

# CHURCH STREET SCHOOL FOR MUSIC AND ART

EST. 1990

## NYC Community Arts Nonprofit Honors Musician, Educator, & Immigration Activist Dr. Tereza Lee

Church Street School for Music and Art (CSSMA) will honor Dr. Tereza Lee during their annual gala, **THE EVENT**, on Monday, March 9th, 2026, at the iconic Roxy Hotel in Tribeca.

**Dr. Tereza Lee's** story is one of resilience, perseverance, and the transformative power of music. Born in Brazil to parents displaced by the Korean War, Lee grew up undocumented and impoverished in inner-city Chicago. Introduced to the piano at age seven, she taught herself to play on a piano generously donated to her. She practiced for hours daily and performed regularly, quickly developing a deep love and talent for the instrument. But as her musical talent grew, so did her awareness of the barriers she and her family faced as undocumented immigrants. After a sibling's near-fatal accident left them with overwhelming medical debt, Lee became determined to help support her family through music.



With the help of her high school choir teacher, at 16 years old Lee earned a full scholarship to the Merit School of Music. Merit became her second home, and its Directors, Duffie Adelson and Ann Monaco, became like family, while the piano became her passion. In her first year, she was the first inner-city student to win the CSO Youth Concerto Competition and perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She also won multiple competitions and national festival invitations that same year. Despite these achievements, her undocumented status initially barred her from college. With the advocacy of Merit Director Ann Monaco and Illinois Senator Dick Durbin, Lee became the namesake of the Tereza Lee Bill, which enabled her to attend college and later informed the DREAM Act. She went on to study at the Manhattan School of Music, where she became an immigration activist within New York City's undocumented community.

Now a U.S. citizen, mother of three, and holder of a Doctor of Musical Arts degree, Dr. Lee has performed at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center and taught thousands of students. She currently serves as Director of Programs at Church Street School for Music & Art, a nonprofit community arts school in Tribeca that works to ensure equal access to high quality arts education for all. In her tenure as Programs Director, she has grown enrollment to 861 students in 2025, overseen the awarding of over \$450,000 in scholarships since September 2022, and expanded in-school programming across Manhattan and the South Bronx, serving 1,120 students weekly.

This year, Church Street School will honor Dr. Lee during their annual gala, THE EVENT, celebrating her journey as a DREAMer, her excellence as a pianist and educator, and her continued commitment to advancing the legacy of equitable access to high-quality arts education for all. **"Art is not a luxury—it's a lifeline, and I'm living proof.,"** said Dr. Lee **"I'm grateful to share my story and help Church Street School raise vital funds to serve our community for another 35 years and beyond."**