

Abdelbarr, Garfi win 2026-2027 UA election

This year's election was significantly more contested than usual

By Jada Ogueh, Grace Zhang
EDITORS

On Sunday, March 22, at 6:15 p.m., the Undergraduate Association (UA) Election Commission announced that Mariam Abdelbarr '27 and Francesca Garfi '29 will serve as the 2026-2027 UA President and Vice President, respectively.

In the email, the Election Commission also released the full election results. 1,688 undergraduates voted, comprising 37.2% of the total undergraduate population — an increase from the previous year's 30.0%. Students also voted for class council representatives for the Classes of 2027, 2028, 2029.

In the presidential and vice presidential election, Abdelbarr and Garfi were the first choice on 790 ballots; in the final round of counting, they finished with 981 votes, which represents 58.1% of the total. Runners-up Rivka Lipkovitz '29 and Anthony Donegan '28 were the first choice preference on 547 ballots and received 636 votes overall. Finally, candidates Johnnie Jones VI '27 and Matthew Barnett '27 received 322 first-choice votes before being eliminated in the final round.

A distinctly controversial election

Due to heated discussion about student governance leading up to the election, this year's UA Presidential and Vice Presidential election was significantly more contested than usual.

On Feb. 21, a dormspam email sent by Donegan — who was not yet a candidate — prompted numerous conversations about the size of the UA's budget, its governance structure, and line item budgeting. In response, the UA sent out an official statement addressing points of conflict; UA President Alice Hall '26 also sat down with *The Tech* to discuss these issues.

While Donegan stated he did not initially plan to run for office in his initial dormspam thread, he officially joined Lipkovitz's ballot as her Vice Presidential candidate two days after the email, according to a report by the Election Commission.

From there, tensions between the Lipkovitz-Donegan ticket and the Election Commission persisted

from the beginning of campaigning until polls closed. On March 7, three days after the official UA Election season had begun, the Election Commission sanctioned the Lipkovitz-Donegan ticket, preventing them from campaigning due to an "unfair advantage from pre-campaign activity."

After Donegan publicized the initial sanction, the Election Commission escalated the penalty to disqualification on March 12, prompting widespread backlash. The Lipkovitz-Donegan ticket appealed the Election Commission's decision to the UA Judicial Board, and the UA presidential debate, originally scheduled for March 13, was delayed pending a decision.

Ultimately, the Lipkovitz-Donegan ticket was allowed to participate in the rescheduled debate on March 16, and the Judicial Board upheld their appeal on March 17, just two hours before voting opened.

Candidate responses

In a statement to *The Tech*, Abdelbarr expressed enthusiasm about stepping into her new position despite the turbulent election season.

"We are so excited to step into this role, begin onboarding, and align in a way that brings about the student government students want to see," Abdelbarr wrote. "We are also so grateful that more of the student body is interested in and engaged with what the UA is doing and what we plan to do in the future."

Abdelbarr and Garfi ran on a platform of increased transparency, improved access to food, and ensuring the safety of all MIT community members, especially "international and marginalized students." Abdelbarr also promised stability and concrete results, citing her prior experience as the 2025-2026 UA Vice President.

Despite the loss, Donegan remains firm in his resolve to effect change in the UA. He will continue serving as a UA Council voting member to "advocate for a more efficient and transparent student government."

"My dormspam and campaign brought attention to the lack of transparency and fiscal responsibility in our student government. I believe my actions have already created positive and lasting change, and I am glad I had the opportunity to stand up for my beliefs," Donegan stated.

Jones expressed reservations about whether the "fundamental issues" with the UA would be resolved with Abdelbarr's presidency.

"Based on the lack of a clear list of priorities ... and the commitment in her postering to many of the same policies that earned the UA a reputation for frivolous spending, I have my doubts," Jones wrote. Moving forward, Jones plans to work with Abdelbarr to address important issues on campus.

Community responses

Former Election Commission member Ananth Venkatesh '28



PHOTO COURTESY OF FERNANDA GUERRERO

Mariam Abdelbarr '27 (left) and Francesca Garfi '29 (right) have been elected the 2026-2027 UA President and Vice President.

called Abdelbarr and Garfi's victory "well deserved." However, he was "very disappointed" by the Election Commission's decisions to remove the Lipkovitz-Donegan ticket from the ballot and appeal the UA Judicial Board decision.

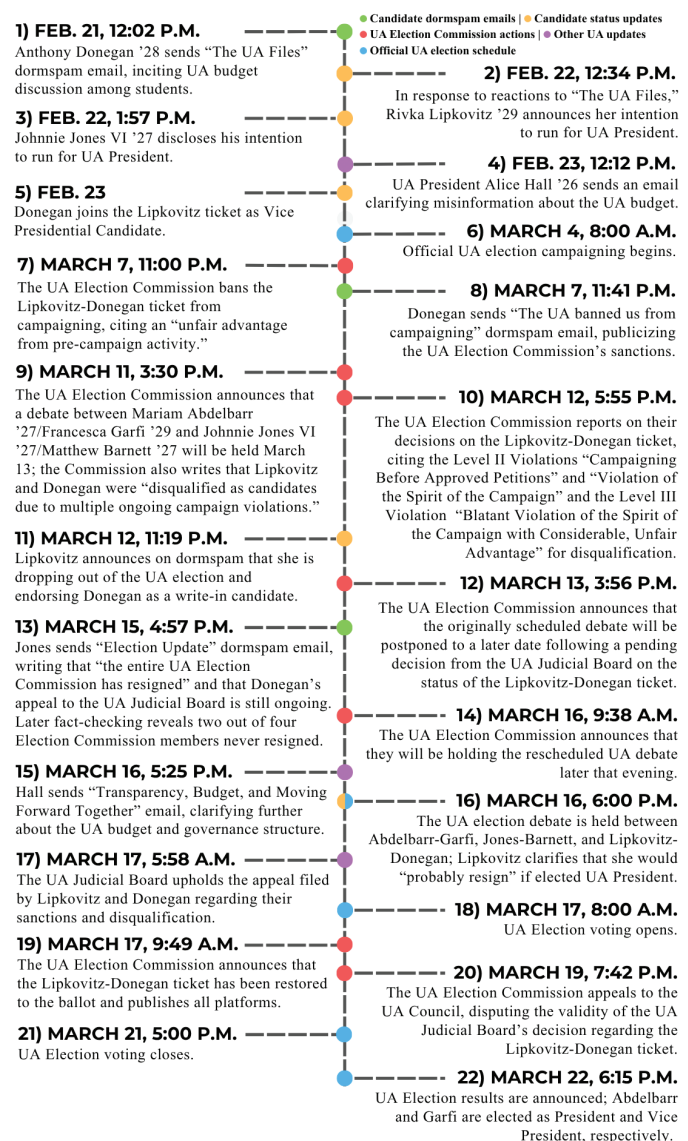
Venkatesh also raised various concerns about the UA's current election structure. According to him, signature requirements for candidates burden opposition candidates and "greatly favor" the incumbent, leading to many one-candidate elections. In addition, Venkatesh worries that the current voting system is vulnerable to spoilers and vote splitting effects.

He lauded the unique competitiveness of this year's election, explaining how it pushed candidates' platforms to "reflect an influx of new ideas from the student body and candidates around them." Finally, Venkatesh looks forward to seeing the UA administration increase funding for student groups and participatory budgeting, as well as expand dining opinions and "other forms of direct democracy."

Hall, the outgoing UA President, was happy to see increased engagement this election cycle, but criticized how "conversations went from productive to destructive."

"Everyone at this school is special and has something unique to offer," Hall wrote as parting advice to the MIT community. "Even if at first, it seems that you do not see eye to eye, be patient and try to understand one another because when we work as a team, we can do incredible things at MIT and beyond."

2026 UA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION TIMELINE



GRACE ZHANG—THE TECH

Timeline of the 2026 UA presidential election, including key events, candidacy updates, and the election schedule.

04/02 IN SHORT

Campus Preview Weekend begins on Thursday, April 16 and ends on Sunday, April 19.

Patriots' Day Holiday is on Monday, April 20.

Drop Date is on Tuesday, April 21.

Interested in joining *The Tech*? Email tt-join@mit.edu

Send news and tips to tt-tips@mit.edu

NEW UA ELECTS

2026-2027 UA election results announced after a contentious season. **NEWS, p. 1**

'DAUGHTERS DOCUMENTARY'

The heartbreaking story of incarcerated fathers. **ARTS, p. 4**

NELSONS LEAVES BSO

BSO conductor to leave in 2027 after over a decade. **ARTS, p. 5**



RESEARCHING FUNGUS

More on the President of the Postdoctoral Association. **SCIENCE, p. 7**

ENERGY TALKS

The complexities and benefits of renewable energy. **SCIENCE, p. 8**

SECTIONS

News 1
 Arts 3
 Science 7

EVENT REVIEW

'Daughters' documentary directors Angela Patton and Natalie Rae talk about the emotional toll of parental incarceration at WBUR CitySpace

Patton: "You are not correcting anything when you are purposefully ripping families apart and destroying lives"

Daughters

Angela Patton and Natalie Rae

WBUR CitySpace, Boston

March 27, 2026

By Vivian Hir
SENIOR EDITOR

On Friday, March 27, WBUR CitySpace hosted a screening and discussion of *Daughters*, an award-winning 2024 documentary about four girls ages 5–15 who prepare for a special father-daughter dance with their incarcerated fathers in a Washington, D.C. jail. To attend the dance, the fathers must complete a 10-week fatherhood program in which they reflect upon family, relationships, and incarceration. The event began with a 34-minute screening of the film, followed by a discussion with directors Angela Patton and Natalie Rae moderated by WBUR reporter Simón Rios.

Angela Patton is the founder of Camp Diva Leadership Academy and the CEO of Girls for a Change, a nonprofit that aims to empower and prepare Black girls for the world. In 2012, Patton gave a TEDxWomen talk about organizing a father-daughter dance in a jail in Richmond, Virginia, which has gained around a million views. Natalie Rae is a film director from Canada who has directed commercial campaigns, global PSAs, and music videos. *Daughters* is her debut feature documentary.

A heartbreaking film

Daughters opens with a montage of black and white shots of the father-daughter dance. The background sound starts with key quotes from Patton's TED talk, which then transitions to contemporary instrumental music that is bittersweet and sentimental. A particularly touching scene is when a crying girl tightly hugs her father, reflecting the emotional toll of a father's separation from his daughter.

After the introduction, the film shares intimate interviews that focus on the lives of four girls: Aubrey (age 5), Santana (age 10), Ja'Ana (age 11), and Raziah (age 15). What makes *Daughters* special is that these interviews are not driven by a clear topic or list of questions from the directors. Instead, the girls share their thoughts and feelings about their father's incarceration, ranging from Aubrey's kind and lighthearted remarks about her dad to Santana's palpable anger at her dad for his past crimes.

By presenting individuals from varied backgrounds and ages, the film does an excellent job conveying the emotional weight and complex feelings that come with pa-

rental incarceration. The intimate, close-up shots of the girls make their emotions and pain feel visceral for the audience, such as Santana's feelings of hurt and shame.

Besides the girls, the film also provides a nuanced glimpse into the difficult emotions that the fathers experience when they participate in group discussions about fatherhood, which are facilitated by a counselor. From these reflective discussions, many of the fathers opened up and became vulnerable, expressing regret for not being present for their daughters and being in jail. Some shared that they haven't even seen their daughter in real life. These scenes not only helped to humanize the fathers, but also cultivated empathy for them despite their history.

The story behind *Daughters*

Daughters came to fruition because of Rae's interest in collaborating with Patton on a documentary about the father-daughter dance after Rae was deeply inspired by Patton's TED talk. Because she grew up with a father who wasn't very present, Rae was moved to tears when Patton said, "Our fathers are our mirrors that we reflect back on when we decide what type of man we deserve." Patton's talk motivated Rae to ad-



Poster for Natalie Rae and Angela Patton's documentary 'Daughters,' a 2024 Sundance Film Festival winner.

dress the issue of daughters with absent fathers, as she believes that this problem is related to gender equality.

"We really like to fight as young women and we are trying to be equal and do all these things," Rae said. "But maybe a part we tend to overlook is the relationship with our dads."

Although Patton received many emails from journalists and filmmakers who wanted to film a documentary, she did not respond



WBUR reporter Simón Rios (right) hosts a conversation with 'Daughters' documentary directors Natalie Rae (left) and Angela Patton (center) at WBUR CitySpace on Friday, March 27, 2026.

to their requests because she felt that their intentions were not genuine. However, Patton was struck by Rae's authenticity based on her interest in wanting to meet Patton and the girls who started the father-daughter dance. As a result, the two of them decided to work on this project, which ultimately took eight years before premiering in 2024.

Patton emphasized the importance of giving the interviewees time so they would feel comfortable with the film crew's presence, given that the documentary discusses many personal and heavy topics. Patton credited the entire team for prioritizing care over the camera, as they did not pressure people to be filmed if they didn't feel comfortable. She urged journalists in the audience to "stop chasing the story" and instead give people time and grace.

"They will come to you if you have a relationship," Patton said. "Do truth telling *with* them and not for them."

Continuing Patton's point, Rae shared that she made *Daughters* a long-scale project so the documentary would be a coming-of-age film that showed the girls growing up over time.

"We follow them for a number of years to really see what that one day of touch does for the rest of their lives," Rae said.

She also underscored the importance of building intimacy and trust with the people in the film, which required time. As a result, Rae's approach to filming was not a "set interview," but rather a series of unstructured conversations with the girls in the film.

In regards to the film crew's emotions when they saw the father-daughter dance, Patton described it as a complicated emotional experience filled with joy, anger, and sadness.

"I'm still thinking about all of those fathers that are not able to participate," Patton said. "I know what's going to happen when we have to separate them."

Despite the emotional pain and "secondary trauma," what inspires Patton to pursue this work is reminding herself how her efforts are "life-changing" for the daughters and incarcerated fathers.

The special fatherhood program and father-daughter dance has had a tremendous positive impact on the families. The fathers in the program not only had stronger relationships with their daughters, but also were significantly less likely to be incarcerated again. According to Patton, the non-recidivism rate of the fathers in the program is 95%. Meanwhile, the recidivism rate in the U.S. is 70% within five years.

Patton underscored the importance of advocating for visitation practices and touch visits so incarcerated parents can be connected with their children. In the last decade, hundreds of jails have stopped touch visits and now offer video visits that require a fee. Patton called out the irony of the word "correctional facility," saying, "you are not correcting anything when you are purposefully ripping families apart and destroying lives." However, Patton is hopeful that programs like the one in *Daughters* can reunite families and significantly lower recidivism.

Although *Daughters* focuses on Black girls with incarcerated fathers, Patton argued that the documentary is also for the "invisible" children out there who have an incarcerated parent, regardless of race or gender. She ended her remarks with a powerful question for the audience, asking, "What can I do while I'm on the outside to make it better for any child that is invisible?"

BOOK REVIEW

'A Terribly Nasty Business' is as much of a romp as its predecessor

Seales returns to the world of 'A Most Agreeable Murder' with another charming regency murder mystery

★★★★☆

A Terribly Nasty Business

Julia Seales

Random House

June 24, 2025

By Rebecca Showalter Enamorado

Two years after the success of her first novel, *A Most Agreeable Murder*, Julia Seales has written a sequel titled *A Terribly Nasty Business*. In her new novel, Seales takes her beloved characters on a new adventure in another delightful satire combining Jane Austen's romance and Agatha Christie's detective fiction.

In *A Most Agreeable Murder*, readers follow Beatrice Steel, a young woman trying to navigate the rules and expectations

of Regency-era England while hiding her obsession with true crime. Beatrice would rather solve a murder mystery than embroider, much to the despair of her mother. But when an eligible bachelor unexpectedly drops dead at a ball, Beatrice finally gets an opportunity to fulfill her dream of solving a murder.

Thus begins Beatrice's first murder investigation, where she comes up against ladies with suspiciously good scone-making abilities, gentlemen who would stoop to crime before doing something so degrading as get-

ting an actual job, and the occasional ghost. Meanwhile, Beatrice must come to terms with who she truly is and figure out a way to reveal her passion for murder investigations without forever being ostracized from society for being a morbid creep.

After the events of Seales's debut novel, Beatrice and her fellow detective Vivek Drake move to London in *A Terribly Nasty Business* to open a private investigation agency. Unfortunately, Drake's former part-

Andris Nelsons to leave Boston after 13 seasons as music director of the BSO

Musicians and patrons mourn the visionary maestro's exit amid conflicting visions for the orchestra

By **Chloe Lee**
ARTS EDITOR

On the gusting morning of March 17, more than 100 musicians and staff members gathered on the steps of Symphony Hall, chanting in unison: "Andris, Andris, Andris...we love you!" Their voices echoed through Boston as a poignant prelude to classical music's most unexpected departure. Earlier, on March 6, Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) President and CEO Chad Smith had announced that Andris Nelsons, the orchestra's music director since 2014, would conclude his tenure at the end of the 2027 Tanglewood season. This decision was shocking for an institution that had seemed, just months before, secure in its artistic vision.

When Nelsons first took the podium at Symphony Hall on Sept. 27, 2014, he became the youngest music director the BSO had appointed in over a century. The Latvian-born maestro arrived as a fresh voice at a moment when the orchestra desperately needed one. His predecessor, James Levine, had left a fractured ensemble in 2011; luckily, Nelsons had an extraordinary gift for transformation. Over his 13 years in Boston, Nelsons shifted the BSO's identity. His decade-long focus on the symphonies of Dmitri Shostakovich produced what many consider one of the era's most defining recording projects, a cycle that garnered multiple Grammy Awards. The orchestral community took notice, and by 2018, Nelsons had been named Musical America's Artist of the Year, a recognition that seemed to cement his place among the world's great conductors.

But Nelsons's influence extended beyond the concert hall. Under his direction, the BSO re-established its reputation internationally, completing four European tours and multiple journeys to Japan. In 2015, the orchestra performed at festivals in London, Salzburg, Vienna, Lucerne, Milan, Paris, Cologne, and Berlin — a statement of artistic confidence that was widely applauded.

Nelsons also created a unique transatlantic partnership between the BSO and the historic Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig, bringing the cultural and musical niches of both ensembles to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. This partnership, which began in 2017 when Nelsons took on the position of Gewandhauskapellmeister, was a bold artistic vision that few conductors could have conceived, let alone executed.

The collaboration between Nelsons and the BSO's musicians was strong and central to his tenure. Principal flutist Lorna McGhee captured this sentiment in a letter to the board that resonated with others in the classical music world: "To work with Andris is to work at the pinnacle of our profession. He is one of the most sought-after, highly respected music directors the world over. He is the deepest, most humble, most sincere, truest musician I have ever worked with. Working with him at the BSO has been the artistic highlight of my life."

Seales pens cozy mystery

Seales, from Page 4

ner, the famous Sir Huxley, has monopolized the business of private investigation in London, leaving Beatrice and Drake to investigate missing pets and misplaced glasses.

Beatrice is struggling to keep their business afloat when she discovers a series of murders amidst the London arts community. Now, she must solve the case before Sir Huxley to save her business. Meanwhile, Beatrice must navigate both her relationship with Drake and her mother's constant entreaties to quit investigating and finally find a rich husband. Seales continues to keep readers guessing and laughing as Beatrice infiltrates the upper crust of London society to track down the killer.

Just like its predecessor, *A Terribly Nasty Business* is hilarious. Seales continues to affectionately poke fun at Austen and Regency romance while weaving a mystery filled with unexpected twists and turns that is simultaneously clever and delightfully ridiculous.

Edwin Barker, who served as the BSO's principal bass for nearly half a century before his retirement last year, offered a similar statement: "I have never seen the esprit de corps in the orchestra so high as it has been under Andris Nelsons's tenure."

Nelsons introduced a unique commitment to contemporary music. Under his direction, the BSO and Tanglewood Music Center commissioned over 100 new works. Under his direction, the orchestra gave 22 world premieres and 13 U.S. premieres. Another highlight of Nelsons's tenure involves one of classical music's most important initiatives. In February 2020, when a planned Asian tour was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Nelsons pivoted to create the first Concert for the City, a free community performance at Symphony Hall. This event became an annual tradition, bringing music directly to Boston residents who may never otherwise experience it.

Under Nelsons's baton, Grammy victories continued to accumulate for the BSO.



Andris Nelsons conducts Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, courtesy of BSO and Robert Torres.

Beyond the Shostakovich cycle, the orchestra won Grammy Awards for recordings of Shostakovich's symphonies No. 4 and 11, a complete Richard Strauss symphonic works collection, and, most recently in February 2026, the BSO won a Grammy for "Shostakovich: The Cello Concertos" with cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

Yet for all these accomplishments, it seems it was not sufficient to overcome what the BSO's board termed a lack of "alignment on future vision." The announcement in early March seemed to come from nowhere, even though it later became clear that negotiations had been underway since the previous September, a fact that surprised both musicians and patrons.

The speed and secrecy of this decision shocked the orchestra; musicians learned

of Nelsons's departure at the same moment as the general public, a breach of trust that several orchestra members underscored as a fundamental violation of the institution's values.

"There is a fundamental lack of common decency in not including the musicians in any discussions leading up to the decision," McGhee wrote to the board. "It is disingenuous to talk of 'our beloved orchestra' when we are treated as if we don't exist."

Double bass player Tom Van Dyck went further, writing that the decision and its manner represented "the biggest crisis since its founding in 1881," according to the *New York Times*.

"Not only does the manner of Andris' dismissal run counter to this stewardship," Van Dyck wrote, "the decision, the lack of communication, and the poor judgement involved signal to musicians that they are not to be consulted."

The musicians' statement is unambiguous, strongly opposing the decision by the



PHOTO COURTESY OF WINSLOW TOWNSON

Boston Symphony Orchestra's music director Andris Nelsons leads a program containing works by Vrebalov, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich.

with the aim of a mutually amicable final chapter. While this is not the decision I anticipated or wanted, I am unwaveringly committed to you and to our work together."

He added that he understood "the decision was not related to artistic standards, performances, or achievements during my tenure," suggesting that the parting stemmed from strategic disagreements rather than any artistic shortcoming.

As the 2026-2027 season unfolds, the BSO faces a delicate task: properly honoring Nelsons's extraordinary contributions while planning a course for the future. The Tanglewood season will traditionally conclude with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the "Ode to Joy," a coda that, given the circumstances, seems both fitting and bittersweet.

In the meantime, Nelsons will continue to lead the Vienna Philharmonic, conduct at the Gewandhaus, and maintain his role as Head of Conducting at Tanglewood. His international prominence ensures he will remain among the world's most sought-after conductors. For Boston, however, the loss is palpable. As McGhee concluded in her letter to the board: "I implore you, please reverse your decision."

The maestro's final season approaches, and the encore, it seems, will be a farewell.

Board of Trustees to end Nelsons's appointment, signaling a strong belief in his vision for the future.

Nelsons has responded with grace. In a letter to the BSO community, he wrote, "The Board has decided that my music directorship will conclude in August 2027,

Capture the Moment

Join Photo at The Tech

tt-join@mit.edu

SPORTS ARTS LIFE FEATURES NEWS OPINION ENTERTAINMENT WEATHER SCIENCE

CONCERT REVIEW

Pianist Víkingur Ólafsson makes his solo debut at Boston's Symphony Hall on March 20

The soloist played pieces by Beethoven, Bach, and Schubert in the keys of E major and minor

Opus 109: Beethoven, Bach, Schubert
Víkingur Ólafsson, piano
Vivo Performing Arts
Symphony Hall
March 20, 2026

By Vivian Hir
SENIOR EDITOR

On March 20, acclaimed pianist Víkingur Ólafsson made his solo debut in Boston's Symphony Hall. Last year, Ólafsson performed a stunning piano duet with Yuja Wang at the same venue. The title for this performance was "Opus 109," reflecting Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109, the last piece in the program. Besides Op. 109, Ólafsson also played a selection of pieces from Bach, Schubert, and Beethoven. Although the repertoire had distinct musical styles, all pieces were in the keys of E major or minor.

Ólafsson began with Bach's Prelude in E Major from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, a short piece with light staccatos full of *joie de vivre*. A nonchalant opening was balanced well with the minor melodies in the middle, adding complexity and contrast to the piece's emotions. Ólafsson's control of tempo was exquisite; he slowed down at times that were appropriate, resulting in a performance of short, smooth twists and turns.

Following the Prelude was Beethoven's Sonata No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90, a special sonata for its two movements that feel like an emotional rollercoaster ride. In the first movement, Ólafsson played with great intensity, evoking scenes of rolling, crashing waves in a tumultuous storm most notably in the latter half. On the other hand, the second movement was happy and animated, interspersed with sections of dreamy, gentle

passages that came from Ólafsson's delicate touch.

Ólafsson then returned to Bach, but this time played Bach's Partita No. 6 in E minor, a suite of dance movements for a solo instrument. The Partita was a kaleidoscope of dances, each one special for its rhythm and melody. The piece began with the "Tocatta," an elegant, courtly dance filled with embellishments that Ólafsson finely played. However, the playing at times felt a bit too deliberate and forceful, causing the melody to feel heavy.

Meanwhile, Ólafsson's dextrous, nimble fingers shone in "Corrente": he produced a melody that depicted a person dancing on their tiptoes, with frequent small jumps that felt like a game of hide-and-seek. He also executed the syncopation well, allowing the movement's polyphonic texture to clearly shine. The complex layering of the voices was also encapsulated in the "Tempo di Gavotta" that had sprightly passages accentuated with staccato notes and quick flourishes, which conjured images of a galloping horse.

After taking the audience through a series of dances in the Partita, Ólafsson played Schubert's Piano Sonata in E minor. The first movement ("Moderato") began with a quiet, poignant melody that underwent significant transformations throughout, from a playful melody to an agitated passage, followed by a calm ending. Ólafsson not only effectively brought out the major dynamic contrasts in the movement, but also elegantly through the nuanced voicing.

The second movement ("Allegretto") had a romantic opening that became passionate and energetic through the flowing cadenzas in the development. In the end, the piece returned to its original blissful theme, with the sustained alternating notes from the left hand that provided continuous steady energy in the background.

The recital concluded with Op. 109, the program's centerpiece. Each of the three movements burst with different colors. The first movement ("Vivace ma non troppo — Adagio espressivo") brimmed with joy. The descending notes in the cadenza began like



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROBERT TORRES

Pianist Víkingur Ólafsson performs his solo debut at Symphony Hall on Friday, March 20, 2026.

tinkling chimes and then evolved to sound like church bells that rang with jubilation. In contrast, the quick and declarative chords in the second movement ("Prestissimo") was like a militant march.

The last movement of Op. 109 ("Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo") had striking contrasts. The movement began with a slow, meditative passage that felt incredibly light. This spell was broken in the middle with an intense and virtuosic passage that Ólafsson executed like a perpetual motion machine with unstoppable energy. In the end, however, the movement returned to its original, restful state, restoring the dreamlike effect again.

After the audience gave a standing ovation for Ólafsson's performance that had no pauses; he closed the performance not with two, but four encores. He first played an arrangement of "Air on a G String" for composer György Kurtág, a beautiful piece that felt as light as a feather. Then, he played Rameau's *Le Rappel des Oiseaux*, a light and

quick piece filled with crystal clear embellishments reminiscent of the sound of birds chirping.

Following *Le Rappel des Oiseaux* was "The Arts and The Hours," a transcription based on Rameau's last opera, *Les Boréades*. The piece felt like a mirror, as if the melodies reflected off of each other. This mirror-like quality also opened the piece to introspection and contemplation, with a tinge of nostalgia. Ólafsson's final encore was Philip Glass's Etude No. 6, a very brisk piece with repetitive notes and chords that conveyed a heightened sense of urgency, as if time was ticking and running out.

Overall, Ólafsson did an excellent job taking the audience through an engaging musical journey, from the delightful contrapuntal melodies in Bach's Partita to the wide-ranging passages in Beethoven's Op. 109. From this program, it is clear how each of the composers' works are related to one another despite coming from different musical eras.

CRAZY
ONES
WANTED

ARGONETA.COM\CRAZY

Want to interview Nobel winners, entrepreneurs, scientists, and fellow students about their work?

Join Science at *The Tech*!
tt-join@mit.edu

We get you the tickets.
You get us the review.

ARTS at *The Tech*
Established 1881

events • movies • theater • concerts
music • books • restaurants

tt-join@mit.edu

Volume VVV, Number NNNN

Want a Front-Page Byline?
Join News at *The Tech* #

Join at tt-join@mit.edu
[HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE]

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Duis quis turpis in ipsum ornare sodales ut eu ex. Donec vel mi egestas leo molestie placerat. Sed arcu urna, facilisis id risus et, scelerisque placerat urna. In odio mauris, feugiat at faucibus non, facilisis non purus. Curabitur

dui. Praesent ullamcorper hendrerit dui, a auctor diam elementum a. Quisque bibendum elit sit amet felis euismod facilisis. In convallis enim vitae accumsan venenatis. Integer accumsan cursus est, eget mollis nunc. In lectus lorem, cursus vel neque at, vestibulum commodo ex. Vivamus imperdiet ligula non libero sollicitudin auctor. Praesent sagittis, tellus ac cursus scelerisque,

Etiam imperdiet pellentesque tellus, at ornare sem tincidunt vel. Morbi porta tempus sem, vitae convallis augue feugiat non. Mauris ut tincidunt metus, vitae consequat velit. Suspendisse non facilisis enim, in laoreet mauris. Pellentesque eu auctor ante. Integer egestas nulla orci. Maecenas ultrices nisl orci, fringilla congue libero eleifend vel. Suspendisse potenti. Phasellus consequat ex

MEET THE MINDS

Dr. Yiqiao Zheng uses her multidisciplinary expertise both inside and outside of the lab

The current President of the Postdoctoral Association has changed fields twice, and she has thoughts on how science is conducted

By **Veronika Moroz**
SCIENCE EDITOR

From developing new biotechnology to documenting genetic blindness to analyzing cellular division in a very peculiar fungus, Yiqiao Zheng PD has worn many hats in her scientific research career. Now, as the president of the MIT Postdoctoral Association (PDA), she uses her experience to bring together a community that could otherwise feel isolated.

Finding (and filling) the gaps

Between her undergrad, PhD, and postdoc, Zheng has switched fields two times: she originally started as a biomedical engineering student at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. However, she felt like there was something missing in her work.

"We always claim that this new tool is going to solve this medical problem," Zheng said. "So then I have this question: is it true that the problems that we claim are being solved by our technology are actually being solved?"

To get a better understanding of what technology can do for medicine, Zheng entered a PhD program in genetics and genomics at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Her project focused on genetic mutations that cause blindness by disrupting the function of the retina, the cells in the back of the eye that reflect light to process images. She ended up writing a review paper summarizing 25 years' worth of retinal blindness research and curating a database of the mutations in all known blindness cases.

The database gives people at risk for developing blindness more information and more options. "They can look up our research and say, 'Hey, so I have this variant in this gene at this location; can I predict what my condition will be and then can I seek medical assistance early on?'" Zheng explained.

Towards the end of her PhD, Zheng's advisor began clinical trials to expand screening for blindness-causing mutations and work towards treating the condition with gene therapy. "That really brought me to a position where curiosity-driven research is good, but the goal really is trying to use the knowledge that I generate to help people," she said.

But she didn't stop there. Because of the competitive nature of the genomics field and her desire to understand biology on a cellular level, Zheng switched fields again after her PhD — this time, to fungal biology.

A very "fun" fungus

After attending a seminar by Professor of Biology Daniel Lew — Zheng's current men-

tor and supervisor — as a graduate student, Zheng began a postdoc studying a special fungus called *Aureobasidium pullulans*.

A. pullulans interested Zheng for a number of reasons. First of all, it's ubiquitous: scientists have documented the fungus' survival everywhere from oceans to plants to even Antarctica. How it does that is still a mystery.

The fungus also has a special reproductive process. Typical cell division occurs through a carefully choreographed process called mitosis, in which all of the cellular components are duplicated and then segregated onto opposite sides of a mother cell. The mother cell then divides in half, creating two identical daughter cell copies. But instead of dividing into two daughter cells, *A. pullulans* can break into multiple daughters at once.

"Do all the daughter cells inherit a similar amount of the materials they need to survive? If so, how does the cell do that? If not, then what is the mechanism?" Zheng asked.

Zheng credits Lew with navigating decreases in funding for biological research in a way that still gives her a chance to pursue the questions that she finds exciting.

"His work has always been driven by curiosity, not by funding sources or what other people wanted to do. I personally think it's a privilege that actually brought many unexpected discoveries," Zheng said.

Tackling old problems in new ways

Zheng's experience across many fields of biology allows her to see the institution of science from more angles. "It helps me understand the system better, because I have a new or different perspective," she said. "It really creates an opportunity to answer a new question with an innovative approach."

This interdisciplinary approach to solving problems also helps Zheng run the PDA. Zheng joined the PDA last year when she began serving as the Community Building and Committee Chair. Her task of connecting postdocs was especially challenging because they don't enter MIT as a single cohort and don't necessarily take classes, giving them few chances to interact.

"People have always told me that they feel isolated working as a postdoc here," she recalled. "That's when I decided I wanted to do something to build a community."

Though Zheng has heard that her work has brought postdocs together, her job has become even harder as some academic departments are forced to downsize diversity-related programs due to lack of funding.

Her progress in the role is what led Zheng to become the president of the PDA. Now, her focus is more on understanding



PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. YIQIAO ZHENG

Lew Lab postdoc and Postdoc Association President Dr. Yiqiao Zheng in her lab, March 2026.

belonging on campus, with the PDA planning on releasing a postdoc-specific belonging survey next year.

As president, Zheng has taken on the responsibility of advocacy. "Across the board, postdoc fellows are not recognized as employees, so they don't have many of the employee benefits," including medical insurance and childcare, Zheng explained.

She's also advocating for better working conditions, like better-functioning Internet, which can play a huge role in how long certain research processes take. "Many postdocs have told me that they

have this feeling that when they come to MIT that it's already an honor or privilege for you to have you come to MIT," Zheng stated. "But then we sometimes feel we are not supported enough."

Though Zheng notes that her departments' administrative team is very helpful and efficient, she has colleagues whose admin has been much harder to reach.

"If other schools are doing better and better supporting their trainees, then I think one day, MIT will lose its talents because of ignoring so many of the things that they take for granted," Zheng added.

Are you a grammar ninja?

The Tech needs copy editors.

should say grammar



Help us out.

email tt-join@mit.edu

