Testimony in Support of FY 2019 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts
Submitted to the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Jesse Rosen, President and CEO
League of American Orchestras
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The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to support increased Fiscal Year 2019 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Bipartisan support in Congress for the ongoing work of the NEA has been especially appreciated in the past two years, and we are grateful for the Subcommittee’s leadership. Further support in FY19 will enable the agency to provide more Americans with meaningful opportunities for arts participation.

The League of American Orchestras leads, supports, and champions America’s orchestras and the vitality of the music they perform. Its diverse membership of more than 2,000 organizations and individuals runs the gamut from world-renowned orchestras to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles, from businesses serving orchestras to individuals who love symphonic music. As orchestras navigate the rapid and profound changes coursing through American society, they are redoubling their efforts to serve their communities through the orchestral experience. NEA support via Art Works and Challenge America grants helps to expand the capacity of orchestras to present concerts and programs to communities of all sizes, and each NEA direct grant dollar leverages up to $9 of additional non-federal or private investment. The following twelve orchestral projects from FY18 total $197,500 in direct federal support and show a glimpse of some remarkable partnerships that are serving the public in increasingly responsive ways.

**NEA funding increases public access to the arts**

The NEA is committed to helping small and mid-sized organizations extend the reach of the arts to populations whose arts opportunities are limited by geography, economics, or disability. The Mobile Symphony reaches 35,000 people every year through its concerts and educational programs, with just nine professional staff members and 72 part-time musicians. A Challenge America grant helped Mobile Symphony bring Grammy-award-winning cellist Zuill Bailey and acclaimed conductor Andre Raphel to southwest Alabama, with both artists participating in educational activities for students in urban and rural Title I schools, including working with band and music students. All students were offered free tickets to the concerts with the orchestra. Raphel also spoke to students at Bishop State Community College, which serves a large number of low-income, minority students in Mobile's inner city.
Another Challenge America grantee, the Timpanogos Symphony Orchestra – an all-volunteer orchestra with just one part-time paid staff person – brought live symphonic music and educational activities to Price, Richfield, and Delta: three cities in Utah that do not have an orchestra of their own. Programming featured pianist Scott Holden, an accomplished pianist and head of piano studies at Brigham Young University, as well as Utah-raised singer Summerisa Bell Stevens. In addition to offering three community concerts, Timpanogos Symphony Orchestra also presented four school assemblies on the tour, introducing students to music from the baroque, classical, romantic, and modern eras. Following the assembly concert at Carbon High School, one of the school staff thanked the orchestra, remarking that “many of our students do not have the opportunity to attend a performance like this, especially free of charge.”

The Fox Valley Symphony Orchestra, with two full-time and nine part-time employees, and 75 musicians, used its Challenge America grant to support activities associated with a February concert featuring Grammy-nominated composer and trombonist Chris Brubeck. Brubeck and orchestra musicians shared music with veterans and students in rural areas of Wisconsin and conducted an interactive workshop with band students in Weyauwega at the Gerold Opera House and a lecture and performance by Brubeck at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, which inspired some memories of Brubeck’s father, jazz musician and composer Dave Brubeck. Chris recalled stories of his father going into hospitals to play music for veterans, connecting with them in a special way. Sharing that spirit, Brubeck said, “If the vets can’t come to a concert, I am happy to go to see them and reach out through music.”

NEA funding supports youth engagement with the arts

With 11 full-time and 3 part-time staff members and nearly 90 contracted musicians, the Des Moines Symphony offered nearly 6,000 Central Iowa fourth and fifth grade students the chance to learn in-depth about orchestral music. With the help of an Art Works grant, each school received an enhanced, multi-media curriculum, then students attended a live Des Moines Symphony performance which included visuals displayed on a screen above the orchestra, and a side-by-side performance with the Des Moines Symphony Youth Symphony featuring the winner of the Des Moines Symphony Academy student concerto competition. Through these concerts, the Des Moines Symphony is introducing a broad range of Central Iowa students to creative expression through orchestral music and building a shared cultural experience across many Central Iowa communities, urban and rural alike.

The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra (ISO) serves over 380,000 patrons every year through concerts and education programs, and employs an administrative staff of 62 full-time and 9 part-time employees, 74 full-time musicians, and 3 conductors. An Art Works grant helps support the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra (MYO), the ISO’s flagship education program that engages youth with music instruction and mentoring to discourage at-risk behaviors and set students on the path to lifelong success. Over 220 children from kindergarten through 12th grade participate in MYO, and over 130 of their parents and guardians either learn to play an instrument alongside them or volunteer in other capacities. Even though many MYO students come from areas of Indianapolis with the highest poverty rates and lowest levels of education, 100% of MYO seniors have graduated and enrolled a 4-year university since 2008.
Through its Intensive Community Program (ICP), the **Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras (BYSO)** currently serves 90 students of color and low-income students. ICP was created nearly 20 years ago to address accessibility barriers that prevent students from underrepresented communities in classical music from auditioning into BYSO and experiencing the benefits of a high-quality music education. ICP accepts students ages 4-11 who show exceptional interest in studying string, wind, or brass instruments and provides tuition subsidies, weekly music lessons, music theory classes, use of a good quality instrument, and ongoing mentoring from professional musicians until they graduate high school. ICP students participate an average of ten years and to date, all graduates of the program have gone on to attend college, many being the first in their families to do so. NEA support helps BYSO run this program with its 13 full-time and approximately 60-70 part-time or contracted artistic staff.

**NEA funding fosters innovative presentation of and engagement with music**

The NEA encourages collaborations, innovative presentation strategies, and initiatives that help organizations engage audiences in new and meaningful ways. Employing more than 290 artists and an administrative staff of 35 full-time and 12 part-time employees, The **Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO)** presented the No Fiction Festival, celebrating life stories through two weeks of concerts, education, and community engagement events. The festival explored the theme of sisterhood through works by women composers such as Amy Beach, whose accomplishments were a beacon in the suffrage movement, and the 21st-century composer of Maori heritage, Dame Gillian Whitehead. Concert programs also included works by sisters Nadia and Lili Boulanger, and Jessie Montgomery. On the theme of place, the composer, sound artist, and writer Brian Harnetty presented “Shawnee, Ohio,” a musical work with sampled sound archives, video, and field recordings about the history and ecology of Appalachian Ohio.

The **Arkansas Symphony Orchestra** (ASO), with 14 full-time administrative staff, 12 full-time musicians, and over 80 part-time musicians, is advancing streaming innovation, collaboration, and fun for Arkansans in its CANVAS Festival, which combined visual arts and the performance of live symphonic music with repertoire including Adam Schoenberg's “Finding Rothko,” and Respighi's “Trittico Botticelliano (Three Botticelli Pictures).” Orchestra musicians collaborated with the Arkansas Arts Center to curate a chamber music performance based on pieces from the center's collection and educational activities included lecture-demonstrations, pre-concert discussions, and open rehearsals. The festival culminated with a performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, “Pastoral” with visual artist Barry Thomas painting onstage in real time in reaction to the music being played.

The **Oregon Symphony** is also pushing artistic boundaries with its **The Sounds of Home** series, directed by Music Director Carlos Kalmar. By pairing classical works with visual art forms, the symphony guides the community through an exploration of the meaning of home through a unique series of programs onstage and throughout the community in venues such as homeless shelters, healthcare facilities, and community centers. The series combines three multimedia productions, four new commissioned works in three art forms, the first commission of a play by an American orchestra, and a diverse collection of collaborating artists from within and beyond the orchestral field. The orchestra, comprising 38 full-time and 12 part-time staff,
and 76 full-time musicians, is actively building collaborations with social service organizations and community leaders, as well as arts groups, to reflect on these issues.

**NEA funding helps honor and celebrate our country’s diverse cultural heritage**

A citizenry steeped in creativity, excellence, and the ability to navigate differences strengthens democracy. Orchestras are very effective at providing an artistic way of connecting people with one another and with our pasts. The Nashville Symphony, for example, with its 72 full-time and 357 part-time staff, and 81 full-time musicians, is using its Art Works grant to support the commissioning, performance, and recording of a new work by American composer Jonathan Leshnoff. The Violins of Hope exhibition showcased restored instruments that were played by musicians who were interned in concentration camps during the Holocaust. For three months, programming was curated and presented by the orchestra, under the direction of Music Director Giancarlo Guerrero, in partnership with more than 25 community organizations. Partners crossed disciplines and sectors, and included the Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee, the Nashville Public Library, and others. The Violins of Hope collection is on display, free to the public, at the Nashville Public Library.

The Toledo Symphony Orchestra (TSO), with its 18 full-time and 19 part-time staff and approximately 60 full-time musicians, helped more than 6,000 patrons celebrate the contributions of African-American musicians in the three-month long North Star Festival. Concert repertoire included spirituals, chamber music, jazz-inspired works, and a modern opera. Composers included Duke Ellington, Steven Gerber, Rhiannon Giddons, Alice Gomez, Adolphus Hailstork, James Weldon Johnson, Coleridge Taylor Perkinson, Florence Price, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Paul Schoenfield, Alvin Singleton, and William Grant Still. The signature event in the series was a special performance by renowned African-American soprano Kathleen Battle, who presented a concert program titled Underground Railroad: A Spiritual Journey. The TSO also brought music into a wide variety of community venues through a creative collaboration with the Toledo Lucas County Public Library system and the Lathrop House, a former stop on the Underground Railroad and local museum.

The Oakland Symphony, which employs over 60 musicians and sixteen staff, is presenting To Belong Here: Notes from the African Diaspora, a concert honoring the people of West and Central African descent. The program will feature works by 18th-century composer Chevalier de St. Georges; African-British composer and conductor Samuel Coleridge-Taylor; and Florence Price, the first African-American woman to have a major work performed by a symphony orchestra. In addition to these works, the performance will be narrated by Oakland native Prentice Powell, a spoken word artist who has performed internationally. In the lobby, Afro-Puerto Rican bomba drummers and dancers will present the once outlawed artform that was used by enslaved people to signify and organize rebellion.

Thank you for this opportunity to convey the tremendous value of NEA support for the communities that orchestras are serving in every corner of our country. We applaud the NEA’s national leadership in promoting excellence and engagement with high-quality artistry by all citizens and we urge you to increase our nation’s creative potential and access to the arts by approving increased funding for the National Endowment for the Arts in FY 2019.