



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JANUARY 9, 2020

Cayenne Harris to Become University Musical Society's Vice President for Education & Community Engagement

ANN ARBOR, MI (January 9, 2020) — **Cayenne Harris** will become the new Vice President of Education and Community Engagement for the University Musical Society of the University of Michigan.

Harris, who has most recently served as Vice President of Lyric Unlimited, the education and community engagement arm of the Lyric Opera of Chicago, will join the UMS team in late February 2020, overseeing UMS's robust activities designed for K-12, university, and community audiences. Each season, UMS presents hundreds of free community activities that complement and enhance the mainstage events. In the 30 years since its first "youth" performance, a one-hour opera presentation designed for fourth graders, UMS's program has grown tremendously and has achieved national recognition from industry leaders for its innovative approach to community engagement.

Cayenne Harris said, "I'm so excited to be joining the University Musical Society team. Over the past several years, I've gotten to know the amazing work that UMS does, not just in Ann Arbor but throughout southeastern Michigan. I'm looking forward to joining this incredible team and bringing my Chicagoland experience to working with K-12 and community organizations in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Flint, and Detroit. And I know that within the incredible environment of the University of Michigan, there will be many opportunities to work with U-M faculty, staff, and students to celebrate the role that creativity and the performing arts play in developing and providing a well-rounded university education. I'm thrilled about this opportunity and can't wait to get started!"

Matthew VanBesien, president of UMS, added, "After an intensive national search, we are thrilled to have found a wonderful new education leader in Cayenne Harris. Through her visionary work at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and before that, the Chicago Symphony, Cayenne has developed partnerships with dozens of organizations and reached tens of thousands of people

throughout the Metro Chicago region, including many with no prior experience with the performing arts. She has commissioned new artistic works, worked closely with African American and Latinx communities, and has dramatically increased the engagement of diverse audiences and communities throughout northern Illinois. We are thrilled to welcome her to the UMS leadership team, and I have no doubt that she will also bring tremendous energy to helping to make the University of Michigan's new arts initiative a reality."

A former French horn player, Harris has been at Lyric Opera since 2012, where she served as the first leader for Lyric Unlimited, building its philosophy, brand, and portfolio of innovative programs. In this role, she united with Lyric Opera Creative Consultant Renée Fleming to plan and implement Chicago Voices, a large-scale multi-year festival celebrating the stories of Chicago's communities and diversity of the city's vocal traditions. The range of activities included in the Chicago Voices initiative included collaborations with community-based groups resulting in original musical theater works; the Chicago Voices Gala Concert, a one-night-only multi-genre concert featuring top vocalists with deep ties to Chicago; as well as panel discussions, master classes, exhibits, and performances offering participatory arts experiences and dynamic cross-genre programming. In 2016, Harris established a groundbreaking new partnership with the Chicago Urban League to produce an original opera based on real life experiences of urban youth. A champion for arts education, Harris has worked to increase opportunities for public students across the city to engage with opera and classical music, resulting in a dramatic increase by Chicago Public Schools. Additional achievements include the establishment of a chamber opera series that champions important stories with social themes relevant to today's audiences.

From 2000-2012, she held a variety of positions at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, including Director of Education, Community Relations & Diversity (2006-2008) and Director of New Initiatives for the CSO's Institute for Learning, Access & Training (2008-2012). In that role, she led youth and family programming, established programs for incarcerated and at-risk youth, and led the development of diversity initiatives, including a Diversity Fellowship Program.

Harris grew up in Mendocino, CA and received music degrees in French horn performance from San Francisco State University and Yale University, in addition to a Certificate in Philanthropy and Non-Profit Fundraising from Northwestern University. She was chosen for the highly competitive DeVos Institute for Arts Management Fellowship at the University of Maryland. She has twice been named one of *NewCity Magazine's* 50 Outstanding Leaders of Chicago's Theater, Dance, Opera, and Comedy Culture and has served as a speaker at numerous professional conferences on a range of topics, from "Sensitive Storytelling" to "Creating Change: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion." An active volunteer, she has served on the board of

the Arts Alliance Illinois and the steering committee for the AALANA (African American, Latino, Asian, Native American) network for Opera America, has volunteered with Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Chicago, and is a member of the Yale Black Alumni Association.

The search committee for the position included UMS board members Karen Bantel, Rachel Bendit, Mark Clague, Versell Smith, and Karen Stutz, as well as Gunalan Nadarajan, Dean of the U-M Stamps School of Art and Design. UMS also acknowledges UMS National Council member and longstanding UMS supporters Eileen and Ron Weiser both for recognizing the importance of and investing in this key leadership position and UMS's ongoing success within our community.

ABOUT UMS

A National Medal of Arts recipient (2014), UMS contributes to a vibrant cultural community by connecting audiences with performing artists from around the world in uncommon and creative experiences. By juxtaposing innovative/creative work with traditional/interpretive work, UMS frames an exploration of performance forms within a diverse, international cultural lens. One of the oldest performing arts presenters in the country, UMS is committed to bold artistic leadership, engaged learning through the arts, and access and inclusiveness.

Also known as the University Musical Society, UMS is an independent non-profit organization affiliated with the University of Michigan, presenting over 70 music, theater, and dance performances by professional touring artists each season, along with over 100 free educational activities for K-12 students, teachers, university students, and the community, with sustained efforts to engage and celebrate regional communities of shared heritage. Since its founding in 1879, strong leadership, coupled with outstanding venues, authentic artistic and community collaborations, dynamic education programs, and an enduring commitment to excellence, has placed UMS in a league of internationally-recognized performing arts presenters. Since 1990, the organization has co-commissioned and supported the production of nearly 80 new or reimagined works. Matthew VanBesien became the organization's seventh president in July 2017.

UMS MEDIA CONTACTS

Sara Billmann, Vice President, Marketing & Communications

734.763.0611 / sarabill@umich.edu

Mallory Shea, Marketing & Media Relations Manager

734.647.4020 / mschirr@umich.edu

--30--