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TESTIMONY TO THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL – BUDGET HEARING, APRIL 8, 2024

Good afternoon, my name is Jim Kelly and I am the President and CEO of the National Philharmonic. One of our most recent sell-out performances last year was a collaboration with NASA, of which I brought that collaboration with me today ...with the solar eclipse.

For nearly 40 years, NatPhil has been the premiere professional symphony orchestra headquartered in Montgomery County. Since 2005, we have performed in, and been a partner to, the Music Center at Strathmore. Our organization's vision is to share and amplify the power of music; besides our extensive concert programming, we perform concerts for all second graders in MCPS, have a Youth Mentorship Program for students to receive free private instruction, mentorship and performance opportunities, run a Summer Strings institute for talented middle and high school musicians, provide free concert admission to over 2,000 students per season, and partner with many diverse community organizations to expand access to classical music.

Past funding from the state arts council, and the Arts and Humanities Council of Montgomery County has been used to transform our organization through an equity lens and bring diversity to our staff, our musicians and our programming. By implementing these changes, new patrons feel comfortable coming to our concerts, and our audience and donor base is evolving and new.

However, like many arts organizations across the country, and particularly orchestras, we find ourselves facing financial challenges. The recovery from Covid has been bumpy at best – our return to full performance seasons continues to be challenging. While our concert audiences are robust, donations and financial contributions have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. Lower ticket prices, to allow access for more patrons to our concerts, have resulted in lower earned income.

Running an orchestra requires much more union labor and production than other art forms. NatPhil's operating costs for necessary items such as concert production, union musician fees, concert hall overhead, and ticketing costs continue to rise, in fact, since 2020, these costs have risen an average of 20%. This year, to offset some of these challenges, our board made the difficult decision to cancel three spring concerts, recast our budget, and reduce our administrative staff.

I come before you today to respectfully ask that the council designate the National Philharmonic in the county budget for a one-time contribution of \$400,000. This investment in NatPhil's future will demonstrate civic pride in our organization and the determination to ensure its continued success. We will be able to stabilize the organization after 4 years of fluctuation and change. Particularly now, as we look to the 2024-2025 season, NatPhil will celebrate its 40th anniversary in the county, and the 40th and final year of our music director, Piotr Gajewski. With your support, NatPhil can be confident that we can continue to bring our excellent concerts, educational programming, and community events to everyone.

Please reference the County Executive's Office most recent study on NatPhil for additional information.

Thank you.

Jim Kelly, President/CEO National Philharmonic

5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda, MD 20852 | (301) 493-9283 | NationalPhilharmonic.org

The National Philharmonic is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, federal EIN 52-1361650. Please retain this letter as receipt of your contribution.

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NATIONAL PHILHARMONIC (NATPHIL)

HISTORY

The National Philharmonic (NatPhil) was created through the merger of the National Chamber Orchestra and Masterworks Chorus on July 1, 2003. The organization began its residency at the state-of-the-art Music Center at Strathmore in North Bethesda, MD on February 12, 2005. It is the only major musical ensemble which creates its programming specifically for Strathmore audiences. Under the distinguished leadership of Maestro Piotr Gajewski, the National Philharmonic is known for performances that are “powerful,” “impeccable,” and “thrilling.” (*The Washington Post*)

The Philharmonic manages both a fully professional orchestra and partners with chorales in our region. In addition to its commitment to high quality musical presentations, the National Philharmonic consistently strives to create outstanding and stimulating learning and engagement opportunities in the community. With its long-standing history of reasonably priced concert tickets and free admission to all young people aged 7-17, the National Philharmonic is an accessible, enriching component of the Greater Washington, D.C. Metro Area.

MISSION

Our mission states that “National Philharmonic engages, inspires, and unites diverse communities across the Washington area through outstanding music performances and innovative education programs.”

VISION

To share and amplify the power of music.

Values

- Access and Inclusion
- Collaborative Creativity
- Innovation
- Educational Engagement
- Inspirational Connections

Who We Support

Based in Montgomery County, Maryland, National Philharmonic supports the metropolitan Washington, DC area, including Central and Eastern Maryland, the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia and beyond.

ARTISTIC PROGRAMMING

The National Philharmonic (NatPhil) performs 10 to 14 high quality subscription series concerts at the Music Center at Strathmore. Concerts in the Symphony Blockbuster, Choral Masterworks, Chamber Orchestra and Philharmonic Opera series draw audiences at a very high rate of capacity. Since NatPhil took up residence at Strathmore in February 2005, the Philharmonic fills nearly 85% of seats available at its concerts, a rate of capacity that is well above the national average. Over 40,000 individuals have enjoyed National Philharmonic performances in the last year including 15,000 children who have been engaged by NatPhil through its learning and engagement programs.

LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Accompanying every National Philharmonic concert season is strong emphasis on accessibility and educational programming for people of all ages throughout the local community. The National Philharmonic is fervently committed to educational engagement and is honored to have the opportunity to promote innovative arts education and music enrichment initiatives that encourage appreciation of classical music and support the musical development of the local musicians. **The National Philharmonic has created and implemented several programs that reach over 15,000 children each year.**

Concerts for Second Grade Students - Each year, National Philharmonic invites every Montgomery County Public School second grade student to attend a National Philharmonic concert at the Music Center at Strathmore. **This program makes it possible for more than 12,000 young children to experience the *Thrill of the Orchestra* at no charge.**

All Kids, All Free, All The Time - Young people age 7-17 attend ALL National Philharmonic concerts free of charge, making it easy for families to come to concerts together and young adults to attend a live classical music performance with friends. Approximately 5% of National Philharmonic audiences are admitted free of charge through the ALL KIDS ALL FREE ALL THE TIME program. **We support 2700 youth annually through this program.**

Youth Mentorship Program - The Youth Mentorship Program (YMP) aims to contribute to students' holistic growth through the vehicles of music and extramusical opportunities to connect with a diverse community of students and professional musicians. In 2023, our Lesson Bank and YMP were integrated to provide weekly private instrumental lessons for all participants. In collaboration with our 2022-2023 Sphinx Orchestral Futurist in Residence, Yasmine Bougacha, we introduced an additional component, the YMP Chamber Players. This program includes chamber group assignments, biweekly chamber music coachings, and various performance opportunities. This year we welcome our new OFIR, violinist Camille Jones who will bring a fresh perspective on mindfulness and creative expression to the program.

In addition to the performance aspect of the program, students will have the opportunity to participate in workshops focusing on life skills, college preparation and personal development. Studying an instrument requires and improves abilities such as time management, working efficiently alone and within a group, project management, etc. Within this program we discuss and work on these abilities, preparing students for future tasks and various professional paths after high school. **We support 21 youth through this program a year.**

Summer String Institutes (SSI) - Each summer, National Phil's Summer String Institutes immerses talented and aspiring middle school and high school string musicians in an intensive week of mentoring, chamber music coaching, individual lessons, and rehearsals, led by Maestro Piotr Gajewski, musicians of the National Philharmonic, and gifted area musicians and educators. The Institutes culminate in performances that are free and open to the public. **This program serves 200 youth annually.**

Harmonic Justice - National Philharmonic is creating dialogue around the importance of racial equity in classical music through a Harmonic Justice series. This virtual showcase intersperses inspiring performances with a panel discussion about racial equity in classical music and how we can all be part of reimagining the orchestral experience (and our own communities) to build a truly inclusive future for America.

SENIOR COMMUNITIES

National Philharmonic is proud to work with senior communities throughout the Washington, DC region and beyond to bolster well-being and connection through musical engagement. This season we look forward to building meaningful community through live online events and performances, streamed straight into the homes of our senior community partners. We are honored to partner with the dedicated communities at Knollwood, The Mather and most recently, Asbury Methodist Village.

Color the Music Creative Aging Program – Adults

The National Philharmonic collaborates with [Mather](#), an over 80-year-old organization dedicated to creating Ways to Age WellSM. Research demonstrates that abilities related to creativity in the present moment, sensory enjoyment, and emotional connection all remain long into dementia progression. We believe that the arts are key to tapping into these long-lasting strengths! National Philharmonic and Mather presents a series of dementia-friendly virtual concerts paired with Creative Explorations to try either during or after enjoying the concert. Each Creative Exploration is outlined with accessibility and wellbeing in mind.

PARTNERSHIPS

Sphinx Organization

NatPhil is proud to be a part of the [National Alliance for Audition Support \(NAAS\)](#), an unprecedented national initiative to increase diversity in American orchestras. It does so by offering Black and Latinx musicians a customized combination of mentoring, audition preparation, financial support, and audition previews.

National Philharmonic is proud to partner with the [National Orchestral Institute + Festival \(NOI+F\)](#) and **The Sphinx Organization** to support the next generation of leaders in the orchestral field with a two-year fellowship and residency program that combines arts administration, orchestral performance, education programs and community engagement. To learn more about this program, click [here](#).

Orchestral Futurist in Residence - NatPhil's strategic partnerships with the Sphinx Organization in Detroit, MI and the National Orchestral Institute + Festival (NOI+F) at the University of Maryland have resulted in a new two-year fellowship and residency program called the Orchestral Futurist in Residence (OFIR). This program focuses on recruitment of BIPOC students, combining arts administration, orchestral performance, music curation, and community engagement. Building on NOI+F's existing one-year fellowship program, NatPhil offers the fellow an opportunity to expand their work into a second year.

International Florence Price Festival: Price Pledge Initiative

The [International Florence Price Festival](#) (PriceFest) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating the life and legacy of composer Florence Beatrice Price through an annual festival featuring all of Price's musical output as well as scholarly, educational, and advocacy-oriented events. The Price Pledge Initiative is a PriceFest project designed to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in classical music programming and instruction, beginning with middle school and continuing through college level. PriceFest brokers partnerships between educational ambassadors and partnering institutions to create educational resources and foster sustainable change in the classical music industry.

Boulangier Initiative

NatPhil is proud to support Boulangier Initiative's mission "to work toward greater inclusivity, and to enrich our collective understanding of what music is, has been, and can be" as an Orchestral Seed Partner for the [Redefining the Canon Initiative](#). This unprecedented initiative aims to update the most widely-used orchestral audition excerpts to include excerpts by historically underrepresented composers.

Find out more about the National Philharmonic by visiting nationalphilharmonic.org