National Symphony Orchestra Names Ben Folds as Artistic Advisor

In Newly Created Role, Folds Serves as Curator, Collaborator, Mentor, Consultant, and Performer Through 2019–2020 Season


(WASHINGTON)—The National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) today announced the appointment of multi-faceted composer/musician Ben Folds as its first-ever Artistic Advisor, a post he will retain through the 2019–2020 season.

In this new role, Folds will perform, collaborate, and consult with the NSO across its varied offerings, ranging from classical to popular, youth, community, and contemporary culture programs. Folds, who is known for defying labels and definition, will also curate NSO concerts and presentations that bring together musicians from all genres and styles of music to collaborate with the NSO and create new experiences for audiences and performers alike.

“I’m honored to serve in this new role with the NSO,” said Ben Folds. “I’m excited about the possibilities—from music education to concerts—putting my favorite current musical artists together with our nation’s capitol’s symphony orchestra at the Kennedy Center to make something new. I’m looking forward to taking this creative journey together.”

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“We are delighted to welcome Ben Folds into the NSO’s artistic family,” said Nigel Boon, the NSO’s Director of Artistic Planning. “Our incoming music director, Gianandrea Noseda, and our Principal Pops Conductor, Steven Reineke, are both eager to work with Ben and to find ways to collaborate that expand what our orchestra does and to redefine how it engages with our audiences. Having Ben’s fresh perspectives will enhance our offerings and inspire us all to think more creatively about music and orchestras in the 21st century.”

Folds’s involvement with the NSO will be evident immediately. On June 2 and 3, he joins Kennedy Center Artistic Advisor at Large soprano Renée Fleming in the Kennedy Center’s and National Institutes of Health’s Sound Health concert and events, which explore the effects of music on the brain, specifically through performance and music therapy, which Folds has championed for years. He has also curated and will host/perform with the NSO on June 30 in the final DECLASSIFIED performance of the current season, which also features composer/producer/guitarist/singer Blake Mills and Cuban R&B/Hip Hop artist Danay Suárez.

Over the coming seasons, Folds will help curate the NSO’s DECLASSIFIED events, which, beginning in 2017–2018, will feature two styles of program: a continuation of DECLASSIFIED concerts that offer shorter performances of classical repertoire; and the new DECLASSIFIED: Ben Folds Presents concerts, at which Folds will merge artists from multiple genres with the NSO to create unique live music experiences.

Next season, the classical format DECLASSIFIED concerts are slated for November 3, 2017 and May 18, 2018. The new DECLASSIFIED: Ben Folds Presents concerts are scheduled for January and June, 2018.

All DECLASSIFIED programs also feature pre- and post- concert events.
As Artistic Advisor, Folds will also curate the NSO’s Young People’s Concerts and accompanying Family Concert, a reimagining of Leonard Bernstein’s famous series as part of the celebration of Bernstein’s centennial in 2017–2018. In future seasons, he will lend his talent as a mentor to young musicians through the NSO’s education programs with future plans to compose new works for young musicians and ensembles as well as to engage further with the D.C. community through participation in the NSO’s annual In Your Neighborhood events.

In addition to his own performances and creative collaborations with the NSO, Ben Folds hopes to forge more connections across the Kennedy Center’s programs during his tenure, such as pairing the NSO with a comedy or other presentation, participating in the annual Arts Summit, joining NSO musicians or other Kennedy Center artists in D.C. public school visits, or curating a collaborative NSO program at Wolf Trap.

Folds’s involvement with the NSO and Kennedy Center began several years ago, when he participated in a master class segment and performed as part of American Voices, performed in the NSO’s first-ever DECLASSIFIED concert in 2015, and, most recently, performed his piano concerto as part of Ballet Across America.

**SCHEDULE OF EVENTS—DECLASSIFIED**

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<tr>
<th>Performance Dates</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Repertoire</th>
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<tr>
<td>November 3, 2017</td>
<td>DECLASSIFIED</td>
<td>National Symphony Orchestra</td>
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<td>Leonard Slatkin, conductor</td>
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<td>The Rite of Spring</td>
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<td>January 2018</td>
<td>DECLASSIFIED: Ben Folds Presents</td>
<td>National Symphony Orchestra</td>
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<td>Guest artists TBD</td>
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<td>May 18, 2018</td>
<td>DECLASSIFIED</td>
<td>National Symphony Orchestra</td>
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<td>Gianandrea Noseda, conductor</td>
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<td>June 2018</td>
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<td>National Symphony Orchestra</td>
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ABOUT BEN FOLDS
Ben Folds is widely regarded as one of the major music influencers of our generation.

He’s spent over a decade sharing the stage with some of the world’s greatest symphony orchestras—from Sydney, Australia to the Kennedy Center—performing his pop hits and his critically acclaimed concerto for Piano and Orchestra.

For five seasons he was a judge on the popular NBC series *The Sing Off*, which catapulted the art of a cappella into the national spotlight, and helped launch the careers of numerous a cappella groups.

Throughout his career, Folds has created an enormous body of genre-bending musical art that includes pop albums as the front man for Ben Folds Five, multiple solo rock albums, as well as unique collaborative records with artists from Sara Bareilles and Regina Spektor, to Weird Al and William Shatner. His most recent album is a blend of pop and classical original works that soared to #1 on both the Billboard classical and classical crossover charts.

Folds continues to pound pianos with cross country solo touring reminiscent of his earliest solo tour, where he defied skeptics by delivering a high energy rock performance using the intimacy of just a piano. His tour schedule also includes a series of orchestral performances where he will showcase his piano concerto and pop hits.

In addition to his self-described love of performing and making music “for humans,” Folds is an avid photographer, and is a member of the distinguished Sony Artisans of Imagery. He also recently served as a guest photo editor for National Geographic’s Your Shot global initiative.

Folds is also an advocate for music education and music therapy as a member of Artist Committee of the Americans for the Arts, and he serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Nashville Symphony.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The 2016–2017 season marks the NSO’s 86th, and its seventh and final led by Music Director Christoph Eschenbach, also the Music Director of the Kennedy Center. Founded in 1931, the Orchestra has, throughout its history, been committed to artistic excellence and music education. In 1986, the National Symphony became an artistic affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where it has performed a full season of subscription concerts since the Center opened in 1971. The National Symphony Orchestra regularly participates in events of national and international importance, including performances for state occasions, presidential inaugurations and official holiday celebrations. Its regularly televised holiday appearances for Capitol Concerts and local radio broadcasts on WETA make the NSO one of the most-heard orchestras in the country.

The Orchestra itself numbers 96 musicians who perform approximately 150 concerts each year. These include classical subscription series, pops concerts, summer performances at Wolf Trap and on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol, chamber music performances in the Terrace Theater and on the Millennium Stage, and an extensive educational program, with performances designed for ages three years and up, and audience engagement activities, as well. Additionally, the NSO’s community engagement projects are nationally recognized, including
NSO *In Your Neighborhood* which comprises a week of approximately 50 performances in schools, churches, community centers, and other neighborhood venues) and NSO *Sound Health*, which has taken the NSO to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Children’s Inn at NIH, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Children’s National Medical Center, and Inova Health System. Career development opportunities include the NSO Youth Fellowship Program and its Summer Music Institute.

For more information, visit [nationalsymphony.org](http://nationalsymphony.org).

**FUNDING CREDITS**

*David and Alice Rubenstein* are the Presenting Underwriters of the NSO.

The NSO Music Director Chair is generously endowed by *Victoria and Roger Sant*.

Bank of America is the Presenting Sponsor of Performances for Young Audiences.

Washington Gas is the proud sponsor of the NSO Family Concerts.

Additional support for the NSO Family Concerts is provided by The Clark Charitable Foundation; Macy’s; The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation; an endowment from the Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation; the U.S. Department of Education; and the Women’s Committee for the National Symphony Orchestra.

Support for Renée Fleming’s initiatives at the Kennedy Center is provided by Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker and Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan.

The National Symphony Orchestra’s Community Engagement Program is made possible through the generosity of Mrs. Irene Pollin.

Major support for NSO *Sound Health* is provided by Aetna and The Orlebeke Foundation.

Additional support for NSO Sound Health is provided by The Anne and Ronald Abramson Family Foundation, The Clark Charitable Foundation, the Foundation for Advanced Education in the Sciences, The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, and Dr. Annette U. Rickel of the Annette Urso Rickel Foundation.

Kennedy Center education and related artistic programming is made possible through the generosity of the National Committee for the Performing Arts and the President’s Advisory Committee on the Arts.

For more information about the NSO, visit [nationalsymphony.org](http://nationalsymphony.org).

For more information about the Kennedy Center, visit [kennedy-center.org](http://kennedy-center.org).

Patrons 30 and under and active-duty members of the military are invited to join the Kennedy Center’s *MyTix* program for special discount offers and chances to win free tickets. For more information, visit [kennedy-center.org/mytix](http://kennedy-center.org/mytix)
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