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The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra grows its accessible Concert Membership program, fosters its unique musician-led artistic model while balancing budget

Fiscal Year 2024 Highlights:

- Balanced budget for fiscal year ending in 2024
- [Commissioned](#) seven new works, including three world premieres and two new arrangements by SPCO musicians
- Welcomed back current [Artistic Partners](#) Richard Egarr, Rob Kapilow, and Abel Selaoe and former Artistic Partner Douglas Boyd
- Continued development of the musician-led artistic model and artistic leadership by SPCO musicians as Creative Leads, with six different concert programs curated between six [SPCO musicians](#)
- Increased in-person audience by 4% at regular concerts with 68,742 total audience members, primarily driven by growth in the Concert Membership program.
- Continued [commitment to accessible pricing](#) with 21,412 tickets sold for \$15 or less, 8,532 tickets distributed free of charge and 15,274 seats reserved by Concert Members
- Grew the [Concert Membership](#) program by 21%, leading to a 29% increase in the number of tickets reserved by Concert Members
- Received 95,922 visits to the free, online [Concert Library](#) from Minnesota and 153,050 visits worldwide
- Arts Partnership presentations of [Ordway Inside Out](#) and [Sphinx Virtuosi](#)
- Celebrated 14 years of [partnership with the Capri Theater](#) in North Minneapolis

Saint Paul, MN, December 10, 2024 — At its Annual Meeting of Members today, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) announced a balanced budget for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024 (FY24). The SPCO has balanced its budget annually since 2012 and 29 out of the past 31 years.

These results were achieved in the context of a significant decrease in corporate and foundation support, a high inflationary environment and a significant decline in subscription revenue since 2019. As planned, the SPCO drew on its Rainy Day Fund and benefited from other special nonrecurring gifts to balance its budget. The Rainy Day Fund was created in FY18 as a proactive measure to protect the organization

during challenging times. “We are fortunate to have access to the Rainy Day Fund and these special gifts to maintain a balanced budget while we continue our work to regain full financial health,” said Jon Limbacher, Managing Director and President.

Total operating expenses for FY24 were \$10,390,580, and total operating revenue for the period was \$8,999,365. The SPCO received \$5,239,185 in contributed operating support for FY24 from individuals, foundations, corporations and institutions, with \$3,165,376 contributed to the Annual Fund. The endowment’s total value increased by 11.0%, to \$55,616,065. The endowment represents a growing source of stable income as the organization works towards financial health. As of the end of FY24, the SPCO’s donor base comprised 5,174 unique households, with 670 donors making recurring monthly sustaining gifts throughout the year.

Attendance at regular concerts grew by 4% over the previous fiscal year, with a total of 68,742 attendees during the season. This growth was driven by increases in the Concert Membership program, with a 21% increase in members throughout the season, and is the result of a focused initiative to grow audiences and the donor base in the face of declining subscription sales.

“This past year, the SPCO continued to deliver on our mission and advance our vision of a great orchestra for everyone in the community,” said Limbacher. “Our musician-led artistic model continued to flourish, and our brilliant musicians provided amazing concert after amazing concert for our community.”

ARTISTIC PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Sandbox Composer Residencies, Premieres and Commissions

The SPCO commissioned seven new works in the 2023.24 season, including three world premieres and three arrangements. With a commitment to commissioning and programming works by composers historically underrepresented in orchestral repertoire, one of the works premiered in the 2023.24 season was commissioned from Clarice Assad as part of her SPCO [Sandbox Composer Residency](#), in which she collaborated with the orchestra while developing her new work, [The Evolution of AI](#).

“The idea behind Sandbox was to really embed the composer into the orchestra in more ways than just showing up for the premiere and the rehearsals,” said Jonathan Posthuma, the SPCO’s Interim Director of Artistic Planning. “Coming out of the pandemic, we said we want to do this differently, we want to do this better ... One way we can do that better is to support the composer taking risks, trying things out, learning in a kind of sandbox setting where there’s no wrong answers” ([MinnPost](#)).

In January 2024, Assad premiered her work *The Evolution of AI* alongside the SPCO, weaving between the musicians on stage in a ground-breaking performance, blending electric and acoustic instruments. “This could not have happened without the time that we had to try things out,” Assad said during an interview with the *Star Tribune*. “Not everybody is open to new things. Some are very rooted in traditional concepts. Not this orchestra” ([Star Tribune](#)).

In addition to Assad’s premiere, the 2023.24 season also featured seven SPCO commissions, with two world premieres and three new arrangements, including two by SPCO musicians:

- **Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel, arr. by SPCO Principal Horn James Ferree:** Selections from *Das Jahr, 2023*

- **Gabriel Kahane:** *Heirloom*, Concerto for Piano and Chamber Orchestra, 2023
Commissioned for pianist Jeffrey Kahane by Linda and Stuart Nelson, Kansas City Symphony, Aspen Music Festival and School (Robert Spano, Music Director), The Knights, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Oregon Symphony, and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra with support from Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting
- **Clarice Assad:** *The Evolution of AI*, 2023
Commissioned by The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, Chicago Sinfonietta, and River Oaks Chamber Orchestra with support from New Music USA and the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation
- **Bedrich Smetana, arr. by SPCO violinist Daria Adams:** Quartet in E Minor, *From My Life*, 2024
- **Stefan L. Smith:** *My Young Friend* for Bassoon and Chamber Orchestra, 2024
- **Lili Boulanger, arr. by Jonathan Posthuma:** *D'un matin de printemps*, 2024
- **Chris Rogerson:** *Samaa'*, 2024
Commissioned by The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and Bravo! Vail with support from Anne-Marie McDermott and Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting
- **Texu Kim:** *Līā*, 2024 (Midwest Premiere)
Commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition at Brigham Young University

Artistic Leadership through the Musician-Led Artistic Model

The 2023.24 season also continued the orchestra's commitment to fostering the artistic leadership of its own musicians. Through the SPCO's unique musician-led artistic model, members of the orchestra are deeply engaged in shaping the organization's artistic vision, including selecting their members, selecting repertoire, shaping artistic interpretations, choosing Artistic Partners and collaborators, and leading uncondacted rehearsals and performances.

The 2023.24 season further expanded the role of Creative Leads, first introduced in the 2022.23 season, where six musicians curated six programs that showcased their musical interests and passions. These Creative Lead programs included:

- **Zachary Cohen Plays Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata** (October 5–7, 2023)
Zachary Cohen, creative lead
- **Assad, Janáček and Smetana** (January 12–13, 2024)
Daria Adams, creative lead
- **Express Concert: Bach's Double Violin Concerto** (March 14–17, 2024)
Daria Adams, creative lead
- **Express Concert: Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*** (March 21–23, 2024)
Andrew Brady & Alicia McQuerrey, creative leads
- **Haydn's *Surprise Symphony*** (April 11–20, 2024)
James Ferree, creative lead
- **Schubert's *Fifth Symphony*** (April 25–27, 2024)
Nina Tso-Ning Fan, creative lead

Bringing World-Renowned Artistic Partners and Guest Artists to the Twin Cities Community

The 2023.24 season saw the return of several SPCO Artistic Partners, both current and former. The orchestra was joined by returning Artistic Partners British Baroque specialist [Richard Egarr](#), American composer and musical commentator [Rob Kapilow](#), and South African cellist, singer and composer [Abel Selaocoe](#). In addition to the 2023.24 season's Artistic Partners, British oboist and conductor [Douglas](#)

[Boyd](#), a former Artistic Partner, returned to St. Paul in a special collaboration with Principal Oboe Cassie Pilgrim.

SPCO audiences continue to return to experience the orchestra's collaborations with Artistic Partners:

“**Rob Kapilow** was wonderful. An engaging performer whose love for music, for the Haydn piece, in particular, and for the SPCO musicians, shone through everything he did. The orchestra looked as if they were interested and engaged as well and of course played amazingly.”

“**Richard Egarr** is delightful and he always curates a fantastic performance. We like how he gives background information, which helps us to appreciate the music. As always, the orchestra is top-notch.”

“The orchestra was so engaged with **Abel Selaocoe**. He was so talented, passionate and compelling. I enjoyed the experience of opening up to a new way of looking at classical music and expanding its definition in my mind.”

“The orchestra, as always, played with great energy and sensitivity as needed throughout the concert. It was wonderful to have **Douglas Boyd** leading the musicians again.”

In addition to performances with current and former SPCO Artistic Partners, the orchestra also collaborated with guest artists from around the world. These included a special father-son Thanksgiving weekend presentation of all-American music with [Jeffrey](#) and [Gabriel Kahane](#). In April, pianist [Anne-Marie McDermott](#), who performed alongside the SPCO in the orchestra's second [Bravo! Vail Music Festival touring appearance in 2022](#), led SPCO musicians in the world premiere of an expanded orchestration of Chris Rogerson's *Samaa*. In May, the SPCO also welcomed the return of pianist Richard Goode for his first performances with the orchestra since 1997. In June, the orchestra welcomed back conductor [Gábor Takács-Nagy](#) to lead its season finale, following their [first fruitful collaboration in the previous year's season finale](#). Along with these returning guest artists, a number of in-demand musicians also made their SPCO debuts, including New York Philharmonic Principal Clarinet [Anthony McGill](#), Gramophone award-winning violinist [Alina Ibragimova](#), as well as conductor-violinist-countertenor [Dmitry Sinkovsky](#), who led the SPCO's annual holiday performances of Handel's *Messiah* to rave reviews.

“One of the most exciting aspects of the SPCO's model of music-making, is that — in addition to the exceptional level of playing from the orchestra — there is a strong commitment to intensive collaboration,” said Interim Director of Artistic Planning Jonathan Posthuma, “whether that is working with an Artistic Partner, a guest artist, a living composer, or one of their own colleagues as an SPCO soloist or creative lead.”

MAKING WORLD-CLASS MUSIC ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE IN THE TWIN CITIES COMMUNITY

The impact of the SPCO's accessible ticket model for concerts continues to resonate with the community. In-person audiences have steadily increased since the pandemic, growing by 4% to 68,742 at regular concerts during the 2023.24 season. The audience growth has largely been driven by the Concert Membership program, which grew by 21%, finishing the season with 1,786 active Concert Members. This resulted in a 29% increase in Concert Member tickets from the previous season, with 15,274 Concert Member tickets reserved throughout the 2023.24 season.

Nearly 20 years since the SPCO made a commitment to lower ticket prices and accessible pricing, the 2023.24 season saw 21,412 tickets sold for \$15 or less. Additionally, 8,531 tickets were distributed free of charge, of which over 66% went to children and students as part of the SPCO's [New Generation Initiative](#). This includes 30 school groups that were able to attend concerts with student tickets being completely free. Tickets for students and children comprised almost 9% of the total audience during the season.

The SPCO's accessibility initiatives extend beyond the concert hall, as the free digital Concert Library received 95,922 visits from Minnesota and 153,050 visits worldwide. In December 2023, the second volume of SPARK! Musical Insights was released into the Concert Library, providing a deep dive into the SPCO's performance of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony hosted by SPCO Principal Oboe Cassie Pilgrim and featuring special interviews with SPCO Principal Horn James Ferree and conductor Gábor Takács-Nagy. This format was created for those looking for additional context and new ways to interact with the music the SPCO performs, and is ideal for use in community viewing settings. The Concert Library currently hosts 28 video and 44 audio recordings of complete SPCO concerts.

"When my mother's health no longer allowed her to attend concerts in person, we enjoyed regular opportunities to watch and listen to SPCO concerts available in the Concert Library. The Library is a wonderful gift the SPCO offers to music lovers in Minnesota and beyond, and a great way to stay connected to the outstanding artistry of the SPCO."

— Peter Myers, avid Concert Library user and longtime SPCO supporter

The Neighborhood Series continued to provide geographic accessibility for Twin Cities residents. In total, 48 concerts were performed as a part of the Neighborhood Series at 10 locations across the Twin Cities for 24,879 audience members during the 2023.24 season. This included three concerts at the Capri Theater in North Minneapolis, which the SPCO has now partnered with for the past 14 seasons. In addition to free tickets for children and students, tickets for these concerts were free for Northside residents and families of Northside school students.

During the 2023.24 season the four [Arts Partnership](#) organizations — Minnesota Opera, Ordway, Schubert Club and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra — presented the dynamic self-conducted chamber orchestra, Sphinx Virtuosi, and their *Generations* program. The year also saw the continuation of Ordway Inside Out, an outdoor event series in Rice Park that utilizes digital technology to dramatically increase access to artistic programming in downtown Saint Paul.

"The SPCO is a special and amazing organization with so many assets including a fantastic and committed orchestra, a hard-working and talented staff, and an extremely generous and devoted Board." Jon Limbacher said, "We are also supported by passionate and wonderful volunteers through the Governing Members and The Friends of the SPCO. We must never forget this entire endeavor of providing our community with a world-class chamber orchestra is only possible because of the extraordinary generosity of so many donors who give year in and year out so that we can fulfill our mission."

MISSION OF THE SAINT PAUL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Our mission is to sustain a world-class chamber orchestra at the highest standards of artistic excellence that enriches the Twin Cities community by sharing dynamic, distinctive and engaging performances. We are actively committed to accessibility and intentional inclusivity in all aspects of our work and continually strive to provide all people in our community with opportunities to connect with the music we perform.

PHOTOS OF THE SAINT PAUL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Access photos of The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra [here](#). Click on the thumbnails to view images. Then, right click and select "Save image as..." to download.

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