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**DONALD PALUMBO NAMED NEXT DIRECTOR OF
THE CHICAGO SYMPHONY CHORUS**

**Palumbo Only the Third Chorus Director in the
Grammy Award-Winning Ensemble's 67-year History**

CHICAGO – The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA) has announced that distinguished choral director and educator Donald Palumbo has been selected as the next Chorus Director of the Chicago Symphony Chorus. His appointment is the result of the unanimous recommendation of the Chorus Director Search Committee following a multi-season, national search. Palumbo will begin an initial three-year tenure beginning July 1, 2025. As Chorus Director, he will work with the Chicago Symphony Chorus each year to prepare multiple programs across the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's downtown season and the annual summer residency at the Ravinia Festival.

Palumbo prepares the Chicago Symphony Chorus for the first time as Chorus Director for its [July 18](#) Ravinia Festival performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 (*Resurrection*) with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and renowned soloists led by the Festival's Chief Conductor Marin Alsop. Prior to that, Palumbo prepares the Chorus as guest chorus director as previously announced for four performances of Verdi's Requiem Mass [June 19-24](#) conducted by Riccardo Muti, the CSO's Music Director Emeritus for Life.

Palumbo is only the third chorus director to lead the Grammy Award-winning Chicago Symphony Chorus in its 67-year history. He succeeds Duain Wolfe who retired from the role in 2022 after 28 seasons and Margaret Hillis, the founding director of the Chorus appointed by the CSO's sixth music director Fritz Reiner, whose distinguished tenure spanned more than three decades from 1957 to 1994. Prior to this appointment, Palumbo was Chorus Master of the Metropolitan Opera for 17 years from 2007 until June 2024 and Chorus Master of the Lyric Opera of Chicago for 16 years from 1991 to 2007.

CSOA President Jeff Alexander said:

“In his previous work as guest director with the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Donald Palumbo immediately created an atmosphere of collaboration that yielded exceptional artistry from the members of the Chorus. His distinguished tenures at the Metropolitan Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago only added to the search committee’s interest in inviting him to step into this essential artistic role that allows us to present choral and operatic masterworks from the repertoire at the highest level. Through our conversations with Donald and his clear enthusiasm for working with the Chicago Symphony Chorus, we knew this would be the ideal choice to build on the legacy of this award-winning ensemble. We are delighted to welcome him to the CSO family.”

Donald Palumbo responded:

“I am extremely honored to have been chosen to lead this prestigious group of musicians. I have admired their work since my arrival in Chicago in 1991, when I first met Margaret Hillis and attended many performances by the Chorus. My recent work with them in preparing programs for Maestro Muti was a high point in my artistic life, and I’m excited about future collaborations with Maestro Mäkelä. They have set the gold standard for choral singing through their vocal and musical skills, and by their commitment to excellence in every rehearsal and performance. I look forward to our collaboration in continuing the rich legacy of the Chorus.”

As Chorus Director, Palumbo prepares the Chicago Symphony Chorus for four programs with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra during the 2025/26 Season at Symphony Center, including Mozart’s Requiem conducted by Manfred Honeck ([November 20-23](#)), the annual holiday presentation of Merry, Merry Chicago! ([December 19-23](#)), a night of Italian opera repertoire including choruses by Verdi conducted by Riccardo Muti ([March 19-21, 2026](#)) and Poulenc’s *Gloria* conducted by Juraj Valčuha ([May 14-16, 2026](#)).

Palumbo made his CSO debut in 2022 as guest chorus director for concert performances of Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera* conducted by Zell Music Director Riccardo Muti and returned in 2023 to work with Muti and the Chicago Symphony Chorus for Beethoven’s Missa solennis. In 2022, *Musical America* noted that “Palumbo made the most of this chorus’s fabled ability to both raise the roof and gently caress the ear” and *The New York Times* added that the Chorus “sounded richly massed, and sometimes terrifyingly robust.” In 2023, the *Chicago Tribune* noted that the Chorus was “excellently prepared,” and the *Chicago Sun-Times* agreed, saying the Chicago Symphony Chorus was “expertly prepared ... handling it all with nimble dynamic control, clear diction, spot-on intonation, impeccable blend and a full-bodied, multifaceted tonal palette.”

As part of the search process, members of the Chicago Symphony Chorus had the opportunity in recent seasons to work with several outstanding choral conductors. The Chorus also had the opportunity to share feedback on their experiences with each candidate with the Chorus Director Search Committee.

Chicago Symphony Chorus and Chorus Director Search Committee Member Scott Uddenberg explained:

“Retaining the exceptional artistic tradition, sound, and legacy, as established by Margaret Hillis and maintained by Duain Wolfe for the Chicago Symphony Chorus were the hallmarks that informed the work of our search committee as we considered the best choice for the next Chorus Director. Having Donald Palumbo’s incredible expertise preparing the Chorus for significant opera and symphonic choral works and seeing his ongoing impact in our field helped to provide clarity in our committee’s decision and gave us full confidence in this choice. The musicians of the Chorus are excited that we have found wonderful new artistic leadership and will begin a new era of great music making together.”

The Chorus Director Search Committee comprised Chicago Symphony Chorus musicians Anastasia Cameron Balmer (soprano), Ace Gangoso (tenor) and Scott Uddenberg (bass); Chicago Symphony Orchestra Members’ Committee Chair William Buchman (Assistant Principal Bassoon); and CSOA President Jeff Alexander, Vice President for Artistic Planning Cristina Rocca and Director of Artistic Administration Randolph Elliot.

About Donald Palumbo

Recognized as a distinguished choral conductor and educator across a career that spans more than four decades and includes multiple awards and distinctions, Donald Palumbo remains one of the today’s most accomplished directors of choral and operatic repertoire.

Palumbo launched his career at The Dallas Opera in the 1980s as the assistant to Roberto Benaglio, the renowned Italian Chorus Master of La Scala. Following a 16-year tenure as Chorus Master at the Lyric Opera of Chicago from 1991 to 2007, he assumed the same position at the Metropolitan Opera. There he was responsible for the Met Chorus’ participation in more than 20 opera productions each season, and his work with the Met Chorus was honored with seven Grammy awards for Best Opera Recording. After stepping down from his position at the Met in June 2024, he returned to the theater in the following season to prepare the Chorus in a new production of Verdi’s *Aida*.

In Europe, Palumbo has held the position of Chorus Master at the Opéra de Lyon, the Aix-en-Provence Festival, the Théâtre du Châtelet, and the Teatro Massimo in Palermo. From 1999 to 2001, Palumbo was the Chorus Director of the Salzburg Festival, the first American to hold that position. In addition, he prepared the chorus for the Schumann Requiem with the Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by Wolfgang Sawallisch. In 2003, he was the chorus master for Berlioz’s *Les Troyens* in Paris under the direction of Sir John Eliot Gardiner.

In North America, Palumbo was the Music Director of the Chorus pro Musica of Boston and has served as Chorus Master of the Canadian Opera Company, the Dallas Opera, the Banff School for the Arts Summer Opera Program, the Opera Company of Boston, and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Recent projects include preparing choral forces for performances of Puccini’s *La Bohème* in 2024 and Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* in 2025 with the Philadelphia Orchestra and

Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

A native of Rochester, New York, Palumbo received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Boston University. Since 2014, he has been a vocal coach for the apprentices of the Santa Fe Opera and in 2016, he joined the faculty of the Marcus Institute of Vocal Arts at the Juilliard School.

About the Chicago Symphony Chorus

The Chicago Symphony Chorus regularly performs with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Orchestra Hall and at the Ravinia Festival. The history of the Chorus began in 1957, when sixth music director Fritz Reiner invited Margaret Hillis to establish a chorus to equal the quality of the Orchestra. The Chicago Symphony Chorus debuted in the spring of 1958. Hillis served the Chorus for thirty-seven years. In 1994, ninth music director Daniel Barenboim appointed Duain Wolfe, who served as the Chorus' director until his retirement in 2022.

The Chicago Symphony Chorus has performed many times at Carnegie Hall as well as internationally in London, Salzburg and Berlin. World premieres featuring the Chorus have included Ned Rorem's *Goodbye My Fancy*, John Harbison's *Four Psalms* and Bernard Rands's *apókryphos*. With visiting orchestras, the Chorus has collaborated with the Berlin Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and Staatskapelle Berlin.

Since first recording commercially in 1959 — Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* under Reiner — the Chorus has amassed a discography that includes hallmarks of the choral repertoire and several complete operas. The Chorus most recently received a 2010 Grammy Award for Best Choral Performance for Verdi's *Requiem*, led by Riccardo Muti on CSO Resound. The Chorus has received an additional nine Grammy awards for Best Choral Performance. The Chorus also has appeared on two movie soundtracks with the Orchestra: *Fantasia 2000*, and John Williams' score for *Lincoln* conducted by the composer.

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Chicago Symphony Orchestra: [cso.org](https://www.cso.org)

Founded by Theodore Thomas in 1891, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is consistently hailed as one of the world's great orchestras. In April 2024, Klaus Mäkelä was named the Orchestra's 11th music director, and he will begin an initial five-year tenure as Zell Music Director with the 2027/28 Season. Riccardo Muti, the Orchestra's distinguished 10th music director from 2010 until 2023, became Music Director Emeritus for Life at the beginning of the 2023/24 Season. Daniil Trifonov is the CSO Artist-in-Residence for the 2024/25 Season.

The CSO commands a vast repertoire, from baroque through contemporary music. Its renowned musicians perform more than 150 concerts annually, in Orchestra Hall at Symphony Center in downtown Chicago and each summer at the Ravinia Festival in suburban Highland Park. The ensemble regularly tours nationally, and since 1892, has made 64 international tours, performing in 29 countries on five continents.

Patrons around the globe enjoy weekly radio broadcasts of CSO concerts and recordings via the WFMT Radio Network and online at [cso.org/radio](https://www.cso.org/radio). Launched in 2007, [CSO Resound](https://www.cso.org/resound) is the ensemble's Grammy Award-winning independent record label, featuring live performances with world-class

conductors and guest artists. Since 1916, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus have amassed an extensive discography that has earned 65 Grammy awards from the Recording Academy.

The CSO is part of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association (CSOA), which also includes the Chicago Symphony Chorus, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Symphony Center Presents, and the Negaunee Music Institute. The [Chicago Symphony Chorus](#), founded by Margaret Hillis in 1957, is the country's largest professional chorus. Founded by second music director Frederick Stock during the 1919/20 Season, the [Civic Orchestra of Chicago](#) is a training ensemble for emerging professionals with Ken-David Masur serving as its principal conductor. [Symphony Center Presents](#) features guest artists and ensembles across an expansive array of genres, including classical, jazz, world and contemporary. The [Negaunee Music Institute](#) offers community and educational programs that annually engage more than 200,000 people of diverse ages and backgrounds throughout the Chicagoland area.

Through the Institute and numerous other activities — including annual free community concerts in Chicago neighborhoods — the CSO is committed to using the power of music to strengthen bonds with its longtime patrons and create connections with new audiences.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association is supported by thousands of patrons, volunteers and institutional and individual donors. The Negaunee Foundation provides generous support in perpetuity for the work of the Negaunee Music Institute.