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***JAMES CONLON TO CONCLUDE EXTRAORDINARY ERA  
AS MUSIC DIRECTOR OF THE CINCINNATI MAY FESTIVAL***

***After 37 years of artistic leadership, Mr. Conlon to be named  
Music Director Laureate following the 2016 season***

CINCINNATI – Cincinnati May Festival Music Director James Conlon has announced that 2016 will mark his final season as Music Director of the Cincinnati May Festival. After nearly four decades of extraordinary leadership and music-making with America’s premier choral festival, 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 Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Conlon has provided the artistic leadership longer than any other music director in the Festival’s 142-year history and he holds a place among the longest-tenured music directors of any major classical music institution in the United States.



“After a milestone 35<sup>th</sup> season culminating with a performance in Carnegie Hall, I decided the 2016 season, which marks the end of my present contract, will be my last as Music Director,” said **James Conlon**. “I am grateful for the almost four decades of music making with the May Festival Chorus, the Cincinnati Symphony and the countless visiting soloists as

well as the many personal friendships that have been made in Cincinnati. I am especially indebted to James Levine, who preceded me as Music Director, for introducing me to the festival.”

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“Maestro Conlon’s decades with the May Festival have been nothing short of extraordinary, and the institution and entire musical community have been the grateful beneficiaries,” said **May Festival Board Chair Shane Starkey**. “He has brought the May Festival to a position of unparalleled excellence not only through his brilliant artistry, but also through his exceptional relationships with the world’s greatest singers who accepted his personal invitation to perform with the May Festival Chorus and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.”

“James Conlon has made an indelible mark on the cultural life of Cincinnati,” said **Robert Porco, Director of Chorus for the May Festival**. “During the past 35 years he has shown an unwavering dedication and loyalty to the May Festival Chorus, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the people of Cincinnati. I consider myself fortunate to have collaborated with James throughout my 25 years here. James is a valued friend, colleague and teacher, and I will miss working with him on a regular basis.”

Mr. Conlon added, “I know of no other festival or classical music institution in the U.S. that has so successfully maintained a great choral tradition: one which brings together a large, highly accomplished non-professional chorus, a world-class professional symphony orchestra and a cadre of internationally recognized soloists. Cincinnati can rightfully take pride in having lovingly nurtured its 142-year-old tradition.”



### **James Conlon**

One of today’s most versatile and respected conductors, James Conlon 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's 35-year tenure as Music Director of the May Festival has been punctuated with many memorable moments and artistic triumphs. Over the span of his directorship, he has conducted more than 350 works by over 100 composers in 144 May Festival concerts, including three concerts at Carnegie Hall. Highlights of his tenure have included the October 2001 performance of Britten's *War Requiem* with the May Festival Chorus and Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall one month after the attack on the World Trade Center.

The emotionally wrenching performance in New York was received at first with stunned silence and then with a long, appreciative ovation. A performance of Britten's *War Requiem* was then reprised during the 2013 Festival in celebration of the centennial of Britten's birth and as part of Mr. Conlon's worldwide three-year homage to the composer. He returned to Carnegie Hall in May 2014 to lead the May Festival Chorus and Cincinnati Symphony in a presentation of Robert Nathaniel Dett's oratorio *The Ordering of Moses*, and John Adams' *Harmonium* as part of the *Spring for Music* Festival.



Early in his tenure, he instituted a series of special concerts at the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption that are now presented each season and have become part of the May Festival tradition, and a series of popular pre-concert recitals given by guest artists; in 1982 he programmed Mozart's Requiem for the first time in 100 years of the Festival's history; and the 2000 May Festival saw record attendance and the taping of a performance that was broadcast on PBS television stations nationwide the following season, marking the May Festival's first national broadcast. Mr. Conlon has programmed inventive and emotionally charged works such as staged versions of Britten's *Noah's Flood* and Ullmann's

*The Emperor of Atlantis*, which was composed in the Terezin internment camp. Ed Stern, then Producing Artistic Director at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, directed the staging of both works.

Following the racial tension in Cincinnati in 2002, Mr. Conlon programmed an entire Festival entitled "Beethoven, Bernstein and Brotherhood," in an effort to help heal the tension in the city. Highlights were a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony juxtaposed aside a local youth chorus performing spirituals and soul music and a performance of Adolphus Hailstork's *Done Made My Vow*, whose text is drawn from the Bible and Martin Luther King Jr.'s *I Have a Dream* speech.

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Over his tenure, Mr. Conlon has forged important relationships with other arts organizations in the region, including three collaborations with the Cincinnati Art Museum providing visual representations of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* and *Roméo & Juliette*.

Mr. Conlon has led numerous world premieres, a newly restored edition of Giuseppe Verdi's *Luisa Miller* and Gideon Lewensohn's *Serenata Concertante*, and he has conducted several May Festival commissions by composers including Daniel Brewbaker, Adolphus Hailstork, and Alvin Singleton. He conducted the American premiere of Mahler's version of von Weber's complete opera *Oberon*, the North American premiere of Kurt Weill's *Propheten* from *Der Weg zur Verheissung* (devised by David Drew), Bernstein's Symphony No. 2, *Kaddish* with the first performance of a revised narration by Jamie Bernstein Thomas, and the world premiere recording of Liszt's *St. Stanislaus*, released by Telarc in 2004 and awarded the 30<sup>th</sup> International F. Liszt Record Grand Prix by the Liszt Society of Budapest.

Throughout Mr. Conlon's distinguished career he has received many honors including his induction into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame in 2010, and the *Légion d'Honneur*, France's highest distinction from then President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac, in 2002. He was also made a Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters of France in 2004. He was one of the first group of recipients of the Opera News Award and has been honored with the Crystal Globe Award from the Anti-Defamation League for his efforts in championing the works of composers suppressed by the Third Reich, and the Zemlinsky Prize for his efforts in bringing the composer's music to international attention. 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.

#### **About the May Festival**

The May Festival is the oldest continuous choral festival in the Western Hemisphere and one of the only true choral festivals that remains in our country today. Featuring the May Festival Chorus and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Festival presents concentrated choral repertoire rarely found during the concert season. Five unique concerts are performed over two weekends, resulting in a magnificent array of choral masterpieces and little known gems that provide an unusual choral experience for audience and performers alike.

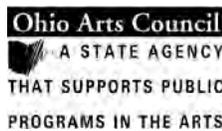
Established in 1873, the May Festival is directly responsible for the development of Cincinnati's modern musical life.

Music Hall, the city's primary concert venue, was built specifically to house the Festival's performances in 1878, and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the fifth oldest orchestra in the United States, can trace its lineage back to this great tradition. The prestigious roster of May Festival Music Directors has included, among others, Theodore Thomas, Max Rudolf and James Levine. Current Music Director, James Conlon, has served since 1979 and has provided the artistic leadership for more May Festivals than any other Music Director in the Festival's 142-year history.

In addition to the valuable outreach performances of the May Festival Chorus and Youth Chorus, the May Festival presents educational programs featuring world-class guest artists. Recent programs have included master classes for aspiring singers taught by established operatic performers, as well as guest lectures and demonstrations presented by renowned composers in area schools.

Inducted into the Greater Cincinnati International Hall of Fame in 2004, the May Festival has earned critical acclaim both nationally and internationally and attracts serious music lovers from all over the world.

The May Festival gratefully acknowledges support from the following:



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