



For Immediate Release

Houston Chamber Choir Founder & Artistic Director Robert Simpson announces he is stepping down at the end of the 2024-2025 season, and the Choir announces appointment of Dr. Betsy Cook Weber as Artistic Director and Conductor beginning with the 2025-2026 season

Grammy® Award-winning choir will continue tradition of artistic excellence

HOUSTON, February 8, 2024 – Houston Chamber Choir Founder & Artistic Director Robert Simpson announces that he will be stepping down from this position at the end of the 2024-2025 season, marking the organization’s 30th anniversary. Simpson has built the Grammy® Award-winning Choir into one of the finest vocal ensembles in the world and leaves a legacy of musical brilliance that has enriched the Houston-area community and left a lasting mark on the choral community at large.

Simpson will continue to serve as Canon for Music at Christ Church Cathedral and Adjunct Lecturer of Church Music at the Shepherd School, Rice University.

Dr. Betsy Cook Weber, the internationally renowned choral conductor will join the Houston Chamber Choir as Guest Conductor for the 2024-2025 season and will assume the podium as Artistic Director and Conductor beginning with the 2025-2026 season. In a unique and dynamic collaboration, Simpson and Weber will join forces for the organization’s 30th anniversary season in 2024-2025.

The milestone 2024-2025 season promises to be extraordinary as these two exceptional musicians combine their talents, continuing the Houston Chamber Choir’s hallmarks of wide repertoire, seamless musicality, and unsurpassed sound. Simpson and Weber have worked together through the years and share great mutual respect and admiration.

Simpson founded Houston Chamber Choir in 1995, starting with a handful of singers, including his wife, educator and choral professional Marianna Parnas-Simpson. The choir has grown and flourished artistically over the years, receiving a Grammy® Award in 2020 for “Best Choral Performance” for its Signum Records recording of “Durufié: Complete Choral Works,” a performance of music by 20th century French composer Maurice Durufié.

In addition to this crowning achievement, the Houston Chamber Choir, under Simpson, has presented several world premieres, including *Desert Places* (Pierre Jalbert), *Circlesong* (Bob Chilcott), *Two Streams a cantata* (Daniel Knaggs) and *The Joyful Mysteries* (Daniel Knaggs), in addition to the regional premiere of *Mass for the Endangered* (Sarah Kirkland Snider). Simpson and the Choir have received prestigious choral awards, including the “Michael Korn Founders Award for Development of the Professional Choral Art” from Chorus America and the “Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence,” also from Chorus America.

Weber is currently the Madison Endowed Professor of Music and Director of Choral Studies at the University of Houston’s Moores School of Music. She is also active nationally and internationally as a conductor, presenter, clinician, and adjudicator.

Under Weber's leadership, The University of Houston Concert Chorale has established a reputation as one of the world's finest collegiate choirs. They have been featured at multiple state and national conventions.

Internationally, the Chorale has received acclaim at eight prestigious competitions, (Wales, France, Germany (2), Hungary, Italy, Norway, and the Netherlands) winning or placing in every category in which they were entered. Comments include "deluxe singing, eliciting admiration and gratitude," "wonderfully elegant and humorous," "sophisticated choir — expertly prepared and with a finely-tuned corporate ear."

Weber served the Houston Symphony Chorus for seven years as Assistant/Associate Director and, later, took the helm of that historic group as Director for eight seasons, preparing more than 200 concerts for some of the world's greatest conductors, including Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Juraj Valčuha, Christoph Eschenbach, Steven Reineke, Nicholas McKegan, and Jane Glover. She led members of the Symphony Chorus on highly successful tours in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany.

Weber routinely prepares singers for Houston's two early music orchestras, Ars Lyrica and Mercury Houston, and is also often called upon to ready singers for touring shows, including Josh Groban, NBC's Clash of the Choirs, Telemundo's Latin Grammys, and Star Wars in Concert. Cook Weber holds degrees from the University of North Texas, Westminster Choir College (Princeton, NJ), and the University of Houston.

The Houston Chamber Choir will announce its 2024-2025 season in early May. For more information about Houston Chamber Choir, please visit www.houstonchamberchoir.org.

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Link to photos [here](#) (Robert Simpson and Houston Chamber Choir)

Photo credit: Jeff Grass Photography

Link to photos [here](#) (Dr. Betsy Cook Weber)

Photo credit: Courtesy of Dr. Betsy Cook Weber

About Houston Chamber Choir

Led by Founder and Artistic Director Robert Simpson, the Houston Chamber Choir is a Grammy® Award-winning ensemble of 24 professional musicians selected from the finest choral artists in our region. "One of the jewels of the city's cultural scene" (*Houston Chronicle*), the Houston Chamber Choir has brought Houston an array of choral works for 28 years ranging from early music and Baroque masterpieces, including the city's first period instrument performance of Bach's *B Minor Mass*, to the rarely heard *Third Sacred Concert* by Duke Ellington, and performances and premieres of works by today's leading composers, many with Houston ties — David Ashley White, Christopher Theofanidis, Dominick DiOrio, J. Todd Frazier, Mark Buller, Karim Al-Zand, Pierre Jalbert, Marcus Maroney, and Daniel Knaggs.

The Houston Chamber Choir's awards include Chorus America's *Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence* and the *American Prize*. They were one of 24 international ensembles selected to appear at the 2020 World Symposium on Choral Music in New Zealand. The Houston Chamber Choir has appeared at national conventions of the American Choral Directors Association, the American Guild of Organists, and Chorus America. Tours have taken them to Mexico, Wales, and the Northeastern United States where they performed at Trinity Church, Wall Street in New York City, and Yale University at the invitation of the Institute of Sacred Music.

The Houston Chamber Choir's recording of the complete choral works of French composer Maurice Duruflé was awarded the 2019 Grammy® Award for Best Choral Performance. In January 2022, Signum Classics released its newest recording of compositions by acclaimed British composer Bob Chilcott. For this recording, the Houston

Chamber Choir is joined by the Treble Choir of Houston directed by Marianna Parnas-Simpson. The title work, *Circlesong*, is a 13-movement composition for two choirs, two pianos, and percussion based on indigenous poetry of North America.

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