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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **The Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival Announces Paul Watkins, cellist of the Emerson Quartet, as Artistic Director Designate**

*Founding Artistic Director James Tocco will retire following the 2014 Festival in June*

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. – The Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival is pleased to announce the appointment of cellist Paul Watkins to the role of Artistic Director. Watkins will succeed founding Artistic Director, pianist James Tocco, who will retire following the 2014 Festival after a 21-year tenure. Watkins will officially assume responsibilities in August of 2014.

“We are delighted and honored to be welcoming Paul Watkins into the Great Lakes family,” said Festival Board Chair Michael Morin. “Paul is a talented musician with an incredible imagination and unique vision that will help the Festival to stretch and grow in new ways. We are looking forward to many years of great music-making.”

Of Welsh descent, Paul Watkins moved to the United States in April 2013, when he joined the Emerson String Quartet. Alongside his quartet concert schedule, he continues to enjoy a successful international career as a soloist, chamber musician and conductor. Watkins was appointed principal cellist of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1990 at the age of 20, and was cellist of the Nash Ensemble from 1997 to 2013. He became the Music Director and Principal Conductor of the English Chamber Orchestra in 2009, and also served as Principal Guest Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra from 2009 to 2012. Since winning the 2002 Leeds Conducting Competition, Watkins has conducted all the major British orchestras, the Royal Flemish Philharmonic, Swedish and Vienna Chamber Orchestras, Prague Symphony, and Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, among others.

“The opportunity to be at the artistic helm of the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival is truly incredible,” said Paul Watkins. “The Festival has a wonderful reputation, thanks largely to James Tocco, and I’m honored to have been chosen as his successor. I look forward to many exciting projects and performances in the coming years.”

While Watkins has never performed on the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, his connection to the Festival family comes through his wife, Jennifer, the daughter of the late pianist Ruth Laredo and violinist Jaime Laredo. A Detroit native, Ruth Laredo was instrumental in the Festival’s growth and regularly graced the Festival’s stage until her death in 2005.

The Festival was founded in 1994 as a vision of James Tocco and his brother, Msgr Anthony M. Tocco, pastor at St. Hugo of Hills Catholic Church. Through them, a remarkable relationship between religious and cultural institutions was formed. Each season James Tocco has brought a rotating contingent of world-class musicians to the Festival. From his vision and leadership, the Festival has grown into an event of national significance.

“It is with a sense of fulfillment that I retire as Artistic Director of the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival,” said Tocco. “From a simple idea, an extraordinary event has emerged. I brought my best to the Festival, and the Festival has brought out the best in me. Now it is time for another generation of leadership to carry the event to even greater achievement. Paul Watkins is the perfect candidate for the role.”

Tocco will continue in his role as Eminent Scholar in Chamber Music at the Cincinnati College – Conservatory of Music. He will also continue performing, including appearances at the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival.

“The Festival’s incredible success can be attributed largely to the talent, generosity, leadership, and integrity of James Tocco,” said Morin. “Without James Tocco, there would be no Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival. We are looking forward to celebrating his legacy during the 2014 Festival and having him remain as our Founding Artistic Director.”

The 2014 Festival, running June 14-29, will celebrate the music and influence of Johann Sebastian Bach. Tocco and Watkins will perform publicly together for the first time during the Festival's opening night on Saturday, June 14 at Seligman Performing Arts Center. Artists throughout the two weeks will include the Ariel Quartet, violinists Tai Murray, Yoonshin Song, and Eric Pritchard; pianists Ivan Moshchuk, Angela Cheng, and Frederic Chiu; cellists Peter Wiley, Andres Diaz, and Paul Katz; and many others. Subscriptions for the 2014 season are now on sale. To order, visit [www.greatlakeschambermusic.org](http://www.greatlakeschambermusic.org) or call 248-559-2097.

Each June, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival brings a contingent of the world's finest chamber musicians to metro Detroit for two weeks of performances in spectacular downtown and suburban venues. A secular event, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival is sponsored by Kirk in the Hills, St. Hugo of the Hills, Temple Beth El, and Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings. The 2014 Festival will take place June 14 – June 29 in venues across Metro Detroit. For more information, please visit [www.greatlakeschambermusic.org](http://www.greatlakeschambermusic.org).