

**Simon Woods, President and CEO
League of American Orchestras
March 10, 2022**

**Written Testimony in Support of FY 2023 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 for fiscal year 2023 a funding level of at minimum \$201 million for the National Endowment for the Arts, as recommended for FY22 by the Appropriations Committee. Like many artists and arts organizations throughout the country, we have been very encouraged to see the agency receive ongoing bipartisan support from the Subcommittee and Congress over the last several years. As we collectively enter the next phase of resuming a more interconnected and interactive life, it is essential for the arts to continue receiving strong federal support that helps communities across the country to celebrate life, mourn those we have lost, process our angst over troubling global conflicts, and so much more. The arts have always provided a productive, creative way to express the full range of what makes us human, and the past few years truly necessitate that children and adults have every opportunity to come together and share in the life-changing and life-affirming experience of engaging with the arts.

The NEA is strongly valued because of the leadership it provides through direct and indirect grantmaking, cross-cutting research, and convenings that bring together arts organizations and practitioners for shared learning. A direct grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts is a significant honor and designation that conveys an organization, regardless of its size or geographic location, has passed a rigorous panel review and offers an artistic engagement worthy of limited federal dollars.

Orchestras undertake countless projects and continually innovate to enhance the experience of live music for people of all ages. Being responsive to community needs is at the heart of every nonprofit organization's mission, and orchestras have been no exception to learning new ways of engaging audiences when traditional ways of gathering were so suddenly disrupted. The arts are a vital part of every community's ecology, and orchestras large and small provide solace, gathering, renewal, and hope for its audiences, who are more than mere listeners but increasingly serve as co-curators of the kind of art they most wish to experience. Grants from the National Endowment for the Arts are an essential form of federal support, and in some cases a lifeline during very precarious times. Moreover, the federal support pays dividends in the other forms of support it leverages, and it inspires others who seek to innovate and draw inspiration from colleagues near and far.

The following orchestral examples illustrate the range of activity and community engagement the NEA helps make possible.

The **Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra** received an NEA Grants for Arts Project award to support its Sandbox composer residency project, a pilot initiative driven by the orchestra's artistic vision committee. The annual residency will place the composer in the center of the orchestra's programs, working directly with musicians through regular rehearsals to try out works in progress, encouraging deeper collaboration and transparency in the artistic development process and grounding new works in the here and now. The community will have opportunities to connect with the composer and orchestra musicians through panel discussions, interviews, open rehearsals, talk-back sessions, social media and blog content, and gatherings. Performances and related activities will take place at the Ordway Concert Hall and in numerous neighborhood venues throughout the Twin Cities, serving many Minneapolis/St. Paul audiences.

The curation of engaging, illuminating programming is at the heart of **The Cleveland Orchestra's** (TCO) "Outsiders in Opera and Music" program, featuring Giuseppe Verdi's opera "Otello," based on Shakespeare's tragedy centered on a Moorish character who was treated as an outsider. Continuing this theme, TCO will present several education concerts for elementary and middle grade students. For Grades 3-5 students, "Music's Many Voices" will include repertoire by composers of many cultures, races, and genders such as Gioachino Rossini, William Grant Still, Carlos Chavez, Reena Esmail, Huang Ruo, Alejandro Garcia Caturla, and John Williams. For Grades 6-8 students, performances will feature the music of Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, a Black composer who was a contemporary of Mozart. In addition, TCO will present an ensemble program, Honoring Black Composers, at Karamu House Theatre and in Reinberger Chamber Hall this May as preludes to non-operatic concerts that continue to explore the 'outsiders' composers festival theme.

Another orchestra exploring a mixture of genres is the **Pensacola Symphony Orchestra**, which in January of this year presented an open dress rehearsal and a concert performance pairing symphonic music with the works of local poets. "Lyric for Strings," written by Pulitzer Prize-winning Black American composer George Walker to commemorate the loss of his grandmother, a formerly enslaved person, was presented as a companion piece to a poem by Pensacola poet Charles McCaskill, Jr. titled, "If These Bricks Could Breathe." The poem shared the feeling of loss in the Pensacola community following the razing of the home of John Sunday, a member of the Union Army, a community leader, and one of the first Black men to serve in the Florida House of Representatives and also the Pensacola City Council. Northwest Florida Poet Laureate, Jamey Jones helped to curate the concert and was also a participant in the project with his poem "Nine River Ways," which paired with the flowing melodies of "Old and Lost Rivers" by composer Tobias Picker. Jones' poem contemplates the literal and ethereal ways in which human existence is like flowing water, powerful and serene, poignant and mundane. Both local poets participated alongside current city councilwoman and John Sunday Society President, Teniade Broughton in a panel discussion about the legacy of Sunday and the Black community in Pensacola. Attendees of the forum were given free tickets to the dress rehearsal and the poets joined Pensacola Symphony's Music Director Peter Rubardt for a pre-concert discussion sharing greater context for the project. The symphony

was delighted to have descendants of John Sunday join for the performance as guests of Councilwoman Broughton, and area creative writing students were given free tickets to the performance.

Creating new opportunities for young people to experience is a priority many grantees share. With a Challenge America grant, the **Boise Phil** has been able to greatly expand its reach and service to local educators. This modest but impactful grant allowed the orchestra to increase free access by creating an education resource library for schools across Southern Idaho. This resource simultaneously supported classroom teachers while also safely engaging participants amid the COVID-19 pandemic through a virtual format. Additionally, the Challenge America grant provided valuable funds that gave the orchestra space to rethink and reimagine its approaches to serving the local community. One example of a new approach Boise Phil is undertaking is to pilot a new school program, which involved the development of a 10-week sequential curriculum aligned with national core arts standards. This new programming would not have been possible without the support of the National Endowment for the Arts, and at a time that has been especially critical not only for the arts, but for teachers and students.

With funding from the NEA's American Rescue Plan Act grant, **Symphony Tacoma** is able to move forward with its commitment to community during unpredictable times. This includes ensuring consistent employment for its staff of six and part-time professional orchestra comprising 84 musicians. The Rescue Plan grant covers a wide range of performances in and around Tacoma—this includes performances at farmers markets, presenting a family series, providing high school orchestra coaching, as well as offering masterclasses with guest artists. Like countless orchestras and arts organizations across the country, Symphony Tacoma's finances were uncertain during the pandemic, but providing music for its community was considered something that must continue—particularly during a time when the power of music has been needed most.

The **Reno Chamber Orchestra** (RCO) also received an American Rescue Plan grant, which will help offset the costs of additional venue rental and new artistic personnel positions. Expanding its performance offerings to include new venues can greatly alter the live experience an orchestra provides. For example, venues such as Acro Enso, which the RCO utilized during the last year in addition to its traditional concert space, are highly valuable because they allow audiences to be seated closer to the orchestra and thus provide a more creative and immersive concert experience. RCO's grant will support a new associate conductor program under the leadership of its new music director, Kelly Kuo. Maestro Kuo brings a traditional chamber orchestra repertoire vision along with the desire to feature composers that have historically been overlooked—like 19th century French composer Louise Farrenc—as well as composers writing music that addresses our current world. Part of Kuo's artistic vision focuses on the next generation of artistic leaders, specifically conductors. An associate conductor program under Kuo's leadership will recruit conductors who identify as female or BIPOC (black, indigenous, or people of color), which are underrepresented groups in classical music. The RCO will select one conductor per season to work with Maestro Kuo

and the orchestra, and the associate conductor will have the opportunity to conduct at least one RCO concert per season.

While many orchestras are expanding the repertoire of the music they share with audiences, the **New Haven Symphony Orchestra** (NHSO), like Reno, is promoting opportunities for musicians from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. In addition to receiving an American Rescue Plan grant, which supported wages for musicians and key staff, the NHSO also received Grants for Arts Projects support for its Harmony Fellowship, which provides professional development across musical, administrative, and board levels of the classical music industry for emerging professionals from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds. Fellows are paid members of the orchestra who receive mentoring from leadership and staff. The program supports the development of individual projects to advance their career goals and provides opportunities to engage in community and educational programming. In addition, Harmony Quartets, consisting of Instrumental Fellows and rostered NHSO musicians, present free Conflict Resolution Workshops which teach communication through a string quartet model, and Song Writing programs in New Haven Public Schools. The importance of this fellowship is evident by one cello fellow who commutes from Indiana to Connecticut. To date, six emerging professionals of color have completed their Fellowships, four are currently working with the NHSO, and three more fellowships will take place during the grant period.

Thank you for this opportunity to share a sampling of ways in which the National Endowment for the Arts supports orchestras' engagement with their communities and the renewal of opportunities for the public to experience live music. These grants have made a tremendous difference, allowing orchestras to continue providing much-needed employment to musicians and staff as they deliver on their missions. We applaud the NEA for its consistent strong leadership in promoting public engagement with high-quality artistry and for the great empathy and understanding it has shown for the urgent needs of arts organizations and artists throughout this pandemic and beyond. It is our hope that Congress will support an annual appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts of at minimum \$201 million for FY2023 so that communities throughout our nation can look forward to deeper engagement with and increased access to the arts.

*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 1,800 organizations and individuals across North America runs the gamut from world-renowned orchestras to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles, from conservatories to libraries, from businesses serving orchestras to individuals who love symphonic music. The national organization dedicated solely to the orchestral experience, the League is a nexus of knowledge and innovation, advocacy, and leadership advancement. Its conferences and events, award-winning Symphony magazine, website, and other publications inform people around the world about orchestral activity and developments. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League links a national network of thousands of instrumentalists, conductors, managers and administrators, board members, volunteers, and business partners.*