



verbierfestival

MEDIA RELEASE

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VERBIER FESTIVAL APPOINTS JAMES GAFFIGAN AS MUSIC DIRECTOR OF ITS VERBIER FESTIVAL JUNIOR ORCHESTRA

20 January 2020 – VEVEY (Switzerland) – The Verbier Festival today announced James Gaffigan as Music Director of its Verbier Festival Junior Orchestra (VFJO). Gaffigan will be only the second Music Director of the VFJO, after founding Music Director Daniel Harding, who served from 2013 to 2016.

As Music Director Designate, Gaffigan is acting as advisor for the 2020 season and putting plans in place for 2021, his first as Music Director.

The Verbier Festival Junior Orchestra is an international orchestral training programme consisting of 57 musicians aged 15 to 18. At each Verbier Festival it performs two symphonic concerts and an opera in collaboration with the Academy's Atelier Lyrique singers. Musicians attend without having to pay for fees, accommodation or meals.

Still less than a decade old, the VFJO has begun to provide a pool of talent from which musicians (aged 18 to 28) are chosen for the Festival's well-established training orchestra, the Verbier Festival Orchestra (VFO). VFO alumni make up the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra (VFCO)—the Festival's resident professional orchestra— and have taken up positions in top orchestras around the world.

Gaffigan's history with the VFJO goes right back to its beginnings having conducted the orchestra in its inaugural summer when it was known as the Verbier Festival Music Camp and has watched it evolve into a permanent and important fixture of the Verbier Festival Academy programmes. In advance of confirming his music directorship, he returned in 2019 to work with the musicians in preparation for their performances with guest conductors.

Stephen McHolm, Verbier Festival Academy Director, commented:

“James Gaffigan is one of the most exciting conductors of today’s new generation of classical musicians. His dedication to developing young musicians is remarkable and makes him an ideal choice to lead the VFJO.”

James Gaffigan commented:

“I myself am a product of summer festivals and youth orchestras. I can’t stress how essential this is to the development of a young musician. The Verbier Festival Junior Orchestra is a perfect and safe environment for young musicians to develop and flourish to their fullest potential. I love teaching and sharing about what it means to play in an orchestra. My philosophy is that great orchestra playing and opera is chamber music in the grandest sense. These young musicians that make up the junior orchestra at Verbier are brilliant musicians and people who have every possibility in front of them. I am happy to now have my new ‘home’ at Verbier. I’m thrilled to be its next Music Director!”

Martin Engstroem, Verbier Festival Founder & Director commented:

“The qualities demanded of a Music Director of an orchestra made up of an international group of teenagers is manifold. It is not only about technical instruction, but about creating an inspirational environment where these gifted kids from very different backgrounds can thrive—both artistically and emotionally. Having closely followed James’s work with our orchestra I believe that we have found the right person. I am looking forward to further developing our wonderful Junior Orchestra together with him.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

VERBIER FESTIVAL

The Verbier Festival, now in its 27th year, returns for 17 days of concerts, masterclasses, talks and education events in the picturesque setting of the Swiss Alps [17 July – 2 August]. 2020 marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven, and the Festival pays tribute to him with his works, influences and those he has inspired. More than 90 world-class artists come together for over 60 mainstage concerts across the Festival.

The Festival’s key mission is to encourage encounters between great musicians and young aspiring artists from around the world. Audiences witness these unique encounters and partnerships through the Festival’s programme of concerts set in the unrivalled surroundings

of Verbier, with its two main venues, the Salle des Combins and Église de Verbier. The 2020 programme includes over 90 leading international artists who will perform solo, chamber and orchestral concerts alongside the next generation of artists in the Verbier Festival Academy's programmes for orchestra (the Verbier Festival Orchestra and Verbier Festival Junior Orchestra), soloists, chamber musicians and singers.

Alongside the big names such as Evgeny Kissin, Mischa Maisky, Denis Matsuev, Mikhail Pletnev and Pinchas Zukerman, legends of classical music are making their long-awaited return to the Festival after more than five years of absence: Martha Argerich, Nelson Freire, Stephen Kovacevich and René Pape.

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JAMES GAFFIGAN

Hailed for the natural ease of his conducting and the compelling insight of his musicianship, James Gaffigan continues to attract international attention and is one of the most outstanding American conductors working today.

James Gaffigan is currently the Chief Conductor of the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester and Principal Guest Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, recently extended for the third time. Since becoming Chief Conductor of the Luzerner Sinfonieorchester James has made a very significant impact on the orchestra's profile, both nationally and internationally, with a number of highly successful tours and recordings (he concludes his tenure there in 2021).

James is in high demand working with leading orchestras and opera houses throughout Europe, the United States and Asia. The 2019/20 season features re-invitations to the Chicago, San Francisco and Detroit Symphony Orchestras, Orchestre National de France and the Czech Philharmonic, as well as debuts with Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, Melbourne Symphony and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

He undertakes three major opera productions in the United States including Rossini's La Cenerentola at the Metropolitan Opera, Mozart's Don Giovanni at Lyric Opera Chicago and Wagner's Tristan und Isolde at Santa Fe Opera.

Recent symphonic highlights include appearances with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Münchner Philharmoniker, Orchestre de Paris, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Dresden Staatskapelle, Wiener Symphoniker, Zurich Tonhalle, Seoul Philharmonic and Tokyo Metropolitan. In North America he has worked with New York Philharmonic and the symphony orchestras of Philadelphia, Cleveland, Los Angeles, St. Louis, and Toronto, among others. Opera highlights include conducting at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Dutch National Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, the Glyndebourne Festival, Hamburg Opera and Opernhaus Zürich.

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Monday to Friday | 13:00 - 17:00

PRESS KIT

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PRESS PHOTOS

Photographs taken by the official photographers of the Verbier Festival may be downloaded from the Festival's [press photo database](#).

Please contact presse@verbierfestival.com for access credentials.

The Verbier Festival is a classical music festival that encourages sharing between great musicians and young aspiring artists from around the world. It is committed to excellence in music performance and education through its highly respected artistic programme, Academy and community engagement programmes. The 27th edition of the Verbier Festival, with Principal Sponsorship of Bank Julius Baer and Neva Foundation, takes place 17 July to 2 August 2020 in Verbier (Switzerland).
