



Commissioner Adam Greshin
Department of Finance and Management
State of Vermont

September 24, 2021

Dear Commissioner Greshin,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Vermont Symphony Orchestra's impact and engagement with the state of Vermont, and for the continued state appropriations which is key to our work.

In 2020, the pandemic forced the VSO to become a 100% online arts organization, but we are now an organization embracing a hybrid live and online model for artistic events and education. Over the two-year financial period ending June 2022, we're able to accomplish the following in Vermont:

- **66 Live full orchestra and chamber ensemble concerts**, of which 12 concerts and educational events are streamed, to a total estimated audience of 25,200
- **\$1,95M in employment** to musicians, arts practitioners, educators, and administrators
- **Ongoing engagement** with six elderly-, Veteran- and disability-focused non-profits and state organizations
- **Side-by-side performances with 125 young musicians** with youth orchestras in Burlington, Bennington, St. Johnsbury and Brattleboro
- **Reaching 36 Vermont towns** with live performance and music education

2020-2022
VSO Communities

Barre
Bennington
Brattleboro
Burlington
Derby
Dorset
Essex Jct.
Grafton
Greensboro
Island Pond
Lyndon
Manchester
Middlebury
Morrisville
Montpelier
Newport
Proctor
Rutland
Saxtons River
St. Albans
St. Johnsbury
Shelburne
South Hero
South Pomfret
South Royalton
Stowe
Vergennes
Waitsfield
Warren
Waterbury
Weston
White River Junction
Williamstown
Williston

Keeping Music New

We've commissioned and performed eight new musical works, including Vermont composers Burlington High School senior Alex Wick, South Burlington jazz virtuoso Ray Vega, Middlebury music professor Matthew Evan Taylor and Randolph-native, Drama Desk award composer Nico Muhly. Their music is a key addition to the repertoire of Bach, Beethoven, Ravel, Stravinsky, Rachmaninoff, and other more traditional symphonic composers showcased at VSO concerts.

We're also combining orchestra music with other artistic mediums, focusing on film (with our Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival collaboration, featuring live orchestral accompaniment to a new animated film each year) and projections (with Champlain College and DoubleE Performance Venue "visualizer orchestra" concerts with projection mapped visuals).

Statewide Education

We've been fortunate to steer resources towards much-needed education projects including:

- **MusicClef Statewide Competition:** Vermont middle- and high-school students, using any instrument and any musical genre, improvise on melodies from newly commissioned music. Student finalists are brought to Burlington to work one-on-one with the composers and to attend the VSO concerts in Oct 2021, and Sept & Oct 2022.
- **Musicians in Schools:** Trios of strings, woodwind and brass instrumentalists are accompanied by an actor to explore STEM principles through storytelling and music. The shows for K-8th grade discover how anything from arithmetic, proportions and patterns to energy transfer, sound waves and pollination can be learned through music.
- **Young Composers:** Aspiring elementary and middle school composers in Brattleboro, Rutland, St. Albans and Woodbury spend three months each year learning to write music with VSO string and brass ensembles, including Zoomed and in-person final concerts.
- **Youth Orchestra collaborations:** Musicians in the Vermont Youth Orchestra in Burlington, at St. Johnsbury Academy and from the Village School in North Bennington are playing side-by-side with the VSO orchestra and Jukebox Quartet in five concerts between October 2021 and April 2022.

Community collaborations

In addition to the educational, disability and equity partnerships noted above, we work with:

- Stowe Performing Arts (Stowe), Pentangle Arts (South Pomfret), Windham Foundation (Grafton), Shelburne Museum (Shelburne) for our Summer Festival Tour
- Weston Playhouse (Weston), Artistree (South Pomfret), NVU Alexander Twilight Theater (Lyndon), ArtsRiot (Burlington), VT Arts Exchange (Bennington) for our Jukebox concerts
- The Flynn and Elley Long Music Center (Burlington) for our Classical Series concerts
- Vermont Arts Council, Vermont Humanities and VCF for funding and arts partnerships

Growing the economy

Streamed earned income: From October 2020 through March 2021, the VSO's streamed concerts engaged a total of 2,370 people and generated \$50,910 in online ticket and sponsorship revenue. This was our first foray into recording, streaming and marketing Vermont's orchestra concerts to the general online public worldwide. For the streaming season October 2021 – May 2022, with lessons learned from 2020 and diversified marketing, we anticipate these figures to double earned via an engagement of no less than 4,500 audience members. Note that recording and streaming adds approximately \$9000 to each concert's cost; ticket sales don't currently cover that, thus sponsorship is required.

Bringing donations into Vermont: We've also been successful in securing financial support from donors based outside of Vermont, whose grants provide new income and help grow our local economy. These donors include the National Arts Council (via Washington D.C. HQ), Gannett Foundation (VA), Cricket Foundation (WA), Music Performance Trust Fund (NY), Byrne Foundation (NH) and more.

Protecting the vulnerable

The VSO is working in collaboration with clients from six organizations serving the elderly, Veterans and disabled: AgeWell, AARP, Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Inclusive Arts, VA Clinic in Brattleboro, VA Hospital in White River Junction

The partnerships include free streamed, interactive concerts combining music with therapeutic storytelling and live summer concerts at VA clinics. We also provide programs for visually impaired patrons via "touch tours" of instruments in conversation with musicians at VSO concerts, and closed-captioning for streamed narrative content. Our staff engaged with Inclusive Arts for a two-month series of workshops on disability access, communication and overcoming ableism in our work.

Equity lens

The VSO has made and is living these commitments towards justice, diversity, equity and inclusion:

BIPOC representation and engagement: the music performed in every VSO concert represents work by BIPOC composers. In FY21 and FY22, 22% of VSO's musical repertoire is by Black or Brown composers, and 47% of VSO guest artists are Black or Brown conductors, musicians, singers or narrators. As members of the national diversity organization Sphinx Organization, the VSO is bringing BIPOC assistant conductors on board in 2022 to develop career paths for Black and Brown conductors and we engage Sphinx instrumental soloists for VSO concerts.

Women: 24% of VSO musical repertoire is composed by women and 42% of VSO guest artists are women. Six of VSO's seven staff are women, as are 11 of VSO's 18 Board members. We are undergoing a search for the VSO's next Music Director: three of seven candidates are women.

Summary of COVID-19 impact

Until the summer of 2021, we were unable to hire over 60% of our musicians primarily due to cross-border travel restrictions (for VSO musicians who reside in other states) and limitations on woodwind and brass instrument playing. This was a significant hit to our musicians' income, and schools were unable to host in-person education programs by the VSO.

Since then, we have been fortunate to secure \$233,892 in FY21 and \$446,025 in FY22 in COVID relief grants from state and federal sources. This timely funding arrived when our earned income had dropped by 91% from pre-pandemic levels. These grants are serving their purpose: keeping business doors open, employing people, and providing financial stability as we rethink and repurpose our artistic and educational programs.

Finally, we are happy to announce that all VSO staff, musicians, guest artists and audiences will work and attend events entirely under a COVID vaccine mandate. It is a decision made in July 2021, in consultation and partnership with our representative musicians' union, staff, board, our partner venues and a sample of our audiences. The overwhelming reaction has been positive to this new policy, which will be in place until further notice.

FY23: Budget challenges and opportunities

As with many organizations, we anticipate little or no further COVID relief and thus a return to pre-pandemic funding models. This is partnered with unknowable guesswork around box office income, tied to the comfort level of our patrons returning to indoor events. However, with what newly integrated recording and streaming platforms are affordable, there is limitless geographic reach for VSO's online concerts and statewide for our education programs.

Additional FY23 funding request: We have submitted budgets based on a 3% increase over FY22's appropriation, as well as a budget with 3% plus an additional proposed \$40,000 allocation. The reasoning and motivation came from FY22, when the VSO was very fortunate to receive a once-off additional COVID appropriation for \$25,000 motivated by Rep. Jim Harrison (Rutland-Windsor-1). This once-off funding was the key affordability factor in recording and streaming our concerts, marketing them to new audiences, providing more employment for Vermont musicians and arts practitioners, and generating the earned income and sponsorship noted above in "Growing the economy."

Given our proposed artistic and educational program for FY23, we respectfully propose an additional \$40,000 to cover these new recording, streaming and marketing costs that bring the Vermont Symphony Orchestra to our state's residents at home, and to the worldwide market. The funding would be split as \$5,000 towards online marketing and content creation (design, advertising, videography), \$10,000 towards hosting online streams and ticketing, and \$25,000 towards audio/visual recording expenses for VSO's concerts and educational programs.

Those who cannot attend a live event due to disability, transport or cost should not be denied access to Vermont's lush musical landscape and its talented musicians. Recording and sharing Vermont's musical offerings online is the answer to access, expanding our reach, and growing our economy.

I'd like to communicate our staff, Board and musicians' gratitude for the State of Vermont's ongoing support of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. Thank you for your commitment to music and providing much-needed support for us to fulfill the VSO mission and our values:

VSO MISSION: to foster and encourage the love of music throughout Vermont.

VSO VALUES: Music, Statewide Community, Inclusivity, Creativity and Stewardship

Sincerely,

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