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## **Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Breaks Ground on New \$11.75 million Stella Boyle Smith Music Center in Little Rock's East Village**

***New 20,000-square-foot headquarters will open September 2024  
as an innovative, welcoming hub for music***

**LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (Aug. 10, 2023)** — [Arkansas Symphony Orchestra](#) broke ground today on its new \$11.75 million [Stella Boyle Smith Music Center](#) in Little Rock's East Village, creating a first-of-its-kind music-focused headquarters for the state. The new 20,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility, slated to open in September 2024, is the Symphony's first permanent home in its 58-year history.

The new music center will be a radically welcoming hub of musical activity for all Arkansans, serving youth and adults of all ages with an array of musical offerings. The building will provide access to music education, music performances and music making to residents of all corners of the state through new spaces and a broadcast and recording studio.

"Our new music center represents a defining moment for the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra and for the state," said Brigita Gardner, chair of ASO's Crescendo Committee. "Countless individuals in the community have dedicated their time, effort and passion to raise funds and meticulously plan for how this center can be accessible to all and a source of joy. We embrace the promise of this landmark home as it enriches the arts in our community and serves Arkansans for many generations to come."

The new music center will boast state-of-the-art features for children and adults that participate in the programs of the E. Lee Ronnel Music Academy, including music classrooms and practice spaces, ensuring a conducive environment for musical growth and creativity. The space will include Morgan Hall, named in honor of long-time ASO supporters Susie and Charles Morgan, which will serve as a versatile space for rehearsals and concerts, fostering an immersive musical experience.

"Live music serves as a unifying force that connects us all, transcending all walks of life," ASO Music Director Geoff Robson said. "Arkansas has a rich tradition of music creators, including

Florence Price, Johnny Cash, William Grant Still, the Ozark Folk Tradition, Sister Rosetta Tharpe and many more. As we embark on this exciting journey, our vision is that this new center will inspire appreciation for all kinds of music-making, be an accessible resource for those learning the craft, and help to cultivate the next generations of music creators. We look forward to ushering in this new era of possibilities.”

The groundbreaking of the Stella Boyle Smith Music Center follows years of effort from community supporters to privately fundraise and identify a suitable location for the new center, which needed to be constructed to provide the right specifications for musical acoustics. More than 200 generous donors throughout the community have contributed towards this project, including 48 musicians, raising more than \$11 million for the center.

ASO is currently raising remaining funds, as it is just \$500,000 shy of its fundraising goal. Major donors include The Stella Boyle Smith Trust, Susie and Charles Morgan, Gus Vratsinas, Terri and Chuck Erwin, Windgate Foundation, E. Lee Ronnel, Simmons Bank, the State of Arkansas and members of the ASO Board of Directors. Additional center supporters include the orchestra, staff, youth orchestra parents, volunteers and numerous community leaders.

“This new music center will offer so many opportunities for the many diverse needs of Arkansans – creating beautiful spaces to learn, teach, work, play, listen and have fun,” said Jan Hundley, chair of the ASO Board of Directors. “The realization of this dream has been made possible by the generous contributions of countless donors and the community’s unwavering support. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our supporters, who tirelessly advocate for music and music education across the state, making this center a reality and fostering a brighter future for all.”

“We look forward to future partnerships with community leaders such as Saint Mark Baptist Church, William J. Clinton Presidential Library & Museum, Lyon College, Central Arkansas Library System, City of Little Rock and more to determine how we can be a resource to strengthen their missions,” ASO CEO Christina Littlejohn said. “Music has the power to connect us and build communities at the micro and macro levels. Creating community has never felt so important as we read about increasing loneliness and isolation. The new Stella Boyle Smith Music Center will be a space for joyous communities.”

ASO’s performances will still be held at Robinson Center, whereas the Stella Boyle Smith Music Center provides the opportunity for many additional community gatherings. The new music center will provide much-needed space as ASO has outgrown its current offices, and, more importantly, it will allow ASO to grow its community programs.

The Stella Boyle Smith Music Center was designed by Witsell Evans Rasco Architects of Little Rock. Bailey Construction of Little Rock will build the center with an anticipated opening date in September 2024. To learn more about ASO and the new Stella Boyle Smith Music Center, visit [www.arkansassymphonyorchestra.org](http://www.arkansassymphonyorchestra.org).

### **About Arkansas Symphony Orchestra**

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra celebrates its 58th season in 2023–2024. The ASO is the resident orchestra at Little Rock's Robinson Center and performs more than 60 concerts each year for more than 165,000 people through its Stella Boyle Smith Masterworks Series, First Orion Pops Series, River Rhapsodies Chamber Music Series and numerous concerts performed around the state of Arkansas. In addition, the ASO offers numerous community outreach programs and brings live symphonic music education to more than 26,000 school children and more than 200 schools throughout Central Arkansas. The ASO employs 12 full-time musicians, more than 70 part-time musicians and 15 administrative staff members with an annual operating budget of \$4 million. The ASO 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.

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