



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra Presents "French Fantastique"

Special Performance Celebrates World Pianist Day and Ravel's 150th Anniversary

NEW LONDON, CT — The Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra (ECSO) invites audiences to experience an evening of French musical brilliance with "French Fantastique" on **Saturday, November 8, 2025, at 7:30 PM** at the beautiful and historic Garde Arts Center in New London.

This special concert celebrates both World Pianist Day (November 8) and the 150th anniversary year of composer Maurice Ravel, featuring a program that showcases the depth and drama of French orchestral music spanning more than a century.

Featured Artist: Mark Markham

The concert will spotlight acclaimed pianist **Mark Markham**, renowned for his 20-season collaboration as recital partner to legendary soprano Jessye Norman. Markham will perform Ravel's captivating **Piano Concerto in G Major**.

Pianist Mark Markham is best known around the world for his twenty-year partnership with the legendary soprano Jessye Norman. Starting in 1995, they gave nearly 300 performances in thirty countries, including recitals in Carnegie Hall, Chicago Symphony Hall, Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Philharmonie in Berlin, La Palau de la Musica in Barcelona, London's Royal Festival Hall, the Musikverein in Vienna, the Salzburg Festival, Bunka Kaikan in Tokyo, the Seoul Arts Center, the Municipal Theater in Rio de Janeiro, Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv, the Ancient Theatre of Epidaurus in Greece, the Baalbek Festival at the Temple of Bacchus in Lebanon, and at the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize presentation to President Jimmy Carter in Oslo.

While Mr Markham is widely recognized as one of the finest vocal accompanists and coaches in the world, the scope of his career also includes solo piano recitals and performances as soloist with orchestras, making him one of the most versatile artists before the public today. This year with the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra and Lincoln's Symphony Orchestra, Mr Markham performed the Concerto for the left hand by Maurice Ravel, honoring the 150th birthday of the great French composer. He gave solo recitals and master classes on the Market Square Concert Series in Harrisburg, as well as at the University of West Florida on the Kamerman Piano Series. In February, he gave a recital with soprano Karen Slack entitled "Dream Variations" for the Lyric Opera of Chicago. He also performed with tenor Curtis Bannister on the Centerstage series in Reston, VA. This spring celebrated the eighth season of his non-profit foundation Singing in Sicily - an intensive training program for young singers from around the world. Later this year he will perform with tenor Limmie Pulliam in Baltimore, give a solo recital on the

Spire Series in Baltimore and return to the Eastern Connecticut Symphony as soloist in the Concerto in G by Maurice Ravel.

Born in Pensacola, Florida, Mr. Markham made his debut in 1980 as soloist with the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra and in the same year was invited by the renowned Boris Goldovsky to coach opera at the Oglebay Institute. His teachers at the time, Robert and Trudie Sherwood, were supportive of all his musical endeavors from solo repertoire, vocal accompanying, and chamber music to Broadway and jazz. During the next ten years as a student at the Peabody Conservatory, where he received the BM, MM and DMA degrees in piano performance, this same support for the diversity of his musical gifts came from Ann Schein, a pupil of Mieczyslaw Munz and the great Artur Schnabel. While under her tutelage he won several competitions including the Munz Competition and the First Prize and the Contemporary Music Prize at the 1988 Frinna Awerbuch International Piano Competition in New York City. While still a student at the conservatory Mr. Markham toured with soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson, a collaboration that resulted in critically acclaimed recordings of works by Messiaen, Carter, Dallapiccola, Schuller, and Wuorinen. In addition, he has toured the US, Europe, and Asia with countertenor Derek Lee Ragin and also performed with Gordon Hawkins, Karen Slack, Theodora Hanslowe, Christine Brewer, Steven Cole, Veronica Tyler, Curtis Bannister, Isabel Leonard, Limmie Pulliam, Eric Owens, Lise Davidsen, Leah Crocetto, Elizabeth DeShong, J'Nai Bridges and Vinson Cole.

As a soloist Mr Markham has been presented in recital at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Market Square Concerts in Harrisburg PA, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington DC, the Spire Series in Baltimore, at First Plymouth Church in Lincoln, and at the Peabody Conservatory for the presentation of the Distinguished Alumni Award from The Johns Hopkins University in 2017. He has also performed as soloist with the Concert Artists of Baltimore, the Eastern Connecticut Symphony, the Pensacola Symphony Orchestra and Lincoln's Symphony Orchestra.

Much appreciated by the public for his improvisational skills, Mr. Markham performed at the Expo 2000 in Hannover, Germany, where he collaborated with Sir Peter Ustinov for a live television broadcast throughout the country. His gift for jazz has been recognized in the Sacred Ellington, a program created by Ms. Norman in which he served as pianist and musical director, which toured Europe, the Middle East and finished in 2009 with a performance at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York City. His recording with Jessye Norman of "Roots: My Life, My Song" was nominated for a Grammy Award.

Mr Markham is a former faculty member of the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University, Morgan State University, the Norfolk Festival of Yale University, the Britten-Pears School of the Aldeburgh Festival in England, and the Solti Accademia in Venice. He has given master classes throughout the US, Europe and Asia and has been a guest lecturer for The Johns Hopkins University and the Metropolitan Opera Guild.

markmarkhampianist.com

Program Highlights

The evening will also feature Ravel's iconic **Boléro**, the hypnotic masterpiece that made its sensational debut at the Paris Opéra in 1928. This mesmerizing work takes a single Spanish theme and transforms it through a gradual, relentless crescendo of intensity and volume, creating an unforgettable orchestral experience.

The program will conclude with Hector Berlioz's monumental **Symphonie fantastique**, subtitled "Episodes in the Life of an Artist." This groundbreaking five-movement symphony tells the story of an artist consumed by obsession, journeying through daydreams, a grand ball, pastoral landscapes, and ultimately descending into opium-fueled hallucinations featuring his own execution and a witches' sabbath. The work was inspired by Berlioz's real-life infatuation with Shakespearean actress Harriet Smithson, whom he married in 1833, three years after the symphony's premiere. Ravel was born just four

years after Berlioz's death, creating a perfect musical bridge between two generations of French compositional genius.

About the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra

The Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra's mission is to inspire, educate, and connect communities through live orchestral music. Under Toshiyuki Shimada's distinguished leadership, the ECSO has become a cornerstone of the region's cultural landscape, presenting world-class performances that bring together exceptional musicians and devoted audiences.

Concert Details

What: French Fantastique

When: Saturday, November 8, 2025, at 7:30 PM (doors open at 6:30 PM)

Where: Garde Arts Center, 325 State Street, New London, CT 06320

Tickets: \$32 to \$84 plus fees

Contact

For season tickets and complete program information, visit ectsymphony.com or call **(860) 443-2876**.

For single tickets go to gardearts.org.

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