

**Robert W. Cross**  
**Executive Director**  
**Perry Artistic Director**



Robert W. Cross founded the Virginia Arts Festival in 1997 and has served as its only Executive Director and Artistic Director. During his tenure, the festival has blossomed into one of the major Arts events on the East Coast, transforming the cultural life of Virginia's Hampton Roads region and making the area a cultural destination for travelers from around the world. The combination of stellar performances and easy access to some of America's finest historical sites and beaches has proved irresistible.

*The Washington Post* has called the Virginia Arts Festival the "Tidewater Tanglewood." From a two-week festival in its first year, the festival has tripled in size and attendance. In 2016, it presented 72 ticketed performances throughout the region from mid-April through June, with patrons traveling from 49 states and 13 countries.

As the festival's artistic director, Mr. Cross has drawn on his decades of experience as a manager, programmer and performer to build relationships with such distinguished dance companies as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Mark Morris Dance Group, Dance Theatre of Harlem and England's Birmingham Royal Ballet. The festival has brought world-class theater to Virginia, including performances by the Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre of Scotland's critically acclaimed drama *Black Watch*. And the festival has welcomed such prominent musicians as Itzhak Perlman, Joshua Bell, Lang Lang, Midori, Herbie Hancock, Van Cliburn, Renée Fleming, Steve Reich, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Orchestra and Tokyo, Guarneri, Emerson and Kronos string quartets.

In addition to bringing top artists from around the world, Mr. Cross has made it the Festival's mission to create and sustain new art from both international performers and area companies. Among the commissioning projects Mr. Cross has shepherded are: Ricky Ian Gordon's and Mark Campbell's Civil War opera *Rappahannock County*; a new staging of the Maxwell Anderson/Kurt Weill musical *Lost in the Stars*; and a new staging of *Romeo and Juliet* by choreographer Mark Morris, set to the never-performed original Prokofiev score. Virginia Arts Festival recordings for Naxos include *Rappahannock County*, Stravinsky's *Les Noces* and *The Soldier's Tale*, and the Schoenberg transcriptions of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and *Songs of a Wayfarer*. Additional Festival recordings include *Peter and the Wolf: A Special Report* for NPR Classics, and the debut recording of the DiGiallonnardo Sisters, who are frequent guests on *A Prairie Home Companion*, which has broadcast from the Festival multiple times.

Mr. Cross conceived the Virginia Arts Festival as a unique public-private partnership that receives support from area governments as well as corporations, foundations and individuals. With an annual budget of \$7 million, the Festival can proudly claim the distinction of operating each season with a balanced budget. The Festival has also become a provider of arts education throughout the communities of southeastern Virginia. More than 30,000 area young people are reached each year through special performances for students, master classes, and workshops.

Mr. Cross graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music, where he studied percussion with Vic Firth of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. As a performer, he has worked with such conductors as Klaus Tennstedt, Colin Davis, Leonard Bernstein, Joseph Silverstein, Lukas Foss and JoAnn Falletta. He has recorded for Naxos, Northeastern Records, NPR Classics, Albany and New Albion.

Mr. Cross has also enjoyed a long association with the Virginia Symphony Orchestra. He joined the orchestra in 1981, and six years later was made principal percussionist, a position he still holds. He has performed at the Leonard Bernstein Festival of American Music, the Skaneateles Festival, Brevard, Eastern Music Festival and the American Repertory Theater. In the pit with some of the world's most prestigious ballet companies, Cross has accompanied the Bolshoi Ballet, Kirov Ballet, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Boston Ballet, Joffrey Ballet and the Martha Graham Dance Company.

Rob Cross and his wife, Debra Wendells Cross, principal flutist for the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, make their home in Norfolk, Virginia, with their dogs, Rusty and Charlie.