

## PERSONAL BIO

# Andre “Chief” Dowell

*Arts Leader · Cultural Architect · FatherFirst*

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**I’m FatherFirst before I’m anything else.** That’s not a brand I put on. It’s the lens I make every decision through. I’m a single Black father raising two kids, and I believe the work of leadership starts at home. Showing up there is the practice. Everything else builds from it.

By day I’m **Chief Programming Officer for the Sphinx Organization**, the nation’s leading arts organization dedicated to transforming lives through the power of the arts. I oversee all areas of programming, which includes a national partner network of over 200 organizations, programs that have supported more than 1,200 artists across career stages, and initiatives with a digital reach exceeding 100 million people worldwide.

The way I lead sits at the intersection of artistry, systems thinking, and human-centered strategy. I build programs that create real pathways, not just moments. I’m clear about decisions and clear about expectations, and I lead through relationships. I bridge artists to opportunity, institutions to purpose, and communities to classical music in ways that feel relevant and earned.

I’m also an early adopter of AI and automation in arts administration. I design workflows and systems that reduce friction across teams. I integrate tools that streamline operations. I approach the work like a builder, thinking in systems instead of tasks. Technology, in my hands, is a way to expand access, improve decision-making, and scale impact.

I’m a native of Trenton, Tennessee. My musical foundation was laid in the Southern Black Baptist Church, where music and community were inseparable. I went on to complete my Bachelor and Master of Music degrees in Percussion Performance at the University of Michigan. A defining moment for me came in college, when other Black students saw themselves in me and reached out. That recognition shaped a lifelong commitment to representation in the arts.

Beyond Sphinx, I’ve been recognized as one of **Musical America’s “The Resilient Warriors.”** I serve as a board member for the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra, Third Coast Percussion, the River Raisin Ragtime Revue, and the Classical Connections Committee within the Association of Performing Arts Professionals. I’m also an Artistic Advisor for Intersection Music.

**I am FatherFirst.** It’s a brand and platform built for fathers who want to show up, and who know it takes work. It grew from my own life. Presence over perfection. Breaking generational cycles. Building the room I needed. I design custom Bows by Dre bow ties, develop content that braids fatherhood and leadership, and I’m constantly exploring how personal narrative becomes a tool for connection and community.

I live in Ypsilanti, Michigan, with my children, and more handmade Bows by Dre bow ties than I probably need.

*“I’m as committed to raising my children as I am to raising the standard for what leadership in the arts can look like.”*

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[andredowell.com](http://andredowell.com) · [AndreDowell@gmail.com](mailto:AndreDowell@gmail.com) · [LinkedIn: andre-dowell-40520035](https://www.linkedin.com/in/andre-dowell-40520035) · [Instagram: @AndreDDowell](https://www.instagram.com/AndreDDowell)