

# Chicago Sinfonietta

## MACARTHUR AWARD-WINNING ORCHESTRA – CHICAGO SINFONIETTA – ANNOUNCES THE APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER BLAKE-ANTHONY JOHNSON

*The Nation's Most Diverse Orchestra Welcomes New Executive Leadership  
Upon Conclusion of its 32<sup>nd</sup> year in July*

**CHICAGO (May 2020)** – Heading into its 33<sup>rd</sup> year, **Chicago Sinfonietta**, the nation's most diverse orchestra, today announced the historic appointment of Blake-Anthony Johnson as Chief Executive Officer. Johnson will officially replace Jim Hirsch, who held the position for fifteen years, beginning June 1, 2020. A leader in the classical music industry having worked with several orchestras and organizations including the New World Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and more, Johnson's multifaceted career to date encompasses work as an administrator, performer, and educator. An internationally recognized and award-winning cellist, he started his career in the arts as a professional cellist performing throughout the U.S. and abroad as an orchestral musician and soloist.

"We are excited to welcome Blake-Anthony Johnson to the **Chicago Sinfonietta** family," said Jim Hirsch, outgoing Chief Executive Officer, **Chicago Sinfonietta**. "There are only a few places where we can come together with all of our differences to celebrate arts and culture and the uniqueness of what we each bring to the community, and **Chicago Sinfonietta** has always embraced that notion. I am delighted to pass the baton to Blake-Anthony as his extensive experience with various orchestral institutions will help continue pushing **Chicago Sinfonietta's** mission forward. I look forward to watching how **Chicago Sinfonietta** progresses under his leadership and am confident that the organization will attain great success for many years to come."

Coming to **Chicago Sinfonietta** from Louisville, Kentucky, Johnson most recently worked as the Louisville Orchestra Director of Learning & Community. In the role, he was charged with institutional development, musician advancement and the organization's efforts in connecting a broad and diverse audience to symphonic music.

"The Louisville Orchestra family is overjoyed to see Blake-Anthony lead such a prestigious organization as the **Chicago Sinfonietta**. His visionary leadership will advance its mission of creating bold and innovative symphonic experiences that will embrace the broader community," said John Malloy, Board Chairman, Louisville Orchestra.

Johnson's work focused on the management and reach of the organization's programming aimed to increase and enhance the public's access to, understanding of and engagement with the orchestra and saw numerous successes including the opening of Paristown Hall, involvement on the citywide consortium Violins of Hope Project and more. He was responsible for 17 education and community engagement programs which aligned with these efforts.

"I am thrilled to be part of the **Chicago Sinfonietta** team," said Blake-Anthony Johnson, Chief Executive Officer-elect, **Chicago Sinfonietta**. "**Chicago Sinfonietta** is a national treasure, that over the past 32 seasons has contributed a great deal to our field and the city of Chicago. The vision of Maestro Paul Freeman has created an incredible organization that has been unmatched in the representation and celebration of equity, diversity and inclusion in a meaningful way. It is a legacy and tradition that I'm honored to continue with our amazing musicians, staff, board, and Music Director Mei-Ann Chen."

Johnson is an alumnus of the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University, Cleveland State University and the Manhattan School of Music. He currently serves on the board of CARES Mentoring Movement in South Florida and is a member of Sphinx Organizations' second cohort of Leaders in Excellence, Arts and Diversity.

"Throughout the entire search process, I kept thinking about our beloved founder, and who he would pick to be Jim Hirsch's successor as **Chicago Sinfonietta's** new CEO. I believe Maestro Freeman would have been very proud of the choice made by the search committee in selecting Blake-Anthony Johnson, a rising-star in the orchestra world. Blake-Anthony's musical journey, from accomplished professional cellist to orchestra administrator, his understanding of both the performance and business sides of an orchestra, and his love for the art, ideally positions him to guide this one-of-a-kind ensemble into the next chapter of its history. I am thrilled to have such a partner in Blake-Anthony and very much look forward to reaching new heights together!" said Mei-Ann Chen, Music Director, **Chicago Sinfonietta**.

Since its inception, diversity, inclusion and bold and dynamic programming have been at the center of **Chicago Sinfonietta's** mission. In 2016, **Chicago Sinfonietta** was one of just 14 organizations in the nation to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions – the "genius award" for nonprofit organizations. The Sinfonietta was also selected in 2016 by the Chicago Innovation Awards in recognition of its innovative approach to programming. Prior to that, **Chicago Sinfonietta** was named by ASCAP as the recipient of the 2011-12 Award for Adventurous Programming and in 2013 was dubbed, "the city's hippest orchestra" by the Chicago Tribune, always embracing the daring programming that has been part of its history.

"The **Chicago Sinfonietta**, like all performing arts organizations, will require innovation and creativity to survive and thrive in our ever-changing world. Fortunately, that is what we've been doing for the last 32 seasons. The appointment of Blake-Anthony Johnson as our new CEO is simply our next bold move. The board is thrilled with Johnson's meteoric rise as an insider in classical music and arts administration, but we are equally impressed with his out-of-box, visionary, forward-looking drive to create an even more diverse, equitable and inclusive world using the power of symphonic music," said Scott Hoesman, Board Chair, **Chicago Sinfonietta**.

For more information about **Chicago Sinfonietta**, please visit [www.chicagosinfonietta.org](http://www.chicagosinfonietta.org).

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### **About the Sinfonietta**

At the end of its 32<sup>nd</sup> year, Chicago Sinfonietta has pushed artistic boundaries to provide an alternative way of hearing, seeing and thinking about a symphony orchestra and is dedicated to promoting diversity, inclusion, racial and cultural equity in the arts. Each concert experience blends inventive new works with classical masterworks, each from a diverse array of voices, to entertain, transform and inspire. In 2016, Chicago Sinfonietta was the proud recipient of John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions (MACEI). This award recognizes exceptional organizations that are key contributors in their fields.

The orchestra was founded by Maestro Paul Freeman to address disconnect between the utter lack of diversity in orchestras and the vibrant, nuanced, communities for which they play. For more than 30 years, Chicago Sinfonietta has made it their mission to represent the city of Chicago, reflecting that vibrancy on stage and in their programming, making classical music accessible for anyone. In everything they do, Chicago Sinfonietta are inspired by founder Paul Freeman (1936-2015). The orchestra's 32 years have been highlighted by six European tours, two Kennedy Center performances, international acclaim as the pit orchestra of the Joffrey Ballet for nine seasons, two Millennium Park concerts attended by over 19,000 people and 16 recordings, including *Project W*, which was released in March 2019.

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The logo for Heron Agency, featuring a stylized red signature of the word "Heron" in a cursive script.

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