

Press Release 12/22/16

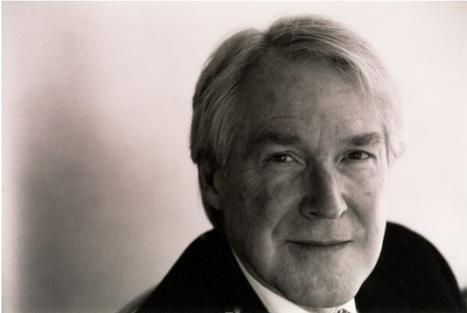
For immediate release, ATTN: Community, Education, and Arts Editors

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Note to Editors: additional high-resolution photos available from Jonathan Schroerlucke



James Smith, WYSO Music Director Retires



After 31 years as the Music Director of the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestras and Conductor of WYSO Youth Orchestra, James Smith will be retiring at the end of WYSO's 51st season. James Smith took over as Music Director in 1985, taking over for outgoing Music Director David Nelson. Since his first downbeat James has helped to grow and expand WYSO into the program it is today.

Jim came to UW-Madison as a professor of conducting in 1983, having already achieved national recognition as a clarinetist. Two years later he would take over as Music Director for WYSO. His gift for enabling students to give their very best in rehearsal, week after week, year after year, has contributed to their personal growth and the musical success of the orchestra.

In 1985, the year Jim was hired, WYSO consisted of three orchestras and a Percussion Ensemble. Jim oversaw the evolution of WYSO as it added a Brass Ensemble, Harp Choir, Chamber Music Program, the Sinfonietta string orchestra, and the Opus One preparatory string orchestra. Under his baton he conducted nearly 400 students in the finale of WYSO's 50th Anniversary Concert at the Overture Center last year.

His leadership was instrumental in taking the Youth Orchestra on their first international tour in 1989 to the British Isles. Since then he has conducted the Youth Orchestra on tour in Taiwan, Japan, Washington DC, France, Spain, Banff, British Columbia, Canada, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Argentina, and Italy. Because of the success of these tours WYSO is committed to touring internationally every two years.

During his tenure several WYSO outreach programs and partnership concerts were implemented. The WYSO Chamber Ambassadors program was established in 1995, the bi-annual Side-by-Side Concert with the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra started in 2008, the Concert in the Park sponsored by the Gialamas Co. featuring Youth Orchestra premiered in 2009, the Music Makers Mentorship Program began in 2011, the NBC15 Sounds of the Season TV broadcast began in 2013, and the Music Makers Honors and Honors Too ensembles formed in 2015.



In 2015, the board of directors established the James R. Smith Guest Artist Fund, in honor of his 30 years of dedication to WYSO. The purpose of this fund is to enrich artistic experiences for young musicians by giving them the opportunity to interact and work with experienced professional musicians.

Maestro Smith has given his best for every second of every rehearsal and every concert. He's touched thousands of lives with his dedication to his students and his craft.