



Internationally renowned conductor Christopher Bell to join The Washington Chorus as Artistic Director

Bell, the current Chorus Director of the Grant Park Music Festival, Founder & Artistic Director of the National Youth Choir of Scotland, Chorus Master of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, and Associate Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra, will step in as The Washington Chorus's next Artistic Director at the start of the 2017/18 Season

The Washington Chorus is thrilled to announce that **Christopher Bell** will join the organization as Artistic Director beginning in the 2017/18 Season. Bell will replace Julian Wachner, who is stepping down after ten seasons. Bell's appointment after a nearly year-long search process involving an international slate of candidates represents a continuing legacy of top-tier musical leadership for The Washington Chorus. An accomplished and highly regarded conductor both in his home of Scotland and around the world, Bell plans to move to Washington to begin working with The Washington Chorus and implementing his long-range plans for the group.

Within the United States, Bell has served as Chorus Director of the **Grant Park Music Festival Chorus** in Chicago since 2002. Up to 120 professional singers undertake six programs during the summer with a repertoire spanning the masterworks to contemporary American music. In 2006, he founded the Festival's Apprentice Chorale, a program that he continues to lead today, providing advanced training and performance opportunities for pre-professional vocal students. Most recently, Bell leads the newly expanded Project Inclusion program for vocalists, which engages underrepresented youth in training and performance alongside the Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus.

Bell currently serves as Chorus Master of the **Edinburgh Festival Chorus**. This all-volunteer choir at the center of the Edinburgh International Festival sings with the world's leading orchestras and conductors and has been doing so for 53 years. Bell began his conducting career as Associate Conductor of the **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra**, where he is still regularly seen on the podium, and he currently serves as Associate Conductor of the **Ulster Orchestra**. Bell has worked with Valery Gergiev, Gustavo Dudamel, Antonio Pappano, and many of the world's leading orchestras.

Bell also serves as Artistic Director of the **National Youth Choir of Scotland**, overseeing four national choirs with singers aged 10-25, fed by 14 regional choirs beginning at the pre-kindergarten level. He co-founded NYCoS in 1996, and regularly conducts, programs, and engages commissions for the chorus, which performs at festivals across the United Kingdom and the United States. “Under Christopher's fiercely professional and gloriously persuasive leadership, NYCoS is simply one of the best in the world,” says Donald Runnicles, who, as Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival and Chief Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, frequently collaborates with Bell.

“I am so delighted to be taking up this position with The Washington Chorus,” said Bell. “This choir is known across the choral world for its innovative programming and its award winning performances and concerts. I am looking forward to building on the work of my predecessors, maintaining and enhancing the reputation of this great institution and taking it forward. There are adventures ahead, and I am very excited to be part of them.”

“To work with a world-class artist like Christopher is a unique and exciting opportunity—one which exemplifies the rising tide of the many great cultural institutions in Washington,” commented Chase Maggiano, Executive Director of The Washington Chorus.

“The Board of Trustees of The Washington Chorus is incredibly honored that Christopher Bell will become our next Music Director,” remarked Christopher Denby, Chairman of the Board of The Washington Chorus. “His role as Chorus Director of the prestigious Grant Park Music Festival and the entrepreneurial and artistic leadership he has displayed in building the National Youth Choir of Scotland put him at the forefront of choral leaders worldwide. We look forward to his arrival in Washington and to working with Mr. Bell to build upon our successes by forging exciting new growth paths for The Washington Chorus. Given our unique focus on education we are particularly excited about Mr. Bell’s outstanding track record at building choral education programs, something we hope to continue to prioritize in the future.”

At The Washington Chorus, Bell will continue to enhance singing standards to ensure that the organization remains at the forefront of choruses in the nation, and direct significant attention to new singer recruitment and audience engagement. Outreach to underrepresented young musicians and an expansive education program in partnership with DC Public Schools will be a critical component of Bell’s mission at TWC, with the goal of a program similar in nature to Grant Park’s Project Inclusion initiative. To achieve these goals, Bell will transition out of several of his commitments in the U.K. to make TWC a primary responsibility.

About Christopher Bell

Born in Belfast, Mr. Bell was educated at Edinburgh University and held his first post as Associate Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Since then, he has worked as conductor with many of the major orchestras in the UK and Ireland, including the Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, BBC Scottish Symphony, Ulster Orchestra, Scottish Chamber, City of London Sinfonia London Concert, RTE National Symphony, RTE Concert and the Bournemouth Symphony. He was Principal Guest Conductor of the State Orchestra of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia from 1998 – 2000, Chorus Master of the Royal Scottish

National Orchestra between 1989 and 2002, and was the first Artistic Director of the Edinburgh Royal Choral Union.

Christopher annually conducts choral and orchestral performances at Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival, where he has been Chorus Director since 2002. During his tenure, he and the chorus have been recipients of the coveted Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence given by Chorus America as well as glowing reviews from both critics and audiences alike.

He is also the Chorus Master of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, preparing them annually for up to six concerts in August with visiting national and international orchestras and conductors. Largely responsible for the formation of the National Youth Choir of Scotland in 1996, he has been its Artistic Director ever since, performing at the BBC Proms, the Edinburgh International Festival, touring internationally, recording and broadcasting. He is currently in his 19th season as chorus master of the RSNO Junior Chorus.

With professional choruses, in addition to his many concerts and recordings with the Grant Park Chorus over 12 years, his work includes concerts and recordings with Opera Australia Chorus (Melbourne), preparation of many concerts with the Netherlands Radio Choir, his debut with the RTVE Choir in Madrid in September 2012 and most recently a performance of Haydn's Creation with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir in 2014.

Christopher Bell is well-known for his abilities with working with young musicians. Before his current posts with the RSNO Junior Chorus and the National Youth Choir of Scotland, he was the founding conductor of the Ulster Youth Choir and director of the TOTAL Aberdeen Youth Choir for six years. Between 2001 and 2008 he was Artistic Director of the highly successful Children's Classic Concert series.

In 2013, Chorus America awarded Christopher the Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art. Christopher has also received the following awards: a Scotsman of the Year 2001 for Creative Talent; the Charles Groves Prize in 2003 for his contribution to the cultural life in Scotland and the rest of the UK, an Honorary master's degree from the Open University for Services to the Arts in 2009 and an Honorary Doctorate of Music from the Royal Conservatory of Scotland in 2012 for his contribution to the performing arts in Scotland. In 2015, he received the Doctor of Music, Honoris Causa, from the University of Aberdeen.

About The Washington Chorus

The Washington Chorus (TWC), now in its 56th season, is one of the foremost symphonic choruses in the nation. TWC is noted for the superb artistry of its performances and recordings of the entire range of the choral repertoire, and won a **Grammy Award for "Best Choral Performance"** for the live-performance recording of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* in 2000. In June 2016, Chorus America, the national association for choruses, honored The Washington Chorus with the prestigious Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence.

TWC's commitment to the greater Washington community is evidenced by outstanding education and outreach programs, including the **Junior Washington Chorus** for teens ages 16 to 18; the **Side-by-Side high school program**; TWC's **Outreach Singers** who bring music to underserved groups throughout the area; and the all-new **DC Honor Chorus** in partnership with DC Public Schools. The Chorus is also known for innovative programs that focus on contemporary composers such as the award-winning *New Music for a New Age* concerts, and classical composers of earlier times with *The Essential* concert series.

TWC is committed to the performance of contemporary music and was proud to receive Chorus America's 2011 ASCAP **Alice Parker Award**, recognizing a chorus programming significant, recently- composed music that expands the mission of the chorus and challenges the chorus' audience in a new way. TWC recordings include *Christmas with The Washington Chorus, Glorious Splendor, Sing Noell!*; the Berlioz Requiem (Gothic Recordings); Dvorák's *Stabat Mater* and *Psalm 149* (Naxos International); Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (nominated for a Grammy Award in 1988); the Grammy Award-winning *Of Rage and Remembrance* by John Corigliano with the National Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Leonard Slatkin; and Leonard Bernstein's *Kaddish* with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Forthcoming recordings include Paola Prestini's *Hubble Cantata*.

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