

Bell takes over Washington Chorus; NSO goes crossover with Ben Folds appointment

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Christopher Bell

Change was already in the air at the National Symphony Orchestra, with incoming music director Gianandrea Noseda set to take the helm this fall. Now the NSO has announced that it has appointed Ben Folds to the newly created

position of artistic advisor. The alternative rock singer-songwriter will hold this position through the 2019–2020 season.

Folds will help curate the NSO's DECLASSIFIED events, expanding them to include musicians from many different genres. His role will not be limited only to pops programs, however, as he will also consult on classical, popular, youth, community, and contemporary culture programs.

The move is part of a trend toward bringing more popular music and entertainment into the Kennedy Center, led by president Deborah F. Rutter since her arrival at the city's premier arts institution in 2014. At the same time, the NSO announced it would expand the definition of "Pops" by offering a diverse mix of programming in genres ranging from rock and jazz to Broadway favorites and from contemporary popular music such as Hip Hop and R&B to live film scores and familiar classics.

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Another change coming this fall is in the leadership of The Washington Chorus. Christopher Bell will succeed Julian Wachner as artistic director of the large volunteer choir, now in its 56th season, with the start of the 2017-2018 season.

Bell now serves as chorus director of the Grant Park Music Festival, founder and artistic director of the National Youth Choir of Scotland, chorus master of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, and associate conductor of the Ulster Orchestra. Born in Belfast, Bell currently lives in Scotland but plans to move to Washington to begin working with The Washington Chorus and implementing his long-range plans for the group.

"I am so delighted to be taking up this position with The Washington Chorus," said Bell in a statement released by the Washington Chorus. "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."