

Conductor **Claire Fox Hillard** pursues a varied career as the Music Director of the Albany Symphony Orchestra, a member of the Music Faculty at Albany State University, and as a guest conductor throughout the world. Maestro Hillard's lifelong interest in opera led to his founding of *OPERA*Albany! in 1995. Hillard has previously served as Music Director of the St. Joseph Symphony, Missouri Western Philharmonia, and Meridian Symphony Orchestras and has taught at Indiana State University and Missouri Western State College.

A native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Hillard began piano and violin studies at an early age and made his conducting debut at the age of 18. At age 25, after earning his masters and doctoral degrees from The University of Iowa, he became one of the youngest conductors ever to be appointed the Music Directorship of a professional orchestra. He received training from several notable conductors of our time including James Dixon, Leonard Slatkin, Pierre Boulez, Maurice Abravanel, Jorge Mester, and John Barnett. Maestro Hillard is the recipient of the League of American Orchestra's distinguished Helen M. Thompson Award. *Georgia Trend Magazine* has honored him as one of the "outstanding leaders in Georgia." The Meridian Council for the Arts honored Hillard with its Artist's Achievement Award and he has been awarded a Dream Award from Albany's annual King Celebration. Hillard currently serves on the Board of the Conductors Guild, is a member of the Georgia Music Hall of Fame Authority, and serves as a music panelist for the Georgia Council for the Arts.

Hillard made his European debut in 1994 conducting the *Karlovarsky symfonicky orchestra*. Since that time he has returned to conduct that orchestra as well as the Moravian Philharmonic in the Czech Republic, *L'Orchestre Chapelle de Lorraine* in Brussels, the *Filharmonica "Banatul"* and *Filharmonica Paul Constantnescu* in Romania, the *Orquesta Sinfonica de San Pedro Sula* in Honduras, the Karkov Philharmonic in Ukraine, the Gdansk Philharmonic in Poland, the National Russian Philharmonic, and the *Orquesta Sinfonica Caxias do Sul* in Brazil. This past season Hillard conducted the *Academic Philharmony* of the City of Astana, in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Among the orchestra he has appeared with in this country are the Abilene Philharmonic, West Shore Symphony, North Arkansas Symphony, Tupelo Symphony, Flagstaff Symphony, Cobb Symphony, Quad-City Symphony and Symphony of Southeast Texas. Hillard's programming is noted for an exciting blend of major symphonic, choral, and operatic repertory including a wide variety of American compositions and the premieres of new works. He has received seven ASCAP awards for his innovative programming and collaborated with a wide variety of composers and artists including Virgil Thomson, Aaron Copland, Alvin Singleton, Adolphus Hailstork, Hilary Hahn, Itzhak Perlman, Ruth Laredo, William Warfield, Ray Charles, actresses Debbie Reynolds, fiddle player Mark O'Connor, and the Billy Taylor Trio.