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Moab Music Festival Names Grammy-Nominated Violinist Tessa Lark Artistic Director

CO-FOUNDERS LESLIE TOMKINS AND MICHAEL BARRETT NAMED DIRECTORS EMERITI AFTER 32 SEASONS OF VISIONARY LEADERSHIP



Photo: Richard Bowditch

Moab, UT -- The Moab Music Festival today announces that violinist Tessa Lark has been named its next Artistic Director. Co-Founding Directors Michael Barrett and Leslie Tomkins will be stepping back from the award-winning Festival (MMF) after 33 years; Lark's role will combine the co-founders' artistic responsibilities.

Festival Board of Trustees President Anne Wilson said, "While it is bittersweet to be moving on to the next chapter of artistic leadership, we are grateful to have had our founders' direction, guidance, and support in choosing their successor. This extraordinary festival is well positioned for the future, with the strong foundation they built, and their long and exemplary tenure. We are delighted to welcome Tessa as the Festival's next Artistic Director. Her long history as a Festival violinist, coupled with her immense talent and creativity, make her a perfect fit. We are excited to see Tessa's vision unfold, and work together to usher in a new generation of world-class *music in concert with the landscape*® experiences, for which the Festival has become famous."

Since her Festival debut in 2016, Lark has delighted audiences with her technical mastery, stylistic fluidity, and welcoming spirit. She boasts a Grammy- nomination for Best Classical Instrumental Solo for her recording of *Sky*, the violin concerto Michael Torke wrote for her. She has been engaged by the San Francisco, Seattle, and BBC Symphonies, Los Angeles

Chamber Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Louisville Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, London's Wigmore Hall, and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw. A recipient of Lincoln Center's most prestigious honor for emerging artists, the Hunt Family Award, she also received a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and top prize at the Naumburg International Violin Competition. She serves as a Co-Host/Creative of *From the Top*, NPR's famed showcase for young classical musicians, and is Artistic Director of the Musical Masterworks series in Old Lyme, CT.

During Moab's 2024 season, Lark performed works from her latest album, *The Stradgrass Sessions*, which pays homage to her love for both Bluegrass and classical music, and her idyllic Kentucky upbringing. The variety of styles presented on the album offers a small window into her fresh take on Festival programming, enhancing what audiences have come to expect from the Festival over the last three decades. As Lark explains, "I've already fallen in love many times over with the Moab Music Festival and what makes the community unique: the impactful relationships that Michael Barrett and Leslie Tomkins have forged through their loving leadership, the symbiosis of new classical music with canonical favorites, the complex network of the Native cultures of the region, and the presence of myriad musical styles. I take genuine pleasure in personally connecting with folks from all backgrounds, and am passionate about creating spaces that joyfully embrace both musical and spiritual confluence. What makes the Festival extraordinary is also my ultimate life goal: relishing nature and music, all at once. Sharing that heaven-on-earth with others is a dream come true."

Under the direction of Tomkins and Barrett, MMF has gained an award-winning national and international reputation, growing from a grassroots organization in a geodesic dome in 1992 to a globally respected institution attracting world-class artists and patrons who want to experience music among southeast Utah's stunning red rock landscape. The founders were a critical part of selecting the incoming artistic director who will usher in the next generation of leadership as they become Directors Emeriti.



"I am beyond excited to be handing the reins of the Moab Music Festival to Tessa Lark," shares Music Director Emeritus Michael Barrett. "I've known Tessa for nearly 20 years and have watched with admiration as she has fulfilled the promise of her immense talent in such creative and unexpected ways. It brings me great satisfaction that she has agreed to become Artistic Director. She has a finger on the pulse of musical life in America, and I'm certain her instinct and artistry will guide the Festival toward the synthesis of art, nature, and community Leslie and I first imagined 33 years ago."

As Artistic Director Emerita, Leslie Tomkins commented, "It has been a great honor and privilege to create and lead this organization for over three decades. Tessa came to mind immediately when considering a successor. She is a spectacular artist who brings joy and endless creativity to her playing and shines in musical genres beyond classical. *Music in concert with the landscape* distinguishes the Moab Music Festival from all others. Tessa has a deep connection to that special alchemy, and I look forward to seeing the Festival thrive and evolve under her imaginative, thoughtful leadership."



Photo: Richard Bowditch

The 2025 season runs from August 27 – September 12. To arrange for interviews or photos, contact Elizabeth Dworkin – elizabeth@dworkincompany.com, 914-244-3803.

ABOUT TESSA LARK

Violinist Tessa Lark is one of the most captivating artistic voices of our time, consistently praised by critics and audiences for her astounding range of sounds, technical agility, and musical elegance. Increasingly in demand in the classical realm, she was nominated for a Grammy in the Best Classical Instrumental Solo category. She is also a highly acclaimed fiddler in the tradition of her native Kentucky.

Highlights of Lark's 2024-25 season include returns to the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London, and the Rochester Philharmonic, and debut with Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. In recital, she will debut with San Francisco Symphony and the University of California at Santa Barbara. She reprises Michael Torke's bluegrass-inspired violin concerto, *Sky* – written for her – with the Boulder and Colorado Springs Philharmonic Orchestras, as well as the West Michigan, Williamsburg, Shreveport, and Tallahassee Symphony Orchestras. As a chamber musician, she will tour with her string trio project with composer-bassist Edgar Meyer and cellist Joshua Roman.

Lark's most recent album, *The Stradgrass Sessions*, features an all-star roster of collaborators and composers. Her debut recording was the Grammy-nominated *Sky*, which she performed with the Albany Symphony Orchestra. Her discography also includes *Fantasy* on First Hand Records; *Invention*, the debut album of her violin-bass duo with Michael Thurber; and a live performance of Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* with the Buffalo Philharmonic in honor of Piazzolla's centenary.

Lark is a graduate of New England Conservatory and completed her Artist Diploma at The Juilliard School. She plays a ca. 1600 G.P. Maggini violin on loan from an anonymous donor through the Stradivari Society of Chicago.

ABOUT THE MOAB MUSIC FESTIVAL

Founded in 1992 by New York-based pianist and conductor Michael Barrett, and violist Leslie Tomkins, the Moab Music Festival has delighted audiences and adventurers for 32 seasons. On a rare vacation, Barrett and Tomkins fell in love with the red rocks of Moab

and were inspired to introduce the joy of music-making to the magical landscape. “Starting a music festival seemed like the perfect way to make sure we would return again and again,” says Tomkins.

Noted for its distinctive programming, superb performances, and intimate concerts, the award-winning Moab Music Festival celebrates *music in concert with the landscape*®, and features chamber music in a variety of genres including classical, jazz, Latin, traditional music from around the globe, and works by living composers. Each season’s star-studded roster is a venerable Who’s Who, and has included the likes of George Takei, Paquito D’Rivera, Bela Fleck, Marcus Roberts, Chick Corea, Clarice and Sergio Assad, David Amram, Lukas Foss, Chris Thile, Time for Three, Ned Rorem, Jamie Bernstein, and many more.

The Festival presents approximately 20 concerts over the course of two weeks in late August/early September. Concerts are held in a variety of indoor and outdoor venues around Moab. Grotto Concerts, the Festival’s signature events, take place in a pristine wilderness grotto reached by jet boat some 30 miles down the Colorado River. Destination-worthy venues also include floating concerts along the Colorado at sunset, music hikes to secret wilderness locations, and 3- and 4-day Musical Raft Trips through Cataract and Westwater Canyons, or on the San Juan River.

The Moab Music Festival, from its inception, has been committed to education and cultural enrichment in the Moab area. The Board and leadership of the festival bring their passion for national arts education to the local level, and work to reach all Grand County students annually through assemblies with visiting Festival musicians. An artist-in-residence program also provides educational experiences for music lovers of all ages during the year.

The Moab Music Festival has received the Utah Arts Council’s Governor’s Award in the Arts, First Prize for “Adventurous Programming” from the American Society of Composers, Artists, and Publishers (ASCAP), and a Utah Governor’s Mansion Arts Award.

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