

League of American Orchestras

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Written Testimony in Support of FY 2021 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts

The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to support \$170 million in Fiscal Year 2021 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). We applaud the steady bipartisan support of the Subcommittee and Congress over the last several years, which has made it possible for the NEA to expand participation in the arts throughout the country, and ask for increased resources to grow the agency's capacity to provide more direct grants to communities large and small.

The League of American Orchestras advances the experience of orchestral music, supports the people and organizations that create it, and champions the contributions they make to the health and vibrancy of communities. We seek to help orchestras attain unparalleled heights of artistry and celebrate broad-based audience and community engagement, having understood, embraced, and acted upon principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Along with the daily work orchestras do, and the partnerships they form to carry out their missions, the designation of being an NEA grantee provides a significant reputational boost that assists orchestras of all sizes in presenting concerts and unique experiences to the public. The following projects illustrate how orchestras—from Alabama to Washington State—are putting FY20 NEA funding to work to benefit their communities in socially impactful ways.

National Endowment for the Arts commemorates key moments in history

Art often serves as a medium for reflecting upon both positive and negative times of historical significance. With an *Art Works* grant, the **Cleveland Orchestra** will produce Alban Berg's opera *Lulu*, which Berg was forced to abandon due to the prejudice, propaganda, and political control of the Third Reich. This opera will serve as the centerpiece of a groundbreaking citywide festival that will encourage discussion about the role of art in society, government censorship, and prejudice. In addition to its 209 full-time administrative employees and musicians, and 32 part-time employees, the orchestra is partnering with many education and cultural institutions for festival events, the starting point of which will be the Degenerate Art & Music movement in Nazi Germany. In addition to *Lulu*, the week-long festival will include several other compositions and a performance of a 1944 commission by the orchestra from American composer William Grant Still. Together, the performances are intended to inspire introspection and discussion about the role music and art can play in contemporary society, and to aid in this effort, Cleveland area teachers and students will be provided with resources to assist in conversations about racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism.

Marking a very different time in history, the **Rochester Philharmonic** utilized its *Art Works* grant last month toward a multi-week program celebrating the 19th amendment and Susan B. Anthony. The celebration began with world-premiere performances of Gemma Peacocke's *All on Fire* and playwright Mark Mobley's *True and Devoted*, which investigated the legacy of Susan B. Anthony and the suffrage movement by re-enacting interviews with five women of Rochester, New York. The play was accompanied by selections from Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel, Copland, and Joan Tower. The cast of *True and Devoted* comprised local women with significant roles in the Rochester community, such as its mayor, Lovely Warren, and Catherine Cerulli, the director of the Susan B. Anthony Center at the University of Rochester. Similarly, the orchestra turned to the community to cast several local students from the Eastman School of Music for the following weekend's performance of Virgil Stein's opera *The Mother of Us All*, which chronicles the life of Susan B. Anthony with fictional and real characters throughout American history. Each of the orchestra's concerts celebrating the Women's Suffrage Centennial included free pre-concert discussions with the composers, performers, and conductors. Marshalling this effort was the Rochester Philharmonic's staff that includes 28 full-time administrative employees, 59 core orchestra musicians, and 50 part-time employees.

National Endowment for the Arts supports the diversity of our communities

Funding from the National Endowment for the Arts provides key support for orchestras to recognize and celebrate the diversity of their communities. With 81 musicians, 13 full-time and 9 part-time administrative staff, the **Santa Rosa Symphony's** *Art Works* grant supports commissioning and artist fees for a new work by Mexican composer Enrico Chapela Barba. This will be a world premiere of a new one-of-a-kind work for mariachi and orchestra that captures the human story and history of the Bracero Program's Mexican immigrant workers in the United States. This little-known policy agreement brought Mexican agricultural workers into the U.S. from 1942-1964 to offset the labor shortage caused by World War II, thus marking the beginning of rural Mexican immigration. With the golden age of mariachi music taking place during the same period, this commission provides a unique musical opportunity to reflect upon the origins of the changing demographics in the U.S. The symphony has also collected the stories of Sonoma County, California residents who worked in the Bracero Program and will use these real-life narratives to help frame for audiences the historical relevance of the new musical work.

Also connecting with its Latino population is the **Carson City Symphony**, a community orchestra in Nevada of approximately 60 musicians. A *Challenge America* grant is partially funding the LatinXpressions concert series, which features the musical traditions of Central and South America. The first concert drew many new audiences members to experience oboeist Stephen Caplan perform "Concertino para oboé e cordas" by Brazilian composer Brenno Blauth, the dancing of Ballet Folklórico International of Reno to orchestral arrangements of "Gira por México" and "Las Chiapanecas," cellist Angelese Pepper playing "Allegro Appassionato for Cello and Orchestra" by Camille Saint-Saëns, and performances of "Estampas Mexicanas" by José Luis Elizondo, "Andalucía Suite" by Cuban composer Ernesto Lecuona, and "Carmen Suite No. 1" by Georges Bizet. A pre-concert preview with the artists offered patrons an opportunity to learn about the composers and music, and the orchestra collaborated

with Lupe Ramirez, Latino Outreach Coordinator at Western Nevada College, to help with translations, concert promotion, and to act as bilingual narrator for one of the pieces on the program.

Another *Challenge America* recipient engaging with its community is the **Mobile Symphony** in Alabama, staffed by 10 salaried administration and education professionals, an orchestra of 85 part-time musicians, and 14 additional part-time educational program instructors and instrument coaches. The Mobile Symphony is engaging cello prodigy Sujari Britt for performances with the orchestra and to engage with students at Bishop State Community College, a historically Black college located in inner-city Mobile. Britt will also visit two Title I elementary schools to perform for youth who are underserved and lack engagement opportunities with the arts. The orchestra aims to bring diverse and inspirational musicians to schools that serve high numbers of minorities and lower-income children. Bishop State's student population is two-thirds African American, and 94 percent of students receive financial aid. In addition to Britt's upcoming free performance at Bishop State, NEA support two years ago helped Mobile Symphony bring Grammy-winning cellist Zuill Bailey and highly acclaimed conductor Andre Raphael to the college and to students in Mobile and rural areas of Mobile County.

National Endowment for the Arts advances inclusivity and accessibility

The **Gateway Chamber Orchestra**, in Clarksville, Tennessee, will record award-winning composer Jeffrey Wood's *Different Bodies*. The original 2016 orchestral song cycle spoke to what it means to be a marginalized human being fighting for acceptance. Wood's composition is inspired by Kenneth Sherman's book, *Different Bodies*, about Joseph Merrick, known as the Elephant Man. The composer hoped audiences would glean from the piece "a sense of this extraordinary person in history, as well as a sense of what it means to be a thoroughly marginalized human being. I have tried to bring across Merrick's pathos as well as his defiance, fighting against simply unimaginable odds in his attempt to be accepted on his own terms. I feel that the subject remains relevant, as there is perhaps an even greater struggle today for many battling marginalization of all kinds." The 2016 performance was so well-received that the orchestra, which has no full-time employees but has a working board, many volunteers, and contracted personnel, is re-engaging baritone Jeffrey Williams for the *Art Works*-supported recording that will be internationally distributed.

The **Georgia Symphony Orchestra**, with just two full-time and 18 part-time staff members, along with about 40 regular paid-per-service musicians, will put its *Challenge America* grant toward the production of its fifth annual sensory-friendly concert for members of the community with autism and sensory sensitivity, along with their families. After holding thoughtful conversations with those in the special needs community and reviewing research studies, the orchestra collaborated with Autism Speaks to present its first sensory-friendly concert in 2016 to overwhelmingly positive feedback, which led to the decision to make this an annual event for the autism community. The upcoming concert, which will celebrate neurodiversity on March 7, will guide listeners through the history of classical music in an environment designed for audience members with sensory sensitivity. For this fifth annual concert, the orchestra is collaborating with Synergies Work, a local nonprofit that will provide a

visual art display by local artists with disabilities. Together, the two organizations will present a live art experience that includes interactive elements for audience members.

National Endowment for the Arts encourages the public to experience art in new ways

Art Works recipient **Oregon Symphony** will present *SoundSights*, a series of multimedia concerts designed to attract new patrons by reimagining what a symphony performance can be. Each production is created in conjunction with an artist from an artistic discipline outside of music. The productions include a live staging of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* from acclaimed director Mary Birnbaum that features Jean Sibelius' engrossing incidental music; original animation and video projection from Portland's own renowned media artist Rose Bond to illuminate Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia*; and a production of Silvestre Revueltas' *La noche de los mayas* that comes to life under the direction of Emmy- and Tony-winning stage and puppet designer Michael Curry, also a Portland native. These collaborations are reaching beyond the typical audience to bring the power of symphonic music to new people and inspire the orchestra's 76 full-time musicians and 53 staff members to think creatively about partnering across artistic disciplines to create rich experiences. The orchestra is leveraging technology to share glimpses into the creative process with behind-the-scenes videos with collaborators, which have already been viewed by more than 1,200 community members on social media platforms.

Symphony Tacoma in Washington received an *Art Works* grant to support its first Composer in the Community residency project with award-winning composer David Ludwig. Under the direction of Music Director Sarah Ioannides, Symphony Tacoma's 7 full-time staff and 84 part-time musicians will present performances of Ludwig's works, including a newly commissioned work titled *The Bleeding Pines*, inspired by Beethoven's "Choral Fantasy" and based on a play by Ray Owen that tells the story of North Carolina's endangered Round Top Long Leaf Pine forest. In addition to the world premiere of this piece, Ludwig will share his talents with a broad cross-section of residents through intensive coaching visits to low-income high school orchestra classes and open-to-the-public masterclasses for music majors at Pacific Lutheran University and the University of Puget Sound. The culminating event of this year's residency will be an event featuring the performance of the work of four rising local composers, to be selected by competitive process led by Ludwig and Maestra Ioannides. Each piece will be followed by feedback delivered to each composer by Ludwig, Ioannides, and orchestra members. This "reading event" is a rare glimpse into the inner workings of an orchestra and how music comes to fruition and will be available free of charge to an audience of 1,000 people.

Thank you for this opportunity to illustrate just a handful of ways the NEA supports orchestras in service to their communities. The agency's value cannot be overstated, with every dollar invested directly by the NEA matched by up to \$9 of additional nonfederal or private investment. In all, there are more than two million full-time artists and nearly five million arts-related jobs in our country, and the distinction of an NEA grant helps many organizations continue to offer employment as well as a broad range of arts experiences to the public. The NEA has shown consistent leadership in promoting public engagement with high-quality artistry, and we urge you to expand our nation's access to the arts with an appropriation of \$170 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in FY 2021.