

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PAUL SPORTELLI RETIRES, SHAW FESTIVAL NAMES RYAN DESOUSA NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR

*- Paul Sportelli to retire after 28 years with The Shaw, passing conductor's baton
to his longtime Associate Music Director -*

Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON (August 18, 2026) – The Shaw Festival is pleased to announce the appointment of **Ryan deSouza** as its new **Music Director**, beginning with the 2027 season, following the retirement of longtime Music Director **Paul Sportelli** at the end of the 2026.

Paul Sportelli has been The Shaw's Music Director for 28 years, serving under three Artistic Directors and helping to grow and develop The Festival's musical productions beyond their original home on the Royal George stage, most notably bringing musical productions to the much larger Festival Theatre stage. Under Sportelli's leadership, classic favourites like Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady* or Styne and Sondheim's *Gypsy*, alongside more contemporary shows such as Ahrens and Flaherty's *Ragtime* debuted to widespread critical and audience acclaim.

"Music has become such an integral part of the fabric here at The Shaw, and our musical productions are truly world-class," Sportelli remarked. "I am incredibly proud of the work all of our creative artists have done here over the last 28 years. I'm going to miss being the Music Director of The Shaw, but I'm choosing now as the time to start my next chapter. It's time to hand the reins to Ryan and I'm excited to continue working freelance with The Shaw in 2027 and beyond."

In addition to overseeing all of The Shaw's musical productions, Sportelli has music directed and provided orchestral adaptations of all the musicals The Shaw has staged as well as co-writing productions of *Tristan*, *Maria Severa* and *The Secret Garden*. He has introduced and curated the Coffee Concert series and composed music for numerous plays.

Starting in 2002, with grants from the Metcalf Foundation and support from The Shaw Guild, Sportelli was able to establish The Shaw's annual music internship, mentoring close to 30 up-and-coming music directors, who have since gone on to flourishing musical careers. Recently, through The Shaw, Sportelli has mentored the Women in Musical Leadership participants in partnership with Tapestry Opera and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Taking over the Music Director role is Ryan deSouza, who currently serves as Associate Music Director and first began his career 26 years ago at The Shaw under Sportelli's tutelage. While helping to oversee musical productions and sharing conducting duties, the Shaw Festival was where deSouza first discovered his passion for writing music and has since written original music for a number of productions. Recent musical contributions include Tim Carroll and Selma Dimitrijevic's 2025 adaptation of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Shaw's *The Apple Cart*.

"For me, taking over the Music Director role is about legacy," explained deSouza. "And as a part of that legacy, I want to make sure I'm living up to the standard Paul leaves behind, both by continuing what he started, and by making the role my own."

Shaw Festival Artistic Director Tim Carroll also spoke about Sportelli's tenure with The Shaw, saying "It's been an honour and an enormous pleasure to work with Paul Sportelli for the last ten years. I have learnt so much from him, not only about musical theatre but about how music

itself works on an audience. We have been truly blessed, and I am very glad that he will still be around to call upon from time to time. We are lucky, too, that in Ryan deSouza we have a ready-made replacement, someone who has worked with and learnt from Paul, and whose own musicianship and creative feel are of the highest order. Thank you, Paul.”

“Ryan is a tremendous music director,” added Sportelli. “For nearly three decades, I’ve watched him grow, branch out and do incredible work at The Shaw and elsewhere. I can’t wait to see where he takes The Shaw next.”

Music Director Paul Sportelli is supported by David & Amy Fulton.

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The Shaw Festival wishes to acknowledge and honour the land upon which its patrons and company members gather as the historic and traditional territory of First Nations peoples. Recognition and thanks are extended to the Neutral Nation, the Mississauga and the Haudenosaunee for their stewardship of these lands over millennia.

About the Shaw Festival

One of the largest charitable theatre companies in North America, the Shaw Festival’s mission is to enrich and connect people’s lives through theatre. Based in beautiful Niagara-on-the-Lake, The Shaw’s 2026 productions include [*Funny Girl*](#), [*One for the Pot*](#), [*Amadeus*](#), [*Sleuth*](#), [*Jeeves & Wooster in Perfect Nonsense*](#), [*A New Work in Progress*](#), [*The Wind in the Willows*](#), [*Heartbreak House*](#) and [*Ohio State Murders*](#). The Shaw Festival’s Holiday Season includes [*A Year with Frog and Toad*](#) and [*Rodgers + Hammerstein’s Cinderella*](#).

Through its [All.Together.Now.](#) campaign, The Shaw is creating new spaces and programs where people can build real human connections and rediscover their creativity. For more information, visit shawfest.com.

We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing. ~ Bernard Shaw

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