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Stamford Symphony Announces Michael Stern as the Orchestra's Fourth Music Director

Stern Will Conduct Two Programs in the 2019-20 Season, Including the Orchestra's Opening Weekend Concerts October 19 and 20, 2019 at the Palace Theatre

Stern's Tenure as Music Director Officially Begins in the Fall of 2020

STAMFORD, CT (September 30, 2019) – Following an exhaustive two-year search, the Stamford Symphony orchestra has announced the appointment of American conductor Michael Stern as its fourth music director. Stern, whose tenure officially begins with the 2020-21 concert season, will commence his partnership with the Orchestra next month, conducting two programs in the current season. On October 19 and 20, 2019, he will lead the Stamford Symphony's opening weekend concerts with a program consisting of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 with Steven Hough as soloist, Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4, and an opening work by Gabriela Lena Frank. In February, 2020, he will return to conduct an all Beethoven program in commemoration of the composer's 250th birthday. Stern is a resident of Old Greenwich, Connecticut, where he is co-parenting two daughters. He is also the Music Director of the Kansas City Symphony, where his contract was recently extended through 2023, and he is the founder and Artistic Director of the IRIS Orchestra in Germantown, Tennessee. He will continue his leadership roles with those orchestras concurrently with his duties in Stamford.

"I'm delighted to announce that following an overwhelming "yes" vote from the members of the Orchestra, the unanimous recommendation of the search committee, and a unanimous endorsement by the board, Michael Stern has accepted our invitation to become our next Music Director, with a five-year contract beginning July 1, 2020," said Alan McIntyre, Chairman of the Board. "Appointing Michael is a huge win for the Stamford Symphony and good news for our audience, the broader Fairfield County community, and the music world at large. We are about to enter a new era for the Stamford Symphony, and couldn't be more pleased and proud to have Michael at the helm."

"It's always special to imagine a new relationship, new possibilities, new projects, and the opportunity to do something really meaningful for a community—for music, for education, and for engagement," said Michael Stern. "It's even more meaningful when that community is the one in which your own children are growing up, as it is for me. The musicians of the Stamford Symphony are an exceptional group of people: committed, dedicated, devoted, and complicit in trying to make something truly transformational for the area and for music. I'm excited to begin this new collaboration, and I can't wait to get started."

Stern made an immediate and profound impression with the orchestra and the audience as a guest conductor during the 2018-19 season. "It was obvious from the very first rehearsal that Michael had a chemistry and connection with the Orchestra," said Russell Jones, Stamford Symphony President and CEO. "With his perfect combination of musicianship, proven track record of success, and commitment to audience engagement, we are

confident that Michael is the ideal choice to take the orchestra to new musical heights and to deepen our relationship with our entire community.”

Peter Weitzner, a double bass player in the ensemble who serves as chairman of the orchestra committee said, “The musicians of the Stamford Symphony are so lucky that after a long and far and wide search for a new music director, we were able to find one in our own backyard! Knowing that Michael lives nearby can only help in getting the word out to the community that this orchestra has not only maintained its excellence over the years but is now poised to do even greater things! We welcome him with open arms.”

Over the course of the past two seasons, the Stamford Symphony was engaged in a process to identify its next artistic leader, and invited several candidates to spend a week each with the Orchestra. Conductors were evaluated for their programming vision, their ability to deliver a spectacular performance, as well as their interaction and potential affinity with the audience and community through pre-concert lectures and related events for students and seniors. The Orchestra’s music director search committee, made up of musicians, board, and staff, conducted a comprehensive assessment, carefully considering feedback from members of the Orchestra, audience, search committee, and staff. Stern is only the fourth music director in the Stamford Symphony’s history, succeeding Eckart Preu, who retired in 2017 after a 12-year tenure. Previous music directors were Roger Nierenberg (1980 to 2004) and Skitch Henderson (1974 to 1980).

With Stern’s appointment, the Orchestra has updated its schedule for the 2019-20 season, adding three guest conductors and adjusting some of the originally announced repertoire. Steve Hackman will lead the November concerts; Jonathan Bloxham will conduct in March; and, Lina Gonzalez-Granados will end the season in April. The complete schedule for the Stamford Symphony’s 2019-20 season follows this release.

About Michael Stern

American conductor Michael Stern has distinguished himself on the podium as a dynamic and nuanced interpreter of the traditional orchestral repertoire and as a bold champion of the music of our time. Now in his second decade as the Music Director of the Kansas City Symphony, he is credited as the architect of the ensemble’s remarkable artistic ascent and original programming and has been instrumental in securing the organization’s development and stability and the extraordinary expansion of its diverse audience. Stern is also the Founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of IRIS Orchestra in Germantown, Tennessee. This unique group, now in its second decade, has been widely praised for its virtuosity and programming, and has produced a catalog of recordings and acclaimed commissioned new works by American composers. Stern was previously the first American Chief Conductor of Germany’s Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra, Permanent Guest Conductor of the Orchestre National de Lyon in France, and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre National de Lille, France.

A frequent guest of orchestras in North America and abroad, Stern has conducted the Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Houston, Indianapolis, National (Washington, D.C.), Montreal, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Seattle and Toronto symphony orchestras, the Cleveland and Philadelphia orchestras, as well as the New York Philharmonic. He appears regularly at the Aspen Music Festival and has served on the faculty of the American Academy of Conducting at Aspen. In Europe and Asia, Stern has led the Budapest and Vienna radio symphony orchestras, the Helsinki, Israel, London, Moscow and Royal Stockholm philharmonic orchestras, the London Symphony, National Symphony of Taiwan, Orchestre de Paris, and Tokyo’s NHK Symphony, among many others.

Stern received his music degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where his major teacher was the noted conductor and scholar Max Rudolf. Stern co-edited the third edition of Rudolf’s famous textbook, “The Grammar of Conducting,” and also edited a new volume of Rudolf’s collected writings and correspondence. He is a 1981 graduate of Harvard College, where he earned a degree in American history.

About the Stamford Symphony

The Stamford Symphony is one of Connecticut's pre-eminent cultural institutions, championing the lifelong appreciation of classical music among all populations of Fairfield County through passionate, professional performances of the highest caliber, diverse and innovative programming, and inspirational education initiatives. The Orchestra is comprised of professional musicians from the tri-state area, drawing its members from premiere ensembles including the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Ballet, the American Symphony Orchestra, the New York Pops, and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Originally formed in 1919, the Stamford Symphony thrived under the leadership of Clayton Hotchkiss, Music Director of the Stamford Public Schools, until after WWII, when many of its musicians returned to their homelands. It languished until its rebirth in 1967 as a regional orchestra of amateur musicians. Skitch Henderson was appointed Music Director in 1974, and with the hiring of Barbara Smith-Soroca as General Manager in 1979, the orchestra began its ascent to its current status as a fully professional orchestra and an integral part of the cultural fabric of Fairfield County. 1980 brought a new music director, Roger Nierenberg, who spent the next 24 years recruiting top musicians from the New York metro area and crafting a balanced ensemble of remarkable versatility. Nierenberg expanded the Orchestra Classics Series and created new music and education programs, developing the Stamford Symphony as a valuable classical music resource for Stamford and its surrounding communities. His successor, Eckart Preu, was appointed in October 2005, following an international search that attracted more than 250 applicants, and concluded his final season with Stamford Symphony in 2017. Beginning with the 2020/2021 season, the Orchestra welcomes Michael Stern as its fourth music director. The Stamford Symphony's home is at the Palace Theatre where most performances occur in the beautifully restored venue. Music Education programs serving 6,000 students have grown to include FREE tickets for kids under 18, Concerts for Students: The American Experience, Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute Link-Up Program, Master Classes with students from the HARTT School of Music and other initiatives. More information is at www.stamfordsymphony.org

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Stamford Symphony - Subscription Season 2019/20 Beethoven250

Updated September 2019.

Epic Rachmaninoff

October 19 & 20, 2019

Michael Stern, *Music Director Designate*

Stephen Hough, *piano*

Gabriela Lena Frank *Apu: Tone Poem for Orchestra*

Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto No. 2

Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 4

A Dance with Spanish Guitar

November 16 & 17, 2019

Steve Hackman, *guest conductor*

Thomas Flippin, *guitar*

Mozart Overture to *The Magic Flute*

Rodrigo *Concierto di Aranjuez*

Dvořák Symphony No. 7

Happy Birthday, Herr Beethoven

February 22 & 23, 2020

Michael Stern, *Music Director Designate***Pamela Frank**, *violin***Beethoven** Overture to *Coriolan***Beethoven** Violin Concerto**Beethoven** Symphony No. 7

Romantic Marimba

March 21 & 22, 2020

Jonathan Bloxham, *guest conductor***Ji Su Jung**, *marimba***Amy Berger**, *harp***Hannah Lash** *Chaconnes***Emmanuel Séjourné** Concerto for Marimba and String Orchestra**Debussy** *Danse sacree et danse profane* for Harp and Strings**Dvořák** *Serenade for Strings*

Fateful Beethoven

April 18 & 19, 2020

Lina Gonzalez-Granados, *guest conductor***Milhaud** *Le Boeuf sur le toit (The Ox on the Roof)***Ginastera** *Variaciones concertantes***Beethoven** Symphony No. 5

Performances on Saturdays are at 7:30pm and on Sundays at 3:00pm

Stamford's Palace Theatre

61 Atlantic Street

Tickets start at \$25. Kids under 18 FREE on Sunday with accompanying adult

Concert tickets include **free admission to the *Behind the Baton*** lectures by each program's conductor one hour prior to every subscription concert.**Just For Kids:** FREE Interactive *MusiKids* program on Sundays at 2pm. Recommended for kids ages 5-12.**Single Tickets are available by calling 203-325-4466, online at www.stamfordsymphony.org, or in person at the Palace Theatre box office.**

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