



**St. Louis Symphony
Orchestra**

stéphane denève : music director



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[May 13, 2021]

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**ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA HONORS RETIRING PRINCIPAL FLUTIST MARK SPARKS
AND CELEBRATES HIS 20-YEAR TENURE**

(May 13, 2021, St. Louis, MO) – The St. Louis Symphony Orchestra celebrates the career of Mark Sparks, the SLSO’s long-time Principal Flutist, who is retiring at the conclusion of the 2020/2021 season after more than 20 years with the orchestra.

Stéphane Denève, Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, said, “Since my debut with the SLSO in 2003 I have admired the immense talent and unique sound of Mark Sparks, whose warmth and musicality have always inspired me greatly. I am so very grateful for all that Mark has shared with the St. Louis region through his extraordinary tenure with this orchestra. His leadership and superb artistry not only leave an indelible mark on our orchestra, but on the entire community. As an alumnus of our spectacular Youth Orchestra, Mark serves as an inspiration to all young musicians, as he continues to lead and inspire others through his decades-long commitment to education.”

Sparks was appointed Principal Flute by the late Hans Vonk in 2000. He played under three Music Directors: Hans Vonk (2000-2002), David Robertson (2005-2018), and Stéphane Denève (2019-2021). He previously held positions in the Baltimore Symphony, San Antonio Symphony, and Memphis Symphony. A frequent soloist with the SLSO, his career has taken him around the world, but his musical journey began in St. Louis as a member of the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra. An enthusiastic educator, he maintains a private studio in St. Louis, teaches at DePaul University and the Aspen Music Festival, and is a former full-time faculty member of the Peabody Institute. He frequently presents clinics and recitals in the U.S. and abroad.

In his two-decade tenure as Principal Flutist, Sparks was a featured soloist on 17 classical programs, performing flute concerti by Joseph Haydn, W.A. Mozart, Carl Nielsen, and Christopher Rouse, whose concerto he played on the SLSO’s 2013 California tour. He has also soloed on other works featuring flute by J.S. Bach, Frank Martin, Maurice Ravel, Antonio Vivaldi, and others.

He regularly appeared in the SLSO’s *Live at the Pulitzer* series—a collaboration with the Pulitzer Arts Foundation presenting music of the 19th and 20th centuries—performing works by Harrison Birtwistle, Pierre Boulez, Hanns Eisler, Charles Ives, Arnold Schoenberg, Torū Takemitsu, Edgard Varèse, and Claude Vivier.



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A committed educator, Sparks was deeply involved in the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, first as a member of the orchestra while a student at Kirkwood High School, then as a coach and mentor for many years.

About the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra

Celebrated as one of today's most exciting and enduring orchestras, the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra is the second-oldest orchestra in the country, marking its 141st year with the 2020/2021 season and its second with **Music Director Stéphane Denève**. Widely considered one of the world's finest orchestras, the SLSO maintains its commitment to artistic excellence, educational impact, and community connections—all in service to its mission of enriching lives through the power of music.

The SLSO musical family also includes two resident choruses: the St. Louis Symphony Chorus, founded in 1976; and the St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus, an ensemble founded in 1994 and focused on the music of African American and African cultures. The SLSO family also includes the St. Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra, founded by Conductor Laureate Leonard Slatkin in 1970.

The dynamic partnership with Stéphane Denève is seen through his visionary storytelling, which is at the heart of the SLSO's artistic profile and has resulted in stronger connections with artists, as well as the elevation of the SLSO's role as music education leader. In addition to its regular concert performances at Powell Hall, which has been the permanent home of the SLSO for more than 50 years, the orchestra is an integral part of the diverse and vibrant St. Louis community, presenting dozens of free education and community programs and performances throughout the region each year. It presents *St. Louis Symphony: Live at the Pulitzer*, a collaboration with the Pulitzer Arts Foundation centered on music of today. The SLSO also serves as the resident orchestra for Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

The Grammy Award-winning SLSO's impact beyond the St. Louis region is realized through weekly Saturday night concert broadcasts on St. Louis Public Radio, acclaimed recordings, and regular touring activity. A sought-after artistic partner by preeminent musicians and composers from across the globe, as well as by local and national organizations, the SLSO enjoys a long history of robust and enduring artistic collaborations that have developed and deepened over the years. The SLSO is also growing its digital presence that helps make music accessible to all.

This expanding content portfolio includes digital concerts filmed at Powell Hall on the SLSO's new high-definition camera equipment, videos series such as *Songs of America*, virtual Lunch & Learn events, and a robust online education program platform that features curriculum materials, Instrument Playground Online, and SoundLab—a four-part video series for teachers, students, and families to create music and engage in the science of sound.

Since the arrival of Marie-Hélène Bernard as President and CEO in 2015, the SLSO has realigned its mission to making music more accessible, while fostering a culture of radical welcome and belonging for all. Building on current momentum, the SLSO serves as a convener of individuals, creators, and



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ideas, and is committed to build community through compelling and inclusive musical experiences. Having sharpened its longstanding focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and access, the SLSO embraces its strengths as a responsive, nimble organization while invigorating partnerships locally and elevating its presence globally. For more information, visit slo.org.

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