



## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Kensho Watanabe Appointed Assistant Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra**

*Aram Demirjian to lead select Family and School Concerts in 2016-17 Season*

(Philadelphia, July 19, 2016)—**Kensho Watanabe** has been named **assistant conductor** of **The Philadelphia Orchestra**, beginning in the 2016-17 season, succeeding Lio Kuokman, whose term ends at the end of the 2015-16 season. The two-year appointment includes conducting select concerts, participating in residency, touring, and educational activities, and serving as a cover conductor. The assistant conductor position also provides assistance to **Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin** on artistic matters in preparation for and during rehearsals, as well as assisting visiting guest conductors. Watanabe joins the distinguished conducting roster of The Philadelphia Orchestra, including **Principal Guest Conductor Stéphane Denève** and **Conductor-in-Residence Cristian Măcelaru**.

“The Philadelphia Orchestra is proud to support and develop the best conducting talent, providing a broad array of artistic experiences and community engagement opportunities,” said Orchestra President and CEO Allison Vulgamore. “We have full confidence that Kensho will flourish in this role and contribute meaningfully to the music and culture of Philadelphia.”

“Kensho Watanabe's appointment is the result of a highly involved audition process both on and off the podium with the musicians of The Philadelphia Orchestra, and we are delighted to work with him in his role as assistant conductor,” said Yumi Kendall, Orchestra assistant principal cello and the chair of the Musicians' Artistic Committee. “His sincere sense of personal and musical growth aligns with how we identify as a group of artists, and we look forward to our collaborations ahead. Congratulations, Kensho!”

“We are thrilled that Kensho will be the new assistant conductor for the Philadelphia Orchestra,” said Roberto Díaz, president of the Curtis Institute of Music. “This is a remarkable opportunity for a young conductor and an incredible vote of confidence from the entire Philadelphia Orchestra. He has the skills and versatility required for a position like this and has already worked closely with Yannick, the mentor conductor for the Curtis conducting program. This is a wonderful boost for Kensho and we are happy he’ll continue to conduct in Philadelphia.”

“The Philadelphia Orchestra has played an enormous part in my development as a musician,” said Watanabe. “I am incredibly honored to join them as assistant conductor, and look forward to continuing my musical growth while supporting Yannick, the musicians, and the organization as a whole.”

As part of the extensive audition selection process, The Philadelphia Orchestra also identified conductor Aram Demirjian to be a collaborator on upcoming concerts in the 2016-17 season, including the Family concerts on October 29, 2016 and February 4, 2017, as well as this year’s run of school concerts. Aram Demirjian is the recently-named music director of the Knoxville Symphony and served as associate conductor of the Kansas City Symphony for four years.

“I am honored and excited to be working with The Philadelphia Orchestra on multiple upcoming Collaborative Learning projects,” said Demirjian. “Music is a gateway to boundless possibility and joy, and it is essential to expose young people to it early and often through programs that encourage self-expression, creativity, and participation, both in the concert hall and in the classroom. I am looking forward to forging meaningful connections with students and families throughout this wonderfully diverse community, and I am grateful to Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the entire Philadelphia Orchestra team for the opportunity to conduct this amazing ensemble.”

#### **ABOUT KENSHO WATANABE**

Japanese-American conductor Kensho Watanabe completed his tenure as the inaugural Rita E. Hauser Conducting Fellow at the Curtis Institute of Music in 2015, under the mentorship of Philadelphia Orchestra Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin. In addition to his title of assistant conductor for The Philadelphia Orchestra, he continues to hold the title of conducting fellow of the San Diego Symphony. Equally at home in both symphonic and operatic repertoire, Watanabe has led numerous operas with the Curtis Opera Theatre, most recently *La Bohème* in 2015. Additionally, he served as assistant conductor to Nézet-Séguin on a new production of *Elektra* at Opera de Montréal.

Future performances include a debut with the Orlando Philharmonic, and reengagements with the Orchestre Métropolitain, the San Diego Symphony, and the Alabama Symphony Orchestra. An accomplished violinist, Watanabe received his Master of Music in Violin from the Yale School of Music, and served as a substitute violinist for The Philadelphia Orchestra from 2012-2016. Cognizant of the importance of the training and development of young musicians, Watanabe has served on the staff of the Greenwood Music Camp since 2007, and currently serves as the orchestra conductor.

Kensho Watanabe is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music in conducting, where he studied with distinguished conducting pedagogue Otto-Werner Mueller. Additionally, he holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Yale College, where he studied molecular, cellular, and developmental biology.

#### **ABOUT ARAM DEMIRJIAN**

Aram Demirjian is a dynamic emerging leader on the American musical landscape. Known for his “confident and expressive style” (*Kansas City Star*), Demirjian bridges the musical traditions of the past with the cultural appetites of the present, forging a magnetic rapport with audiences.

Demirjian was recently appointed music director of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, adding to an already lively 2016-17 season, which includes two return engagements with the Louisiana Philharmonic, debuts with the Corpus Christi Symphony, Fresno Philharmonic, and Illinois Symphony, and his European debut on the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra’s *Dominicales* series. Recent guest conducting highlights include debuts with the Minnesota Orchestra, and Memphis and Omaha symphonies. Demirjian is a frequent cover conductor with the Boston Symphony, where he assisted Music Director Andris Nelsons, Christoph von Dohnányi, and Manfred Honeck.

In four years as associate conductor of the Kansas City Symphony (KCS), Demirjian conducted over 200 performances, including subscription concerts and critically praised annual performances of Handel’s *Messiah*. He also was instrumental in designing and launching *Classics Uncorked*, a widely acclaimed series that presents weeknight classical concerts, enhancing the concert hall experience with thematic programming, narration, visual effects, musical demonstrations and audience interaction.

Demirjian is involved in community outreach initiatives with the goal of ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, background, or circumstance, has access to great symphonic music. With the KCS, he programmed, scripted, and conducted education concerts for nearly 45,000 elementary school students annually, and he will carry on his commitment to education in Philadelphia and Knoxville.

Aram Demirjian was one of only two conductors in the inaugural class of the distinguished Orchestral Conducting program at New England Conservatory, where he earned his Master of Music. He also holds a Bachelor of Arts, *cum laude*, in music and government from Harvard University, where his conducting journey began with a two-year appointment as music director of the Harvard Bach Society Orchestra. His primary teachers and mentors include Hugh Wolff, Robert Spano, Larry Rachleff, and Michael Stern.

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About [The Philadelphia Orchestra](#)

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