

# League of American Orchestras

**Simon Woods, President and CEO**  
**League of American Orchestras**  
**March 17, 2023**

## **Written Testimony in Support of FY 2024 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts**

The League of American Orchestras urges the Senate Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to provide no less than \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in fiscal year 2024, as recommended by President Biden. We are grateful for the strong bipartisan support from House and Senate Appropriators over the last several years and encourage Congress to enable more communities across the country to inspire the next generation, provide connectivity, and continue to advance the arts as a necessary, creative way to express the full range of what makes us human.

The NEA holds a unique and valuable federal leadership role through direct and indirect grantmaking, cross-cutting research, and convenings that facilitate shared learning and advancement among arts organizations and practitioners. A direct grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts is a respected national designation that conveys an organization has passed a rigorous panel review and offers an artistic engagement worthy of federal investment. Every orchestra—large and small—is a vital part of its local ecology, and those that receive an award from the National Endowment for the Arts highly value the support in their continual work to enhance the experience of live music for people of all ages and respond to community needs. The following examples offer a glimpse of recent orchestra-led engagement made possible in part by the NEA.

The **Utah Symphony** presented Olivier Messiaen’s *Des canyons aux étoiles (From the Canyons to the Stars)* at O.C. Tanner Amphitheater in Springdale, Utah this past June, with assistance from a Grants for Arts Projects award. This marked a rare opportunity for a capacity audience of more than 1,600 people from across the state—many driving hundreds of miles—to hear this monumental 12-movement work performed outside in one of the settings that inspired the composer. Maestro Thierry Fischer emphasized how fitting it was for the Utah Symphony to showcase its artistry with music that arose out of the composer’s spiritual experiences stirred by the landscapes, night skies, and bird life of Zion and Bryce national parks and Cedar Breaks National Monument. “It will be incredibly unique to hear Messiaen’s music performed... by musicians who live in, know, and love the natural beauty of Utah,” said Maestro Fischer when announcing the concert. This performance was one of the highlights in a multi-year vision introducing Utah audiences to the works of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century composers, focused on music animated by nature and celebrating the natural beauty of Utah and its power to inspire.

Also bringing music outdoors is **The Jackson Symphony**, which received an NEA Challenge America grant for its “Symphony On the Move” program. Eight communities across six counties in West Tennessee will enjoy free hour-long concerts along the theme of “A Musical Journey Around the World.” This year’s theme informs not only the musical performances but is also designed in partnership with local schools and libraries to complement the summer read program. The ensemble itself will include six professional Jackson Symphony musicians and one local vocalist. Together, they will perform works of international composers and representing the diverse populations of Tennessee. Concerts will be performed in town squares, parks, and local gathering areas in each town, amplifying a sense of community and togetherness in each location. To date, the Jackson Symphony has performed more than 50 of these Symphony On the Move concerts, and in recognition of the limited ability of many Tennesseans to travel to a performance, this NEA support will directly assist in the orchestra’s mission to bring the live music experience to more Tennesseans.

Performing in wider parts of its state is also a priority for the **Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra** (FWSO)—the only professional symphony orchestra in Tarrant County. One of the ways the FWSO has historically achieved its goal of providing its community with equitable opportunities to access classical music is through its Statewide Touring Initiative, which brings live performances of classical music and engaging music education programs to adults and children living in rural areas of Texas. In fiscal year 2022, the FWSO received an NEA Grants for Arts Projects award to support this initiative and put that funding toward its tour to rural communities in North Texas such as: Glen Rose, Graham, Granbury, Keller, Stephenville, and Waxahachie. In each of these places, the FWSO performed a combination of educational concerts—designed to address cross-curricular goals and meet the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills state educational standards—and free or reduced-cost evening concerts in familiar venues that residents of the communities could easily access.

Picking up on the theme of both touring and engaging young people, the **Wheeling Symphony Orchestra**’s Young People’s Concert Tour introduces students to new music using a familiar genre that grabs their attention and creates a bond among the artist, conductor and the orchestra. Grammy nominated Progressive Hip-Hop Artist Christylez Bacon, in collaboration with composer Evan Meier and music director John Devlin, will perform *Migrations in Rhythm* that explores the progression of hip-hop from its beginnings. Christylez will perform lyrics and beat-box with orchestral accompaniments for 5,000 elementary students and their teachers from public, private and home-schools in West Virginia counties of Ohio, Marshall, and Brooke; Ohio counties of Belmont and Jefferson; and Washington County, Pennsylvania. With support from the NEA, free concerts will be performed in three school auditoriums in mid-April 2023, and to reach even more students in West Virginia, the performance will be filmed and distributed to students in school districts unable to travel the distance to attend one of the concerts in person. Using the Teacher’s Guide prepared by the president of the WV Music Educators’ Conference, teachers in each school will prepare students to attend the concert.

The **Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra** (RPO) is responding to both young people and adults in its NEA-supported expansion of its Care & Wellness Initiative. This arts accessibility program is built around addressing barriers due to health or disability status. Now in its second year, the Care and Wellness Initiative brings RPO musicians to hospitals, memory care units, special education centers, and more to bring appropriate, therapeutic performances directly to individuals who otherwise may not have access to live performance. This year the Philharmonic is mounting its first-ever Sensory-Friendly Concert for children and families with sensory challenges such as Autism spectrum disorder. Planned accommodations include noise-reduction headphones, “quiet rooms” for those who are overstimulated or otherwise need a break, preparatory materials for families such as a social narrative, and adaptive concert etiquette. The orchestra anticipates that more than 1,250 individuals will be able to access and experience the RPO and live music through this initiative in 2023.

Part of how orchestras respond to community is to utilize the art form to share the deep connection between music and historically significant events. The **Portland Symphony Orchestra’s** Grants for Arts Project award contributed toward the production of a Concerts of Remembrance project last October which consisted of performances as well as exhibitions of more than 60 instruments from Violins of Hope. The exhibitions, which took place at the Maine Jewish Museum (MJM) in Portland and the Holocaust and Human Rights Center (HHRC) in Augusta, shared stories about the musical instruments and the Jewish people to whom they belonged before they were confiscated by the Nazis before and during World War II. Principal string players of the orchestra performed on instruments from this collection, offering free string quartet concerts of music by Jewish composers at MJM and HHRC. The PSO also offered performances and education programs at three area schools, reaching between 800-1,000 students in all. Lastly, the full symphony, along with Choral Art, gave two performances of Verdi’s *Requiem*, which was made available for viewing on PSO TV throughout the month of November. These *Requiem* performances brought this poignant programming to more than 2,000 people, with an additional 1,000 viewers of the digital concert.

The **New Haven Symphony Orchestra** (NHSO) is similarly planning to engage its audiences with music informed by historically and culturally significant events. Its NEA-supported program will focus on works by one contemporary and three historic Black composers: Margaret Bonds’s *Montgomery Variations* (1964) was inspired by the civil rights movement; Florence Price’s 1934 *Piano Concerto in One Movement* incorporates spirituals as well as the Juba, a dance originated by enslaved people; Helen Hagan’s 1912 *Concerto in C Minor* has been re-orchestrated to intersperse Ragtime into a late Romantic style; and contemporary composer Quinn Mason describes *A Joyous Trilogy* as “the very embodiment of happiness.” Pianist Michelle Cann will join the Symphony for this performance. In addition to the performances at Lyman Center for the Performing Arts, free concerts will be held in community venues throughout New Haven featuring the orchestra’s Harmony quartet and soprano Lisa Williamson, and will include opportunities for community artists to perform.

The **Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra** (SPCO) is also using music as a means to highlight important issues of our time, past and present—focusing in particular on people who were not fully acknowledged in their own time. An NEA grant will assist the orchestra in highlighting several women in the field of classical music as part of the SPCO’s larger efforts to include more historically underrepresented artists in its performance repertoire. Curated and led by Artistic Partner Tabea Zimmermann and SPCO musicians Maureen Nelson and Eunae Koh, the project additionally celebrates women in music leadership roles. A combination of 18 performances will showcase 6 women composers: Clara Schumann, Valborg Aulin, Hilary Tann, Louise Farrenc, Gabriela Lena Frank, and Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel. In culmination, SPCO flautist Alicia McQuerrey will deliver a solo performance of Amy Beech. Delivering on the SPCO’s mission of serving as many in the community as possible, performances will take place at 10 venues across the Minneapolis/Saint Paul Metro Area, and one program will be livestreamed for free.

Thank you for this opportunity to share how the National Endowment for the Arts supports orchestras’ engagement with their communities. These grants, and many others throughout the country, make a tremendous difference by helping orchestras provide employment to musicians and staff while fulfilling their core purpose of educating and serving. We applaud the NEA’s consistent leadership in promoting public engagement with all forms of art and for its responsiveness to both present and future concerns for the sector. With Congressional support for an annual appropriation of at least \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in FY2024, more communities throughout our nation will be able to experience the life-changing and affirming benefits of 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. A 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.*