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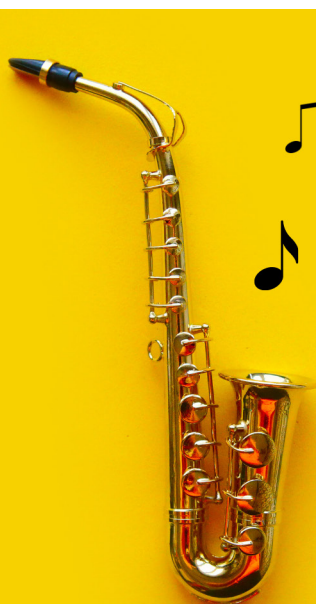
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Dear ASO patrons,

Thank you for being here! I am so happy the ASO can perform its full orchestra concerts in this beautiful performance hall, Robinson Center, and I am so grateful the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra now has its first real home—the new ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center located at 1101 East Third Street, between Heifer International and the Clinton Presidential Library.



We opened the new Stella Boyle Smith Music Center on September 14 with puppets, jugglers, marching bands, Irish dancers, Mexican dancers, and more. Our aspiration is for the center to be a Radically Welcoming Hub of Musical Activity for all Arkansans and our opening celebration reflected those aspirations. We commissioned ASO Youth Orchestra alum Jeremy Crosmer to write the first piece of music publicly performed by ASO musicians, youth orchestra, and community orchestra members. He named it “Skyward,” for the direction your ASO is going. The Sanctuary Choir of Saint Mark Baptist Church joined ASO musicians for an afternoon performance, and all who wished joined Geoff Robson for a Beethoven Five Play-along. The evening culminated with a Masquerade Dance Party where hundreds of people, mostly in their 30s danced the night away to the music of the Dizzy 7. The weekend could not have been more perfect. Outdoor activities with community partners included book reading, balloon making, crafts, instrument petting zoo, bucket band play-along, and more. The rain stopped before the parade and didn’t come back until after the outdoor activities were winding up.

So many people worked hard to make this music center a reality for Little Rock and Arkansas, starting with our fantastic architects, WER Architects of Little Rock, Ben Gregory, David Sargent, and team, and Bailey Construction of Little Rock. This music center was built on budget and on time, and it is simply incredible. When you walk into the spaces, you can tell our home is designed for making music, hearing music, and building community through music.

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is committed to three things: building our community with music, being artistically innovative, and maintaining financial discipline. The new ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center is the manifestation of these core values, and it will enable thousands of Arkansans the opportunity to experience and make music together for generations. ASO is opening a fully funded \$11.75 million Music Center so soon after the pandemic because of three key guiding principles the volunteer leaders of this orchestra embedded in our DNA over the last 50 years: it’s about the music and community, show up for the hard work, and have fun. These fundamentals are seen in the ASO administrative team, musicians, board, and throughout the new ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center—a radically welcoming hub of musical activity for all Arkansans. Thank you to all the volunteer leaders who have made the music center a reality through the decades and for your participation with ASO this weekend.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina Littlejohn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the last name.

Christina Littlejohn

ASO

ARKANSAS
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Thank you



for your extraordinary support of the

Stella Boyle Smith
MASTERWORKS Series

Dear Music Lovers,

We are delighted to welcome you to this concert with your Arkansas Symphony Orchestra! It's an honor and joy to serve as the Music Director of this sensational orchestra, and I am thrilled that you are in the concert hall to enjoy their glorious sounds!

On the main stage here at the Robinson Center, we have enjoyed a season lineup that has once again shown off the orchestra as a virtuosic ensemble capable of bringing any music to life. This was encapsulated in our opening night program, which featured jazz star Aaron Diehl playing Gershwin's Concerto in F and Carlos Simon's *Graffiti*, which portrays urban contemporary art through music. We followed our opening night with three performances of *The Empire Strikes Back*, live to film!

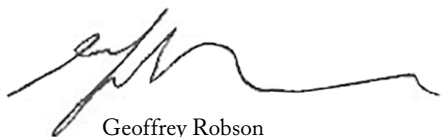
This season we celebrated the return of *Beethoven and Blue Jeans*, a dressed-down affair that encourages you to come enjoy a beautiful symphony concert in a relaxed atmosphere. Throughout the season you have experienced works by great composers like Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Liszt, and more. We close the Masterworks season with the master of composing at the grandest scale, Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 7.

We have also featured works by some of the greatest living composers. It was a thrill to bring to the stage a violin concerto by Philip Glass, as well as, to introduce you to the music of Mexican composer Gabriela Ortiz, whose music is full of pounding rhythms and excitement.

Our *Home for the Holidays* concert was an extravagant celebration of the season, replete with 100 voice choir, and featuring the winners of last year's Arkansas Talent vocal competition, Marcus Murphy and Kim Qualls. Our last concert of the season is a major collaboration with Arkansas Circus Arts, which will blend live symphonic music with stunning acrobatics. We also performed some deep cuts of great film music with our *Lights, Camera, Action!* concert, and the best hits of contemporary musical theater with *Broadway Rocks!*

The ASO has been busy demonstrating its commitment to being an artistically innovative organization and a cultural institution accessible to all. This has been embodied in our newly opened ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, our new headquarters and home of our wide-ranging music education programs. It is also the new home of our River Rhapsodies chamber music series, where you can hear small groups of ASO's outstanding musicians perform in an intimate environment.

It is an exciting time for this organization, and we want you to be part of it! Starting at just \$9 per month, our nationally recognized membership program is a great way to enjoy all of our concerts with the ultimate flexibility and ease of access. I encourage you to come see and hear something new, and seek out what you know will be your favorite concerts. Follow us on social media for all the latest news and updates, and I hope you enjoy hearing your marvelous Arkansas Symphony Orchestra perform live all year!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoffrey Robson".

Geoffrey Robson

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Song of the Night: MAHLER'S SEVENTH SYMPHONY

Geoffrey Robson, *conductor*

MAHLER, Gustav
 (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 7 ("Song of the Night") 80'

- I. Langsam – Etwas weniger langsam –
 Nicht schleppen – Allegro con fuoco
- II. Nachtmusik: Allegro moderato
- III. Scherzo: Schattenhaft
- IV. Nachtmusik: Andante amoroso
- V. Rondo – Finale: Tempo I (Allegro
 ordinario)

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Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is supported in part by a grant from the
 Arkansas Arts Council, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

SONG OF THE NIGHT: MAHLER'S SEVENTH SYMPHONY

Geoffrey Robson, Conductor, *Pamela Diane Stephens Conductor's Chair*

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PHOTO: JOE MAZZA

GEOFFREY ROBSON, *Music Director*

Geoffrey Robson, violinist and conductor, is the Music Director of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. Prior to his appointment, his tenure as the Arkansas Symphony's Artistic Director and Principal Conductor was a significant success. His dynamic leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in national and state-wide visibility for the organization. The orchestra's *Bedtime with Bach* online concert series received nationwide acclaim and was featured by the *Washington Post* and the *Kelly Clarkson Show*.

During his tenure with the ASO, Robson has conducted critically acclaimed and sold-out masterworks, pops, chamber, and educational concerts throughout the state. His innovative programming has brought new audiences into the hall and made all feel welcome and has inspired and energized the orchestra.

In 2021, he 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. This was the orchestra's first commercial release in over 20 years. In the spring of 2025, the orchestra released a recording of Christopher Theofanidis' *The Wind and Petit Jean*, also conducted and produced by Robson.

A champion of new music, he collaborates with and explores the music of renowned living composers. In 2016, he conducted the world premiere of James Stephenson's *Concerto for Hope* with celebrated trumpeter Ryan Anthony. He served as arranger, conductor, and violinist for the world premiere of *Billy Blythe*, a one-act opera based on the life of the young Bill Clinton, by Bonnie Montgomery. He conducted the premiere of *Into the Beautiful North* by Joe Brent, performed by the 9 Horses trio, as well as the premiere of *Richard III, A Crown of Roses, A Crown of Thorns*, an opera by Karen Griebing. In 2021 and 2022, he secured co-commissions of new works by Tania León and James Lee III, which were performed by the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.

An active violinist, Robson is an avid chamber musician and regularly collaborates with musicians across the country. He also serves as the Artistic Director of the Faulkner Chamber Music Festival, curating a summer concert series and directing the chamber music camp for students.

He served as concertmaster of the Connecticut Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra and as Assistant Concertmaster of the Waterbury Symphony. He is also recognized for his skill and versatility as a fiddle player and has established himself as a highly sought-after studio musician. He writes and performs string and orchestral arrangements for recording artists to assist them in achieving their goals in the studio. His arrangements have also been featured on numerous Arkansas Symphony Orchestra performances.

Robson studied orchestral conducting at the Mannes College of Music in New York City under the tutelage of David Hayes, and he holds violin performance degrees from Yale University and the Michigan State University Honors College. Primary violin teachers include Erick Friedman, Dmitri Berlinsky, James Krehbiel, and I-fu Wang.

He studied conducting at Yale University with Lawrence Leighton Smith, Edward Cumming, and Shinik Hahm. Other notable teachers include John Farrer, Neil Thomson, Joana Carneiro, Dirk Brossé, and Larry Rachleff.

SONG OF THE NIGHT: SYMPHONY NO. 7 / GUSTAV MAHLER

b. Kalíšťě, Bohemia / July 7, 1860 – May 18, 1911)

Gustav Mahler's music is performed frequently by major symphony orchestras and his symphonies are exhaustively recorded. Some even say Mahler has grown in popularity to the point where he is presently the most popular composer, but that wasn't the case during his lifetime. Mahler's "day job" was conducting, and he was known in Europe as one of the best. His busy schedule forced him to defer his time for composition to summers. The creation of Symphony No. 7 took place during summer interludes over three years, 1904-1906, in between his stressful and exhausting work as director of the Vienna State Opera.

Symphony No. 7 premiered at a festival in Prague on September 19, 1908, performed by the Czech Philharmonic and conducted by Mahler. This expansive work has all the trappings an audience would expect to hear in a symphony by Gustav Mahler. Extreme contrast, large orchestral forces, unpredictability, high woodwind trills, raspy sounds in the low instruments, auxiliary percussion, a harp or two, yearning love songs, tragic laments, multiple melodies at nearly every moment, and march-like themes that sound like a processional or a parade depending on the tempo. A listener could stay well-engaged with the music simply by creating a mental checklist and noting when each of these traits is heard!

There is much dazzling music in movement 1, and Mahler remarkably keeps our modern minds interested by surprising us every step of the way. Listen for some heavenly music, at a slower tempo, announced by rising trumpet calls (including a melody that will cause many listeners to recall the original Star Trek theme!).

To identify Movement 2, Mahler used the word *Nachtmusik* (Night Music), a descriptor that might lead many listeners to try and imagine the composer's intent. Mahler did not give Symphony No. 7 the nickname "Song of the Night," nor did he provide any programmatic suggestions to guide our imaginations. Instead, the composer leaves it up to every individual listener to derive meaning from the sound world of his unique music.

Movement 3 has an instruction to create a "shadowy" mood. Scholars have written about the frightening nature of this movement, but all of us hearing this music today are accustomed to film music much more effective at inducing terror. The orchestration was novel a century ago, and it is still interesting, but now the sounds are familiar. In fact, movements 3 and 4 provide some relief from the continuous change dominating the other movements.

Movement 4 is the simplest movement of the work, with only slight diversions from a steady tempo and volume. Added to the orchestration are guitar and mandolin, timbres that are rarely heard at symphony concerts. With yearning melodies, fretted instruments, steadiness, and the suggestion of an 'amorous' tempo, it's easy to imagine a serenader and a serenade-ee exchanging glances in fading evening light.

After the delicate ending of the fourth movement, the opening of Movement 5 is a wakeup call, with the timpani leading the orchestra to set up a trumpet fanfare that recurs occasionally. The music energetically builds to a climax, and in an instant, everything is swept away leaving quiet woodwinds. We quickly learn that such sudden changes are the norm, and Mahler demands that we accept change throughout the rest of the work. Tempo, volume, motives, and moods cannot be counted on to last even for a minute. At just the right time, in true Mahler fashion, the composer decides this voyage is over and provides a conclusion that is decisive and uplifting!

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The mission of the ASO Guild is to support your Arkansas Symphony Orchestra. The money raised by participation in Symphony of Homes will go to the ASO for music education programs such as the Sturgis Music Academy, the ASO Youth Orchestra, and the Children's Concert, as well as other needs.

E. Lee Ronnel Music Academy

The E. Lee Ronnel Music Academy expands ASO's capacity to reach and serve Arkansas children and adults through music education programs. These are designed to develop **confidence**, **creative thinking** and **a strong work ethic** that will enhance students' musical endeavors and life skills. The E. Lee Ronnel Music Academy will also support the development of future music programs in the Stella Boyle Smith Music Center that may include adult music classes, bucket band, children's choir and more.

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Endowment and legacy gifts to the ASO Foundation **provide permanent funding for ASO to serve the community through music for generations.** With guidance from the ASO Foundation Board of Directors, the initial investments donors make stay intact, and each year, ASO receives an annual distribution of 4-5% from those investments.

With the Foundation Board's stewardship and belief in the importance of ASO for the quality of life for Arkansans, the endowment has grown from \$2.7 million in 2009 to \$12.3 million today. Earnings from the endowment now generate close to \$450,000 each year for the ASO's operations. As the endowment has grown over the years, so has ASO's ability to responsibly make long-term commitments to increase the pay for our professional musicians and add music education programs for our young people.



LEGACY GIVING

Distributions from the Foundation **allow ASO to hire professional musicians to make a living and choose to call Arkansas home, be a radically welcoming hub of musical activity for all, and remain a financially strong and flourishing organization.**

ASO has served Arkansas through music for nearly 60 years, and **endowment gifts to the Foundation either in present or through legacy gifts make it possible for ASO to keep serving the community for the next 60 years and beyond.**

ASO's endowment is a source of long-term funding to support ASO's mission to serve Arkansas through music.

To find out more or to notify ASO of your intentions to make a planned gift, please contact David Renfro at (501) 666-1761, ext. 130.

ENDOWMENT SUPPORT



The Arkansas Symphony would like to thank the following donors who have made a lasting commitment to great symphonic music and music education in Arkansas through their gifts to the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Foundation. The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is now in its 59th season, and these gifts to the ASO Foundation help ensure future generations can enjoy the artistic excellence and education programs of the orchestra for the next 50 seasons and beyond.

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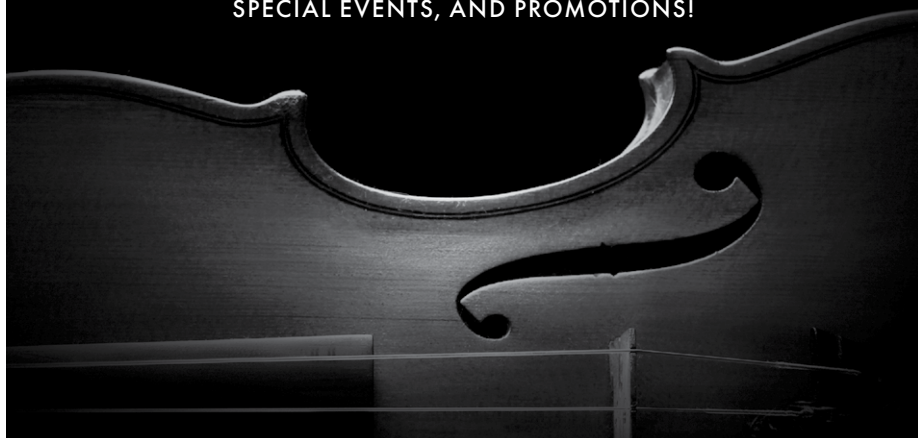
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