

MAY FESTIVAL

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Embargoed for 3 p.m. Oct. 4, 2015

James Conlon announces programs and artists for 2016 Cincinnati May Festival, May 20-28

Festival honors Maestro Conlon's extraordinary tenure as Music Director

CINCINNATI, OH – James Conlon, Music Director of the Cincinnati May Festival, announces the programs and artists for the 2016 Cincinnati May Festival, scheduled for **May 20-28, 2016**, the final May Festival in his extraordinary 37-year tenure as Music Director. Mr. Conlon is the longest-serving artistic leader in May Festival history, and among the longest-tenured music directors of any major classical music institution in the country. The 2016 May Festival pays homage to Mr. Conlon's unprecedented tenure, with programs that recall artistic milestones and audience favorites from the past four decades. The annual choral festival dates back 143 years, and features the volunteer **May Festival Chorus** and the acclaimed **Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (CSO)**. After this season, Mr. Conlon will be named May Festival **Music Director Laureate** and continue to have a presence conducting in Cincinnati both with the May Festival and the CSO.



“As I complete almost four decades as Music Director of the May Festival and working with the Chorus and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, I decided to program a Festival that would invoke some of my fondest memories of Cincinnati,” said **Mr. Conlon**. “Each selection of this year’s May Festival resonates in a special way with audiences, guest artists and the storied history of the Festival.”

The 2016 May Festival will also be the final Festival (and the final performances by any organization) to take place in Cincinnati’s historic Music Hall prior to its planned renovation. The 2017 May Festival will take place at the Taft Theatre in downtown Cincinnati while Music Hall is under construction, while the 2018 May Festival will be back in a newly-revitalized Music Hall.

Festival Highlights

Highlights of the 2016 May Festival include a powerful **all-Mozart** opening performance culminating with the composer’s **Mass in C minor**, as well as **Verdi’s Otello**, a favorite of Mr. Conlon’s. The Festival closes with **Mendelssohn’s** epic masterpiece, **Elijah**.

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The Festival will also include **Dvořák's *Stabat Mater***, the work Mr. Conlon conducted at his May Festival debut in 1978 at the invitation of then-Music Director James Levine. The annual and much-loved concert at **Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption in Covington, Kentucky**, will feature works commissioned for the occasion of Mr. Conlon's final season.

Several of the world's rising vocal stars and established greats make their May Festival debuts this season, including **Lisette Oropesa, Elizabeth DeShong, Gregory Kunde, Tamara Wilson, Egils Silins, Julianna DiGiacomo**, and **Anthony Dean Griffey**, while many more Festival favorites return, such as **Sara Murphy, Ben Bliss, Rodrick Dixon, Kristinn Sigmundsson** and **John Cheek** (who has been a regular guest of the May Festival since 1977 under James Levine).

2016 Cincinnati May Festival Program

8 p.m. Friday, May 20, 2016—Cincinnati Music Hall

The 2016 May Festival kicks off on **Friday, May 20** at Cincinnati Music Hall with **Mozart's** exquisite "**Great**" **Mass in C minor**. With its grandiose choruses, pristine virtuosity for soloists and soaring expressiveness, this is one of the composer's most-beloved works. Also on the program are Mozart's *Ave verum corpus* and *Exsultate jubilate*. **Soprano Lisette Oropesa, mezzo-soprano Elizabeth DeShong, tenor Ben Bliss and baritone John Cheek** bring their artistry to these masterpieces along with the May Festival Chorus and CSO.

8 p.m. Saturday, May 21, 2016—Cincinnati Music Hall

On the second day of the Festival, jealousy, deceit and passion fuel **Verdi's** epic *Otello*. Mr. Conlon has long held an affinity for Verdi's operas, and first conducted a complete *Otello* with the May Festival in 1987. Bringing Shakespeare's characters to life alongside the May Festival Chorus and CSO are tenor **Gregory Kunde** (Otello), soprano **Tamara Wilson** (Desdemona), baritone **Egils Silins** (Iago), tenor **Ben Bliss** (Cassio), mezzo-soprano **Sara Murphy** (Emilia), tenor **Rodrick Dixon** (Roderigo) and baritone **John Cheek** (Lodovico, Montano, the Herald).



8 p.m. Sunday, May 22, 2016—Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption

Mr. Conlon and May Festival Youth Chorus director **James Bagwell** both conduct this annual performance at one of the country's most exquisite spaces, the **Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption** in Covington, Kentucky. This concert remains a regular favorite of the May Festival since introduced by Mr. Conlon in 1980. On the program are commissioned works by **Julia Adolphe** and **Alvin Singleton**, nodding to Mr. Conlon's longstanding

championship of new works and contemporary composers. Ms. Adolphe, hailed as being "alive with invention," (*The New Yorker*) has burst onto the compositional scene with works ranging from chamber operas to orchestral pieces, and recently co-produced *The Prodigal Son*, conducted by Mr. Conlon at the LA Opera. Mr. Singleton, a lifelong friend of Mr. Conlon's, previously composed *PraiseMaker* in honor of the May Festival's 125th anniversary in 1998. The **May Festival Youth Chorus** performs along with the May Festival Chorus.



8 p.m. Friday, May 27, 2016—Cincinnati Music Hall
Dvořák's deeply personal cantata, *Stabat Mater*, was written during a time of deep grief for the composer following the death of his daughter. This rarely-performed work is full of symbolism, following a journey of mourning to hope of Paradise. At the invitation of James Levine, Mr. Conlon made his May Festival debut in 1978 conducting *Stabat Mater*. Joining the CSO and May Festival Chorus will be soloists Julianna DiGiacomo (soprano), Elizabeth DeShong (mezzo-soprano), Anthony

Dean Griffey (tenor) and Kristinn Sigmundsson (baritone).

8 p.m. Saturday, May 28, 2016—Cincinnati Music Hall

The 2016 May Festival with one of the most epic works ever written for chorus, **Mendelssohn's** *Elijah*. Performed at the second ever May Festival and telling the fiery tale of the Old Testament prophet, *Elijah* has remained a favorite among musicians, critics and audiences. Finally, **Mr. Conlon** completes the Festival with a traditional rendition "**Hallelujah Chorus**" from **Handel's** *Messiah*. Joining the May Festival Chorus and CSO on this program are soprano **Julianna DiGiacomo**, mezzo-soprano **Sara Murphy**, tenor **Anthony Dean Griffey** and baritone **Egils Silins**.

WGUC broadcasts

Beginning Sunday, October 4, re-experience May Festival 2015. Each of last season's May Festival performances at Music Hall will be broadcast on Sunday evenings in October at 8 p.m. on 90.9 WGUC, Cincinnati's classical music radio station.

Supertitles

Supertitles will be provided for each of the four Music Hall performances (May 20, 21, 27 & 28), enabling concertgoers to more easily follow the stories and enhancing their Festival experience. Supertitles are made possible by a grant from **The Corbett Foundation**.

Ticket Information

Four-concert subscriptions start at \$88. **Subscription sales begin October 5, 2015**. For more information, please call **513.381.3300**. Single tickets will be available beginning March 10, 2016.

Conductors

James Conlon, Music Director

James Conlon, one of today's most versatile and respected conductors, has cultivated a vast symphonic, operatic and choral repertoire. Since his 1974 debut with the New York Philharmonic, he has conducted virtually every major American and European symphony orchestra. Through worldwide touring, an extensive discography and videography, numerous essays and commentaries, frequent television appearances and guest speaking engagements, Mr. Conlon is one of classical music's most recognized interpreters.



Mr. Conlon is Music Director of LA Opera, the Ravinia Festival (summer home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) and the Cincinnati May Festival, America's oldest choral festival, where he has served as Music Director for 36 years—more than any other music director in the festival's 143-year history. He will also take the post of Principal Conductor of the RAI National Symphony Orchestra in Torino, Italy in 2016. Mr. Conlon served as Principal Conductor of the Paris National Opera (1995-2004); General Music Director of the City of Cologne, Germany (1989-2002), where he was Music Director of both the Gürzenich Orchestra-Cologne Philharmonic and the Cologne Opera; and Music Director of the

Rotterdam Philharmonic (1983-1991). Mr. Conlon has conducted more than 270 performances at the Metropolitan Opera since his debut there in 1976. He has also conducted at Teatro alla Scala, the Royal Opera at Covent Garden in London, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and the Teatro del Opera di Roma.

At LA Opera, where he has served as Music Director since 2006, Mr. Conlon has conducted 52 different operas including 19 company premieres, two U.S. premieres and one world premiere. Highlights of his tenure include conducting the first Ring cycle in Los Angeles, initiating the groundbreaking Recovered Voices series, and spearheading Britten 100/LA, a city-wide celebration honoring the centennial of the composer's birth. His pre-concert lectures at LA Opera consistently attract capacity crowds. This season at LA Opera, Mr. Conlon conducts Jake Heggie's *Moby Dick*, Bellini's *Norma*, Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. He also leads Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* at the Wiener Staatsoper and Verdi's *Luisa Miller* at Teatro Real.

Mr. Conlon marks his final season as Music Director of the Ravinia Festival in the summer of 2015 with programming that celebrates his 11-year tenure including Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, Zemlinsky's *The Mermaid* and works by Mahler, Mozart and Shostakovich. In the 2015-2016 season he returns to conduct the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Orchestra Hall, as well as the San Francisco Symphony. In Europe he leads the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, RAI National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, and the National Philharmonic of Russia.

In an effort to raise awareness of the significance of the lesser-known works of composers silenced by the Nazi regime, Conlon has devoted himself to extensive programming of this music throughout Europe and North America. In 2013 he was awarded the Roger E. Joseph Prize at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion for his extraordinary efforts to eradicate racial and religious prejudice and discrimination, in 2007 he received the Crystal Globe Award from the Anti-Defamation League, and in 1999 he received the Zemlinsky Prize for his efforts in bringing that composer's music to international attention. His work on behalf of suppressed composers led to the creation of The OREL Foundation, an invaluable resource on the topic for music lovers, students, musicians and scholars, and the Ziering-Conlon Initiative for Recovered Voices at the Colburn School. His appearances throughout the country as a speaker on a variety of cultural and educational topics are widely praised.

Mr. Conlon's extensive discography and videography can be found on the EMI, Erato, Capriccio, Decca and Sony Classical labels. He has won two Grammy Awards for Best Classical Album and Best Opera Recording for the LA Opera recording of Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. He was among the five initial recipients of the Opera News awards and was honored by The New York Public Library as a "Library Lion." Mr. Conlon's other honors include a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Los Angeles (2010), the Music Institute of Chicago's Dushkin Award (2009), the Medal of the American Liszt Society (2008) and Italy's Premio Galileo 2000 Award for his significant contribution to music, art and peace in Florence (2008). Mr. Conlon was named Commandeur de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Minister of Culture and, in 2002, he received the Légion d'Honneur, France's highest distinction, from then-President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac.



Robert Porco, Director of Choruses

Robert Porco has been recognized as one of the leading choral musicians in the United States and for more than 37 years has been an active preparer and conductor of choral and orchestral works, including most of the major choral repertoire, as well as of opera. In 2011 Mr. Porco received Chorus America's "Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the

Professional Choral Art."

Mr. Porco's conducting career has spanned geographic venues across western Europe and the U.S., including performances in the Edinburgh Festival; Taipei, Taiwan; Lucerne, Switzerland; and Reykjavik, Iceland; and in the May Festival, Tanglewood Music Festival, Berkshire Music Festival, Blossom Festival and Grant Park Festival. He has been a regular guest conductor at the May Festival since 1991, with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra since 1996 and with The Cleveland Orchestra since 2000.

In 1989, Mr. Porco became Director of Choruses of the May Festival, and in 2010 he led the May Festival Chorus in the highly regarded premiere of *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*, a piece commissioned by the Chorus in honor of Mr. Porco's 20th season as director. Other notable events during Mr. Porco's tenure are four highly acclaimed appearances by the Chorus in Carnegie Hall: a 1991 performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with Jesús López-Cobos and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; a 1995 performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with Robert Shaw, The Cleveland Orchestra, the May Festival Chorus and other choruses; and an October 2001 performance of Britten's *War Requiem* with James Conlon and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. In addition, the May Festival Chorus's 2008 performance of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *On the Transmigration of Souls*, under the baton of the composer John Adams, led Mr. Adams to write, "The pure American quality of their enunciation and their perfectly balanced sonorities lifted the matter-of-fact plainness of the words to a transcendental level, and for once the piece did not seem as compromised and uneven as I had previously thought."

In 1998, Mr. Porco became Director of Choruses for The Cleveland Orchestra, preparing the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus for appearances in Severance Hall and the Blossom Festival and with the Orchestra at the Edinburgh Festival in 1999, at Carnegie Hall in 2002 and at the Lucerne Festival and London Proms in 2005. Mr. Porco's work during the 2013–14 season included preparing the Cleveland Orchestra Chorus for its debut with the Orchestra in Frankfurt, Paris and Luxembourg.

Mr. Porco has gained national recognition for his preparation of choruses for prominent conductors such as John Adams, Pierre Boulez, James Conlon, Andrew Davis, Christoph von Dohnányi, Paavo Järvi, Erich Kunzel, Raymond Leppard, James Levine, Jahja Ling, Jesús López-Cobos, Zubin Mehta, John Nelson, André Previn, Kurt Sanderling, Leonard Slatkin, Robert Shaw, Franz Welser-Möst, John Williams and David Zinman.

Mr. Porco taught doctoral-level choral conducting at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music from 1979 to 1998, and as a guest instructor in 2011 and 2012.

A highlight of his tenure at IU included leading a wholly student choral and orchestral ensemble of 250 in a highly acclaimed performance of Leonard Bernstein's Mass as part of the Tanglewood Music Festival's celebration of the composer's 70th birthday. As teacher and mentor, Mr. Porco has guided and influenced the development of hundreds of musicians, most of whom are now active as professional conductors, singers or teachers in schools of music, performance ensembles or solo careers. Mr. Porco remains a sought-after guest instructor and coach for conservatory students, young professional conductors and singers. His guest teaching venues have included Harvard University, the University of Miami Frost School of Music and Westminster Choir College (Princeton, NJ). From 1988 to 1998, Mr. Porco was Artistic Director and Conductor of the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir.



James Bagwell, Youth Chorus Director

James Bagwell maintains an active international schedule as a conductor of choral, operatic, and orchestral music. He has been Music Director for the May Festival Youth Chorus in Cincinnati since 1997. In 2009 he was appointed music director of The Collegiate Chorale and principal guest conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra, leading them in concerts at Carnegie Hall during the 2012-2013 season. Some of the highlights of this past season included Bellini's rarely-performed opera *Beatrice di Tenda* and the New York premiere of Philip Glass's *Toltec Symphony*, both at Carnegie Hall. He recently conducted a performance of Kurt Weill's *Knickerbocker Holiday* at Alice Tully Hall, which was recorded live for Gaslight Records and is the only complete recording of this musical. In July 2011 he prepared The Collegiate Chorale for three concerts at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland, and they will return in 2013 for four concerts.

In 2012 they traveled to Israel and the Salzburg Festival for four programs with The Israel Philharmonic. He has prepared The Concert Chorale of New York for numerous performances with the American Symphony Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Mostly Mozart Festival (broadcast nationally in 2006 on *Live from Lincoln Center*)—all in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center. Since 2003 he has been director of choruses for the Bard Music Festival, conducting and preparing choral works during the summer festival at The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College.

In June 2012 he conducted the Amici New York Orchestra at the OK Mozart Festival. Since 2011 he has collaborated with singer and composer Natalie Merchant, conducting a number of major orchestras across the country, including the San Francisco and Seattle Symphonies. In December 2011 Mr. Bagwell made his debut with The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in a highly acclaimed performance of *Messiah*.

James Bagwell has trained choruses for a number of major American and international orchestras, including the San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, NHK Symphony (Japan), St. Petersburg Symphony, Budapest Festival Orchestra, American Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

He has worked with such noted conductors as Zubin Mehta, Riccardo Muti, Lorin Maazel, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Michael Tilson Thomas, Louis Langrée, Leon Botstein, Ivan Fischer, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Raymond Leppard, James Conlon, Jesús López-Cobos, Erich Kunzel, Leon Fleischer, and Robert Shaw.

He conducted some twenty-five productions as music director of Light Opera Oklahoma, including *Candide*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *The Merry Widow*, among others. At Bard SummerScape he has lead various theatrical works, most notably *The Tender Land*, which received glowing praise from *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *Opera News*. He frequently appears as guest conductor for orchestras around the country and abroad, including the Jerusalem Symphony, Tulsa Symphony, and the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra. From 2005-2010 he was music director of The Dessoff Choirs in New York, who under his leadership made numerous appearances at Carnegie Hall in addition to the regular season. He holds degrees from Birmingham-Southern College, Florida State University, and Indiana University. He has taught since 2000 at Bard College, where he is Director of the Music Program and co-director of the Masters Program in conducting.

Ensembles

May Festival Chorus

The May Festival Chorus has earned acclaim locally, nationally and internationally for its musicality, vast range of repertoire and sheer power of sound. The Chorus of 145 professionally trained singers is the core artistic element of the Cincinnati May Festival as well as the official chorus of the Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestra. Throughout each season the chorus members collectively devote more than 40,000 hours in rehearsals and performances.



Founded in 1873, the annual May Festival is the oldest, and one of the most prestigious, choral festivals in the Western Hemisphere. The annual Festival boasts the May Festival Chorus and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra as anchors, hosts an international array of guest artists and presents two spectacular weekends of dynamic programming under the musical leadership of James Conlon and choral preparation of Robert Porco. James Conlon has provided the artistic leadership for more May Festivals than any other Music Director in the

Festival's 141-year history. Many important choral works have received their World and American premieres at the May Festival, including Johann Sebastian Bach's *Magnificat*, Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 3, Benjamin Britten's *Gloriana*, Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Death of the Bishop of Brindisi* and Robert Nathaniel Dett's *The Ordering of Moses*.

Beyond Cincinnati, the May Festival Chorus has performed with great success at numerous venues across the country, including four celebrated appearances at Carnegie Hall, the most recent performance being in May of 2014 for the Spring for Music Festival, with James Conlon and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

The May Festival Chorus has further strengthened its national presence through numerous PBS broadcasts of live concerts and several award-winning recordings, many in collaboration with the Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestra. In 2001 the Chorus recorded *Christmas with the May Festival Chorus*, a popular *a cappella* holiday compact disc. Their 2004 Telarc release, the world premiere recording of Franz Liszt's *St. Stanislaus* featuring James Conlon and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, was awarded the 30th International F. Liszt Record Grand Prix by the Liszt Society of Budapest. The Chorus is also featured on the 2012 Cincinnati Pops release, *Home for the Holidays*.

The May Festival Chorus has garnered two awards in recognition of its continuing artistic excellence and performances throughout the state. In 2011 the Chorus received the Spirit of Cincinnati USA Erich Kunzel Queen City Advocate Award from Cincinnati USA Convention and Visitors Bureau. In 1998 the Chorus earned the Irma Lazarus Award from the Ohio Arts Council's annual Governor's Awards for the Arts.

May Festival Youth Chorus

Now in its 29th year, the May Festival Youth Chorus provides the opportunity for high school students to rehearse and perform challenging choral repertoire in a demanding artistic environment. The group of roughly 40 students, led by director James Bagwell, rehearses weekly and currently represents over 20 area high schools. They have become an integral part of the annual Festival and routinely perform with the Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestras.



In addition, the Youth Chorus introduces the power of great choral music to residents through more than 30 performances each year at churches and arts centers, in ArtsWave events and across the region. Not only does the training and experience provided through the chorus build upon the students' existing musical training, for many of these talented and passionate young vocalists the Youth Chorus is the only music education they are able to access.

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

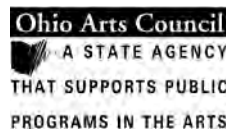
The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra is a dynamic ensemble of some of the world's finest musicians. The sixth oldest symphony orchestra in the U.S. and the oldest orchestra in Ohio, the CSO has played a leading role in the cultural life of Greater Cincinnati and the Midwest since its founding in 1895. Louis Langrée began his tenure as CSO's thirteenth Music Director at the start of the 2013-14 season.

About the May Festival

Established in 1873, the May Festival is directly responsible for the development of Cincinnati's modern music life. Music Hall, the city's primary concert venue, was built specifically to house the Festival's performance. The prestigious roster of Festival Music Directors has included, among others, Theodore Thomas, Max Rudolf, James Levine and, currently, James Conlon.

PHOTOS and COMPLETE ARTIST and ENSEMBLE BIOS ARE AVAILABLE VIA EMAIL OR CD UPON REQUEST

The May Festival gratefully acknowledges support from the following:



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