

Oakland Symphony Names Kedrick Armstrong as Next Music Director

Armstrong's Role Will Comprise Conducting Appearances, Education Programs, and Community Engagement Work Throughout Oakland and the Bay Area



Music Director Kedrick Armstrong | Photo: Scott Chernis

Oakland, CA: April 9, 2024 – The Oakland Symphony announces the appointment of **Kedrick Armstrong** as its next Music Director, effective immediately. In addition to conducting the orchestra's public concerts, Armstrong will also actively participate in the Oakland Symphony's many education and community engagement programs, designed to inspire a love of music in people of all ages throughout the Oakland and Bay Area region. Through his musical excellence and commitment to equity in classical music, Armstrong is a natural successor to previous Music Director and Conductor Michael Morgan, who passed away in 2021 after a 30-year tenure at the Symphony, leaving behind an indelible legacy. Armstrong's next appearances with the Oakland Symphony will take place on October 18, 2024 to open the 2024-2025 Season.

Armstrong, who is 29 and hails from Georgetown, SC, is currently the Creative Partner and Principal Conductor of the Knox-Galesburg Symphony. The *Chicago Tribune* has praised conductor Armstrong for his ability to "simply let the score speak for itself." He enjoys a wide

range of repertoire, spanning early music to premiering new works, using his joy and curiosity for all music to cultivate understanding and collaboration within diverse communities.

"I am deeply honored and grateful for the opportunity to serve as the new music director of the Oakland Symphony," Armstrong said. "As a Black conductor, I find it humbling to stand on the shoulders of both Michael Morgan and Calvin Simmons [the most recent and the first African-American Music Directors of the Symphony, respectively]. The Oakland Symphony community has embraced me with open arms since my first visit in 2022 and 'The Town' immediately felt like a place I wanted to call home. The board, administration, and I are already building a relationship guided by trust, collaboration, and innovation, deeply rooted in the transformative work that has been a part of the Oakland Symphony's legacy for many decades."

After an extensive two-year search, Kedrick Armstrong was selected unanimously by Oakland Symphony's Board of Directors and musicians. The search committee, chaired by longtime Board member James F. Bell, was impressed by Armstrong's demonstrated leadership and community-building abilities along with his passion for and command of an extraordinarily broad range of music. All of these qualities were reflected in the programs that he conceived, organized and conducted, including Carlos Simon's oratorio "Here I Stand" (about Paul Robeson) in Oakland and the genre-crossing opera, "The Factotum," at Chicago Lyric Opera.



Kedrick Armstrong leads the Oakland Symphony | Photo: Scott Chernis

Dr. Mieko Hatano, Executive Director of the Oakland Symphony and a search committee member, said, "The committee was overwhelmed by Kedrick's scholarship and curiosity about all kinds of music, from classical and jazz to gospel and hip-hop. His programming is innovative and reflects his commitment to including underrepresented composers, works and artists, which speaks directly to the Symphony's mission. Wherever he goes, Kedrick inspires musicians, singers and audiences who are captivated by his presence, energy and openness; his commitment to community and music education for all comes through in everything he does, in everyone he meets. We are thrilled to have him join us at the Oakland Symphony."

Armstrong led three programs at the Symphony between 2022 and early 2024, which showcased his broad knowledge of the classical repertoire and enthusiasm for spotlighting diverse voices. In addition to music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, William Grant Still, and Dmitri Shostakovich, Armstrong also conducted works by Darius Milhaud and Joan Tower. On his Oakland Symphony subscription debut on February 16, 2024, Armstrong led the World

Premiere of *Here I Stand: Paul Robeson*, an oratorio by Carlos Simon on a libretto by Dan Harder, commissioned by the Oakland Symphony.

Kedrick Armstrong made a memorable subscription-series debut ... in a thematically and musically intense program on Friday. In performance and in the preconcert interview, Armstrong seemed irrepressibly involved. He is also a musical activist of the highest order and in the best sense.

– San Francisco Classical Voice

In 2023, Armstrong conducted the Oakland Symphony's Family Hype concert, presented in partnership with Ronald McDonald House Charities of the Bay Area. The program featured a playlist of music selected by kids fighting critical illnesses, their families, and the hospital teams and community leaders who support them through their medical journey. Free concerts like this one demonstrate the Oakland Symphony's commitment to reaching its entire community with programs that will resonate with audiences from many different backgrounds and experiences.

Named one of *The Washington Post's* "22 for '22: Composers and Performers to Watch," Armstrong spent several seasons as the music mentor and supervisor for "EmpowerYouth! Igniting Creativity through the Arts," a collaboration between the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Chicago Urban League. He also previously worked with Ravinia Festival's REACH*TEACH*PLAY, Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative, and Chicago Sinfonietta's Audience Matters. Armstrong's ongoing advocacy for minority voices in classical music led to a research fellowship studying Black female composers at the American Music Research Center in Boulder, Colorado.

In addition to Michael Morgan — whose impact on Oakland extends far beyond his role as conductor — previous Oakland Symphony Music Directors include Orley See (1933–1958), Harold Farberman (1971–78), and the orchestra's first African-American Music Director, Calvin Simmons (1979–1982). Two murals in downtown Oakland depict Simmons and Morgan, embodying their deep ties to the city; Kedrick Armstrong now joins their legacy of serving all residents of Oakland and the East Bay.

Through a broad range of music education programs such as the free Young People's Concerts for students in grades K-8, the Oakland Symphony Youth Orchestra, and the MUSE (Music for Excellence) program in public schools, the Oakland Symphony has helped over 100,000 young people unlock a passion for music. Of the orchestra's approach to programming, *Oaklandside* wrote, "For over three decades, Oakland Symphony's leaders have worked to diversify classical music by broadening its audience and broaching the questions that matter to communities historically excluded from prestigious arts institutions." As Music Director, Armstrong brings a demonstrated commitment to advocacy and music education, and will be deeply involved in programs like these and working to expand their reach even further.

About the Oakland Symphony

For almost 100 years, the Oakland Symphony has presented classical and symphonic music in the Bay Area. The Oakland Symphony, Youth Orchestra, and Chorus bring together orchestral music, choral music and youth education to strengthen the Oakland/East Bay community by providing live performances, education for lifetime enrichment, and the perpetuation of the performing arts. The Symphony's aim is to make classical music accessible to all members of the community by presenting unique programs and attracting a wide-ranging, culturally diverse audience. A leader in music education, Oakland Symphony has developed a comprehensive instrumental music program that serves over 1,500 students at 19 Oakland public schools. Later this year, the Oakland Symphony will launch a \$9M comprehensive campaign, *The Oakland Symphony Legacy Campaign: Sustaining Our Roots*. For more about the Oakland Symphony, visit Oakland Symphony.

About Kedrick Armstrong

Named by the Washington Post as one of "22 for '22: Composers and performers to watch," Kedrick uses his voice and platform as a Black conductor to advocate for classical music's performance, publication, and preservation of minority voices. This advocacy has led to various speaking engagements and a research fellowship with the American Music Research Center (University of Colorado-Boulder) studying Black female composers within the Helen Walker-Hill archives.

Kedrick's recent highlights include debuting at the **Lyric Opera of Chicago** to premiere a new opera, *The Factotum*, by Will Liverman and K Rico. He also appeared at the **Opera Theater of St. Louis** as one of the festival's assistant/cover conductors (*Tosca*, *Susannah*). Guest conducting engagements have included a SummerStage and family concert with the **Oakland Symphony**, **DePaul Opera Theater** (*Candide*), and **Chicago Opera Theater** (Matthew Recio's *The Puppy Episode*). He has also served as assistant conductor for Dan Shore's *Freedom Ride* at **Chicago Opera Theater** and music director for Monteverdi's *L'Orfero* with **Wheaton College's Opera Mainstage**.

Kedrick spent several seasons as the music mentor/supervisor for "EmpowerYouth! Igniting Creativity through the Arts," a unique collaboration with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Chicago Urban League. He also enjoyed working with Ravinia Festival's REACH*TEACH*PLAY, Chicago Musical Pathways Initiative, and Chicago Sinfonietta's Audience Matters.

Kedrick is an alum of **Chicago Sinfonietta's** Project Inclusion Freeman Conducting Fellow program, where he served as Assistant Conductor during the 2018-2019 season. He holds a B.M. in History and Literature from Wheaton College and an M.M. in Orchestral Conducting from the University of Colorado-Boulder. He graduated from the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts & Humanities. Armstrong has studied with and assisted/covered conductors John Nelson, Mei-Ann Chen, Michael Morgan, Cliff Colnot, Lidiya Yankovskaya, and Daniela Candillari, among others.

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