

JACKSONVILLE SYMPHONY ONE OF FEW ORCHESTRAS HOSTING CONCERTS FOR A LIVE AUDIENCE

Jacksonville, FL (October 13, 2020) – The week of September 16 marked the first time a live audience would file down the aisles of Jacoby Symphony Hall since March 7, nearly seven months prior. Like almost all their peers across the country, the Jacksonville Symphony was forced to close its doors mid-season due to the impact of COVID-19. Since September 16, the Jacksonville Symphony has successfully performed seven concerts for an audience of nearly 600 at each.

“It’s not been easy,” says President & CEO Steven Libman. “No one has ever had to do this before! It’s all new: distancing an orchestra, distancing an audience, changing the way the experience in the concert hall looks and feels. The good news is the one thing that COVID-19 will not change is the way the orchestra sounds. The Symphony will continue to produce the same high-quality musicianship they have become known for.”

The safety of patrons, musicians and staff remains the Symphony’s top priority. Based on CDC guidelines, and the results of a survey sent to patrons in June, the Symphony developed a comprehensive list of safety protocols that are in place within the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts and Jacoby Symphony Hall. These include:

- Physically distanced seating in the symphony hall. Those who are not physically distanced will be separated by plexiglass screens. This has reduced the capacity of the hall from nearly 1,800 to 582, a 65% reduction.
- Patrons will always be required to wear masks throughout the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts and Jacoby Symphony Hall.
- Patrons will also be required to have their temperatures taken before entering the building.
- There will be no intermissions held at Symphony concerts during the 2020/21 season in order to reduce unnecessary lines and groups of people.
- Performances will range from 60-75 minutes.
- Electrostatic cleaning is done between building events.
- There are over 50 high-grade (MERV 13) air filters in Jacoby Symphony Hall that are checked and changed regularly.

As a result of new safety guidelines, Music Director Courtney Lewis and the Symphony artistic team had rework programming for the 2020/21 season from what was originally announced. The Florida Blue Masterworks Series underwent the most changes due to the time constraints of a concert without an intermission and the number of musicians who can safely perform on the Jacoby Symphony Hall stage. This season, patrons will see no more than 53 musicians at any given time on the stage. During a normal season there are often 70, or more, musicians on the stage. All pieces chosen for each concert had to be specifically selected to conform to the necessity of having a smaller orchestra. All musicians are required to wear masks while performing, and the wind and brass sections are surrounded by plexiglass shields.

In an interview with News4Jax, Music Director Courtney Lewis said, “For us musicians, and I know for our audience as well, one of the most important things is hearing live music. There’s something about hearing music in a group together that is a very powerful and rich emotional experience.”

On September 26, the Symphony held its official opening night, “Fanfare!” The performance was sold out and featured Grammy-winning violinist James Ehnes performing Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto. The program also featured the Symphony’s own Piotr Szewczyk’s “River City Fanfare,” as well as one of the most well-known pieces of classical music: Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony.

Since then, the Symphony has performed its first concerts in both the Florida Blue Masterworks Series (October 2/3) and the Fidelity National Financial Pops Series (October 9/10).

“We have taken great care to ensure that coming to the Symphony will be a safe experience that will allow us to once again bring live music to Jacksonville,” says Libman. “Our Board, staff and musicians have all come together to make sure we will be able to perform for our community this season.”

Patrons with questions regarding tickets for the 2020/21 season can call the Symphony Box Office at 904.354.5547 or visit the Symphony website at www.jaxsymphony.org.

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The Jacksonville Symphony is North Florida’s leading music nonprofit offering nearly 40 weeks of live performances at Jacoby Symphony Hall, located within the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts, and other venues throughout the area. Founded in 1949, the Symphony now enjoys a national reputation, regularly heard on more than 250 public radio stations across the country on “Performance Today.” In 2018, the orchestra was selected as one of four orchestras from across the country to participate in the 2020 SHIFT: A Festival of American Orchestras in Washington, D.C. The Symphony’s performance home, Robert E. Jacoby Symphony Hall, is an acoustic gem and offers an intimate and acoustically superior concert experience. The 2020/21 season is the sixth with Music Director Courtney Lewis on the podium.

In addition, the Symphony provides music instruction for youth through the Jacksonville Symphony Youth Orchestras. For more information about the Symphony, visit jaxsymphony.org, like them at [facebook.com/jaxsymphony](https://www.facebook.com/jaxsymphony), follow them on @jaxsymphony, on Instagram at JaxSymphony and on YouTube at JacksonvilleSymphony.