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## **Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Concertmaster Andrew Irvin to Retire**

### *Longtime ASO Concertmaster Kiril Laskarov to Take the Lead*

**LITTLE ROCK, AR. (March 20, 2026)** — The [Arkansas Symphony Orchestra \(ASO\)](#) today announced the retirement of Concertmaster Andrew Irvin after more than two decades in the role and that longtime ASO violinist Kiril Laskarov will assume sole concertmaster duties.

Irvin, who joined the ASO as concertmaster in 2002, will mark his final Masterworks concert in the role at Robinson Center with this weekend's performance of "[Pictures at an Exhibition.](#)" He will continue to perform with the orchestra in other capacities while expanding his work as a conductor, educator and chamber musician.

Over the past 23 years, Irvin has helped shape the artistic identity of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra through his leadership on stage, his solo and chamber performances and his dedication to music education across Arkansas. In addition to serving as concertmaster, he was the originator of the ASO's nationally recognized "[Bedtime with Bach](#)" series, which reached audiences around the world and earned him recognition from Musical America [as one of its "Top 30 Professionals Worldwide" in 2021.](#)

"While I'm stepping back from the honor and privilege of being concertmaster, I will be sitting in the section of the ASO because I love the musicians, making music and our supportive community," Irvin said. "I can't thank the many musicians, staff and concertgoers enough for the last two-plus decades of joy, growth and music making. It was my honor and privilege to learn, perform and grow with you all."

Irvin will continue conducting the ASO's [Prelude Orchestra](#) and will add [Community Orchestra](#) conductor to his responsibilities. He also will serve as director of youth chamber music for the [Arkansas Symphony Youth Orchestra](#) program while continuing to teach private violin students and pursue additional chamber music performances throughout the region.

Laskarov, who joined the ASO 27 years ago as concertmaster, has served alongside Irvin in the role and will now take on sole concertmaster responsibilities. The concertmaster serves as the principal first violinist and a key artistic leader of the orchestra, working closely with the music director and musicians to shape the ensemble's sound and performance.

“It is a profound honor to take on the role of sole concertmaster for the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra,” Laskarov said. “This orchestra is filled with extraordinary musicians, and I am grateful for the opportunity to help lead an ensemble with such artistry, heart and commitment to our community.”

ASO Music Director and Conductor Geoff Robson praised Irvin’s tenure and welcomed Laskarov into his new leadership position.

“Andrew Irvin has made an extraordinary mark on the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra,” Robson said. “For more than two decades, he has led from the concertmaster chair with passion, integrity and a deep commitment to the orchestra and the community. We are fortunate that his work with the ASO will continue through conducting and teaching.

“At the same time, I am delighted to congratulate Kiril Laskarov as he assumes sole concertmaster duties. Kiril is an exceptional musician, and his appointment reflects the tremendous depth of talent within the ASO. Artistic excellence depends on great musicianship throughout the orchestra, and we are proud to have such a strong artistic bench as we continue building for the future.”

A native of Bulgaria, Laskarov brings extensive performance and leadership experience to the position. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the State Academy of Music in Sofia and a master’s degree from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, where he studied with Professor Michael Barta. He has appeared as a soloist with the Arkansas Symphony, Las Vegas Philharmonic, Monroe Symphony, Conway Symphony, Southern Illinois Symphony, Abilene Philharmonic, Symphony Irvine and Texarkana Symphony. He also has served as guest concertmaster with the McCall Festival Orchestra and assistant concertmaster with the Evansville Philharmonic and Scottsdale Music Fest Orchestra.

As an ASO musician, Laskarov has been featured prominently as a soloist, including with Irvin in the world premiere of Michael Fine’s Double Concerto for Two Violins, and he also presented the Double Concerto for Violin and Cello by Jacob Tews with the Southern Illinois Symphony. He is scheduled to perform the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with the Sierra Vista Symphony Orchestra in April 2026.

Irvin began his violin studies in his hometown of Columbia, Missouri, with Kathy Rollings. After studying with Kevin Lawrence at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Catherine Tait at Eastman and Katy McLin at Arizona State University, he moved to Arkansas and joined the ASO as concertmaster. His recent solo engagements include Mozart’s “Sinfonia Concertante” on the ASO webcast. His solo repertoire ranges from Bach and Vivaldi to Mozart and Haydn. It also includes Tchaikovsky, Dvorak and Korngold, and Vaughn-Williams.

Irvin’s chamber music highlights include performances with violinist Augustin Hadelich, the Ying Quartet, the Audubon Quartet, bassist Milton Masciadri, violinist Julian Rhee and composer Steve Mackey. His recordings include the 2011 album “Child’s Play” as a member of the Camino Trio with clarinetist Kelly Johnson and pianist Gail Novak. Irvin’s students have attended music schools and universities across the U.S., many with music scholarships, including Ithaca, SUNY-Fredonia, Harvard, Yale, Arizona State University, Florida State University, Interlochen Academy, Johns Hopkins and the University of Michigan. He plays a 1765 Gagliano violin.

### **About The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra**

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is the leading employer of professional performing artists in Arkansas and is celebrating its 60th season in 2025-2026. The ASO recently opened its first permanent home, the

ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, in the East Village between Heifer International and the Clinton Presidential Library. The state's first music center is a radically welcoming hub of musical activity for all Arkansans, housing programs of the E. Lee Ronnel Music Academy, a broadcast studio, and the River Rhapsodies Chamber Music Series. ASO is the resident orchestra at Robinson Center and performs over 60 concerts yearly 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 throughout Arkansas. The E. Lee Ronnel Music Academy reaches over 30,000 Arkansans in over 200 schools from ages 4 to 104 through the string academy, youth ensembles, bucket band, community orchestra, ASO Children's Choir, the annual Children's Concert, and more. In 2020, over 1 million people in over 30 countries viewed the ASO musician-led Bedtime with Bach series. The ASO employs 14 full-time musicians, over 70 part-time musicians, and 16 administrative staff members with an annual operating budget of \$4.9 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](http://www.arkansassymphony.org).

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