



Hearing is believing

DATE: September 21, 2015

CONTACT: Sara Torrey
storrey@esy.org
(w) 518-382-7581
(c) 518-956-3534

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ESYO Hires Program Director from England to Head CHIME™ outreach program;
Also Appoints Local Jazz Musician/Educator as Conductor**

(Schenectady, NY) Empire State Youth Orchestras (ESYO) announced the appointment of **John Connolly** as the Program Director for CHIME™, ESYO's outreach music education program and **Lee Russo** as Conductor of ESYO's Repertory Jazz Ensemble.

Hailing from Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, England, **John Connolly** earned his trombone degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (formally the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama) and has taught at Ayr College, Kings Priory School and The Sage Gateshead. He has studied with some of the world's most respected teachers including Kristian Steenstrup, Alison Balsom, Chris Holding, Ian Bousfield, Mark Nightingale, Hakan Bjorkmann and Jonas Bylund. A passionate advocate of the *Sistema* movement, Mr. Connolly served for three years as lead teacher for England's *Sistema*-inspired In Harmony program. During that time, he was selected to tour Venezuela with the directors of the six English-based *Sistema* programs and in 2014, was chosen as the lower brass teacher for *Sistema* Europe at its annual summer music camp in Istanbul. Mr. Connolly has enjoyed an active performance schedule and has played with some of England's leading orchestras including the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Mr. Connolly will head ESYO's CHIME™ program, a free, music education program inspired by the *El Sistema* movement, that serves middle- and elementary-school students in Albany and Schenectady. CHIME™ is an expansion of ESYO's 18 year old outreach program that has provided free music lessons for underserved students at Albany and Schenectady middle schools; this fall, CHIME™ will provide an intensive, ensemble-based program for elementary students at Yates Arts In Education Magnet School in Schenectady.

Lee Russo is currently the Director of Guilderland High School's Jazz Ensemble and Concert Band and teaches woodwind lessons and music technology. An active performer, he leads his own trio/quartet, and plays with groups led by Joe Barna, Keith Pray, Michael Benedict, Pete Sweeney and Teresa Broadwell. He has released two CD's as a band leader: "Trading Off" (2006) and "The Abenaki" (2007). Mr. Russo studied with Paul Evoskevich and Jack Fragomeni at The College of Saint Rose and completed his studies at the Crane School of Music where he studied with Bob Faub and Brett Zvacek.

At both schools he worked under the direction of many guest artists/clinicians, including Bob Mintzer, Bill Cunliffe, Rufus Reid, Donald Sinta, The New York Hardbop Quintet, Ralph Lalama and Dave Demsey. Mr. Russo will lead ESYO's Repertory Jazz Ensemble, formed in 2006 as a starting group for less experienced jazz musicians. The group routinely performs with ESYO's more experienced jazz ensemble, Youth Jazz, directed by Paul Evoskevich. For several years Repertory Jazz also played at the SaratogaArtsFest (SAF). In 2014, with an SAF grant, the ensemble premiered Walk Like the Guv, which ESYO commissioned from jazz trombonist Michael Davis.

"We are thrilled to have these two music educators join our staff this coming season. They bring strong skill sets and experience to their respective positions and we look forward to seeing the positive impact we know they will have upon our musicians," said Rebecca Calos, ESYO's Executive Director.

About Empire State Youth Orchestras: 300+ talented youth from the Capital Region of New York and western New England are selected by audition each year for positions in ESYO's program of high-level music education and performance opportunities for young musicians. Well known for its Youth Orchestra's participation in CBS 6's Melodies of Christmas (benefit concerts for the pediatric cancer program at Albany Medical Center), ESYO actually has a total of nine performing ensembles that collectively give approximately 30 public performances a year. ESYO reaches out to the community with an annual free concert for senior citizens, concerts for young people, and ESYO's CHIME™, a free music education program for inner-city, low-income youth in Albany and Schenectady. Founded in 1979, ESYO has been recognized as a premier music education/performance program for youth and has received three prestigious ASCAP awards. A not-for-profit organization governed by a volunteer board of directors, ESYO was named Tech Valley Nonprofit Business Council's Nonprofit Organization of 2013 (for organizations of fewer than 75 employees) in recognition of ESYO's positive contributions to the vitality of the region. For more information, visit www.esyo.org.