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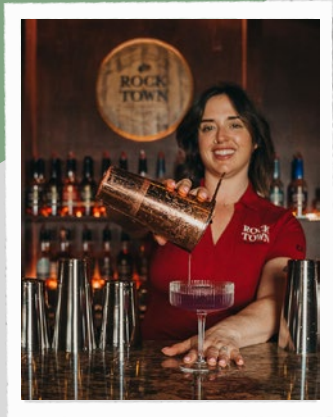


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Dear ASO patrons,

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



for your extraordinary support of the

Stella Boyle Smith
MASTERWORKS Series

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 follow our opening night with three performances of *The Empire Strikes Back*, live to film!

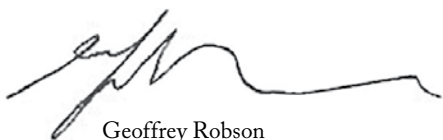
This season we will celebrate the return of *Beethoven and Blue Jeans*, a dressed-down affair that encourages you to come enjoy a beautiful symphony concert in a relaxed atmosphere. Throughout the season you'll hear works by great composers like Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Liszt, and more. We will close the 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". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Geoffrey Robson

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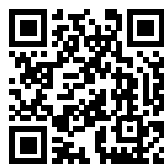
For over 55 years, thousands of volunteers from the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Guild have used music and the arts to make a profound impact on the lives of children and adults.

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Geoffrey Robson, *conductor*

Music by John Williams

JOHN WILLIAMS <i>(b. 1932)</i>	Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back Act I	66'
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INTERMISSION

WILLIAMS	Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back Act II	60'
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GEOFFREY ROBSON, *Music Director*

Named winner of the 2017 Respighi Prize in Conducting by the Chamber Orchestra of New York, Geoffrey Robson has emerged as a force of artistic leadership throughout the United States and the state of Arkansas.

In 2023, the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra named Maestro Robson as its eighth Music Director after a four-year nationwide search. 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.

Over the past three years, he has played an integral role in the planning, development, and design of the new ASO Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, which opened in September 2024. His influential leadership helped secure funding and community support for the orchestra's 11.75-million-dollar project. This unique music center serves as headquarters for the orchestra and is conceived as an anchor in the community for artistic innovation, excellence, and education. It too has garnered national attention, including from NPR and the *New York Times*, and is helping the ASO to serve as a model to orchestras around the country looking to deepen their connection to their communities.

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.

Robson has recently conducted numerous ballet and opera productions including *The Nutcracker*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *La Bohème*, and *Madama Butterfly* with the Plano (Texas) and Waterbury (Connecticut) symphonies, as well as Opera in the Rock (Little Rock) and Ballet Arkansas. As a founding member of The Chelsea Symphony (New York), he conducted numerous sold-out performances and served as artistic advisor, ensuring the growth and success of the organization.

In addition to his rigorous Arkansas Symphony Orchestra schedule, in the 2023-24 season Robson guest conducted the Greenville (South Carolina) Symphony Orchestra and the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra. Other recent guest conducting appearances include with the San Juan (Colorado) Symphony, and the Plano (Texas) Symphony.

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 Artistic Director of the Faulkner Chamber Music Festival. In this role, he curates a summer concert series and serves as director of 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.



JOHN WILLIAMS, *Composer*

In a career spanning more than six decades, John Williams has become one of America's most accomplished and successful composers for film and for the concert stage, and he remains one of our nation's most distinguished and contributive musical voices. He has composed the music and served as music director for more than one hundred films, including all nine *Star Wars* films, the first three *Harry Potter* films, *Superman*, *JFK*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *Far and Away*, *The Accidental Tourist*, *Home Alone* and *The Book Thief*. His 50-year artistic partnership with director Steven Spielberg has resulted in many of Hollywood's most

acclaimed and successful films, including *Schindler's List*, *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, *Jaws*, *Jurassic Park*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the *Indiana Jones* films, *Munich*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, *War Horse*, *Lincoln*, *The BFG*, *The Post* and *The Fabelmans*. His contributions to television music include scores for more than 200 television films for the groundbreaking, early anthology series *Alcoa Theatre*, *Kraft Television Theatre*, *Chrysler Theatre* and *Playhouse 90*, as well as themes for *NBC Nightly News* ("The Mission"), *NBC's Meet the Press*, and the PBS arts showcase *Great*

continued next page

Performances. He also composed themes for the 1984, 1988, and 1996 Summer Olympic Games, and the 2002 Winter Olympic Games. He has received five Academy Awards and fifty-three Oscar nominations, making him the Academy's most-nominated living person and the second-most nominated person in the history of the Oscars. He has received seven British Academy Awards (BAFTA), twenty-five Grammys, four Golden Globes, five Emmys, and numerous gold and platinum records. In 2003, he received the Olympic Order (the IOC's highest honor) for his contributions to the Olympic movement. He received the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors in December of 2004. In 2009, Mr. Williams was inducted into the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and he received the National Medal of Arts, the highest award given to artists by the U.S. Government. In 2016, he received the 44th Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute – the first time in their history that this honor was bestowed upon a composer. In 2020, he received Spain's Princess of Asturias Award for the Arts as well as the Gold Medal from the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society in the UK, and in 2022 he was awarded an honorary knighthood of the British Empire as one of the final awards approved by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

In January 1980, Mr. Williams was named nineteenth music director of the Boston Pops Orchestra, succeeding the legendary Arthur Fiedler. He currently holds the title of Boston Pops Laureate Conductor which he assumed following his retirement in December 1993 after fourteen highly successful seasons. He also holds the title of Artist-in-Residence at Tanglewood. Mr. Williams has composed numerous works for the concert stage, among them two symphonies, and concertos commissioned by several of the world's leading orchestras, including a cello concerto for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, a bassoon concerto for the New York Philharmonic, a trumpet concerto for The Cleveland Orchestra, and a horn concerto for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In 2009, the Boston Symphony premiered his concerto for harp and orchestra entitled "On Willows and Birches," and in the same year, Mr. Williams composed and arranged "Air and Simple Gifts," especially for the first inaugural ceremony of President Barack Obama.

In 2021, Williams premiered his second violin concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood along with soloist Anne-Sophie Mutter, for whom he composed the work.



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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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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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ArkansasSymphony.org/crescendo

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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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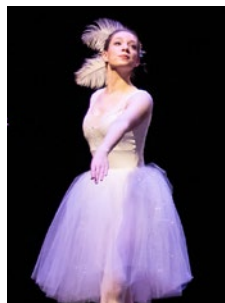
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