

San Bernardino Symphony receives National Endowment for the Arts Grant

Posted: Wednesday, December 3, 2014 2:36 pm

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Chairman Jane Chu announced today that the San Bernardino Symphony is one of only 163 nonprofit organizations nationwide to receive an NEA Challenge America grant. Each will receive \$10,000. The Symphony's award will support "Music for All Ages," a community engagement project designed to stimulate the imaginations of diverse audiences.

"It is very rewarding to be nationally recognized for the efforts that we have been making toward reaching the diverse audiences in our communities," said Symphony Board of Directors President Dr. Judith Valles.

The need for this project is significant in the San Bernardino area where more than 28% of households have incomes below the poverty level and over 90% of students qualify for free or reduced-cost school lunches. In the midst of this richly diverse, yet underserved community, the Symphony has long served as a vitalizing force, presenting excellence in classical music programming through concerts and music education programs since 1928.

In fact, the San Bernardino Symphony is the longest-running professional orchestra in the region. Their 2014/15 season – themed "By Request: The Music You Want to Hear," was especially designed to include music suggested by audience members. This concept – considered novel in an industry known for adherence to traditional classical offerings – has so far proven advantageous; the Symphony's opening concert, "Virtuosity" received exceptional reviews and their up-coming "Home for the Holidays" concert has been extremely popular at the box office.

"Our mission is, essentially, to provide accessible music and music education," said Symphony Executive Director Dr. Anne Viricel. "The first part of that mission is to present concerts that are interesting, relevant, affordable, and that will attract a wide breadth of audience members, many for the first time. Our goal is to be the first place that comes to mind when people think of fine music in the Inland Empire."

The Symphony has also partnered with local school districts for most of its 86 years. In fact, over 90,000 students have been introduced to orchestral instruments through the Symphony's efforts and thousands more have benefitted from their music enrichment programs and workshops, and from their annual free student concerts for the schools.

"Our relationship with the San Bernardino City Unified School District is incredibly important to us,

and it will be vital to the success of this initiative,” said Viricel.

Scheduled for April 11, 2015 at the historic California Theatre in downtown San Bernardino, the “Music for all Ages” project advances both aspects of the organization’s mission in a way not previously realized at a Symphony concert.

The work will begin months before the event when top art students are invited to take part in special workshops led by Viricel, a long time professor at the University of Redlands, and local artist Michal Madison, known for paintings that evoke movement and emotion. There, they will learn the historical and contextual backgrounds of the pieces and learn Madison’s interpretive artistic process. Then, listening to the various selected pieces (Beethoven’s Egmont Overture, Brahms; Concerto for Violin and Violincello, and Mendelssohn’s Scottish Symphony), they will create unique works of art based upon their individual understanding of the music.

The artwork will be incorporated into the April concert event as part of a curated show during which members of Symphonie Jeunesse will perform. Further, the student art work will be projected above the orchestra during the presentation of the music. Audience members who are familiar with the music will then have the opportunity to experience it anew through the eyes of participating young artists. The young artists will be challenged to visualize the music in new ways they can translate through their unique media, then see their work come alive through the orchestra performance. Those audience members new to symphonic music will draw inspiration from the students’ work, from the 12-to-20-year-old musicians of Symphonie Jeunesse, and from the Symphony’s professional musicians. Perhaps most important in our underserved community, all will be encouraged to see the music – and perhaps the world – in a new more cohesive and inclusive way.

Chu said, “I’m pleased to be able to share the news of our support through Challenge America, including the award to the San Bernardino Symphony. The arts foster value, connection, creativity and innovation for the American people and these recommended grants demonstrate those attributes and affirm that the arts are part of our everyday lives.”

The Challenge America category supports projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved populations whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability. For a complete list of projects recommended for Challenge America support, please visit the website at arts.gov. Follow the conversation about this and other NEA-funded projects on Twitter at [#NEAFall2014](https://twitter.com/NEAFall2014).

The San Bernardino Symphony presents a full subscription season, as well as many concerts performed throughout the region. This season, the San Bernardino Symphony will also be featured in Lake Arrowhead, Loma Linda, Fontana, Rancho Mirage, Riverside, and at San Bernardino’s Roosevelt Bowl. You can learn more about the San Bernardino Symphony at: www.sanbernardinosymphony.org .