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Philanthropy & Nonprofits

Philanthropic support fuels Jacksonville Symphony's success



Image: Jacksonville Symphony

The Jacksonville Symphony performs Rachmaninoff in 2024.

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As a nonprofit, the Jacksonville Symphony can only be as successful as its patrons are supportive. And according to its leader, the organization is thriving in a community that's quite literally invested in its mission.

CEO Steven Libman told the Business Journal the Symphony's many patrons share the goal of delivering cultural inspiration to all demographics in the region.

The Symphony's 2024 budget shows \$13.5 million in revenue earned from ticket sales, financial gifts, grants, its endowment and other sources.

"I continue to be astounded at how generous our patrons are," Libman said. "We're blessed to have them. And not only are they generous, but they're incredibly knowledgeable of the art form."

In all, [philanthropic gifts](#) make up at least 50% of the Symphony's annual budget, according to Libman. The Symphony's approximately \$1.3 million yearly endowment from contributions allows for performances and enhances music education and community engagement programs.

"If we didn't have the endowment, we would have to double ticket prices and hope that the same number of people show up," Libman said. "Our mission is to serve the community, and these donations allow us to continue to serve the community and keep the ticket prices at a reasonable range."

This comes via donations large and small from area residents, foundations, corporations and the city.



The Jacksonville Symphony performs Alexei Plays Dvořák on November 22, 2024 at the Jacoby Symphony Hall in Jacksonville Florida.

JAMES GILBERT

Recently, the Symphony acknowledged a pair of major private contributions.

Ann Hicks' gift of \$2 million celebrated the 10-year anniversary of conductor Courtney Lewis at the helm.

"Under his leadership, the orchestra has reached new heights, elevating it to the level that Jacksonville deserves," Hicks said in a press release.

Michael Ward and Jennifer Glock's \$1 million gift includes continued support of the Jennifer Glock Endowed Clarinet Chair.

Most of the Symphony's shows take place at Jacoby Symphony Hall. Opened in 1997, the theater remains a distinct venue designed in a "shoebox" configuration similar to renowned music halls in Boston and Vienna.

Almost three decades of use requires maintenance. Jacksonville's City Council agreed last year to pay \$6.97 million for a new roof above the three theaters that make up the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts.

Inside, the Symphony purchased new sound and lighting equipment over the past year to update and improve sound and show quality.

New LED lights help to reduce energy and equipment bills and help to generate less heat on performers. New moving lights help to make it "pretty cool for a pops concert," Libman said.

And a new soundboard helps to enhance the patron experience.

The audience at the various performances often include local students. Libman said that the Symphony serves upwards of 70,000 students per year and 146 local Title I schools through education programs, free and discounted tickets, ensemble performances and experiential engagement.

Its Jacksonville Symphony Youth Orchestras program serves more than 230 young musicians from all over Northeast Florida through six levels of ensembles. Libman said this music education helps to develop soft skills like collaboration and discipline.

"And those are really important skills that will allow them to succeed," Libman said. "We have one young woman who's going to Harvard in the fall, and she and her mom credit her experience in our youth orchestras for making that happen."

This also helps to hand down symphonic music to future generations who might become lifelong supporters of the community-based arts program.

The organization's 60 full-time musicians and 100 full-time employees are full-time area residents.

“We have a unique art form. We're different from the Broadway shows that come in and then all those artists leave the city,” Libman said. “Our musicians live here, work here, raise their families here and send their kids to college. Some of them have been with us for 30 years plus.”

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