



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COLORADO SYMPHONY TO UNVEIL CHARLES BURRELL PORTRAIT AT BOETTCHER CONCERT HALL

Trailblazing double bassist spent more than 30 years with the Denver Symphony Orchestra

Nov. 29, 2021 – Denver, CO – The Colorado Symphony Association (CSA) will unveil a portrait of trailblazing double bassist Charles “Charlie” Burrell in a ceremony at Boettcher Concert Hall on December 4, 2021. The unveiling will take place at 7:00pm in the Boettcher Concert Hall lobby, prior to the Colorado Symphony’s performance that evening, featuring Elgar’s *Enigma Variations* and Eduard Tubin’s Double Bass Concerto featuring Colorado Symphony principal bass Steve Metcalf.

Burrell, 101, enjoyed a long and fruitful career as a classical and jazz bass player most prominently known for being the first African American to be a member of a major American symphony when he joined the Denver Symphony Orchestra, now known as the Colorado Symphony. For this accomplishment he is often referred to as “the Jackie Robinson of Classical Music”.

“Charles Burrell is a living legend who’s been a hero, mentor, and a shining example to so many in Denver and across the country for close to a century,” said Anthony Pierce, Chief Artistic Officer for the Colorado Symphony. “Charlie’s contributions to the music world, our orchestra, and this community have helped shape the world we live in today and we’re proud to honor his legacy with this portrait.”

Charles was born in Toledo, Ohio, and raised in depression-era Detroit, Michigan. In grade school, he excelled in music. When he was twelve years old, he heard the SFS under renowned conductor Pierre Monteux on his family’s crystal radio, and vowed to one day play as a member of the orchestra under his direction

His orchestral career began with the then Denver Symphony in 1949. In 1959, Burrell left Denver for San Francisco where he was hired by the San Francisco Symphony, becoming the first African American to play with them.

After five-and-a-half years with the San Francisco Symphony, Burrell returned to Denver and embarked on a 30-year tenure with the Denver Symphony, retiring in 1999 at the age of 79.

In addition to his work in classical music, Burrell also enjoyed a renowned career as one of the best jazz bassists of his generation. He was the top on-call jazz bassist in Denver for more than 50 years and performed with legends including Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker, Gene Harris, Ben Webster, and Sarah Vaughn. Additionally, Charlie launched the career of his niece, five-time Grammy Award winner Dianne Reeves and taught the legendary pianist/composer George Duke at the San Francisco Conservatory.

Burrell’s career garnered numerous awards and accolades including:



- 2008: Received a Denver Mayor's award for excellence in Arts and Culture
- 2010: Congresswoman Diana DeGette led a tribute to him on the floor of the United States House of Representatives in honor of his 90th birthday, referring to him as a "titan of the classical and jazz bass"
- 2011: Received the Martin Luther King Jr. humanitarian award
- 2017: Inducted into the Colorado Music Hall of Fame
- 2019: The Alphonse Robinson African American Music Association named the "Charles Burrell Award" after him
- 2019: Congressional Commendation by Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of House for his Excellence in Humanities and the Arts
- 2021: On November 16, the Aurora Public Schools Board of Education named its new arts magnet program in his honor. The Charles Burrell Visual and Performing Arts Campus will incorporate creative thinking into core K-12 curriculum and expand opportunities for arts education.

The portrait unveiling will be open to the public with valid tickets for the December 4 performance. For tickets and more information, please contact the Colorado Symphony Box Office at 303.623.7876.

EVENT INFORMATION:

What: Charles Burrell Portrait Unveiling

Where: Boettcher Concert Hall

When: Saturday, December 4 at 7:00 p.m. | Concert to follow at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: <https://tickets.coloradosymphony.org/6019>

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CONTACTS:

For more information or to request interviews, please contact:

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For high-resolution, downloadable images of the Colorado Symphony,

[contact: ndobreff@coloradosymphony.org](mailto:ndobreff@coloradosymphony.org)

The 2021/22 Colorado Symphony Season is presented by Bonfils-Stanton Foundation. Support also provided by: The Scientific & Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), United Airlines, and the Colorado Symphony Guild.

TICKETS:

Tickets to Colorado Symphony events are available online at coloradosymphony.org/tickets or by phone at 303.623.7876. The Box Office is open Monday - Friday, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., and Saturday, 12 p.m. - 6 p.m.

ABOUT THE COLORADO SYMPHONY

The Colorado Symphony Association is the region's only full-time professional orchestra committed to



artistic excellence and ensuring the future of live, symphonic music. Performing over 150 concerts annually at Boettcher Concert Hall in downtown Denver and across Colorado, your Colorado Symphony is home to eighty full-time musicians, representing more than a dozen nations, and regularly welcomes the most celebrated artists from all genres of music. During the COVID-19 health pandemic, we worked to safely produce over 50 concerts with and without audiences, including: 18 Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre performances, two large scale virtual community benefit concerts, and dozens of small ensemble concerts performed in numerous outdoor venues like the Denver Performing Arts Complex Galleria, Denver Zoo, and Denver Botanic Gardens. Virtual #PlayOn campaigns garnered 2 million views between our Virtual Music Hour, Weekly Replay, From Home Concerts, and MusiCurious Instrument Interviews. Recognized as an incubator of innovation, creativity, and excellence, your Colorado Symphony continually expands its impact through education, outreach, and programming. We partner with the state's leading musical artists, cultural organizations, corporations, foundations, sports teams, and individuals to expose diverse audiences to the power of symphonic orchestral music.