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Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Names Matthew Pavon **As New Associate Conductor**

Appointment Marks Continued Investment in ASO Youth Programs

LITTLE ROCK, AR. (June 1, 2026) — The [Arkansas Symphony Orchestra \(ASO\)](#) today announced the appointment of Matthew Pavon as its new associate conductor. Pavon, a conductor and artistic leader dedicated to creating musical experiences that resonate with and unite communities, will join the ASO on Aug. 1.

In his new role, Pavon will serve as the artistic leader and conductor of the Arkansas Symphony Youth Orchestra (ASYO), while supporting the broader ASO Youth Ensembles programs (ASOYE). On the ASO podium, Pavon succeeds Valery Saul, who concluded her three-year tenure with the orchestra in May, and will serve as assistant and cover conductor for all Masterworks and Pops concerts.

The hiring represents a strategic expansion of the ASO's investments in its student musicians, ensuring that its youth programs remain highly engaging and the first choice for music students across the state. Under this educational framework, Gabriel Bruce, the previous Youth Orchestra conductor, will remain with the ASO as conductor of the Academy Orchestra, which serves intermediate student musicians in seventh through 12th grade.

"Matthew Pavon is an exceptional talent whose vision for the future of orchestral music aligns perfectly with our mission to connect and inspire Arkansas through the power of music," ASO CEO Christina Littlejohn said. "He understands that a symphony is most powerful when it is an accessible, welcoming space for everyone. We are thrilled to welcome him to Little Rock as we continue to grow the impact of our new music center. I am incredibly excited for the future of the Youth Orchestra, and confident that these deliberate leadership moves will strengthen all of the ASO's youth music programs."

Pavon comes to Arkansas with a rich background in performance and conducting. He recently served as an assistant instructor and co-music director for the University Orchestra at the University of Texas at Austin, where he earned a Master of Music in Orchestral Conducting. Before his time in Austin, he was appointed assistant conductor for Missouri State University during the 2022-2023 academic year. His professional experience also includes a five-year tenure as a violist with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra and frequent performances with the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas.

"Matthew brings a wonderful combination of high-level artistry and a genuine heart for people," ASO Music Director Geoffrey Robson said. "Our audiences and musicians are going to love his energy, personality and musicality, and his background as a violist and in youth orchestras gives him a

perspective that will truly resonate with our students. I look forward to collaborating with him as we embark on our 61st season.”

An advocate for the arts, Pavon founded the Galloway Chamber Orchestra in Springfield, Missouri, in 2021, developing it from a small string ensemble into a full symphony focused on local professional collaboration. He has served as a guest and workshop conductor for the Youth Symphony of Kansas City. Additionally on the podium, he has collaborated with a diverse range of ensembles, including the Austin Civic Orchestra, Kansas City Civic Orchestra, and the Missouri Philharmonic Orchestra.

“The ASO’s commitment to reaching 30,000 students annually through the E. Lee Ronnel Music Academy requires a leader who is truly dedicated to the next generation of musicians,” said Beth Robison, ASO’s Director of Education and Community Engagement. “Matthew has a proven track record of nurturing young talent and building inclusive spaces for collaboration. His energy and expertise will be a tremendous asset to our youth ensembles and community programs.”

Pavon, who holds degrees from Missouri State University and Evangel University, said he is excited about working with the ASO, its musicians and students, and meeting the orchestra’s patrons.

“The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra’s artistry and commitment to community advancement are deeply inspiring,” Pavon said. “My musical journey began in Arkansas, so returning to join the ASO as Associate Conductor and Youth Symphony Conductor is a profound honor.”

Pavon will move to Little Rock this summer with his wife, Leianna, and their two mini-Australian Shepherds, Koda and Ellie.

About The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is the leading employer of professional performing artists in Arkansas and is celebrating its 61st season in 2026-2027. 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.

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