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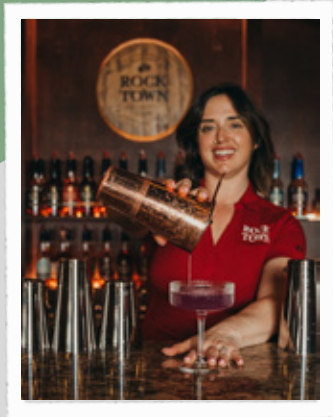


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Dear ASO patrons,

Welcome to the 2024-25 concert season! 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,



Christina Littlejohn

ASO

ARKANSAS
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Thank you



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Stella Boyle Smith
MASTERWORKS Series

FROM THE MUSIC DIRECTOR



Dear Music Lovers,

Welcome to the '24-'25 season 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 a season lineup that will once again show 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 will celebrate 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'll hear works by great composers like Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Liszt, and more. We will close the Masterworks season with the master of composing at the grandest scale, Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 7.

We will also feature works by some of the greatest living composers. I am thrilled to bring to the stage a violin concerto by Philip Glass, and I also can't wait 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 will be 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 will be a major collaboration with Arkansas Circus Arts, which will blend live symphonic music with stunning acrobatics. We'll perform some deep cuts of great film music with our *Superheroes vs. Villains* 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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STELLA BOYLE SMITH MASTERWORKS SERIES

Beethoven & Blue Jeans

Geoffrey Robson, *conductor*

Andrei Ioniță, *cello*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67 35'
 (1770-1827)
 I. Allegro con brio
 II. Andante con moto
 III. Scherzo: Allegro - Trio
 IV. Allegro

INTERMISSION

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS Cello Concerto No. 1 in A Minor, Op. 33 19'
 (1835-1921)
 I. Allegro non troppo – Animato –
 Allegro molto – Tempo I
 II. Allegretto con moto – Tempo I –
 Un peu moins vite
 III. Molto allegro
Andrei Ioniță, cello

GABRIELA ORTIZ Antrópolis (2019) 11'
 (b. 1964)

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

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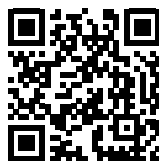
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Beethoven & Blue Jeans

GEOFFREY ROBSON, Music Director & Conductor, *Pamela Diane Stephens Conductor's Chair*ANDREI IONIȚĂ, *Cello***VIOLIN**Kiril Laskarov
*Concertmaster*Dora Paley Ronnel
*Concertmaster's Chair*Andrew Irvin
*Concertmaster*Katherine Williamson
*Assistant Concertmaster**† Meredith Maddox Hicks
*Principal Second Violin*Eric M. Hayward
Memorial Chair

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† Charlotte Crosmer

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‡ Trisha McGovern Freaney

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Sandra McDonald

Tom McDonald

Geronimo Oyenard

Matthew Pickart

Lauren Pokorzynski

Tarrah Reynolds

Magdalena Ryszkowski

Algimantas Staskevicius

Leigh Wing

VIOLA‡ Katherine Reynolds
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PHOTO: LOS 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 fall of 2024, the orchestra will release 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.



ANDREI IONIȚĂ, *Cello*

The Gold Medal-winner at the 2015 XV International Tchaikovsky Competition, Andrei Ioniță is one of the most admired cellists of his generation, called “one of the most exciting cellists to have emerged for a decade,” by *The Times of London*. A versatile musician focused on giving gripping, deeply felt performances, Andrei has been recognized for his passionate musicianship and technical finesse. His debut album on Orchid Classics combined a Brett Dean world-premiere with Bach and Kodály, prompting *Gramophone* to declare him “a cellist of superb skill, musical imagination and a commitment to music of our time.”

Andrei made his U.S. debut in 2017 with recitals in Chicago and Washington, D.C., and gave his New York debut recital in Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall.

Previous season highlights include performances with the Chicago Symphony, Gewandhaus Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Münchner Philharmoniker, Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, BBC Philharmonic, Danish National Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, San Diego Symphony, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. He has worked with famous conductors including Herbert Blomstedt, Cristian Macelaru, Sylvain Cambreling, Kent Nagano, Omer Meir Wellber, John Storgårds, Joanna Mallwitz, and Ruth Reinhardt. He has given recitals at Konzerthaus Berlin, Elbphilharmonie, Zurich Tonhalle, LAC Lugano, and LAuditori in Barcelona, as well as at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Schleswig-Holstein, Verbier, and Martha Argerich Festivals. Andrei Ioniță’s exceptional talent makes him a versatile and sought-after performer of chamber music. In his concerts, he joins forces with Martha Argerich, Christian Tetzlaff, Sergei Babayan, and Steven Isserlis, among others.

Highlights of Andrei’s 2024-25 season include performances with the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra conducted by Geoffrey Robson, the St. Louis Symphony under the direction of Ruth Reinhart, and a collaborative trio performance with William Hagen and Anton Nel with Chamber Music in Oklahoma.

Prior to winning the Tchaikovsky Competition, Andrei won First Prize at the Khachaturian International Competition in June 2013, and Second Prize and the Special Prize for his interpretation of a commissioned composition at the International ARD Music Competition.

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SYMPHONY NO. 5 IN C MINOR OP. 67*Ludwig Van Beethoven*

b. Bonn, Germany / December 17, 1770 - March 26, 1827

Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5 in C minor Op. 67* is one of the most iconic and frequently performed pieces of classical music. Its popularity has endured not only for its artistic brilliance but also for the intensity of emotion it conveys. Sketches show Beethoven had ideas for this work as early as 1804, which was not long after he had publicly expressed despair over the rapid decline in his hearing ability. The first performance was in December of 1808, just a few months before the death of Beethoven's early teacher, composer Joseph Haydn. The music of Haydn and Wolfgang Mozart established the "Classical Style" that Beethoven heard as a young musician. On the surface, *Symphony No. 5* appears to follow the mold set by his famous predecessors, but "under the hood," this composition has demonstrative examples of innovative ways Beethoven diverged from convention to rattle audience expectations while creating excitement.

The symphony follows the common four-movement scheme that composers had been using in previous decades for symphonic and chamber works. The *Allegro con brio* opening movement in sonata form starts with the very familiar theme 1 in c minor, then the exposition section continues with a contrasting theme 2 in Eb major. The movement unfolds concisely and conventionally until the moment in the recapitulation when these contrasting themes are supposed to agree to a truce by being stated in the opening key of c minor. Instead, theme 2 is presented in C major. (Interestingly, Haydn employed this novel key arrangement in his *String Quartet Op. 74 No. 3* that he composed while Beethoven was his student more than a decade before *Symphony No. 5*). An even bigger surprise follows when Beethoven launches into a disproportionately lengthy coda that includes new thematic material.

In the second movement, *Andante con moto*, we encounter a gorgeous melody starting in the low strings that seems to go on and on forever. Scholars have discovered at least thirteen attempts by the composer to get this melody right before coming up with the ideal version he used. The form is theme and variations, and the movement closes with another extended ending.

The third movement *Scherzo* begins with a melody whose first nine notes are the same as the start of the concluding movement of Mozart's *Symphony No. 40*. While this *Scherzo* is notated in a fast triple meter like Beethoven did in previous symphonies, at times the music gives the impression of being in march-like 4/4. The ending of this movement is not extended, and in fact, it does not have a traditional conclusion as it makes a seamless transition to the final *Allegro* movement. One would expect a work in c minor to start and end in c minor, but Beethoven ends his *Symphony No. 5* in C major. Although film music did not exist in the early 1800s, the composer concludes this masterwork with music that many feel is like a cinematic depiction of triumphant victory.

CELLO CONCERTO NO. 1 IN A MINOR OP. 33

Camille Saint-Saëns

b. Paris, France / October 9, 1835 - December 18, 1921

In the early 1800s, Paris began to gain footing as the premier cultural capital of Europe. From Hector Berlioz to Claude Debussy, innovative French composers made noble efforts to create music that was uniquely French. Camille Saint-Saëns was born nearly midway between his country's most famous composers, and he was claimed by a different generation. Berlioz respectfully called his younger compatriot "a great artist," while Debussy derisively proclaimed about his elder, "I have a horror of sentimentality and cannot forget that its name is Saint-Saëns."

While he wasn't considered an innovator, Saint-Saëns helped the "cause" of French music as he was in the right place at the right time when French musicians needed a morale boost after the 1870-71 Siege of Paris; he was an influential leader in organizing the National Society of Music to encourage the creation and performance of new French music.

Cello Concerto No. 1 was composed in 1872 right on the heels of the establishment of the Société. While the printed program lists three discrete movements adhering to the usual fast-slow-fast tempo scheme, in fact, the music continues without pause, the movements spliced together by cello solos. The opening projects a sense of unrest beginning with a fast and ornate downward-spiraling theme played by the soloist. That mood is broken by a calmer ascending theme in a slower tempo. As the second movement commences, we are led into a different musical world, a shiny simple dance like a lullaby, charming yet archaic situated between the stormy outer movements that represent a true Romantic Era pedigree. The longer final movement is announced by the oboe playing the opening theme, and it mirrors the first movement somewhat with the alternation of fast and slow themes and tempos, but this time the slower melody projects a more somber mood. Ultimately, the soloist has plenty of space to take part in the sporting aspect of the genre, showing off technical prowess and depth of musical expression.

ANTRÓPOLIS

Gabriela Ortiz

b. Mexico City, Mexico / 1964

In recent years, composer Gabriela Ortiz seems to be getting the recognition she deserves. Her music is championed by influential conductor Gustavo Dudamel. This season she is composer-in-residence for Carnegie Hall. In September 2024 she was profiled in the *New York Times*, then in October on National Public Radio. The *Times* writes, "As her profile has risen, Ortiz has emerged as a prominent voice for change in classical music, arguing the field has been focused for too long on European masters." *Antrópolis* is an exciting, rhythmically driven work for full orchestra, with unabashed brass and every percussion instrument under the sun. With forces like that, expect it to be loud! A full thirty percent of the work features the timpani in a tour-de-force solo performance.

continued next page

The composer has provided some interesting background information about this composition:

The word *antro* has its origin in the Latin “*antrum*,” meaning “grotto,” or “cavern.” In Mexico, until the ‘90s, the term referred to bars or entertainment places of dubious reputation. But nowadays, and especially among younger people, this word refers to any bar or nightclub.

One time, while talking with flutist Alejandro Escuer, we imagined the title of a future work, one that would synthesize the music of Mexico’s legendary dance halls and bars: *Antrópolis*, a neologism, a precise invented name for a piece that narrates the sound of the city through its dance halls and nightclubs.

In 2017, conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto commissioned me to write a short work—brilliant and rather light-hulled—to be premiered at the close of a concert celebrating the 80th birthday of American composer Philip Glass, performed by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in New York.

Given the parameters of the commission, I retrieved the title we had imagined, and thus *Antrópolis* came to life. It is a piece in which I wanted to pay a very personal tribute to some of those “*antros*,” or emblematic dance halls of Mexico City that left a special sonorous imprint in my memory. These cabarets or dance halls that represent the nostalgia for rumberas and live dance orchestras, such as “*El Bombay*,” where it is said that Che Guevara would twirl; or the “*Salón Colonia*,” which seems to have come out of dreams taken from a film of the Golden Age of Mexican cinema. Who doesn’t remember the fun ballroom “*Los Infernos*,” a perfect place for those who, after a long day at work, would leave their cubicles to go dancing, drink, and listen to music? Finally, the memory of the bar “*Tutti Frutti*” leaves an impression, where I first met the punk couple who own the “*antro*,” and where you could listen to experimental music from the 1980s.

Antrópolis is the sonorous reflection of a city through its “*antros*,” including the accumulation of experiences that we bring and that form an essential part of our history in this very complex but fascinating Mexico City.

PROGRAM NOTES BY BARRY McVINNEY © 2024

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Arkansas Symphony Orchestra opened its new \$11.75 million Stella Boyle Smith Music Center in Little Rock's East Village in September 2024, creating a first-of-its-kind music-focused headquarters for the state. The new 20,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility is the Symphony's first permanent home in its 58-year history.

PHOTO: DERO SANFORD AND WER ARCHITECTS

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The new music center is a **radically-welcoming hub** of musical activity for all Arkansans, serving youth and adults of all ages with an array of musical offerings. The building provides access to music education, music performances, and music-making to residents of all corners of the state through new spaces and a broadcast and recording studio.

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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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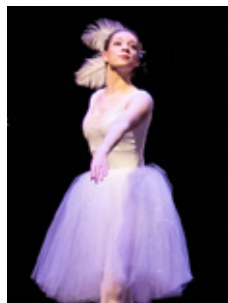
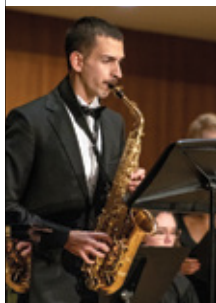
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