

Vermont Symphony Orchestra Narrative for the Governor's Budget for State FY 2018

Vermont Symphony Orchestra Mission Statement

The Vermont Symphony Orchestra Association, Inc. (VSO), a state assisted non-profit institution founded in 1936, exists for the purpose of fostering and encouraging the appreciation of music in all its various forms, with emphasis on orchestral, choral, and chamber music. It seeks to raise the common standard of music education and enjoyment, and to provide, at moderate cost, quality performances for a broad and diverse public throughout the State of Vermont.

Description of Appropriation, Division, and Programs

The Vermont Symphony Orchestra is the oldest state-assisted orchestra in America and historically receives a single appropriation from the General Fund to support musical and educational programs around the state, with primary emphasis on the *SymphonyKids* education program, and performances in underserved, rural areas. We are also very proud to offer free Holiday Pops tickets to members of the Vermont National Guard and their families as well as no-cost student tickets at select concerts, and deeply discounted student tickets for all concerts.

Last year, the VSO received an appropriation of \$141,214 and we would like to humbly request consideration for increase of 6% (\$8,473) for FY18 to **\$149,687**.

Activities

This modest increase enables the VSO to update, reinvent, and augment the *SymphonyKids* initiatives being offered statewide. Specifically, we intend to deepen our partnership in select schools that demonstrate a commitment to arts-focused curricula, as well as integrate inquiry-based learning, career-readiness, and individual creativity into our existing programs, which are currently focused primarily on breadth and exposure.

Last season's *SymphonyKids* statewide educational programming included 278 presentations by our professional musicians, and involved over 26,000 Vermont schoolchildren from 175 schools in 141 different towns. The attendance represents close to half of all Vermont K-6 schoolchildren. Support from the state of Vermont has been, and continues to be *essential*, particularly as these programs evolve.

Institutionally, the VSO is going through a period of greater evolution than at any point over the past 15 years. With the introduction of Executive Director Benjamin Cadwallader in October, 2015, the VSO is being reimagined and redirected from top to bottom. During 2016, the VSO has moved forward with several innovative artistic, educational, and institutional initiatives. Artistic initiatives include a co-production with Higher Ground, a multi-year partnership exploring music in film with the Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival, the addition of a VSO Violinmaker-in-Residence at all 2016/2017 Masterworks Concerts, and a pioneering sensory experience in collaboration with ArtsRiot exploring the interplay of music and food called "Sound and Soil." Institutionally, there has been some expected staff turnover, an ongoing effort to update and formalize our internal systems and databases, and renewed focus on Board Governance, Committees, and Engagement.

In August, 2016 the VSO received national attention when Benjamin Cadwallader was one of eight leaders selected by the League of American Orchestras to participate in the Emerging Leaders Program, a one-year opportunity afforded to individuals identified as having the potential to make significant contributions to their communities, and to the field as a whole.

The VSO presented approximately 330 presentations during its 2015/2016 season, reaching 55,000 people statewide. 290 of the events were offered free of charge to audience members. Over half of the VSO's education and community engagement initiatives are located in census tracts with median household incomes under \$53,000.

Appropriation Key Budget Issues

Among the major indicators measuring the results and impact of VSO programs each fiscal year, the most important are:

- 1) Program usage statistics. Ticket revenue and attendance have been uneven in recent years, with 15/16 seeing a slight overall increase as efforts to broaden the presentations to underrepresented communities and define ways to appeal to younger and more diverse Vermont audiences begin to see results. Our expectation is that we will see these trends continue to rise into 2017 and beyond.
- 2) Statistical evidence of broadening community and business support across the state. Individual gifts and business support slumped in FY14, when we lacked development staff. We are building back with a result of \$316,740 in FY15. Likewise, business and foundation support continued modest but steady growth to \$225,744 in FY 15. With the installation of a new permanent Executive Director (Oct., 2015), a Senior Director of Philanthropy and Communications (July, 2016), and a realignment of development & marketing staff duties (July, 2016), individual and business support should continue to see modest increases, with an 11% increase expected in FY17 (6/1/16-5/31/17).
- 3) Evidence of artistic and administrative excellence and financial results and evidence of economic impact. The Vermont Symphony Orchestra has developed a consistent, superior level of artistic ability that is unparalleled locally and competitive regionally and nationally. In recent years we have hosted performances by Yo-Yo Ma, Sarah McLaughlin, Sharon Isbin, Gregory Alan Isakov, Joseph Kalichstein, and more. FY16 saw a 9% increase in ticket sales over FY15. The artistic quality delivered by the VSO is reflected in performance reviews, increasing ticket sales, and in periodic reviews by outside agencies.

The operating cash flow of the VSO continues to be tenuous, and must to be permanently strengthened. Although a robust stock market has helped the VSO grow its endowment to supplement operations, those funds are carefully and responsibly disbursed, accounting for just over 6% of the VSO's annual budget. The VSO had an operating deficit in FY15, narrowing slightly in FY16. With the important staffing changes and realignment mentioned above, we are optimistic that we will see an increase in business sponsorships, private donations, and ticket sales, as we continue to create, work, and innovate our way toward a bright, surprising future.