



**BUFFALO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**

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## **Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra appoints Grant O'Brien as inaugural JoAnn Falletta Conducting Fellow**



The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra is proud to announce the appointment of Grant O'Brien as the inaugural JoAnn Falletta Conducting Fellow for the 2025-26 and 2026-27 concert seasons. This prestigious fellowship provides emerging conductors with comprehensive artistic development and opportunities to lead the orchestra in education, family, and community engagement performances under the mentorship of BPO Music Director JoAnn Falletta.

The JoAnn Falletta Conducting Fellowship builds on a legacy of cultivating the next generation of orchestral leaders at the BPO. While the name has evolved, the purpose remains the same: expanding access, opportunity, and mentorship for gifted young conductors. O'Brien succeeds Fernanda Lastra, who brought vibrant artistry and deep community connection to her tenure. He becomes the third conductor to hold this role, joining a growing lineage of Fellows helping to shape the future of symphonic music.

O'Brien joins the BPO following successful terms as Assistant Conductor of the Jacksonville Symphony (2022-2024) and Augusta Symphony (2024-2025). Recognized for his engaging podium presence and innovative approach, he has developed and led numerous programs aiming to make orchestral music accessible and appealing to diverse audiences, reflecting his commitment to music education and the communities he serves.

Throughout his fellowship, O'Brien will have the opportunity to conduct the BPO in Youth concerts, the BPO Kids Series, and community engagement programs, while serving as a cover conductor and assisting with concert preparation and program development. He will also contribute to educational initiatives for Buffalo Public Schools, participate in mentorship and professional development activities, and collaborate with community leaders through the BPO Diversity Council.

Falletta commented, "Grant embodies the spirit of innovation and dedication that this fellowship represents. His dynamic approach to conducting and passion for community outreach make him an invaluable addition to our orchestra."

Robin Parkinson, BPO Vice President of Education and Community Engagement, added, "Grant's commitment to education and his ability to connect with audiences of all ages align perfectly with our mission to make music accessible and engaging for the entire community."

Originally from Houston, Texas, O'Brien holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music and has studied with prominent conductors Neil Varon, Brad Lubman, Emmy-winning conductor Mark Watters, and former BPO principal tubist Don Harry. His father and grandmother grew up on Native American reservations near Buffalo; his grandmother was a proud member of the Seneca Nation (Cattaraugus Territory, Heron Clan). With these connections to Western NY, O'Brien brings a personal passion for enriching the region's cultural vitality.

O'Brien shared, "This fellowship feels like coming home. My path as a musician has been leading me toward Buffalo for years—my father lived here, I went to college just an hour and a half away, and my mentor, Don Harry, spent decades playing with the BPO. Now I have the incredible privilege of returning to work with one of the finest orchestras in the country and to contribute to its mission of bringing music to the people of Buffalo. I'm excited to collaborate on meaningful projects and become part of Buffalo's rich and dynamic arts community. Most of all, I look forward to engaging with the public school system and helping inspire the next generation of musicians, dreamers, and music lovers."

Read Grant O'Brien's full biography [here](#). For additional information, interviews, or images, contact Simone Viola at [sviola@bpo.org](mailto:sviola@bpo.org).

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## About the JoAnn Falletta Conducting Fellowship

The JoAnn Falletta Conducting Fellowship is a two-year professional program created by the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra to identify and nurture talented emerging conductors, with a particular commitment to engaging and elevating musicians from communities historically underrepresented in orchestral leadership. Fellows receive extensive artistic mentorship, practical podium experience, and numerous opportunities to lead concerts and community-focused initiatives that reflect and celebrate the rich diversity of Western New York.

Building upon the BPO's legacy of fostering meaningful inclusion within the orchestral field, the fellowship empowers young conductors to become leaders who champion musical excellence and authentic community connection. By investing intentionally in these future leaders, the BPO reaffirms its dedication to an orchestral experience that is accessible, welcoming, and impactful for all audiences.

*To learn more about the BPO's history, distinguished conductors and world-class musicians, and commitment to IDEA, visit the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.*



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