Testimony in Support of FY2014 Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts
Submitted to the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Jesse Rosen, President and CEO
League of American Orchestras
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The League of American Orchestras urges the House Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee to approve Fiscal Year 2014 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) at a level of $155 million. We ask Congress to continue supporting the important work of this agency, which increases public access to the arts, nurtures cultural diversity, promotes the creation of new artistic works, and cultivates a sense of cultural and historic pride, all while supporting millions of jobs in communities nationwide.

The League of American Orchestras leads, supports, and champions America’s orchestras and the vitality of the music they perform. Its diverse membership of more than 800 orchestras runs the gamut from world-renowned symphonies to community groups, from summer festivals to student and youth ensembles. Orchestras unite people through creativity and artistry, fuel local economies and civic vitality, and educate young people and adults.

Throughout the nation, persistent economic challenges beset nonprofit arts organizations; therefore, the award of a notably competitive NEA grant continues to be a compelling boost to an orchestra’s pursuit of funding from other sources. Indeed, a grant from the NEA has long been recognized as a mark of public value and national artistic significance, and the distinction of presenting these nationally recognized programs is enjoyed by communities large and small. In Fiscal Year 2013, the NEA’s Grants to Organizations included 100 direct grants to orchestras, and continued funding for the agency will support orchestras’ ability to serve the public. The NEA promotes creation, engagement, livability, and learning in the arts through Art Works—the major support category for organizations—and the Challenge America: Reaching Every Community grant program, as well as through vital Federal/State partnerships.

In addition to educating and engaging people of all ages, fueling local economies, and attracting new business development, orchestras connect people and cultures in a uniquely powerful way. The League is committed to helping our members engage with their communities, and the NEA plays an invaluable leadership role through its direct grants, strategic initiatives, and research on trends in public participation and workforce development.
**NEA Funding Increases Public Access to Live Cultural Experiences**

The NEA, together with the organizations it helps support, is dedicated to improving public access to the arts. For example, the **Portland Symphony Orchestra** (PSO), which employs ten full-time and five part-time staff, along with 86 musicians, received an NEA grant in FY09 that supported a program featuring the performance of **Sabar: Concerto for Senegalese Drummers and Orchestra** by James DeMars. This grant allowed the PSO to offer a lecture at the Museum of African Culture in Portland with Music Director Robert Moody, guest Senegalese drummer Mark Sunkett, and Museum Director Oscar Mokeme, as well as an in-school performance and presentation at King Middle School, which serves the most racially, ethnically, and economically diverse neighborhoods in Maine. Twenty-six percent of the school’s nearly 500 students speak a primary language that is not English. The centerpiece performance attracted the second highest attendance for a PSO Classical Concert during the 2008-09 season, and the concert allowed the PSO to serve the people of Southern Maine by increasing their knowledge of, appreciation for, and understanding of West African music and culture by presenting it in the context of similar dance and cultural influences in the music of Bartok.

The rural isolation of the Walla Walla, Washington region poses challenges to its local cultural arts organizations, but the **Walla Walla Symphony**, with just two full-time and five part-time staff, roughly 60 musicians, and more than 35 volunteers nonetheless finds a way to offer a year-round, intensive complement of musical and educational experiences—often at free or low-cost. The region’s population has a low median income, with more than half of area youth qualifying for the Federal Free/Reduced Lunch program, and every school in the district failed to meet No Child Left Behind progress requirements in 2011. A lack of resources in the schools has made it all the more important for area arts organizations to serve as partners to the schools. With an FY13 Challenge America grant from the NEA, the Walla Walla Symphony will bring guest artists PROJECT Trio to a community that has expressed an ongoing interest in compelling guest artist performances, high-quality symphonic music, and music education resources and opportunities for its children. During its four-day residency, PROJECT Trio will collaborate with symphony musicians to offer four musical events to the public: they will appear in an Educational Family Concert, offer a solo Trio performance, appear in a full symphonic concert, and provide educational programs at local schools.

Another recipient of Challenge America support, the **Tulsa Symphony Orchestra**, a musician-led orchestra with five full-time and seven part-time staff and a musician pool of 140, organized two days of string workshops and clinic sessions for area students, teachers, and musicians with visiting guest violin and teaching artists Mark O’Connor and Kelly Hall-Tompkins. The sessions preceded a concert and were hosted by Will Rogers High School and the University of Tulsa. More than 95% of the students participating were from underserved Title I schools and the NEA grant provided much-needed transportation to the workshop sites. This component of support is often overlooked and yet it meets a specific, acute need that would otherwise have prevented Will Rogers students from being able to learn from these artists. In addition to making the workshops possible, the NEA grant also allowed the Tulsa Symphony to provide tickets to 400
economically disadvantaged students to attend an evening concert featuring these same guest artists at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center.

**NEA Grants Help Orchestras Educate and Engage America’s Youth**

NEA support helps bring disparate communities together through the experience of live music, and it also provides a creative means to focus on educating and encouraging young people in their musical and academic endeavors. In June 2012, the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra’s (ASO) “Music Makes a Difference” program engaged more than 3,600 students in a hands-on arts education program. The orchestra partnered with three Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to create and deliver an integrated music, art, and astronomy unit based on Virginia Standards of Learning for elementary school students. The unit culminated in three side-by-side performances of Gustav Holst’s *The Planets*, performed by both ASO professional musicians and ACPS middle school students. During the concerts, elementary students’ artwork based on their astronomy lessons was projected on stage to further reinforce science concepts. ASO was able to offer this kind of innovative program thanks to NEA support and its dedicated four full-time and two part-time staff members, 250 part-time musicians, and 40 volunteers.

The El Paso Symphony Youth Orchestras (EPSYOs) similarly utilized NEA funding to foster the musical and academic achievement of more than 270 students from throughout the region through four distinct ensembles based on age and skill levels. These ensembles include the El Paso Youth Orchestra, the El Paso Symphony Youth String Ensembles, the El Paso Youth Symphonic, and the El Paso Youth String Philharmonic. In addition to the musical instruction these students receive, such as weekly rehearsals, master classes, clinics, and performances, they also develop study skills, self-esteem, confidence, and determination that crosses over into their academic work as well. In fact, 100% of all high school seniors participating in the EPSYO program since its inception six years ago have gone on to seek a higher education at universities and colleges throughout the United States. Although most of these youth orchestra alumni are not pursuing a music degree, almost all of them credit their involvement with the EPSYOs for their desire and ability to apply to these programs. Furthermore, many of these students are low-income and in addition to receiving financial aid for EPSYOs tuition during their involvement, many of them also received higher education scholarships due to their involvement with the EPSYOs program and its clinicians and master class presenters.

Like El Paso, the Heart of Los Angeles affords valuable opportunities to economically disadvantaged children. An FY13 NEA Arts Works grant supports the Youth Orchestra Los Angeles at Heart of Los Angeles (YOLA at HOLA) program. Implemented in partnership with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which employs 107 full-time musicians, 133 full-time administrative staff members and 1,814 part-time and seasonal workers, YOLA at HOLA provides 240 children in the underserved Rampart District with free afterschool instrumental instruction, ensemble performance opportunities and academic support 15-17 hours per week for 48 weeks out of the year. YOLA at HOLA students have the opportunity to participate in both large orchestral and small group ensembles, service learning projects, and student leadership committees. The program’s young musicians have participated in public performances in
community venues throughout Los Angeles, including the nationally-renowned Hollywood Bowl and Walt Disney Concert Hall, reaching more than 20,000 listeners. A music learning program with an emphasis on community-building, YOLA at HOLA also provides families with access to social service support, adult music learning opportunities and parenting workshops.

**NEA Funding Encourages New Works and Local Artistry**
NEA grants to orchestras help support the creative initiatives of American composers and musicians, many of whom share the agency’s dedication to developing young audiences. The Cleveland Orchestra and its 236 full-time staff members will use its FY13 Art Works grant to host a week-long residency at Severance Hall featuring a newly-commissioned orchestral work by young American composer Sean Shepherd. From April 16th through April 21st, The Cleveland Orchestra is premiering Sean Shepherd’s commissioned work, and Mr. Shepherd is participating in numerous educational activities that will inspire students of all ages in northeast Ohio. His residency encompasses master classes, in-school visits, lectures, chamber concerts, concert previews, and rehearsals throughout the community. Students from four local high schools and universities will be given the opportunity to discuss the composition process and ways to bring creative musical ideas to life, and students will also receive feedback from Mr. Shepherd on their own compositions. The Cleveland Orchestra and conductor Franz Welser-Möst will premiere Sean Shepherd’s work in concerts at Severance Hall in Cleveland’s University Circle district on April 18, 20, and 21. Thanks to the NEA’s support, approximately 7,000 students and adult community members in northeast Ohio will interact with this art and the variety of related educational programming. Mr. Shepherd's residency exemplifies the orchestra’s commitment to providing opportunities for the next generation of composers to create new work while mentoring and developing wide-ranging, multifaceted relationships with young composers, as well as engaging audiences of all ages in the classical music art form.

Thank you for this opportunity to convey the tremendous value of NEA support for orchestras and communities across the nation. These are but a sampling of the innovative compositions, thoughtful programming for underserved regions and populations, and lifelong learning opportunities orchestras provide in service to adults and children from all walks of life. The Endowment’s unique ability to provide a national forum to promote excellence and engagement through high standards for artistic products and the highest expectation of accessibility remains one of the strongest arguments for a federal role in support of the arts. We urge you to support creativity and access to the arts by approving $155 million in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts.