

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



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Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Reveals Plans for New Stella Boyle Smith Music Center in Little Rock's East Village

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (January 12, 2022) – The [Arkansas Symphony Orchestra](#) (ASO) has revealed plans for a new state of the art, 20,000 square foot music center to serve students and communities across Arkansas. Planned for development in the heart of Little Rock's East Village, the new \$9-million [Stella Boyle Smith Music Center](#) will greatly expand ASO's capacity to serve Arkansas children through outstanding education programming and provide all residents with extensive musical offerings. The formal announcement of plans for the new community music center follows years of private fundraising and marks the launch of a public fundraising campaign to make it a reality.

"Right now, hundreds of students and adults come to create, learn and perform music in a building built in 1916 as a nunnery and dining hall. Children must rehearse and practice outside, in the storage room or in offices because of the high demand for music classes and the limited space in ASO's current facility. Yet, students from all across our state return week after week to inspire and be inspired," said ASO CEO Christina Littlejohn. "This new community music center will allow us to meet current demand, expand music instruction offerings and allow us to provide more programming for adults of all ages to complement the concerts at Robinson Center. We are incredibly grateful for the generous support of our donors to date and through their leadership, we are ready to share the vision for this transformative project for ASO and the communities across Arkansas that we serve."

ASO education and community music programs, like the Youth Orchestra, Music Academy, ASO Community Orchestra for adult amateurs, virtual classroom performances and other initiatives that serve people across the state, currently take place in a small, rented space which makes it difficult to be accessible to all who wish to participate. The new community music center, located between Heifer International and the Clinton Presidential Center, will include a Grand Hall for rehearsals and concerts, multiple practice spaces, music classrooms, climate-controlled instrument storage and additional flexible space to serve future generations of Arkansans.

"This project will become an incredible addition to the arts and culture landscape of Arkansas and a vibrant jewel of creativity in Little Rock's East Village, and it will also be far more than that," said Brigita Gardner who serves as chair of the fundraising effort. "This new center is a commitment to serve our communities for generations and marks a significant opportunity for our current community leaders to leave a lasting legacy that ensures every young Arkansans for years to come will have access to music education and all the power that comes with it."

To further serve the state, the Stella Boyle Smith Music Center will also have a dedicated streaming studio to eliminate all barriers for all Arkansans to access ASO programs. That means Arkansans in

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nursing homes, retirement centers, libraries, schools or anywhere who are unable to come to the community music center in person will still be able to access music and educational resources through the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra.

“With this effort, ASO will soon have the potential to double or even triple the number of students and community members they can serve, significantly advancing Stella Boyle Smith’s vision of providing quality music education and access to every young person in our state,” said Stella Boyle Smith Trust trustee Mike Mayton. “Once this new music center is complete, thousands of children from across our state will experience tens of thousands of hours of the highest quality music education in an environment that inspires them to excel.”

The next phase of the project will require support directly from the communities it serves. Thanks to the generous support of 58 donors to date, including \$3.2-million donated by members of the ASO Board of Directors in addition to other leading gifts from the State of Arkansas, Stella Boyle Smith Trust and Simmons Bank, ASO has been able to raise \$5.4-million or 60-percent of the goal to make the new Stella Boyle Smith Music Center a reality. Now advocates and supporters of ASO’s mission to connect, enrich, inspire and advance Arkansas through the power of music are calling on fellow Arkansans to lend their support as well.

“We are proud to support the construction of the Stella Boyle Smith Music Center because we know the impact it has on the lives of our youth and our communities both now and for our future,” said Chris White, executive vice president and Arkansas Community Division president of Simmons Bank and a member of the ASO Board of Directors. Simmons Bank donated \$500,000 toward the community music center project. “Music education not only teaches valuable life skills, but it also builds creativity, teamwork, mathematics and problem solving that prepare the youth of today to be our leaders of tomorrow. We hope other leaders, organizations and individuals passionate about lifting up our next generation can join us in supporting this effort.”

The Stella Boyle Smith Music Center was designed by Witsell Evans Rasco Architects of Little Rock. To learn more about the new ASO community music center and how individuals or groups can help make it possible to expand ASO’s impact on the community, visit: www.arkansassymphony.org/music-center

MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

Design renders for the future Stella Boyle Smith Music Center:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1EyBv0PYOvfJfBjoT4SF1Bms5pRMIzRli?usp=sharing>

About Arkansas Symphony Orchestra

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The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra celebrates its 56th full season in 2021-2022. ASO performs more than sixty concerts each year for more than 165,000 people through its Stella Boyle Smith Masterworks Series, Acxiom Pops Live! Series, River Rhapsodies Chamber Music Series, and numerous concerts performed across the state of Arkansas. In addition, it serves central Arkansas through numerous community outreach programs and brings live symphonic music education to over 26,000 school children and over 200 schools. ASO's education programs include the Sturgis Music Academy, which provides violin and cello instruction to more than 350 students, and the ASO Youth Ensembles Program, which has nearly 200 students enrolled in two full orchestras and a strings-only ensemble. ASO is the lead employer of professional performing artists in the state of Arkansas with 12 full-time musicians, more than 70 part-time musicians and 15 administrative staff members with an annual operating budget of \$3.5 million. ASO has balanced its budget for twelve years and is the resident orchestra of Robinson Center Music Hall. Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is a member of the League of American Orchestras and a partner orchestra of the National Alliance for Audition Support, an unprecedented national initiative to increase diversity in American orchestras.

For more information about the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra call 501-666-1761 or visit www.ArkansasSymphony.org

Program notes, artist bios and high-resolution headshots available upon request.

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