

Orchestras at the Epicenter—A Plan for Sustainability

2026 National Conference

MARK HANSON: In a moment I'll introduce three of my colleagues, our panel, but first I wanted to frame this afternoon's session. Many orchestras have focused over the decades, of course, on protecting the art of symphonic performance. It's most certainly an art form worth protecting, cherishing, and celebrating, whether it's being performed by highly trained and experienced professionals or by aspiring young musicians who are experiencing the repertoire, perhaps for the very first time. If you imagine yourself as a presenter of concerts, that's the right focus to protect the art form, but it is a mindset and approach that assume patrons, subscribers, donors, all keep showing up roughly the way they always have. That assumption, of course, is getting harder and harder to maintain.

So we've been experimenting with a different question here in Baltimore. And I'm sure this is aligned with how you're thinking about your opportunity. Not how do we protect the art, but what does Baltimore and the state of Maryland gain if we see ourselves more as cultural infrastructure, a reliable civic platform, something the community can count on? A place where people gather, find meaning, and build relationships, including with each other. We're excited to tell you more about how we're approaching this pivot, not because we've solved it, but because we think there are perhaps some interesting questions and lessons that will help you continue your work wherever you are visiting from. The slide says, "A Plan for Sustainability," and we want to state loud and clear it is just that, a plan. We are implementing that plan and these three important elements because we have not yet achieved true sustainability.

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So we have as much to learn from you as you hopefully have to learn from us when we get to the Q&A session. But thank you so, so much for joining us. Yesterday you had a chance to learn a bit more about the BSO when Jonathon and I spoke during the plenary session. We're expanding the BSO team this afternoon by including three other key members of our executive team. Allison Burr-Livingstone is our Chief Advancement and Communications Officer. Agnieszka Rakhmatullaev is our Chief Operating Officer, and Jennifer Barton is our Chief Revenue Strategies Officer. You will be hearing from all of them after a couple of introductory slides.

Here you see that we are a 110-year-old institution. Jonathon was announced as Music Director in 2022. This month's concerts represent the culmination of his third full season. We're proud to maintain a 52-week contract with our 85 musicians, operate on a budget, as you can see there, of about 34 million. Uniquely, we perform almost every week, almost

every concert program in two different halls, the Meyerhoff here in Baltimore and Strathmore in Montgomery County. We have a bunch of concerts spanning a wide breadth of what we call "programming collections," and it's this diversity of programming that is helping us to engage 400,000 or more people, including those who reside in our roughly 5,000 subscriber households—much more on how we talk about and engage our patrons later in the presentation.

As was beautifully demonstrated yesterday during the plenary session at the Meyerhoff, educational programming and youth empowerment are very important to the BSO. It's no coincidence that Marin Alsop and Jonathon Heyward chose the BSO as a primary platform for advancing their educational and youth engagement aspirations, given what is in our DNA and has led to the introduction of both OrchKids and the absorption of a growing youth orchestra.

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So before describing what we've been doing, we want to tell you four things about how we got here, basically our DNA. Because what we're building on now is not a pivot, it's the operating model version of a commitment that's been in this institution's DNA for over 100 years. We were founded as something the city would be responsible for, thank you Allison, not something that would have to earn its way every year on ticket sales. We literally were a department of city government for our first few years, a couple of decades. The orchestra as civic infrastructure isn't a new idea here. It was the founding principle here in Baltimore. The Meyerhoff was built as a civic act. It's a place for the city to gather around music and other important civic and educational events. It was funded both by the state of Maryland and the late Joseph Meyerhoff and designed for the community as much as it was designed for the orchestra. State legislature and leadership in Montgomery County created a second home for us in another populous county in Maryland, and one that sits right next to Washington, D.C.—not a coincidence, of course. Since we perform all of our subscription concerts there, in addition to many specials, Strathmore is a significant expansion of all that the BSO does. We're recognized there as a founding partner, and we treat it not as a second home, but as a different home of similar significance to the Meyerhoff. Then almost 20 years ago, we decided to expand our commitment to young musicians and youth empowerment by establishing the OrchKids Program within Baltimore City Schools, and more recently by absorbing in 2012 and subsequently expanding the Greater Baltimore Youth Orchestras now referred to as the Baltimore Symphony Youth Orchestras.

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So again, when we say we aspire to be a cultural connector, we're not pivoting or reinventing the BSO. We're simply realizing more fully what was already here from the very beginning.

Some of you will recall our reference yesterday to the BSO being a 110-year-old startup. The history part is the firm foundation upon which we stand. The startup part is the discipline we're building now, the willingness to experiment publicly with what an orchestra can be to its community. Over the past few years we've made three deliberate shifts that my colleagues are going to speak about. These aren't the only things we've done, but these three taken together are changing how we operate and think as an institution. We'll name them, and then each colleague will walk you through these three points, including what's been a bit harder than we had expected. Rather than having a come-to-us mindset, we're now focused on being in service to and in partnership with communities across the state.

Engaging with audiences in more than just one concert home and appreciating that when audiences, artists, and communities partner with the BSO, when people are invited to more fully express themselves to the BSO, their stories, their presence, their curiosity, their joy become a fully integral part of the sound. This one decision changes everything as you'll see downstream. When it comes to the relationship with our patrons, we've stopped optimizing for the next transaction and started optimizing for the long-term health of the relationship with patrons of all types. And counterintuitively, as we've made this shift, the transactional part of the equation has improved.

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And as we heard from Jonathon yesterday, if you want to understand what an orchestra stands for and believes in, look at its programming. We stopped designing a season that needs a big, fixed subscription base and started designing one in which you can enter through many, many different doors, with each concert hopefully telling a compelling and inviting story. These concepts sit in a deliberate order, service as to whom we belong, patrons as how we grow relationships once people arrive. Programming is what growth makes possible artistically. Each sets up the next, and concert programming, live performances in partnership with an engaged audience is the point of it all. So let's turn things over to Allison.

ALLISON BURR-LIVINGSTONE: Thank you, Mark, and good afternoon, everyone. I'm excited to lead into the first of three shifts that we've been talking about, and this is really about how we redefined our service area from just a building or two buildings to the entire state, and hopefully it's applicable to whatever the right geographic focuses for your institution. And again, to show some specific examples and some learnings about how everything downstream had to change. The examples that I'm going to walk through in this section are evidence of that change, not stand-alone accomplishments, but of course we're very proud of each of them as stand-alone accomplishments, and that must be said. This shift is about, as Mark said, taking a change in thinking from "come to us" to "we come to you." It perhaps

sounds overly simple, but it did substantially change the way now a larger community views the BSO. This concept isn't budget-size specific, whether it's small, mid-size, our size, the question is the same, which is on the slide here.

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Who do we belong to, and both how and where do we show up to prove it? And again, this change for the BSO was treating the answer as an operating decision, not simply a marketing one. Three major initiatives have shaped our work here, and we'll walk through them one by one. The first is Music for Maryland. This started as a three-year pledge that was announced in 2022 on the outcomes of the pandemic, to reach all 23 unique Maryland counties in a very short timeframe. We've met and exceeded that initially bold goal, but the point here isn't the tour itself or even checking 23 county boxes. Thankfully, we're in two counties—well, a county and a city—every week, all year round. The real point of Music for Maryland is its central core. It proves that every Marylander has a standing claim to this orchestra as theirs. The tour is the evidence that our redefined service area is real and not simply a brand statement.

What has changed downstream since 2022? Programming choices for tour concerts now incorporate the communities that we visit. State funding, which we're very excited about, has enabled really the return of a robust summer season at the Meyerhoff, something that, again, was in our history but perhaps had flagged for a period of time. The Development Team now tells a more statewide story, and that has raised the sights of individual and institutional funders whose giving sites now far outweigh the cost of these community-based programs. And perhaps most important, we have built trusted, identified champions and cultivated partners in new micro-markets across the state that otherwise may not have paid much attention to us, let alone focused attention over a period of time. I spent a lot of time getting every dot nearly right on this slide, but please don't judge me if you happen to represent a partner, and you are not in the right corner of your place on the vector map of Maryland.

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So, what we got wrong, and how we pivoted along the way. In year one, we took a stacked approach. We had seven or nine different concerts in a single summer, and we felt that we had to do it all—full orchestra concerts and education or family pop-ups in each market that we visited, thinking about a dual-touch model to make the commitment visible. The intention was right, but together with a summer line-up at the Meyerhoff, as you can imagine, the breadth simply wasn't sustainable. We were in too many places at once, spread too thinly. So by year two, we really took a focused attention at pulling back. We have a more sustainable focus of four or five Music for Maryland concerts we now do annually. Equally

exciting, we are prioritizing the inherent flexibility that the summer schedule allows, but also thinking about strategic opportunities to bring community-based concerts across the state all throughout the season, and we are focusing on the alignment of each visit. Think about quality rather than quantity of touch-point and the consistency, not only in a single visit, but how do we build repeat engagement and partnership in turn?

One concrete example of this that I'd just like to highlight is our first 2023 visit to Harford County. I also happened to be from Harford County. No bias there, but I would note a few things. One, we really focused on how we could help the county celebrate a milestone. Our country is about to celebrate its semi-quincentennial. That's 250 years, if you didn't know that term. Harford County celebrated 250 in 2023, so they started a bit earlier. They really looked to us to help them to commemorate that official county celebration. We worked closely with local county government and local commissions created to help celebrate that milestone, to plan a program with that specific celebration in mind. It was hosted at Harford Community College. We also thought about how we can support that host venue in terms of covering all of the hard costs that it takes to open your hall to a symphony orchestra.

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We joined the State Arts Council's touring roster. If your state has such a touring roster, it's a great opportunity to think about how you can help partners fund your own visits across the state. So we helped our host venue secure a grant to cover the costs associated with presenting the BSO. And we have since brought a couple of things. The county school system voice now sits on our Education Committee. We have doubled the amount of education concert attendance in each of the years to follow since this initial tour. That also had some specific connectivity with the county school system, and now we're actively planning for a return for the summer of '26. I believe it's set for August 6th or 7th. But we are going to be going back to the community college campus and helping them to open a newly renovated auditorium. So this is a wonderful, not only reinforcing, it is now a multi-year, multi-pronged touch point partnership with Harford Community College, but also has helped to seed and build a more strategic college and university approach within Music for Maryland more broadly and, of course, across the BSO, including our artistic programming, which Agnieszka will talk about shortly.

Initiative number two is something that we call Symphony in the City. Music belongs as a part of community celebrations. We believe that very passionately at the BSO. And with our unique municipal founding history in mind, we really relaunched this specific initiative following the pandemic to show our values by meeting Baltimoreans in places that have meaning to them, not necessarily convenient for us. Symphony in the City is always free, and it is consistently programmed in collaboration with host venues and partners. A couple of

examples that really bring this thread to life and have now led to an even stronger partnership with the city of Baltimore today start with the picture on the left. This is at the B&O Railroad Museum. If you have not been to the BSO or have time in your schedule, I encourage you to experience another wonderful asset here in town. We decided to bring back a long tradition of MLK concerts in 2023, and our partners at the B&O invited us to help them do just that.

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They helped us to commission a new piece that was inspired by an exhibition that they were launching to highlight the venue's history on the Underground Railroad. We recorded that piece, although it snowed on the day, so we had a smaller audience turnout. It was a beautiful concert, and now it is a living piece of the museum experience so people can experience our recording as you walk through the B&O. We are now partnering, again, to think about planning for a celebration of the American Railroad 200th anniversary in 2027, and more importantly, it was a kickstart for us to think about how we really celebrate MLK Day here in Baltimore.

Example two is in the middle. This is Jonathon Heyward, and his Symphony in the City debut, which was at Fort McHenry, which was a Key Bridge concert to help our city heal and come together following that disaster. We recognized first responders. We partnered with the city and the state to ensure that that was a celebration where the time felt right, where we could remember lives lost, honor heroes, and contribute to recovery.

Example three is, I think, a beautiful thread line of how each of these things connect. This past year, we now officially returned to the city's official celebration for MLK Day with a concert at the Meyerhoff. So this then turned into a thinking of Symphony in the City not necessarily being place-based, but how equally important it is to open the Meyerhoff for a free community concert with intentionality. We partnered with Morgan State University, one of our local HBCUs. The city created beautiful lobby activations, which speak to a second thread, which I'll talk about shortly. And it was a real civic and cultural moment that I think lives on in all of our daily memories. And we're excited to think about where we go in 2027 and beyond.

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But what all this body of work requires, it requires us to ask ourselves some questions. We had to defer to community knowledge about the right place and the right time for the BSO to engage, rather than assume that we knew. And that's a posture change. It's not about a venue or a pricing change. And equally important, it required us to get very comfortable with knowing that as free, non-registered, non-ticketed events, we had to believe that we were

doing the right thing and expected that audiences and transactions would follow. And again, thankfully, they have.

The third initiative in this body of work we call Hall for All. If Music for Maryland and Symphony in the City are all about taking the organization to traditional and adopted spaces across the city and around the state, Hall for All is a recognition that once our service area changed, our home building had to change, too. This is a mindset, and it's a series of programs and partnerships that open the Meyerhoff to more people, more genres, and more kinds of gathering. So what has changed? We now think about front-of-house representation evolving. We have lobby activation at every BSO concert, featuring small and minority-owned food and vendors, photo experiences, and surprise moments. We have community gatherings that aren't ours, filling the hall on non-orchestra nights, including commencements, festivals, memorials, fundraisers, conveniences of all kinds. Many more people are walking across the stage or experiencing the Meyerhoff in a way that matters to them. And we also now have a robust lineup of Live at the Meyerhoff presentations, curated, marketed, and presented programs that don't feature the orchestra, put together by the BSO team. And equally important is that it's a team effort, changing from a single member of staff whose job is to focus on rentals and presentations, but a larger cross-departmental business unit that recognizes that it is just as important and valuable to the future of the BSO for people to have a meaningful experience at the Meyerhoff before trying an orchestra concert, if they try an orchestra concert at all.

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And if Mark mentioned OrchKids and the BSYO, we have to say this Hall for All idea is not new to the BSO. Programs like OrchKids and BSYO have been doing this long before it had a name, which we're very proud of. This really now is about the building and the entire institution catching up to what those programs long understood, and we're excited now that part of our Hall for All initiatives sees every single OrchKids major concert and every single youth orchestra concert happening on the stage at the Meyerhoff, with their families and groups really taking over the space as their own home and their extended living room.

So, what we learned—two things. Citywide and statewide service isn't about how many jurisdictions you reach or whether it's a full orchestra or a smaller ensemble, chamber music counts too. It's about consistency, it's about intention, and it's about communication. And secondly, being a Hall for All can't be a statement on its own. It really has to be backed by a flexible, partner-first approach. The evidence is the way now that a much larger community views the BSO. This shows up in a few ways. The first proof point that I want to expand upon is awareness data. So with his chucks proudly on display in the photo, Jonathon's arrival was a new signal of approachability made visible for the BSO. It was very exciting, after rolling

out his tenure and having him lead several of these Music for Maryland events in his inaugural season that our market data showed that there was a wide awareness of the BSO and Jonathon's leadership. They were satisfied with his appointment, and they really identified the core value of his leadership as expanding audiences and community connection at the BSO. I also am happy to share that Music for Maryland, Symphony in the City, some of our Hall for All and Live at the Meyerhoff presentations—

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These have been some of the moments most intrinsically tied to institutional storytelling and sharing in earned and social media, driving up followers and engagements. We now have a much larger group of our community who are watching us to see what we do day in and day out and sharing their own experiences.

Another outcome, partnership growth and public investment. Partnership data speaks for itself. One thing that we are very proud about is now having a very large and robust list of lobby activation partners that we go to on a consistent basis, and their offerings and experiences are then tied to the BSO brand and vice versa, and that's a beautiful thing. I'm particularly excited that through this expanded view of public good, we have been able to retain, if not increase public investment, not just from the state of Maryland in terms of very significant annual special line item investments in the BSO, but also in a roughly 18% increase over a few years in both our annual operating grades from Baltimore City and Baltimore County. Baltimore County is another partner where we are about to celebrate 250 in a special way at Oregon Ridge.

And finally, this idea of individual partnerships with individual institutions. Just last week and after leading the second of our Music for Maryland concerts at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Jonathon Heyward was invited to serve as their commencement speaker, and he got his honorary doctorate, so we are very proud of that moment. He looks good in his robes. But it's a way for us now to continue to expand this connection with an entire group of alumni within that UMBC family, so they had that experience hearing from Jonathon, learning about the BSO, and we are excited to welcome more and more retrievers back to the Meyerhoff.

And finally, but perhaps most important, community feedback and participation data. The volume of expanded activity and audience reach, I think, speaks for itself. You look at more than 40,000 estimated audiences, most of whom who are totally new to file that have experienced the BSO, perhaps in their own backyard, from Western Maryland to Eastern Maryland to Southern Shores. Many of those folks we know are starting to come back, and we also know that we don't necessarily understand who was at each of those performances. So although we can't track their data, one thing we're very conscious of, and what Jennifer

will talk about next, is once people enter our hall and enter our system, how do we think about that relationship and build loyalty in turn? Equally exciting is that every one of these 40,000 estimated audiences or 50,000 estimated rentals and presentation attendees, and again looking at the growth in the number of individual events that we have been presenting in the past two seasons, they all had a meaningful experience, something that Mark mentioned yesterday, a "sympiphany," whether the orchestra was a part of it or not. And that means that they now have a point of introspection of joy and a connection that is rooted in the BSO or the Meyerhoff, and that is something that we can build upon and that we are working very hard to do in turn.

So in closing, I would say we asked who do we serve and how do we show up? And we've learned the following: It's about finding community partners whose work you amplify and the city and state level champions who turn a visit into sustained relationships. A relationship has residual impact, and our whole presence no longer hinges necessarily on one individual or expensive concert. That's how we're building institutional resilience. So once you've decided your service area is the whole state and the building belongs to everyone in it, the next question is what you do with the people who walk in the door. And I'll turn it over to Jennifer.

[APPLAUSE]

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JENNIFER BARTON: So we had to ask ourselves, we have all of this excitement and patrons coming in. How do we rebuild a system that centers them? Okay, so our model consists of five integrated elements that work as a system rather than siloed departments. And a very key piece of all of this is a mindset shift that is our economic driver. The number of households that are participating and how much they annually spend has become a North Star for our organization. And we'll talk a little bit about what that means. People can come across different metrics, and it can mean different things to them. You can go in a lot of different directions with the way that these things are interpreted, but we really needed to move quickly by getting on the same page. We were able to focus on this total revenue number because it had been hiding the erosion of the subscription base and impaired sustainability.

So we have four strategic horizons of growth. The first is frequency, which is getting people in and getting them to come back. The second is encouraging our patrons to commit to a journey, whether it's through a ticketing membership or a subscription or a giving membership. The third is volume. We're trying to grow the loyal base that exists in each of our product lines. And then once we've achieved a certain amount of success there, we can start tinkering with the revenue, with adjusting our inventory or our pricing. For the sake of

illustrating my point, I'm going to be sharing a few numbers that are just one angle that we can look at this in. You might see some pieces of information that even conflict, for example, averages not adding up. This is because we're constantly looking at our data from many different angles to test the hypotheses that we come up with as we dig into it. I have to give a big shout out to Amy Bruce, our Vice President of Data Analytics and Revenue Operations. She's here in the room. She does deserve a round of applause.

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[APPLAUSE]

HANSON: Jennifer, something happened with the screen.

BARTON: Oh, what's going on here? Oh, no. Now you can all read my email. Okay, thank you.

So this is the story that we're telling. We're tracking new and returning patrons as a rich ticket buyer pipeline. You can see that we've seen growth there. We're also looking at the type of tickets that are associated with deeper relationships. In the past, this has been subscriptions largely, but now we're knowing that people are locking into taking a journey with us in many different ways. And we can see here we've got our fixed subscriptions, the bread and butter. We have our Choose, which is quickly becoming our primary form of subscription tickets. We have our free ticket programs, which are the memberships that people pay for. So they're free, but they are not actually free. And then add-on tickets, and we've seen a lot of growth in that, too. So we see changes that are associated with deeper relationships. But there's still room to grow. As Allison acknowledged, we have added more presentations. We're trying to balance, again, what the volume is that belongs in all of the different parts of our organization. So we're up on inventory, and we're up on capacity, but it's a little bit deceiving the way that all of it fits together. And this is something that we have to manage as a team.

Finally, we have a pipeline to support all of this. We divided this patron behavior into four different quadrants based on spending, concert attendance, and retention rate. And I will admit, this was with the help of an AI tool, which helped us to just drill down to something that's a little bit more simple than the regular segmentation that we use on a daily basis.

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We can see that 65% of our revenue comes from our core patrons, and initially, most patrons engaged at a casual level and progressed to light, emerging, and core engagement. So the other thing that this doesn't tell you about what we've experienced is that in the fiscal year '24-'25, we presented Yo-Yo Ma and Nas for a total of \$800,000 in revenue. That might

not look on the surface like—you might plan for that growth to exist again. We know that there is only one Yo-Yo Ma, and in Baltimore, there's only one Nas. He was amazing. He sold out even faster than Yo-Yo Ma. So you can see that at the bottom of this page, we have the revenue that's grown just in our ticket sales. And what we need to be able to do is develop these strategies to be constantly generating more of that flow to the core patron level. If you're wondering why, not only do they give 65% of our total revenue, there's a higher retention rate, which means a return on our investment in the marketing work that we do. And we're just always learning about how this is changing.

The next thing is we actually have a look at this when you include giving in tickets, and the same outcome is shown here. In fact, giving only strengthens the statement about how our pipeline is growing, starting from '22-'23 into this year. These numbers, by the way, are projections. So what has been underlying all of this? There are five key elements. I'm going to go right into them.

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These are the fast tracks to—the first thing is the fast track to insider status. So we needed to lower the barrier for entry to be in with us. That meant that the Passport program, our Subscriptions program—sorry, Passports are ticketing membership. Our Subscriptions program, we had lower bars on those than we might have thought originally. For example, going out with a Choose 4 package in our renewal period, then waiting until June to announce four. And what we had to do also was balance the three main offerings so that people could understand what was available to them. So we had Choose 4 and Save, our curated options, are also made to emphasize the ease of buying in. You can kind of see that messaging here. And then finally, with our Passport Membership, which I've mentioned a few times, you buy a pass for \$140 annually, it automatically renews, and you can have access to the next thing I'll talk about here.

So the big idea is that patrons can deepen relationships at their own pace, giving them many on-ramps, especially when there have been so many different ways and unpredictable ways that our patrons have behaved over the past five years as we've rebuilt the audience. The next thing that we did was simplify our offerings. I love telling the story about what we did. Yes, we do classical, pop, fusion, film, and then just like some other random stuff, which doesn't really help anybody understand what you do. So we split it into three collections that help people wayfind their products that they're looking for. We have Classical, that's obvious. Popular is basically everything that's not classical, and Celebrations are those things where you're experiencing something out in your regular life, and we're celebrating and acknowledging that in the Hall. So yes, the holidays, but also Lunar New Year, Gospel Fest, Martin Luther King Day, all those kinds of things.

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This helps us understand the base pricing and compare the offers so that when we're talking to our patrons, we're not confusing them. The point really is simplicity, even though this chart might look a little bit complicated, this is an internal tool that also keeps our ticketing programs consistent from one program to the next. It's good to have a baseline.

So the next thing that we did was integrated our planning and management tools. So we think in broader segments, because if we tried to do all of the segmentation work that we sometimes hear about in talks like these, we would tie ourselves into pretzels. So we have three big groups: People who are engaged, our conversion groups, and then our prospects. What we do underneath the surface of that is every night there's an automated update that tags people with an updated version of their current status. So that's where we see subscribers, members, advocates, ticketing memberships. There's even a Subscriber Donors one. And this allows us to access the analysis that we need when we want it. And it keeps us out of thinking about it all the time. We can see at point in time how things change. We also need to use one big institutional calendar to communicate what all of these various departments are sending out. So you can see that on the right. Asana Implementation has been a really, really big project that we've been undergoing for a few years at this point, and what you can see here is that we have a few different segments that are kind of sub-segments of who's being sent what. Everybody who's sending anything out has something on this calendar, and there's an equal one for our activities too.

This helps us to, at a micro and a macro level, see what members and first-timers are receiving across all of our channels. We also have, thanks to Amy, a great set of in-house dashboard and tracking elements.

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The coolest thing about this is actually that our staff spends an hour a month together. It is an open invitation to the whole staff to get under the hood and look at what's changing. These are just three slides. In the presentations that Amy shares, there are like 30 slides. It's incredible. Please talk to her if you want to know how she did it, because it has really been important for us to back up the whole idea of making data-driven decisions with practices that promote data-driven decision-making.

So our relatively small team size for the marketing team necessitates technology that allows us to scale personalization and human interaction. One way that we do this is by choosing one offer that's going to be showing up to various segments across different channels. So for our donors, it's a reminder about benefits. For first-timers, it's a limited-time reminder of a 50%-off discount. Or for Passport, it's a reminder to add that friend ticket on for \$25. We

use this in all of our technology. Even ink-jetting on a piece of mail is technology that you can use to advance your relationships with your patrons. And so what we are seeing is that we just we tag it into places where we're already doing things. And the other really big thing, hopefully you've had a chance to download our app. This offers the best personalization experience. That's a whole other talk. It happened this morning at 8:30. But I really hope you'll download our app and see the personalized journey that has been made for you as League members.

Finally, we take a roadmap approach to personalization that gives us a lot of flexibility. We categorize our work into three different categories. First is the cadence—the things that cannot drop, no matter what happens. You always must acknowledge the gift. You must enter it. You have to take that ticket order, deliver those tickets, without question. If something's getting in the way of that, everything else really needs to be put on hold until that's fixed.

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Second, we have connections or campaigns. These are those moments that drive a relationship forward, like a stewardship campaign or a direct mail campaign that's driving sales for one or another giving initiative. Or we have these multi-channel marketing campaigns that we're used to. I also would consider events to be something that's a connection that's really important to us. And then finally, capacity-building. And that is where we take what we see in the cadence and connections places and we say, "Okay, where do we have the space to make one of these two better?" Maybe it's both at the same time, but we're always looking at how we can build capacity, and we have to limit ourselves because we have a really talented team and a lot of interest and curiosity, and we could go down these rabbit holes all day. And sometimes we do. But it all is flowing from a central growth strategy.

So, the last thing I wanted to share with you—this is an image of the Chesapeake Bay that we're on right now. This image hangs in my home, and it shows how incredible this ecosystem is. It's being fed by all of the parts of this region of the East Coast. Similarly, the BSO has an ecosystem of patrons whose interactions originate from many points, literally and figuratively. So, making stronger upstream decisions will help us determine whether our patron bases are healthy and thriving or hiding environmental issues that might exist under the surface. When we started this work, we were focused on the tributaries, conflicts were surfacing at execution, and it was a little bit late to do that.

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So, one of the biggest things that we did was find a way to unify the vision for what we wanted to accomplish. And so we restructured to create a team that supports most of all of this, and we are empowering great decision-making at every level on a daily basis, making decisions about what campaigns will get run and what capacity-building activities are going to fit into our offerings. By the way, we're located right here. It's kind of amazing. And yes, overall, we need to shift from high-volume hustle to high-value outreach. Being bigger and doing that enables us to stay competitive and to pivot quickly in a very noisy and dynamic world. So, a healthy ecosystem allows us to take artistic risks and adventures that allow our communities to thrive, and that's what Agnieszka is going to talk about.

[APPLAUSE]

AGNIESZKA RAKHMATULLAEV: I'm going to move away from this wonderful image to our next one. So, what you have just heard from Jennifer, the redefined service area, the relationship-centered operating model, that's not background to what I'm about to describe. That is the precondition for it. We can make artistic decisions that resonate because we know who is in the room. The shift here is from a series-first to a story-first approach. A season that works less like a single track you subscribe to and more like a story you can enter from many, many doors. And we have three deliberate moves that get us there: The Partnership programming, Throughlines, and editorial intentionality. So, I'm going to speak a little bit about each of those components.

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Partnership programming and cultural representation: Increasingly, the BSO seasons are full of moments when someone's personal life and culture are represented on the BSO stage. So, special concerts that were mentioned before by Allison, the MLK Day, Lunar New Year, Gospel Fest, the Ukraine Benefit, July 4th, the New Year's Eve concert recreate something we usually provide around the holidays, incorporating programming into important live moments people share. We at the BSO identify what's important to our community and neighbors and create unique orchestral tributes to those throughout our season. And these carefully crafted moments become trust-builders with our community and our patrons. These moments also include partnerships that bring other artists, ensembles, and institutions onto our stage. The Baltimore School of the Arts, the Gospel choirs of various HBCU in the area, Peabody Jazz Ensemble, Maryland Institute College of Art, the B&O Railroad Museum, and side-by-sides with various youth orchestras, and many, many, many more examples.

And then, there is our Music Director, Jonathon Heyward, who represents three important pillars: Excellence, curiosity, and definitely, reliability. Jonathon leads the institution as we

embed each of those principles into every aspect of our season, planning, and everything that we do as an organization. In other words, he is the artistic articulation of this thesis.

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This kind of programming is only sustainable when, of course, we know who is coming, when they came last, what brought them, and what would bring them back. The BSO makes deliberate decisions based on these data points. I just love this collaborative approach of the images here that represents an incredible area of things that Jonathon brings to the organization and our community, and the wonderful partnerships that we present in this organization. I'll go to the next slide.

Here at the BSO, we are intentionally diversifying our programming. We are starting to use Live at the Meyerhoff, so the rentals and presentations business uses our organization as a platform that bolsters deliberate Throughlines through the season. And we also introduced the Signature Series, strong door-openers that wouldn't fit on a regular classical series, but that would advance people's relationship with the orchestra and the organization. Some examples of those for our upcoming season include Dolly Parton, Joe Hisaishi, and Beethoven 9, a presentation during New Year's Eve. Throughlines is how we create a season. When we are programming these magnets, we ask ourselves, what is the next concert that people will go to, and in addition to who from the previous concerts may attend again? And why does it matter? Because an audience following a Throughline is different from an audience attending a single concert. The Throughline produces commitment, not just attendance, and that's exactly what we're looking for. We don't need them to come to one concert. We want them to come back again and again and again, to the BSO, to Live at the Meyerhoff, and to our incredible venue.

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This is the first place patron data is shaping artistic choices. We can build Throughlines because we can see which audiences follow them and how. There's definitely editorial intentionality inside the programs, each and every one of them that we have during our season. Each program with the BSO season is built strategically and deliberately. For classical programs, newer works are paired with core repertoire, so the program is a conversation rather than a checklist. For popular offerings, a wide variety of programs is presented across the year to ensure both diversity and continuity within and beyond the season, including the summer. Across each BSO season, we strive to balance concerts designed to bring new people in with those designed to feed the curiosity of our core audience, including the Passport buyers that Jennifer mentioned, who are becoming taste-shapers—I love that term—because of the access we have given them to many, many BSO concerts. The intentionality behind each program and the connection between various

pillars is what makes the season feel like one institution making coherent choices, not just a calendar of unrelated concerts and events.

So what are the lessons that we learned from this? As Mark mentioned, we are still on a journey. It is important to note the significant change in how we plan our season, which has occurred in a way that is both helpful, as well as maybe slightly uncomfortable. A few years ago, the BSO season planning process ran on a variety of informed assumptions. There were assumptions, but they were informed. We knew what the subscribers tended to like. We knew what had worked before, and then we built the season largely on that knowledge.

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Choose Your Own and the detailed broader patron data that is being analyzed each week have changed that. Now we can see, in close and real time, partially because of the amazing data that Amy and her team provides, which programs are pulling audiences and which aren't, and which kinds of partnerships are deepening our artistic work versus stretching the orchestra beyond what is sustainable. And that visibility is harder than the old way. It means we can't just assume, we actually have to know. But it also lets us right-size artistic impact across our entire season. Being more ambitious, where the data tells our audiences are following something, and are more disciplined, where ambition would outrun what we can actually deliver.

A data-driven approach doesn't constrain creativity. I think that's a very important point. It focuses it and funds it. We are building seasons with more information and earlier decisions than we used to. It is a very collective and a very collaborative process here at the BSO. And with involvement and more perspective and people around the table from across the entire organization informing those decisions. That is harder, but absolutely the better version of the way to build a season.

And while we have done some significant progress, as Mark mentioned, we are still learning to use it in the best and most efficient way possible. None of what I have described is possible without the three tools the whole institution shares. And I would like Mark to continue.

HANSON: Thank you. So collaborative that we recently had to renovate our green room area because we had quickly outgrown the second floor conference room that used to house those artistic planning and long-range calendar meetings.

[00:50:08]

So let me summarize before we open the floor to your questions. Well, you've heard Allison, Jennifer, and Agnieszka talk about the redefined service area, the revenue operating model, the season of many doors. There aren't three separate stories. It really is three sides of one question. What does it mean to build an institution that is stronger because it connects more deeply with its community? The overarching goal isn't to preserve the institution. The point is to become something the community would deeply, deeply miss if it disappeared. Our strong belief is that by providing cultural infrastructure, the BSO is creating more pathways for support, involvement, engagement that will improve organizational resiliency over time.

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