

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press contact: Deirdre Roddin

[droddin@charlottesymphony.org](mailto:droddin@charlottesymphony.org)

Phone: 704-714-5112

**RESIDENT CONDUCTOR CHRISTOPHER JAMES LEES  
EXTENDS CONTRACT WITH THE CHARLOTTE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
THROUGH JUNE 2029**

**As the CSO's Resident Conductor Since 2018, Lees Leads the Orchestra's Popular Movie and Family Series, On Tap, Summer Pops, and CSO Roadshow Performances**

**He Conducts Debussy's *La mer* with the CSO on the Classical Series This Weekend  
April 25 & 26 | Belk Theater**

**April 24, 2025 | Charlotte, NC** – The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra (CSO) is pleased to announce that Resident Conductor Christopher James Lees has extended his contract through the end of the 2028–29 season.

Lees joined the Charlotte Symphony as Assistant Conductor in 2016 and was appointed Resident Conductor in 2018. Since then, he has become a cornerstone of the organization, conducting around 70 performances each season. He leads the Orchestra's popular Movie and Family Series and appears occasionally on the Classical Series. Lees has also conducted several high-profile special events, including Gala performances with Grammy Award-winning artists Branford Marsalis and Rhiannon Giddens.

Lees is a leading presence in the Symphony's community engagement initiatives. He conducts CSO Roadshow performances — bringing live orchestral music directly to neighborhoods across the region with the Symphony's mobile stage — and On Tap, which features intimate performances in local breweries. He also frequently leads the beloved Summer Pops concerts at Symphony Park, drawing thousands of attendees each year.

“I feel overjoyed to be continuing on as Resident Conductor with the Charlotte Symphony,” said Christopher James Lees. “This city is my home, and the phenomenal and indefatigable musicians of the CSO have become my musical family. I am deeply grateful to continue our work together, alongside Music Director Kwamé Ryan, as we consistently create transformative musical experiences for every person in our treasured community.”

“We are incredibly fortunate, both as a Symphony and as a community, to have Christopher James Lees with us,” said Music Director Kwamé Ryan. “His exceptional skills on the podium are complemented by his enthusiasm, infectious energy, and deep love for the music he brings to life. Christopher is a true advocate for the Charlotte Symphony, and I'm excited to continue collaborating with him as we shape the future of the CSO.”

“Christopher has been a steadfast and collaborative presence within the Orchestra, and we’re proud to continue working alongside him,” said Benjamin Geller, Principal Viola and Chair of the Musicians’ Artistic Advisory Committee. “The musicians deeply value our ongoing partnership and look forward to sharing even more inspiring performances with our community.”

### **About Christopher James Lees**

Emerging American conductor Christopher James Lees brings passionate and nuanced orchestral performances to the stage, a fierce commitment to contemporary music, and a natural charisma to audiences all around the world.

An active guest conductor, Mr. Lees has conducted or returned for performances with the New York, Los Angeles, and Rochester philharmonic orchestras, as well as the Houston, Detroit, New World, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Fort Worth, North Carolina, Portland, Flint, Toledo, and Winston Salem symphonies. Additional engagements have taken him to the National Arts Centre Orchestra, Orchestra de Chambre de Paris, Aspen Philharmonic Orchestra, Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, and the Music in the Mountains Festival and Festival Internacional de Inverno de Campos do Jordão in Brazil.

Only the second American to be named a Gustavo Dudamel Conducting Fellow with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Mr. Lees made his debut with the orchestra in April 2013 and returned for concerts in February 2015.

With the New York Philharmonic, St. Louis and Atlanta Symphonies, among others, Mr. Lees has served as an assistant conductor for the world's leading conductors, including Gustavo Dudamel, Paavo Järvi, Herbert Blomstedt, Leonard Slatkin, David Robertson, Robert Spano, Marin Alsop, Pablo Heras-Casado, Stéphane Denève, Susanna Mälkki, and Nicholas McGegan.

Additionally, Mr. Lees was named Music Director of the Rock Hill Symphony Orchestra in 2023.

After two summers of study with Robert Spano at the Aspen Music Festival, Mr. Lees was named winner of both the 2011 James Conlon Conducting Prize and the 2012 Aspen Conducting Prizes, respectively. In 2013, Mr. Lees returned for a third summer as assistant conductor for the Aspen Music Festival and School.

An active pianist, and equally comfortable in the opera pit, Mr. Lees has served as Music Director or Assistant Conductor for a wide array of operas: Verdi's *Aida* (Atlanta Symphony), Britten's *Peter Grimes* and John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* (Aspen Opera Theatre Center), Louis Andriessen's *De Materie*, and Philip Glass' *the CIVIL warS* (Los Angeles Philharmonic), Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Mark Adamo's *Little Women*, (University of Michigan Opera Theatre), and Nino Rota's *Il Capello di paglia di Firenze* (AJ Fletcher Opera Institute).

A recipient of a Career Assistance Grant from the Solti Foundation US, Mr. Lees was also chosen for showcase on the Bruno Walter Memorial Foundation National Conductor Preview, hosted by the League of American Orchestras and Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra.

A dedicated advocate for music of our time, Mr. Lees has premiered more than 150 works by a diverse range of composers, and collaborated closely with Pulitzer Prize winners John Adams, William Bolcom, John Corigliano, Jennifer Higdon, Joseph Schwantner, Steven Stucky, Caroline Shaw, Roger Reynolds, and Julia Wolfe. An equally passionate advocate for music education, Mr. Lees has brought inspirational energy to student orchestras across the country, leading ensembles from the Colburn School, the Shepherd School at Rice University, and at the New England and Oberlin Conservatories.

A native of Washington, D.C., Mr. Lees holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Michigan, and has studied conducting with both Larry Rachleff and Robert Spano, as well as having participated in masterclasses with Lorin Maazel, Michael Tilson Thomas, Gustav Meier, and Jorma Panula.

### **About the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra**

The Charlotte Symphony Orchestra (CSO) is one of the premier music organizations in the Southeastern United States and the oldest continuously operating symphony orchestra in the Carolinas. As Charlotte's most active performing arts group, the CSO presents around 150 concerts each season, reaching more than 150,000 music lovers. The CSO is committed to its mission of uplifting, entertaining, and educating the diverse communities of Charlotte-Mecklenburg and beyond through exceptional musical experiences. Led by Music Director Kwamé Ryan, the CSO employs 65 professional full-time orchestra musicians, fosters four youth orchestras, and offers significant educational support aimed at serving the under-resourced areas of our community. Founded in 1932, the Charlotte Symphony plays a leading cultural role in the Charlotte area and serves the community as a civic leader, reflecting and uniting our region through the transformative power of live music.

*Hi-res photography is available in the Charlotte Symphony's [photo gallery](#)  
or by contacting Deirdre Roddin at [droddin@charlottesymphony.org](mailto:droddin@charlottesymphony.org)*

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