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THE HOBBY CENTER LAUNCHES “BREAKING BREAD,” A NEW SERIES WITH JAMES BEARD AWARD-WINNING CHEF AND TV HOST CHRIS SHEPHERD

Intimate Conversation Series set in the Hobby Center’s Founders Club Debuts April 2026

(Houston, TX) – The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts announces *Breaking Bread*, a new live conversation series in partnership with James Beard Award–winning chef, entrepreneur, and television personality **Chris Shepherd**. Launching in April 2026, the three-event series brings together Grammy®-nominated rapper and Houston icon **Bun B**; acclaimed cellist and self-described foodie **Joe Kwon**; and Michelin-recognized chefs **Felipe Riccio**, **Emmanuel Chavez**, and **Mayank Istwal**.

Tickets on sale **Thursday, February 26** at thehobbycenter.org, with individual tickets starting at \$35 and a three-show package available for \$89.

Hosted in the Hobby Center’s Founders Club, *Breaking Bread* places audiences steps away from the conversation. Shepherd trades his chef’s jacket for a microphone, sitting down with creatives and leaders who have inspired him personally and influenced culture. Together, they share candid, unscripted exchanges about craft, risk, reinvention, and the experiences that shaped them. Each evening pairs small-club energy with a menu curated by Shepherd and available for purchase, creating a setting where food and dialogue share the spotlight.

“Through this new *Breaking Bread* conversation series, I will share the stories of people I look up to,” says Shepherd. “Stories that haven’t been told before. What led them here to this moment on this stage with me. Moving this series to Founders Club at the Hobby Center is even more special for me since I’ve had such a great time working with the team to update the food and drink menus so guests can have a really wonderful experience from the time they arrive. Join me for these intimate conversations with my friends, who also happen to be incredible artists and even better people.”

The series takes its name from a ritual associated with Shepherd’s former restaurants, where whole loaves of bread were set on tables to be torn and shared, sparking connection among strangers. Though he has stepped away from restaurant life, that belief in gathering people around a table remains central to his work.

“The *Breaking Bread* series captures what makes the Hobby Center special, bringing remarkable people together in a setting where conversation feels personal,” says Hobby Center vice president of programming and education **Deborah Lugo**. “Chris has built his career around gathering people and sparking dialogue, and this series extends that spirit beyond the kitchen, welcoming artists, musicians, and leaders whose work defines culture today.”

The new series expands artistic programming in the Founders Club beyond its music focus in the Live at the Founders Club Series, opening the space to a broader range of artists and creative voices. The

addition reinforces the Hobby Center's role as an intimate crossroads where Houston audiences can experience diverse forms of artistic expression up close.

The Founders Club is a flexible event space located on the top level of the Hobby Center. For *Breaking Bread*, it is transformed into an intimate club with cabaret-style tables offering food with an exclusive menu by Shepherd and beverage service throughout the event.

Shepherd's menu includes Birria Taquitos with warm spicy broth and jalapeño cabbage slaw; Caviar, Crème and A Can featuring Altima Kaluga caviar with crème fraîche and sour cream and onion Pringles; and Crackling Queso with crispy chicharron and hatch chile queso. The full menu is available online at thehobbycenter.org/lafcmenu.

Doors open at 6 pm for guests to relax and socialize before the show. Patrons are invited to purchase full tables of four or meet new friends. Parties of one, two and three may be seated with other guests.

Visit thehobbycenter.org for more information. Patrons can become Hobby Center Insiders by signing up at thehobbycenter.org/news/stay-connected to receive updates and additional perks.

"BREAKING BREAD" 2026 CONVERSATIONS:

Breaking Bread: A Conversation hosted by Chris Shepherd with Bun B | Wednesday, April 8, 7:30pm

Grammy-nominated American rapper and Houston legend **Bun B** sits down with Chris for an unfiltered conversation on music, culture, and a career that keeps reinventing itself. From pioneering rapper to Rice University professor and trusted civic voice, Bun B reflects on the moments that shaped him. The two also get into his jump into the restaurant world and how Trill Burgers became a citywide obsession, plus his move into podcasting and storytelling—and what it means to build a legacy that stretches far beyond the mic.

Breaking Bread: A Conversation hosted by Chris Shepherd with Joe Kwon | Saturday, May 16, 7:30pm

Joe Kwon—known to many as the cellist of The Avett Brothers—joins Chris for a thoughtful, wide-ranging conversation about curiosity, craft, and creativity. Born in South Korea and raised in High Point, North Carolina, the self-described foodie shares his roots on stages around the world as they explore his Joe Kwon path from lifelong musician—with a detour through computer science—to artist, wine enthusiast, and collaborator, reflecting on how discipline and instinct shape everything he pursues, from music to food. It's a behind-the-scenes look at how passions evolve, how ideas connect across worlds, and why a melody or a shared meal can mean more than the moment itself.

Breaking Bread: A Conversation hosted by Chris Shepherd: A Michelin Roundtable with Felipe Riccio, Emmanuel Chavez and Mayank Istwal | Saturday, June 13, 7:30pm

Three of Houston's Michelin-starred chefs—**Emmanuel Chavez** (Tatemó), **Felipe Riccio** (March), and **Mayank Istwal** (Musaafer)—join Chris for an honest, wide-ranging conversation about what a star really means for their kitchens and their teams. They'll debate whether rankings push the industry forward or hold it back, reflect on the turning points that shaped their paths, and share the lessons behind becoming some of the city's most celebrated chefs. It's a rare behind-the-scenes look at success, pressure, creativity, and what it takes to build something that lasts.

ABOUT CHEF CHRIS SHEPHERD:

Houston-based chef, [entrepreneur](#), restaurateur, [author](#), [wine guy](#), [TV host](#), and flag-bearer for bringing kickass flavors back to our food.

Chris Shepherd has seen every side of the culinary industry, but nothing's made more of an impact than the thriving immigrant cultures found across Houston. Those uncelebrated chefs were the spark that lit

a fire—one that would eventually land him a James Beard Award, inspire his first cookbook, and make him a household culinary name across the country.

Chris's journey started in Tulsa, elbow-deep in the sink of a small sushi restaurant and eventually led him to the Art Institute of Houston. During that time, Chris fell in love with his city's rich immigrant cultures, and he wanted the world to see the real face of Houston through the food of its Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, Thai, and Chinese citizens.

So, after nearly a decade working in the city's high-end culinary scene, he launched Underbelly, a restaurant concept designed to celebrate Houston's uncelebrated cultures. He published his first cookbook *Cook Like a Local* in 2019, opening people's eyes to a new way of seeing their city, its foods, and the people behind both of them. Then, Chris launched the [Southern Smoke Foundation](#), a non-profit that supports food and beverage workers in crisis. He's joined *Food & Wine* magazine as Editor in Chef, where he mentors each class of Best New Chefs, participates in demos and discussions at their F&W Classic events around the country, and even writes an article from time to time.

Through his work, Chris has been honored with a James Beard Award for Best Chef: Southwest, a James Beard nomination for his cookbook, two Lone Star Emmys for *Eat Like a Local*, his show on KPRC-TV, and several "Best Of" appearances including *GQ*, *Food & Wine*, *Bon Appetit*, and *Esquire*.

Despite the awards and notoriety, Chris's driving force hasn't changed. He's hungry to de-bland the food business and highlight the uncelebrated humans hidden in plain sight.

The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts serves as a connector, convener and incubator for all Houston audiences, artmakers and arts organizations. Opened in 2002, the campus houses two theaters including the 2,650-seat Sarofim Hall and the 500-seat Zilkha Hall. Delivering a best-in-class patron experience, the Hobby Center welcomes over 400,000 audience members annually to engage with high-quality arts programming including the Memorial Hermann Broadway at the Hobby Center series, Beyond Broadway series, Live at the Founders Club, and more. The Hobby Center is also home to a full season of musical theatre produced by Principal Resident Company Theatre Under the Stars, as well as a variety of diverse performances from both Houston-based and touring artists and companies. Education and accessibility initiatives are central to the Hobby Center's impact in Houston through programs like the ExxonMobil Discovery Series that welcomes thousands of fifth-grade students to free performances every season. Please visit TheHobbyCenter.org. Follow the Hobby Center on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).

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