Amherst Symphony Orchestra Association

Established 1946 Sixty Seventh Season

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Matter: Funding for Amherst Symphony Orchestra

September 20, 2012

Members of Erie County Legislature
%Hon. Thomas A. Loughran
Erie County Legislator, District 5
7 Bernhardt Drive
Amherst, NY 14226

Dear Members of Erie County Legislature:

Thank you for continuing your interest in the initiatives associated with the Amherst Symphony Orchestra as per our discussions.

The purpose of this letter is to reiterate my interest in seeking financial support from the Erie County Legislature associated with the 2012-13 Amherst Symphony Orchestra's season. As will be outlined in accompanying documentation, the orchestra is indeed one of the cultural centerpieces of Western New York. However, as all cultural institutions, they face challenges related to sustainability in this very challenged environment.

As per our discussions, please note the following:

- Over the course of a symphonic season, approximately 5,000 individuals have an opportunity and/or participate in the five concerts and St. Gregory School mentoring project offered by the Amherst Symphony this year.

- Of that, 94% are from Erie County. A further delineation of that data indicates that approximately 85% of those individuals participating reside within the zip codes of 14226 and 14221. The remaining percentages vary from zip codes 140 through 154. Hence, we have a very significant representation from the 5th District which it should be noted is within the County a very populous region.

  Furthermore, our demographics indicate that the participants in the Symphony series are from multiple age ranges within this demographic region.

  Another important attribute in addition to the Amherst Symphony attendees, is the membership of the Orchestra members. This represents a demographic of 98.2% from within Erie County. Once again, it should be reiterated this is very much a Western New York/Erie County based cultural asset.

PO Box 1083 Williamsville, New York 14231-1083 • email: ASOrch46@gmail.com • www.amherstsymphony.com • (716) 633-4606

- The Amherst Symphony Association Board has maintained a mission that the concerts are free and open to everyone within Erie County. The concerts have been designed to attract audiences from a wide range of demographic/populations.

- The infrastructure of the Amherst Symphony Orchestra is composed of volunteers from our community who perform both administrative programming and fundraising functions to maintain the viability of this organization. They have adopted a platform of not only developing a programmatic platform based on contemporary cultural practices, but have been very cognizant of the need to address a wide variety of continuing and emerging demographic matters associated with elder populations. In particular, they have sponsored numerous activities to engage the youth of our community as well as the senior citizen centers and facilities such as Amberleigh Retirement Community, Beechwood Continuing Care, and Elderwood.

- You will note in the attached document containing the mission and history of the Symphony, that the Amherst Symphony has been a leading cultural entity of the highest caliber. In addition to the very talented and dedicated members of the orchestra, soloists, all with ties to Western New York, have included Carol Wincenc, Professor of Flute at the Juilliard School, David Kim, Concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and many of the principal musicians from the BPO who are of considerable national and international renown.

At this time, we would like to seek your support and that of your colleagues in the Legislature for a sum of $10,000. This particular donation would allow the orchestra to stabilize its financial well-being and, in turn, provide a very important sustainability quotient for the orchestra in the years to come.

With the exception of the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Amherst Symphony Orchestra stands out as one of the cultural resources of Erie County and promotes an ongoing platform for cultural development.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss and provide additional information regarding the Amherst Symphony Orchestra and its longstanding impact on the legacy of the performing arts within Erie County.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy E. Wallace, President
Amherst Symphony Orchestra Association

Paul T. Wietig Ed.D.
Interim Director, Teaching and Learning Center
Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs
Core Curriculum Coordinator, Training Program Coordinator
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Enclosures

Bee Group Newspapers

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September 11, 2012

Mr. Ed Fisher
Amherst Symphony Orchestra Association
PO Box 1083
Williamsville, NY 14231-1083

Dear Ed,

You asked about my support for the Symphony. I am a huge cheerleader and supporter of the Symphony and their mission.

The Amherst Symphony Orchestra has been an intricate part of our community for 67 years. As you know, the four or five Sunday concerts preformed yearly have grown in attendance plus the Orchestra has entertained at many other venues to spread the educational value of music in our town.

Our newspaper has been reporting on all of their concerts and events. We are a strong supporter of the Symphony and their mission with their many benefits to our community.

I have been a member of the Symphony Board of Directors twice and have seen first hand the dedication of the musicians, volunteers and the audience excitement at their performances.

Based on the long history of the Symphony, the community and I support the many, many benefits the Amherst Symphony Orchestra has to offer.

Sincerely,

Trey Measer
Publisher

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Amherst Symphony Orchestra Mission Statement

The Amherst Symphony Orchestra, a non-profit organization, offers volunteer musicians the opportunity to showcase their talents by performing free concerts to entertain and educate our audience.

Description of the ASO

The ASO, composed of approximately 85 volunteer musicians, plays to a diverse multi-cultural audience of over 5000 people during its four annual performances at Amherst Middle School, a summer concert held at the Amherst Museum and other performances and activities during the season. In addition, the orchestra provides free musical education in area schools in assembly settings where various orchestra members with non-musical professions demonstrate their instruments and discuss the importance of music in their lives. The concerts are free, open to everyone, and, with the exception of the February concert which is perfomed at 3:00pm, are held Sunday evenings at 7:00pm, attractive times for young people, families with small children and senior citizens. The ASO Association Board performs the administrative and fundraising functions that are essential to maintain a viable organization. The Board has a special liaison with senior centers and facilities such as Amberleigh Retirement Community, Beechwood Continuing Care and Elderwood and coordinates buses and reserved seating for residents from those facilities.

History

The Amherst Symphony Orchestra had its origin in 1946 as an adult education class at Amherst Senior High School taught by its first director/conductor Joseph Wincenc. The class was composed of people with a variety of professions who wanted to play musical instruments and perform for the sheer joy of the opportunity rather than the thought of any financial gain. Initial funding by the local Rotary Club provided the means to perform early concerts and essentially launch the ASO. Arthur Pankow, a guidance counselor at Amherst High, became the first general manager; he and Dr. Wincenc formed the team that led the orchestra and caused it to evolve and grow as a volunteer organization.

After fifty years of leadership, Dr. Wincenc and Mr. Pankow retired; the present team of Steven Thomas, Music Director/Conductor and Joan Fishburn, General Manager, has led the ASO to expand its outreach and elevate its performances to become the respected organization it is today.

Narrative of Request

The Amherst Symphony Orchestra Association, through its volunteer Board of Directors, assumes the responsibilities to present, promote and provide the funding for five concerts each year, four at the Amherst Middle School and a summer concert at the Amherst Museum. The Board is made up of people from all walks of life and representative of the residents of Amherst and surrounding Erie County communities who make up our audience. Our Board is a working group inasmuch as each member has a task or committee assignment. We

continually attempt to expand our audience through a database. Each summer we have booths at the "Taste of Williamsville," Williamsville Water Mill Farmers Market, "Evening in the Village" and our summer concert at the Amherst Museum where we obtain names and addresses to add to our database. For each concert, the Board provides volunteers to hand out programs, help with the first-come-first-served seating of patrons, and attend to the several necessary behind-the-scenes tasks that are part of presenting an enjoyable concert. The Board is supported by the Friends of the Amherst Symphony (FASO), formerly the Women's Committee, a group comprised of approximately 125 men and women, who provide refreshments for the orchestra members, provide funding for the orchestra through a plant sale in conjunction with Mischler's Florists, and organize a Holiday Cookie Reception for all concert-goers following the December concert.

Present Funding Sources

The ASOA obtains funding from several sources. These include free will donations from concert-goers received when we pass baskets at concerts, the net proceeds from any fundraising activity that involves Board member work, and money received from the Friends Committee resulting from plant sales. Corporate gifts include unrestricted moneys received from corporations and ads that appear in our printed programs. Private donations include gifts from individuals (contributors) and organizations such as service clubs. We consider public funds to originate from local, county and state government sources, and grants from various foundations. This past year, the ASO received a generous grant from the Town of Amherst; however, we did not receive funding through the offices of our New York State or County legislators.

Statement of Need and Proposed Solution

As with most arts organizations, fund-raising is the most important Board challenge; without the necessary funds, the other activities would not be possible. This past year was a difficult one financially for the ASO as it had a deficit of over $10,000 which was covered using reserve funds from accumulated surpluses of previous years. Clearly, this deficit must be eliminated in FY2013.

Our budget for the current fiscal year is $83,570. Over the past several seasons, our budget has increased by nearly $25,000 as we continually endeavor to improve our services and programs which we hope will help to increase the size of our audience and ability to attract funding. Other reasons for the increase are the result of higher costs for guest artists, an increase in the stipend for the conductor/music director, the cost of providing a shuttle bus to help alleviate parking problems, and general increases in miscellaneous items such as printing and postage. We are also expanding our internet site as another means to promote our activities, inform and interest people in our programs and obtain private donations online. Funding from individual contributors and corporate sources has increased to cover much of the budget increase. For the current year, we are depending on individual contributors to provide $34,000 and corporate sources to provide $21,000, both historic highs that will require a great amount of work to achieve. Our request of $10,000 from Erie County is a critical as it would help the ASO to stabilize our financial status.

Project Objectives, Anticipated Results and Work Plan

The Amherst Symphony Orchestra "project" is to perform a series of four regularly scheduled concerts, a summer concert and other performances, open to the public and free of charge. Our annual Summer Concert was held at the Amherst Museum at 6:30pm on August 10, 2012. The concert, entitled "A Grand Night for Singing," was conducted by ASO Music Director Steven Thomas with trumpeter Matt Miraglia and accordionist Al Schlisserman as the featured artists. This year, the ASO will feature a variety of outstanding guest artists and groups either from

or with ties to Western New York. The first regularly scheduled concert of the season, "Flute Finesse," will be performed on October 21, 2012. The guest artists for that concert will be Carol Wincenc, a world renowned flutist, daughter of ASO founder Joseph Wincenc, and professor of flute at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York, and Christine Bailey, Principal BPO flutist. This exceptional combination of outstanding flutists with local name recognition is expected to nearly pack the house on concert night. The Holiday Concert, "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year," to be performed on December 2, 2012 will feature soloist Jeffrey Snider and the Bel Canto Choirs, conducted by Sue Fay Allen as guest artists. The concert will close with the traditional audience sing-a-long. "Hop on the Symphony Express" will be performed on February 10, 2013 and will feature WNED's Peter Hall as the narrator for "The Little Engine that Could." The "petting zoo," pre-concert event and concert are discussed in the following section, Education. The final concert of the season on April 14, 2013, "Roman and Friends....BRAVO," features the BPO Principal cellist and his students, thus continuing our efforts to bring BPO talent to our stage for the enjoyment and benefit of our audience. All concerts will have a pre-concert event beginning 45 minutes prior to the concert.

The work plan is simply to do what the ASOA has done since its inception. Our Music Committee has already set the concert agenda for the 2012-2013 Season including selection of the guest artists. The General Manager and the Board will secure the funding to support the concerts and other activities during the season. Fliers will be prepared prior to each concert and mailed to the potential concert attendees in our database. The librarian will acquire the printed music to be performed. The General Manager will prepare the copy for the printed programs to be distributed at each concert and contract with a printer to have them produced. The Music Director/Conductor will schedule and direct the required practice sessions prior to each concert. The personnel director will assure that the various orchestra seats are filled for each rehearsal and concert. Board members will be present at the concerts to attend to the various peripheral activities during the concerts including passing the baskets to collect free will donations from the audience. A sound and lighting sub-contractor will install and operate the proper equipment for each concert to make our stage and performance as professional as possible within our limited budget. The education of our audience includes the following: The school's front hall lobby will engage the audience prior to concert time and at intermission with educational information and photos about the composers, musical pieces and guest artists. Families of young readers may preview picture book selections geared toward each concert's theme and the instrument family being highlighted. The anticipated results of our project are the near-professional performance of our concerts and other events for the enjoyment of our many loyal fans which are mostly from Amherst, and ending the season at the financial break-even level, having raised sufficient funds from our various sources to support all of our activities. The success of our project/program is evaluated in terms of our audience, the quality of our performances and our ability to raise the necessary funds to pay the bills throughout the season and put us in a good financial position to begin the following season.

Educational Programs

Each year at the final concert of the season, the ASO, with funding from the Williamsville South Rotary Club and the Friends of the ASO, awards a $1000 scholarship to a student from a high school in the Town of Amherst who has demonstrated a high level of proficiency in some area of music, vocal or instrumental, and intends to pursue a music curriculum in college. In April 2012, the winner was Leonard Ranallo, a classical guitarist who graduated from Sweet Home High School in June.

Since 1994, we have identified a different school each year to mentor during the concert season; last year's school was Kadmah School of Buffalo in Eggertsville. The Amherst Symphony Orchestra school outreach program is designed to aid the existing school music curriculum. The orchestra places a high priority on bringing music education to schools especially at the elementary

grade level where students first begin to think about and may have an opportunity to play a musical instrument. During these impressionable years, the seeds that are sown often find a fertile environment that can grow and influence a lifetime of activity and enjoyment. By exposing students to the music and instruments of an orchestra during those early formative years, the ASO hopes to develop musicians and audiences of the future.

The ASO plans to take its musical education efforts to a new level. We have already contacted Patricia Freund, the principal of the Saint Gregory School of Williamsville, New York which currently has a music program; they are thrilled at the prospect of working with us on our proposed project. The project has four elements: a music class project assignment for extra credit in which students are required to attend one or more ASO concerts and prepare a written critique of their observations and impressions; an instrument "petting zoo" during which students from the Saint Gregory School and other local schools can hold and try out wind, string and percussion instruments to learn something about them and, hopefully, begin to get interested; this will be immediately followed by a concert in which all of the instruments are used to create beautiful music; and, at different times during the year, visits in the form of classroom or assembly programs will be held at the Saint Gregory School to initiate, enhance and reinforce the overall experience of this introduction to classical music.

The project will begin in October, 2012 when Saint Gregory music class students will be given an extra credit assignment to attend one or more Amherst Symphony concerts and create a written evaluation of their observations and impressions. This "homework" aspect of ASO involvement with schools will cause students to focus on the music, prepare themselves to listen and evaluate the music, and come away with an appreciation of what they heard. This represents a "first" and we are excited to try it out as we endeavor to generate interest in kids and develop future musicians and audiences. This is made possible, in part, because all ASO concerts are free and do not represent a cost burden to the students or their parents. During October, to the extent to which they are available, Carol Wincenc, a world renowned flutist and professor at the Juilliard School in New York, and Christine Bailey, principal flutist for the BPO, both of whom will be guest artists at the October 21, 2012 concert, will visit Saint Gregory School to demonstrate their instruments and excite the students with their virtuoso capabilities. Members of the Amherst Symphony will also visit the school to similarly demonstrate other instruments and, thereby, set the stage for a season in which students at the elementary level are introduced to symphonic instruments and music. In addition, Saint Gregory School students will participate in a contest to design the cover for the December 2, 2012 concert programs; the winner will receive a cash award of $25.

The "petting zoo" portion of the February concert, "Hop on the Symphony Express," will be held in the Amherst Middle School gymnasium from 1:45 to 3:00pm on February 10, 2013. A wide range of instruments from McClellan Music House (wind), Monaco Music (strings), and Buffalo Drum Outlet (percussion) will be available during the "petting zoo. " Each student attending the "petting zoo" will receive a copy of the cleverly illustrated booklet "The Symphony Goes to School—A Musical Guide to the Instruments of the Orchestra." The Amherst Symphony concert will be performed in the Middle School auditorium beginning at 3:00pm. This concert will feature "The Little Engine that Could" narrated by Peter Hall of Classical WNED, Buffalo. It is noted that the concerts performed on December 2, 2012 and April 14, 2013 involve students as guest artists. The December concert will present the Bel Canto Choirs conducted by Sue Fay Allen, a former Amherst Middle School music teacher. The choirs will also perform during a pre-concert event 45 minutes before the regular concert. The April concert will feature Roman Mekinulov, Principal BPO cellist, as the guest artist. Prior to the concert, a cello competition will be conducted by Mr. Mekinulov among the students of his Bravo Cello Camp. The winner of the competition will perform onstage with the ASO during the April concert. Members of the Bravo group will also perform during the April pre-concert event. Thus, the Saint Gregory students will be encouraged to attend and report on four symphony orchestra concerts and, hopefully, some will gain an appreciation of classical music that will last a lifetime.

At a date to be established in March 2013, thirteen ASO musicians will put on an assembly program at the Saint Gregory School for the students and their parents to consolidate the experiences of the previous visits, "petting zoo" and concert, and the message contained in the booklet; additional copies of the booklet will be distributed for use during the assembly. The ASO volunteer musicians, who make their livelihoods from a variety of occupations, will not only demonstrate their instruments but tell their life stories and how the love of music provides an added dimension to their lives. The assembly will be followed by a reception with snacks to encourage conversation and interaction among the musicians, students, parents and teachers.

Beneficiaries

We work hard to expose our musical passion to area students and to involve them in several ways. Each year, the Friends of the Amherst Symphony present a scholarship to an outstanding student who intends to pursue music in a college curriculum. For the February 2012 concert, the program cover design was created by a student from Kadimah School of Buffalo. The winner was awarded a $50 US Saving Bond in addition to the excitement of seeing his/her work appearing on over 1000 covers. The program cover design competition for the coming season will be moved to the December concert when Saint Gregory students will compete for the honor. High School Youth Engaged in Service (YES) students are present at all of our regularly scheduled concerts at the Amherst Middle School to hand out programs, perform ushering duties and provide assistance as needed. Other ways include the annual visits by orchestra members to our community schools, the publication of a booklet for children that describes the layout of an orchestra and the various instruments, the frequent performance of school musical groups and gifted young musicians during our concerts and the pre-concert events, and having high school students write the concert "program notes" that appear in the printed programs for our four concerts.

The concerts are all performed in Amherst which is convenient for Erie County residents, especially senior citizens with limited access to transportation. The concerts are free so that cost is not a prohibiting factor. Parking congestion has become a "nice" problem. Two solutions are offered: 1. Adding pre-concert events has allowed our audience to choose their arrival times. 2. Additional parking space has been made available at the nearby Amherst Senior High School with a free shuttle service provided between the schools. Based on a recent poll, we estimate that approximately 98% of our attendees are residents of Erie County who are the direct beneficiaries of our efforts and funding provided by Erie County.

Future Plans and Sustainability

As a volunteer organization, the funds we can raise from non-public sources are not sufficient to meet the performance and other standards to which we and our audience have become accustomed. This year, we are making a special effort to energize the ASOA Board to substantially increase funding from private and corporate sources. However, funding from Erie County in the amount of $10,000 would provide financial stability for the ASO by essentially covering the loss incurred during the 2011-2012 Season. It would provide a critical addition needed to augment funds from other sources and make it possible for the ASO to financially break even after presenting five free concerts for a total audience of nearly 5000 people, approximately 98% of whom are Erie County residents. The concerts are events that educate, inform, inspire, entertain and bring families of all ages together. This represents the ultimate benefit to the citizens of Erie County.