



Press Contact: Joshua Cook
Office: (501) 777-5032
Mobile: (512) 201-5990
Email: joshua@ghidotti.com

Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Opens Its Next Chapter by Appointing Geoffrey Robson as Music Director

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (*Jun 7, 2023*) – Following a four-year national search, the [Arkansas Symphony Orchestra](#) (ASO) has appointed [Geoffrey Robson](#) as music director to lead the performing arts organization into its 58th season. Robson, who currently serves as the symphony’s artistic director, stood out from a field of exceptional candidates as the unanimous choice to guide the ASO’s creative future.

“Geoff has become a remarkable conductor and leader. From his concerts with Midori, Gil Shaham and most recently Zuill Bailey, Geoff has proven himself as the artist, musician and leader this orchestra wants to follow into its future success,” said ASO CEO Christina Littlejohn. “His deep love of music and people set him apart. Whether conducting symphonic repertoire or playing bluegrass, folk or Florence Price, he brings joy and a sense of wonder to every performance.”

The search for the ASO’s next music director began in earnest following a year-long delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, Robson played an instrumental role as artistic director designing innovative programs that allowed the symphony to continue to move forward and adapt as it transitioned from public to online, live streaming performances that reached over one million music fans around the world at a critical time. Some of those programs included the online Bedtime with Bach series which garnered nationwide acclaim and was featured in the Washington Post and Kelly Clarkson Show. Other programs included creative collaborations with other local performing artists. Demonstrating artistic, flexible, creative strengths with levity, Robson’s leadership style allowed ASO musicians to safely continue their service to the Arkansas community. Because of that successful transition and the generous support of the Arkansas community, the symphony was able to continue to employ its full-time musicians and staff throughout 2020–2021.

“It is the honor of a lifetime to be chosen to chart the path forward as the next music director of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, made extraordinary as I was chosen by a group of musicians, most of whom I have known for years. During these years, the passion for the music shown by the players, the presence of brilliant creative partners in the orchestra and around the community, and a common desire to grow as artists has kept me rooted here, inspired to have the greatest positive impact that I can,” said Robson. “The ASO is a marvelous organization made possible by this Arkansas community. Every single person I work with has a steadfast dedication to making beautiful music available to all. Thus, the ASO is inseparable from the community it serves. This gives us our purpose, relevance, and visibility.”

Robson’s work with ASO has included conducting critically acclaimed and sold-out masterworks, pops, chamber and educational concerts throughout Arkansas. In addition, he frequently performs as a guest conductor with symphonies around the nation and was awarded the Respighi Prize in Conducting by the

Chamber Orchestra of New York in 2017. In 2016, he conducted the premiere of James Stephenson's Concerto for Hope with celebrated trumpeter Ryan Anthony and the San Juan (Colorado) Symphony.

"The symphony's next music director will play a key role in the organization's future success and Mr. Robson's artistry, discipline, curiosity, humor and infectious enthusiasm made him the leader we want to lead ASO into this next chapter," said Jan Hundley, chair of the ASO Board of Directors. "While many of us have had the opportunity to watch him develop as a musician, conductor and leader over the years, he clearly stood out in this nationwide search and from an incredible field of candidates for the professionalism, creativity, vision and passion he brings to this work."

In 2021, Robson conducted and served as executive producer for the recording of Florence Price's Concerto in One Movement with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, featuring pianist Karen Walwyn. As a founding member of The Chelsea Symphony (New York), he conducted numerous sold-out performances and served as artistic advisor. Robson studied orchestral conducting at the Mannes College of Music in New York City under the tutelage of David Hayes and holds violin performance degrees from Yale University and the Michigan State University Honors College. He studied conducting at Yale University with Lawrence Leighton Smith, Edward Cumming and Shinik Hahm. Other notable teachers include Leon Gregorian, John Farrer, Neil Thomson and Larry Rachleff.

Robson's appointment as music director comes at a key moment for the ASO as it prepares to break ground on the [ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center](#) planned for development in the heart of Little Rock's East Village. The symphony's first permanent home in 55 years will become a radically welcoming hub of musical activity for all Arkansans. The new state of the art, 18,500 square foot music center will greatly expand ASO's capacity to serve Arkansas children and adults through music making opportunities, concert programs and extensive music education offerings.

The Music Director Search Committee was chaired by Dr. Denise Compton and included members of the board of directors, orchestra and staff. The four-year process started with an artistic leadership task force to define what ASO needed in its next artistic leader.

About The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra celebrates its 58th season in 2023–2024. The ASO is the resident orchestra at The Robinson Center Music Hall, and performs more than 60 concerts each year for more than 165,000 people through its Stella Boyle Smith Masterworks Series, First Orion Pops Series, River Rhapsodies Chamber Music Series, and numerous concerts performed around the state of Arkansas. In addition, the ASO offers numerous community outreach programs and brings live symphonic music education to over 26,000 school children and over 200 schools through Central Arkansas. The ASO employs 10 full-time musicians, more than 70 part-time musicians and 20 administrative staff members with an annual operating budget of \$4-million. The ASO is a member of the League of American Orchestras and a partner orchestra of the National Alliance for Audition Support, an unprecedented national initiative to increase diversity in American orchestras.

For more information about the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra call 501-666-1761 or visit www.ArkansasSymphony.org

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