

I am writing to you as a violinist in the National Philharmonic. I have been a core member in NatPhil for 37 years. When I first joined in 1987, it was a 30 piece chamber orchestra named Montgomery County Chamber Orchestra and we played in the Fitzgerald Theater in Rockville. Now we are a full-fledged symphony orchestra comprised of approximately 90 musicians playing in the beautiful Strathmore Hall. What a long way we've come!

Today, I want to support our President/CEO Jim Kelly's request for a \$300,000 line item in the county budget dedicated to the National Philharmonic. NatPhil has been in the county for nearly 40 years, performing since 2005 at Strathmore as a partner. Besides its extensive concert programming, NatPhil presents concerts for all second graders in MCPS, has a Youth Mentorship Program for students to receive private instruction and performance opportunities, runs a Summer Strings institute for talented middle and high school musicians, provides free concert admission to over 2,000 students per season, and partners with many diverse community organizations to expand access to classical music. Its reach in the county is deep and wide.

Like many arts organizations across the country, and particularly orchestras, NatPhil finds itself currently facing financial challenges. The recovery from Covid has been bumpy at best – the return to full seasons of in-person concerts continues to be challenging. While concert audiences are robust, donations and financial contributions have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

In contrast, the NatPhil's operating costs for necessary items such as concert production, union fees, rent, and ticketing costs have risen an average of 20% since 2020. This year, to offset some of these challenges, the board of directors made the difficult decision to cancel two spring concerts, recast the budget, and reduce the administrative staff.

The NatPhil is a treasure in Montgomery County. I want to add my voice to those who want to see it supported through a direct line item of \$300,000 in the county budget, as is done in Fairfax County with the Fairfax Symphony. Fairfax recognizes the treasure it has in their local symphony and we hope the same can happen in Montgomery County.

As we look to the 2024-2025 season, NatPhil will be celebrating its 40th anniversary in the county, and the 40th year of music director, Piotr Gajewski. With line item funding, NatPhil can be confident that it has the full support of county leadership as it continues to bring excellent concerts, educational programming, and community events to everyone.

Respectfully submitted,
Leslie Silverfine