

League of American Orchestras

Simon Woods, President and CEO
League of American Orchestras
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Written Testimony in Support of FY 2025 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts

The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to provide at minimum \$211 million for the National Endowment for the Arts in fiscal year 2025. We are grateful for consistent bipartisan support from House and Senate Appropriators that has enabled the cultural agencies to provide much-needed grants to arts organizations throughout the country so they can bring inspiration, creative opportunity, and connectedness to people of all ages.

The National Endowment for the Arts has long held a unique federal leadership role; its direct and indirect grantmaking, indispensable research, and inspiring convenings advance learning and provoke important action by arts organizations, practitioners, other federal agencies, and the public to advance the myriad benefits of the arts and reach more Americans. A direct grant awarded by the NEA is a highly sought national designation because it demonstrates an organization has offered an artistic engagement that a rigorous panel review process deems 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 this support of their continual work to enhance the experience of live music for people of all ages. The following examples highlight recent orchestra-led projects supported by the NEA.

The **Boise Phil** received an FY24 Challenge America grant to support free performances for more than 7,000 3rd-5th grade students. From Treasure Valley's largest public school district of West Ada to individual homeschool students in Emmett, students were able to engage with classical music at a performance centered around the educational state standards for music history. Collaborating with Boise Contemporary Theater brought to life composers, instruments, and musical concepts, which won overwhelmingly positive feedback from students. Teachers were also appreciative that the concerts were able, thanks to grant funding, to offer accommodations for students who face accessibility hurdles to experiencing live orchestra music in an inclusive environment.

Another orchestra making intentional strides to engage underserved students is the **Palm Beach Symphony**, which is utilizing its Challenge America grant to partner with the Palm Beach County School District for a residency program that brings symphony musicians to Title I schools. The teaching artists help students with technique, tone, posture, proper instrument

position, and the intricacies of reading and interpreting music in small group settings, working toward a culminating event of a large group ensemble rehearsal alongside symphony musicians. Schools are selected after consulting with teachers and the School District of Palm Beach County's K-12 Arts Education Program Planner in the Department of Teaching and Learning, who oversees all music activities in the public schools. The symphony is intentional about maintaining an enduring and continuous relationship with teachers, schools, and students, and it is especially impactful for the students when they attend Palm Beach Symphony concerts as guests and see their coaches perform on stage.

Yet another Challenge America grantee that is focusing its efforts on young audiences and learners is the **Kamuela Philharmonic**, which hosted two Children's Concerts in Kamuela, HI attended by approximately 650 students, accompanied by teachers and chaperones. The enthusiastic response from the students underscored the impact of the orchestral experience on their musical education and appreciation, with students coming from seven public schools from around the island and a strong turnout from the Waimea/Waikoloa areas. In addition to school groups, 13 individuals, homeschoolers, and families attended the concerts. The concerts allowed musicians to creatively demonstrate their orchestral instruments and the experience was enhanced with verbal narrations, American Sign Language interpretation, and captivating illustrations on the screen, providing a multi-sensory journey through the musical narrative. In addition, students were inspired by the performance of 12-year-old violinist Yunju Cho, one of this season's Youth Concerto Competition winners.

While much orchestral education programming focuses on young learners in elementary and secondary school, older students and adults also benefit from programming specifically curated for them. The **Chicago Sinfonietta's** Grants for Arts Projects FY24 award helped support a sold-out, free to the public orchestral concert and series of educational opportunities at the historically Black Spelman College in Atlanta, GA – an extension of the community work done in Chicago. The concert featured a performance of music by Black, woman, and living composers, an integral part of Sinfonietta's mission and especially relevant to the student body. In fact, surrounding events within the Sinfonietta tour offered several connection and enrichment engagements that highlighted the importance of diversity in the symphonic world, including lecture/demonstrations and master classes with Sinfonietta musicians, and a special pre-concert panel discussion for Spelman students.

Featuring the work of historically underrepresented voices is a growing focus for many American orchestras, and the **Oregon Symphony's** 2023-24 season provides a platform for women and people of color appearing as guest soloists, conductors, or composers on nearly every program. An FY24 NEA grant is supporting two concerts highlighting composers of color. The first features two Black composers whose music directly explores themes of racism and resilience: *Darker America* by William Grant Still, which fuses classical, jazz, and spiritual elements to depict the struggle of Black Americans, and *Remnants* by contemporary composer James B. Wilson, which utilizes spoken word poetry to address the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. The second concert celebrates the rhythms and dances of Latin America, opening with

a new commission by Portland-based Venezuelan composer Giancarlo Castro (b. 1980) and followed by an orchestral arrangement of Astor Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*. This concert will also welcome Artist-in-Residence Xavier Foley (b. 1994) on the double bass. Both programs will reach an in-person audience of more than 6,000 people and will be broadcast globally on All Classical Radio, disrupting usual perceptions of classical music by utilizing orchestral music to illuminate the pressing issues of our time.

The **Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra** (LPO) serves as a culture bearer honoring monumental figures and telling stories of Louisiana through music. With an FY24 grant from the NEA, the LPO honored New Orleans icons Edgar "Dooky" Chase II and Leah Chase for their significant contributions to the city through their civic activism, musical influence, and culinary expertise. An ode to jazz in the art form's birthplace, the concert was a nostalgic celebration of the Dooky Chase Orchestra's 75th anniversary of their final performance ended with George Gershwin's 100-year-old timeless sensation, *Rhapsody in Blue*. Featured on the program were vocalist Chase Kamata – Mr. and Mrs. Chase's granddaughter – and the Marcus Roberts Trio. Audiences were immersed in the Chase family history with a pre-concert lecture featuring maestro Thomas Wilkins and a program book with their written legacy and archival photographs. The LPO values the various elements that thread New Orleans' cultural tapestry and aims to represent these elements in their programming and community initiatives throughout the season.

Over the years, NEA support has empowered the **Detroit Symphony Orchestra** to make innovative programs come to life. In commissioning works by living composers, the orchestra especially seeks to showcase voices that may have been historically underrepresented. An FY24 Grants for Arts Projects award is supporting DSO's April performance of a new co-commissioned work for the pipa by composer Du Yun in a collaboration with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Carnegie Hall. Du Yun was an early recipient of the DSO's own Elaine Lebenbom Award for women composers and so the orchestra is thrilled to welcome the work of an honoree to the Orchestra Hall stage. One of the DSO's proudest achievements is the ability to share performances far beyond the in-person audience. This program will be broadcast live on Detroit radio station 90.9 FM WRCJ, and online in HD video through the DSO's free *Live from Orchestra Hall* program.

Focusing on an enhanced local community experience is the **Louisville Orchestra**, which will utilize its NEA award to support the Creators Corps Program. The Creators Corps seeks artists that are passionate about forging relationships with community organizations to advance music's role in civic life, care deeply about education, and are interested in being "artist-leaders" for both the orchestra and the community more broadly. The unique experience of living in Louisville and working as part of the orchestra's staff for a year deeply informs and inspires the compositions the composers write, allowing for a level of specificity and customization for the orchestra and community. In addition, composers will work on projects that bring them into regular meetings or sessions with community members, students, and teachers. In becoming a

Louisvillian, the investment in community and partnerships built over that time results in ties that are indispensable to the orchestra and community for years afterward.

Finally, the **Toledo Alliance for the Performing Arts** received an FY24 grant which assisted in a commissioning and performance project featuring a new set of Symphonic movements by nine members of the composers' collective ADJ•ective New Music. The Toledo Symphony performed music inspired by the planets of the solar system in celebration of the anticipated total solar eclipse on April 8, 2024. This project was an opportunity to partner with the University of Toledo Department of Physics and Astronomy and KV265, a nonprofit organization dedicated to communicating science through multidisciplinary artistic projects. As a part of TAPA's ongoing partnership with Imagination Station, Dr. Salgado from KV265 and composers from ADJ•ective New Music appeared as part of the Total Eclipse Lecture Series at Imagination Station's KeyBank Discovery Theater in the weeks leading up to the Toledo Symphony's performances. The first of these free Community Conversations was a lecture on exoplanets with solar system ambassador Jim Ottaviani and the composers of Jupiter and Pluto. Dr. Salgado shared how his work with NASA inspired the creation of his extraordinary videos that accompany existing and new orchestral works.

These orchestral projects are a small sampling of the thousands of thoughtful initiatives and ongoing programs orchestras undertake year-round in a variety of settings. Federal support is uniquely impactful and invaluable in leveraging additional forms of support. Just as the arts ecosystem in our country comprises countless partners all striving to meet people where they are, the funding ecosystem is similarly complex and relies on each element to provide as robust a level of support as possible. 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 disbursed via the agency's state and regional partnerships, 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 FY2025, more communities throughout our nation will be able to experience the life-changing and affirming benefits of the arts.

*The **League of American Orchestras** champions the vitality of music and the orchestral experience, supports the orchestra community, and leads change boldly. The only national organization dedicated to orchestras and their communities, the League supports the field through advocacy, research, convenings, leadership development, artistic programs, and grants. Founded in 1942 and chartered by Congress in 1962, the League includes nearly 25,000 musicians, conductors, orchestra staff, board members, volunteers, and business partners working within our membership of 1600 world-renowned orchestras, community groups, summer festivals, student and youth ensembles, conservatories and libraries, businesses serving orchestras, and individuals who love symphonic music.*