supported by the NSF, NEA, and Templeton Foundation. Goldstein holds degrees from Cornell and Boston College and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at Yale. Her most recent book is “Why Theatre Education Matters: Understanding its Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Benefits”.

Candice Mattio

Dr. Candice D. Mattio is an assistant professor of Music Teaching and Learning at the USC Thornton School of Music. Her research explores musical creativity, social issues in contemporary and popular music education, and technology-based music learning environments. At USC, she teaches graduate courses including creative thinking in music, technology integration, pedagogy, assessment in teaching and learning, and quantitative research methods. Dr. Mattio’s work bridges research and practice, supporting innovative approaches to music education that are responsive to today’s cultural and technological landscapes. She is committed to advancing equity, creativity, and critical inquiry in music teaching and learning.

Vincent P. Womack

Vincent P. Womack is Music Director at James A. Foshay Learning Center, a K–12 public school in South Los Angeles, where he has led award-winning music programs and overseen a $10 million theater renovation. A passionate advocate for equity in arts education, he has received multiple honors, including the Bravo Award and Mr. Holland’s Opus Foundation Award. Mr. Womack also serves as an adjunct professor at the USC Thornton School of Music and previously directed the USC Trojan Marching Band. He and his students have performed internationally and appeared on national television, including performances with Alicia Keys and Queen Latifah.

Alissa Chitwood

Alissa Chitwood is an Orff Certified General Music Educator in the Alvord Unified School District (AUSD) in Riverside, CA, where she teaches Transitional Kindergarten through 5th Grade using singing, movement, instruments, and play. Named Arlanza Elementary’s 2023 Teacher of the Year, she has served as an itinerant music teacher across multiple AUSD schools for five years. Alissa also mentors new educators as an Induction Program Reflective Coach. She has taught students from preschool to high school and draws on her broad experience to advocate for diverse, high-quality music programs that ensure all students have access to meaningful music education.

Jim Wang

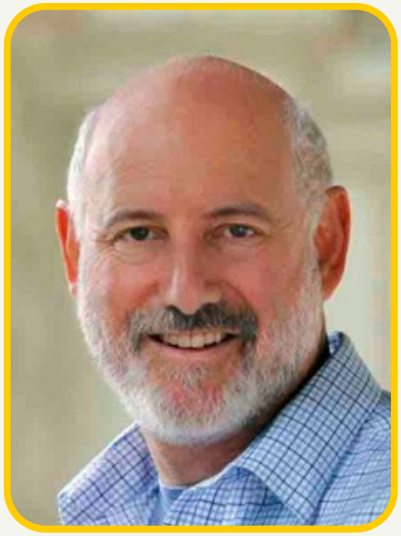
Dr. Jim Wang has been named Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator for the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District. A dedicated educator, he previously led orchestras at Lincoln Middle School and Santa Monica High School, contributing over two decades of experience in teaching, coaching, curriculum development, and teacher mentorship. Dr. Wang has conducted youth ensembles and played a key role in strengthening district music programs. He holds a bachelor's in violin performance from Biola University and earned his master's and doctorate in music teaching and learning from USC. His research focuses on student engagement and retention in music education post-pandemic.

Veronica Alvarez

Dr. Veronica Alvarez is an educator, historian, and arts advocate committed to equitable access to arts education. She currently serves as Executive Director of Create CA, leading statewide efforts to implement Proposition 28 and expand arts learning for all California students. Previously, she directed the Community Arts Partnership at CalArts and held leadership roles at LACMA and the Getty Museum. Dr. Alvarez has consulted for institutions including UCLA, the Kennedy Center, and the U.S. State Department. Born in Michoacán, Mexico, she holds a BA and MA from CSUN and an Ed.D. from LMU's Educational Leadership for Social Justice program.

Andréa Fuentes

Dr. Andréa Fuentes serves as Vice President of LA Opera Connects, the community engagement and education division of LA Opera. In this role, she leads initiatives that bring opera into schools, neighborhoods, and wellness settings across Los Angeles County. With a background in nonprofit arts leadership and a doctorate in educational leadership, Dr. Fuentes is committed to expanding access to the arts and fostering inclusive cultural participation. She has been instrumental in organizing events like the LA County Arts and Health Week Summit, which explores the intersection of the arts and community well-being.



Ed Honowitz

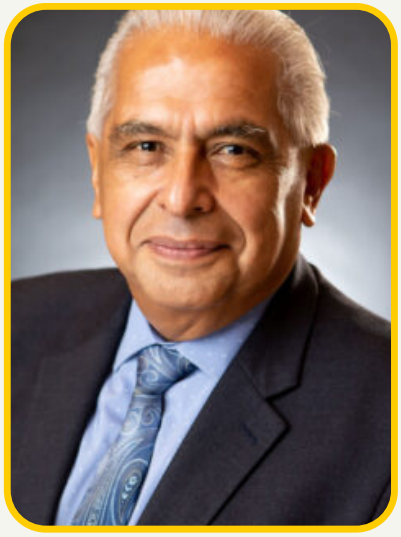
Ed Honowitz is Senior Project Director for the California Labor Management Initiative (CA LMI), a project of the CDE Foundation that fosters labor-management collaboration to advance educational equity. With a strong background in education policy, he served as education policy adviser to State Senator Carol Liu, focusing on K–12 reform, school-based health, and community schools. A former Pasadena Unified School District board member, Ed has led statewide community school initiatives and presented nationally on education partnerships. He currently serves on the board of CREATE CA and remains a champion for public education, community engagement, and access to arts learning.

Sharon Herpin

Dr. Sharon A. Herpin is an experienced researcher and program evaluator specializing in technical assistance, arts education, higher education, and professional development. She has led projects for national organizations including the NEA and Arts Education Partnership, as well as state and local agencies. Dr. Herpin currently directs evaluations for USC's Master of Arts in Teaching Program, the Getty Center, and the Hammer Museum. She also provides consulting on research design, evaluation, logic models, and SMART objectives. A lead author on key arts education reports, she has served on California's state arts education task force and reviews for the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Dalouge Smith

Dalouge Smith is a passionate advocate for community-building through music. Since 2018, he has served as the inaugural CEO of The Lewis Prize for Music, supporting creative youth development nationwide. Previously, he led the San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory for 13 years, helping to restore music education across the Chula Vista Elementary School District, reaching over 30,000 students. Dalouge holds a BA in World Arts and Cultures from UCLA and spent a year in India studying Gandhi's non-violent movement. A lifelong performer, he grew up singing folk music and acting in theater.



Jesus M. Holguin

Jesús M. Holguín is a longtime education leader and advocate for equity in California public schools. He served on the Moreno Valley Unified School District Board of Education from 2002 until his retirement in June 2024, and was President of the California School Boards Association (CSBA) from 2014 to 2015—the first Latino to hold that role in two decades. Holguín has also served as Vice President for Education for the California State PTA and is a board member of Create CA and Pacific Crest Youth Arts Organization. With over 30 years of experience in school finance through the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools, he continues to champion arts education, family engagement, and student-centered policy statewide.

Julia Rubio

Julia Rubio is Executive Director of the NAMM Foundation, where she leads global grantmaking and workforce development to promote equitable access to music making, learning, and career pathways. With over two decades in philanthropic strategy and nonprofit leadership, her work spans arts and culture, behavioral health, and international aid. Appointed in 2024, she has spearheaded major efforts, including the 2025 LA Wildfires Relief Fund. Previously, Julia was Executive Director of the Merakey Foundation, where she managed national grantmaking for the largest U.S. behavioral health service provider. She is known for building impactful, equity-driven initiatives across diverse communities and sectors.

Sarah Lyding

Sarah Lyding is the Executive Director of The Music Man Foundation, where she leads efforts to use music as a catalyst for lasting social impact. Under her leadership, the Foundation has expanded its support for initiatives in music education, therapy, and advocacy, including the launch of a dedicated music therapy grant program for Southern California-based organizations. Prior to joining the Foundation in 2017, Lyding served as Executive Director and Senior Program Officer at The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation, where she advanced programs like BankWork$ and Social Impact Theatre. She also led development efforts at Pasadena Playhouse and Center Theatre Group.

Jeffrey Dollinger

Jeffrey Dollinger is the Executive Director of the Find Your Light Foundation, a nonprofit founded by singer and actor Josh Groban to expand access to arts education for young people. Since joining the organization, Dollinger has overseen grantmaking efforts that support youth-centered arts programs nationwide. Prior to this role, he served as Executive Director of the LACHSA Foundation, where he led fundraising and strategic initiatives for the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. Dollinger brings extensive experience in nonprofit leadership and arts education advocacy, with a commitment to using the arts as a vehicle for equity and empowerment.

Kristin Sakoda

Kristin Sakoda is the Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, where she leads initiatives that advance arts, equity, and community well-being. Under her leadership, the department has expanded support for arts education, cultural equity, and creative workforce development, and launched groundbreaking programs at the intersection of arts and health. A national leader in cultural policy, Sakoda has over two decades of experience spanning public service, nonprofit leadership, and performing arts. She holds a J.D. from NYU School of Law and a B.A. from Stanford University, and is also a professionally trained dancer and vocalist.

Maria Rosario Jackson

With an aim towards building healthy communities where all people can thrive, Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson has a 30+ year career in strategic planning, policy research, and policy and program design, implementation and evaluation with philanthropy, government, and nonprofit organizations. For nearly 20 years, Dr. Jackson was based at the Urban Institute, a Washington, DC-based national public policy research organization. For more than ten years, she served as a senior advisor at the Kresge Foundation and other philanthropic organizations. She was appointed as a member of the National Council on the Arts by President Obama in 2012. She was also a co-chair of the County of Los Angeles Cultural Equity and Inclusion Initiative and has served on governing and advisory boards of numerous arts and community development organizations around the United States. In December 2021, Dr. Jackson was appointed as Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts. She served in that role until January 2025. Dr. Jackson is currently on leave from Arizona State University, where she is a tenured Professor.

This event is organized in partnership with:

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Thank you to our partners for their collaboration and support in organizing today's event!

The Center for Music, Brain, and Society at USC's Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences is dedicated to serving as a collaborative nucleus for USC faculty deeply committed to exploring music on both neurobiological and societal levels.

Contact Us

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