

MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT

EMBARGOED UNTIL 10.00 A.M. WEDNESDAY, JULY 8TH, 2020

**Richmond Symphony Executive Director David Fisk steps down after 18 years
Becomes Senior Advisor, Menuhin 2021, and President & CEO, Charlotte Symphony**

Former Symphony leader Michèle Walter to return as Interim Executive Director

Richmond, Va. (July 8, 2020) — The Richmond Symphony announced today that David Fisk, its Executive Director since 2002, will be stepping down August 31st, when he moves to Charlotte to become President and Chief Executive Officer of the Charlotte Symphony.

In order to smooth the transition in Richmond through the 2020/21 Season to its culmination, David will be retaining his relationship with the Richmond Symphony by stepping into a supportive role through May 2021 as Senior Advisor, Menuhin Competition Richmond 2021.

David Fisk has been an admired and well-respected leader of the Richmond Symphony over the last 18 years. He joined the Symphony in July 2002 from being CEO of the Ulster Orchestra in Northern Ireland, at a time when the RSO was preparing for the closure of the Carpenter Theatre and the creation of what is now the Dominion Energy Center for the Performing Arts.

Forced to react quickly to the sooner-than-expected and longer-than-expected closure of the Theatre from 2004-2009, David adroitly led the orchestra through 5 years of homelessness, during which the Symphony found new subscribers by taking its performances to area churches, becoming committed to what is now its hallmark, of “meeting people where they are.”

When the Performing Arts Center project ran into fundraising and political turbulence in 2006, David was tapped by Mayor L. Douglas Wilder to represent the performing arts on the nine-person Committee that led to the successful creation of a private-public partnership to complete the Center. He was instrumental behind the scenes in bringing parties together for the collective success of the venture, and laying the groundwork for its post-opening operations.

Following the opening of the Performing Arts Center in 2009, and the appointment of Steven Smith as Music Director in 2010, the terrible impact of the Great Recession forced tough decisions on the Symphony’s leadership to enable it to remain solvent. Audiences continued to grow under David’s custodianship through the crisis, however, and generous donors stepped up. By 2013, the Symphony was back in the black, and a new contract was agreed with the musicians’ union AFM Local 123 that restored equilibrium and became the basis for renewed organizational health and collaboration.

In 2015, David was the mastermind behind the purchase and launch of the Symphony's 'Big Tent', a \$250,000 mobile stage that has transformed the Symphony's relationship with the City of Richmond and the neighboring Counties. First deployed in front of a crowd of 11,000 for the opening ceremony of the UCI World Road Cycling Championships, the Big Tent has become a cultural icon, bringing families together in public parks across the region, including a record crowd of 22,000 for Henrico County's 2018 4th July celebration. Most noteworthy, though, has been the Big Tent's ability to generate proceeds from its community festivals in the City, of over \$400,000 to date, to buy musical instruments for all the City's elementary and middle schools. 7 of the 9 Districts have been served in this way so far. The Big Tent goes to Maymont in September and Forest Hill Park next June, aiming to complete the Symphony's goal of enabling every RPS elementary and middle school student to have access to learning an instrument.

Access to music for all has been a theme of David's tenure. Under his leadership, the Symphony expanded its youth orchestras program; created its annual 'Come & Play' event, that brings 700 community members together, playing with the RSO musicians; launched its Lollipops family concerts, and Rush Hour at Hardywood Brewery concerts, and presented many popular new programs, such as Star Wars in Concert, Video Games Live, and Harry Potter in Concert, that have introduced tens of thousands of new audiences to the Symphony.

The Symphony's financial health has remained a key focus of attention under David's watch. Its endowment has grown from \$8M in 2002 to \$18M now, and the Symphony's operating budget from \$4M in 2002 to \$8.5M in 2020. Working closely with its Boards of Directors and Trustees, David has helped to ensure financial stability along the way through special fundraising initiatives such as the creation of its cash reserve, a \$750K Rainy Day Fund.

Artistic highlights under David's leadership through the tenure of Music Directors Mark Russell Smith, Steven Smith, and now Valentina Peleggi have included major concerts held for the Symphony's 50th and 60th Anniversary Seasons, new commissions, broadcasts, and recordings - such as the Grammy-nominated 'Children of Adam' by Mason Bates - and especially Richmond's selection to host the 'Olympics of the Violin', the Menuhin Competition, in May 2020 - now postponed to May 2021. Working with Mayor Levar Stoney, the Presidents of the University of Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University, and the team at Virginia Public Media, David and the Symphony led Richmond's bid to beat out London, Melbourne and New York to bring this prestigious international event to the City - and to the USA for only the second time.

When the COVID-19 crisis closed the Symphony's performances down in March, David and the Board committed to keeping its musicians and staff fully employed while devoting every effort to special fundraising initiatives to counter the loss of ticket revenues; and deploying technology and creativity to replace live concert-going. So far, so good in that regard; and the Symphony remains determined to return to the concert stage as soon and as safely as possible, so that its music can once again help to bring people together, lifting spirits depressed by the pandemic. An online music marathon in

April raised \$65,000 in one day toward musicians' salaries, bolstered by challenge grant fundraising in May and June. The Symphony's popular summer concerts begin tomorrow - ***Comfort and Joy: the Beethoven Summer Series*** - with a live audience limited to 40 in the 200-seat Gottwald Playhouse, but hundreds more participating online, as the Symphony partners with VPM to present high-quality live video and audio streaming to audiences watching at home.

<https://www.richmondsymphony.com/currents/summer-series/> In a week or so, the Symphony plans to announce its return to the Carpenter Theatre stage in September, guided by federal and state health and safety protocols, with a combination of reduced capacity seating in the theatre compensated by additional performances; and complemented by live streaming at home.

David Fisk commented: "It has been an enormous privilege for me to serve the Richmond Symphony as its leader these 18 years, and to have been able to work with such wonderful musicians, staff and volunteers. While I am excited by the opportunity now to lead the Charlotte Symphony, I will be forever grateful for the warmth and generosity we have found in RVA, and for the countless friendships formed, through the Symphony's work across the region, and as our children have grown up here. Our family will always think of Richmond as home!"

George L. Mahoney, Board Chair, said:

"David has made a huge difference for the Symphony, for our community, for the arts in Richmond and for arts organizations all across the Commonwealth. While this is a sad day for us, we believe the Symphony's strong reputation positions us well to attract top candidates to become our next Executive Director and join Valentina Peleggi, our superb musicians and our excellent staff as we continue to inspire audiences and build on our record of innovation, community outreach and outstanding educational programs. We naturally will provide the community with regular updates on our progress during the search process. We thank David and his wonderful, gifted wife, Anne O'Byrne, for all they have done, we wish them the very best, and we look forward to having them join us, post-COVID, in a celebration of the many accomplishments of David's tenure."

The musicians of the orchestra added:

"The musicians of the Richmond Symphony would like to sincerely thank David Fisk for his 18 years of dedicated, talented, and transformative leadership. Some highlights from David's tenure include: leading the symphony back into the Carpenter Theater in 2009, raising funds to purchase instruments for RPS school children, increasing the number of full-time musicians from 36 in 2002 to 41 at the end of the current contract, and attracting the Menuhin Competition to Richmond. David has expanded the Symphony's presence in the community by making new connections and reaching out to new audiences, especially through the Big Tent Initiative. The musicians are grateful for the phenomenal staff David has assembled, and deeply appreciate his creative leadership and teamwork during this pandemic. We will miss David and his family, wish them all the best in Charlotte, and look forward to celebrating his remarkable tenure at a Masterworks concert in the near future."

The Symphony Board has chosen Aspen Leadership Group <https://www.aspenleadershipgroup.com/> to conduct the search for the new Executive Director over the summer; and, to ensure a smooth transition, David's predecessor, Michèle Walter, has kindly agreed to serve as Interim Executive Director in September until his successor takes office. In 2002, Michèle became the COO of the Virginia Performing Arts Foundation and was a key executive leader in creating what is now the Dominion Energy Center. Michele today serves as Managing Director of AMS Planning & Research, <https://www.ams-online.com/>, a consulting firm that helps arts organizations and facilities all across the country.

About the Richmond Symphony

Launching its 63rd Season in September 2020, the Richmond Symphony is the largest performing arts organization in Central Virginia. The organization includes an orchestra of more than 70 professional musicians, the 150-voice Richmond Symphony Chorus and more than 275 students in the Richmond Symphony Youth Orchestra programs. Each season, more than 200,000 members of the community enjoy live concerts and radio broadcasts. The Symphony was one of 21 American orchestras initially selected as a leader in orchestra innovation by the League of American Orchestras through its Futures Fund Initiative - it is now a recipient of a Catalyst grant to become a leading symphonic organization for diversity, equity and inclusion. The Richmond Symphony is partially funded by the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. More at <https://www.richmondsymphony.com/>

About the Charlotte Symphony

Founded in 1932, the Charlotte Symphony is a longstanding nonprofit organization committed to connecting and strengthening the community through exceptional musical experiences. Led by internationally renowned Music Director Christopher Warren-Green, the Symphony upholds the highest artistic integrity and takes bold steps to engage the community through music. We employ 58 professional full-time orchestra musicians, support two youth orchestras, and offer significant educational programming aimed at improving areas of our community with the greatest need. Today, we continue as a 21st-century orchestra, responsive to and engaged in the narrative of our community. We employ music as a tool for building community and even as an agent for change. The Charlotte Symphony is integral to the Charlotte area, serving its community through music that connects and inspires. charlottesymphony.org

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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