

# Washington Chorus names new music director

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By **Anne Midgette** May 11

Just in advance of the final concert of the season on Sunday, the Washington Chorus has named its next music director — and it appears to be an excellent choice. Christopher Bell, 56, a highly esteemed conductor based in Scotland who has led Chicago's Grant Park Music Festival chorus since 2002, will arrive in the fall to replace Julian Wachner, who, as previously announced, will step down at the end of the current season.

Bell, born in Northern Ireland, has a fairly high-profile career in Scotland, where among other activities he is the artistic director of the National Youth Choir of Scotland, which he co-founded, and chorus master of the Edinburgh Festival Chorus. He has also conducted a raft of major orchestras, particularly in Britain and Northern Ireland, including the London Philharmonic and the Ulster Orchestra. This makes him a fitting successor for Wachner, who also brought orchestral and choral experience to the table.

Bell will move to Washington to make the Washington Chorus a focus. In addition to leading the chorus's regular-season concerts, he hopes to create something akin to the Project Inclusion initiative he developed with Grant Park, targeting underrepresented youth — in tandem with an educational program in partnership with D.C. Public Schools.

In a laudatory write-up in 2012, the late Chicago critic Andrew Patner reported the kinds of praise that Bell was receiving at Grant Park. Patner said that two of the chorus's singers said, "He has the best ears in the business. ... He misses nothing and knows how to communicate what he hears and what he wants to reach his goal." Washington audiences may be in for a treat in the months ahead.

Anne Midgette came to the Washington Post in 2008, when she consolidated her various cultural interests under the single title of chief classical music critic. She blogs at The Classical Beat. 🐦 Follow @classicalbeat

