

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

A NEW ERA BEGINS —



2023–2024 IMPACT REPORT



DRIVEN BY MISSION, FUELED BY YOU —————

Each season, the Minnesota Orchestra is driven by its mission—"to enrich, inspire and serve our community as an enduring symphony orchestra"—to provide memorable experiences for music lovers of all ages, with something to offer no matter what music you love. Week in and out, Orchestra Hall in the heart of downtown Minneapolis is a vibrant and uplifting space where folks gather to experience the magic of the Minnesota Orchestra. Donor support—*your* support—is an investment in the vital role the artistic excellence of the Minnesota Orchestra plays in the cultural and economic landscape of the Twin Cities, the state and beyond.

TO GREAT HEIGHTS —

There's a magical moment of silence before each Minnesota Orchestra concert after the musicians have tuned and before the conductor takes the podium. For just a moment, the packed auditorium holds its breath in anticipation for the door to open, the baton to raise, and the music to begin. And at the top of our 2023–24 season, this moment was even more special, as **Thomas Søndergård** waited in the wings before he **gave his first downbeat as the 11th music director of the Minnesota Orchestra.**

Søndergård, already an internationally recognized talent, joined the Minnesota Orchestra at a high point of artistic excellence. Together, they are poised to aim even higher—all propelled by the support of donors like you.



Orchestra Hall was decked in red and white (a nod to the flag of Thomas Søndergård's native Denmark) for Season Opening. Other prominent buildings and bridges in Minneapolis joined Orchestra Hall in painting the town red to welcome our new Music Director.



In his first collaboration with the Minnesota Chorale, Söndergård and the Orchestra performed the complete version of Maurice Ravel's evocative ballet *Daphnis and Chloe*, setting in motion a new partnership and era of music-making in our community.



Concertmaster Erin Keefe greets Søndergård at the top of his inaugural concerts as music director, before he led the Orchestra in a program of Strauss and Mozart. The concerts, which also highlighted Principal Oboe Nathan Hughes as soloist, were performed to capacity houses and offered our audiences a taste of what lies ahead artistically for Søndergård and the Orchestra. Your gifts allow the Orchestra to attract and retain top musical talent that is showcased at Orchestra Hall.

"And the magic happens when the orchestra connects to what [Søndergård is] trying to communicate with his eyes, with his words, with his body, like he's speaking a multidimensional sign language."

—MPLS.ST.PAUL MAGAZINE, APRIL 2024


Søndergård sat down with YourClassical MPR host Melissa Ousley onstage to chat all things music and to meet Minnesota audiences.

All season long, Søndergård connected warmly and authentically with audiences. At events public and private, he spoke frankly about the passionate love for the Orchestra he felt from audiences in his first year—underscored even more by support from you, our donors. **"You make this amazing organization soar,"** he says.



MUSIC BRINGS US TOGETHER

With donor support, the Minnesota Orchestra has, in the last several seasons, prioritized building concert experiences and other initiatives to reach and resonate with more communities by broadening the circle of guest artists, repertoire and musical styles in our programming. **We believe that music belongs to everyone, and that everyone coming to Orchestra Hall has a place here.** Your support helps us bring together audiences of all ages to hear inspirational music and interact directly with the artists making that music. Whether you're hearing a new commission, experiencing an innovative Symphony in 60 concert or bringing the kids for their first exposure to live music, the Minnesota Orchestra has something for everyone.



Young concertgoers get a hands-on look at a bass before Thomas Søndergård conducted his first Relaxed Family Concert in January. Søndergård made it a priority to conduct this program in his first season, highlighting his strong commitment to reaching young people in the Twin Cities and beyond by offering what he calls “what is uniquely ours”—the power of symphonic music. We thank you for your contributions which allow us to create transformative moments like these all season long.



Notable Debuts ★

Award-winning cellist Sterling Elliott (far left) made his Minnesota Orchestra debut in April along with rising conductor Kristiina Poska (left, applauding), in Tchaikovsky's ebullient *Variations on a Rococo Theme*.

In February Steven Banks (below left) performed *Diaspora*, a new saxophone concerto co-commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra; it was written for him by Billy Childs and based on the poetry of three Black poets chronicling Black life in America. Conducted by Ruth Reinhardt, Banks' performance—programmed with works of Smetana and Prokofiev—was shared live on the web, radio and Twin Cities PBS (TPT 2) as one of several *This Is Minnesota Orchestra* broadcasts.



Getting Nur-D With It

In April, Twin Cities-based rapper Nur-D (aka Matt Allen) made his Minnesota Orchestra debut with Principal Conductor of Live at Orchestra Hall Sarah Hicks in two sold-out performances. The shows featured songs from Nur-D's catalogue reimagined for symphony orchestra and put on full display the rapper's trademark wit, humor and heart. His innovative and thought-provoking collaboration with the Orchestra highlights our commitment to cultivating relationships with local artists and offering new ways for audiences to experience genre-blending styles at Orchestra Hall.

Surprise! First Associate Concertmaster Susie Park, violist Grace Takeda and violinist Emily Switzer greet young Symphony in 60 concertgoers at a post-concert reception.



Our Symphony in 60 concerts feature an earlier start time, a pre-concert happy hour, a shorter program and perhaps best of all, a chance for concertgoers and musicians to mingle onstage after the performance.



A Twin Cities drag performer regales an audience in the lobby before our Season Finale “Celebrating Pride” concert. These concerts, which celebrated the rich contributions of LGBTQ+ artists throughout music history, were carefully programmed by Søndergård to share a message close to his heart—that Pride is a celebration of the fact that “we exist of so many different emotions and colors within us.” Works by Dame Ethel Smythe, Francis Poulenc and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky were a fitting close to an epic season.

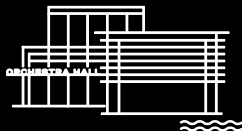


Day of Music

The annual Day of Music—which took place entirely within Orchestra Hall to kick-start the venue's 50th anniversary celebration—provided young people multiple opportunities to get up close to the music. Every corner of Orchestra Hall was filled with activities and live music for over 12 hours, provided by local artists of all genres to shine a spotlight on the depth of talent around the Twin Cities. The Minnesota Orchestra—under the baton of Stephanie Childress—offered two programs, while Creative Partner Jon Kimura Parker also joined Orchestra musicians onstage for an afternoon of chamber music. Donor support is crucial in creating these moments of wonder and inspiration!



A SEASON BY THE NUMBERS



143 Minnesota Orchestra concerts were held at Orchestra Hall and beyond. In total, the Orchestra performed **280 pieces** written by **172 composers** during the 2023–24 season.

224,049 guests attended in-person MinnOrch concerts; with audio streaming, digital concerts, TV and radio broadcasts included, that number reaches more than **2.3 million**.



Orchestra Hall was filled to **75%** paid capacity and **83%** total capacity (including free tickets) across the 2023–24 season. More than **14,800 guests** were first-time Minnesota Orchestra concertgoers.

Glowing reviews from patrons are incredibly rewarding—affirming the hard work and dedication put into providing an exceptional experience: “This was my first experience at Orchestra Hall, and I hope to be back. Everyone was so helpful and welcoming—from greeters to bartenders to the Minnesota Orchestra themselves, we loved the experience. **5 stars!**”



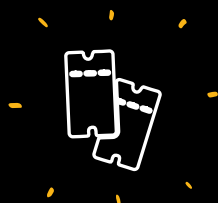
10 albums in the Orchestra’s now-complete project to record all of Gustav Mahler’s symphonies with Conductor Laureate Osmo Vänskä. The last disc, containing the composer’s mighty Third Symphony, was released in June 2024 to critical acclaim, with *The Guardian* praising “**the grandeur and beauty in Vänskä’s sober approach.**”



28,242 students and teachers from **240 schools** attended Young People's Concerts. **45%** of those students attended for **free** thanks to donor underwriting, while others received their ticket for just **\$6.25**.

7,800 "Hall Pass" tickets were issued during the 2023-24 season, allowing young people under 18 to attend concerts for free alongside the adults in their lives.

Here's what patrons have said about this special program:



" Hall Pass helped our family of four experience the Orchestra **for the first time**. Our kids both especially had a great experience. Thank you.

This program allows a new generation to be exposed to the **power of orchestra music**.

The only barrier to us going is cost, so **THANK YOU!!**

Thank you for providing Hall Pass; it allows me to more easily share my **love of orchestral performances** with my neurodivergent teenager.

Thank you for the donation. Hall Pass makes someone like me, a single mom, **able to afford amazing experiences like this** for my boys. "



12,967 donors made gifts that fueled the season's spectacular performances and programs. **Thank you for your support!**



CHAMPIONING MUSIC EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

In late April, the Minnesota Orchestra—fueled by your support—invited 54 Minnesota music educators to participate in the Orchestra's first-ever side-by-side experience with music teachers. This idea was born out of conversations with educators, the Orchestra's Education and Community Engagement team, and Søndergård himself. Since his appointment, Søndergård has been a champion of music education and in particular supporting music educators across our state in their work to inspire young people. After two rehearsals, the educators performed with the Orchestra and Søndergård in two concerts. Throngs of excited students made their way to Orchestra Hall to see their own teachers in action onstage. The side-by-side performances were part of a larger week focused on educational initiatives and included a performance conducted by Søndergård with the full Orchestra at Roseville Area High School as part of the ensemble's Symphonic Adventures series.

All smiles with music educators during a side-by-side rehearsal. Here, Concertmaster Erin Keefe (front row left) plays alongside violinist Sheila Wilcox, a 36-year veteran orchestra director at Rock Ridge High School in Virginia, Minnesota. "Erin Keefe's warmth and kindness put me at ease, so I was able to enjoy making music to a very high degree," Wilcox says of the experience.



"This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I was surprised by the depth of appreciation the Orchestra members had for us. It just showed me that what we do matters, and it has pushed me to be better not only for myself, but for my students."

—NYSSA JIMENEZ, GRADE 5–12 BAND DIRECTOR FROM LAC QUI PARLE VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT IN MADISON, MINNESOTA

This moment of advocacy and celebration of music education came at a crucial time for the city of Minneapolis. Amid budget concerns, the city school district had proposed cutting an instrumental music program—and these concerts were one part of a productive campaign in lobbying the district to save it. "The advocacy and support shown by the Minnesota Orchestra, including Thomas Søndergård, totally worked," wrote Reid Wixson, Director of Instrumental Music at Southwest High School.





Finding time to socialize was a key aspect of the side-by-side experience. Here, Associate Principal Bass Kathryn Nettleman connects with a group of educators during a lobby reception.

"I get to play with professional musicians in the Minnesota Orchestra, how cool is that?"

—ELIZABETH,
STUDENT MUSICIAN,
FLUTE & PICCOLO



A WORLD OF POSSIBILITY: To learn more about this special week celebrating music education, scan the QR code to watch a mini-documentary chronicling the experience.





A group of students of Nora Tycast (far left) came from Hopkins High School in Minnetonka to watch their teacher play with the Minnesota Orchestra.

Søndergård and the Orchestra also welcomed young musicians from Minnesota Youth Symphonies and the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies for side-by-side rehearsal experiences.





SPARKING A LOVE FOR MUSIC

Donors like you are instrumental in bringing students from across the state of Minnesota to Orchestra Hall for our Young People's Concerts. For over 110 years, the Minnesota Orchestra has performed for thousands of students each year with the aim of inspiring young minds with the power of music. These concerts cover a wide range of themes designed to explore how music can unite us across cultures. This year, thanks to you, we again welcomed nearly 30,000 young Minnesotans to Orchestra Hall. We are grateful to have your continued support for this important program. 💛



In November, we welcomed students for a series of Young People's Concerts called "Sounds of the Harvest." The Orchestra performed a program that encompassed vibrant harvest traditions and festivals around the world, featuring dancers Cheng Xiong and Pasha Yang. Through wide-ranging repertoire that included works from composers like Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate and Robert Schumann, students explored how music plays a part in harvest traditions held near and far.

MUSIC MADE MORE ACCESSIBLE

With your generous gifts, the Minnesota Orchestra is made more accessible to listeners in our state and beyond through our award-winning digital and television broadcast series *This Is Minnesota Orchestra*. In the 2023–24 season, the Orchestra broadcast four concerts live and introduced Music Director Thomas Søndergård to state-wide audiences.

In February, the Orchestra released the Music & Healing initiative to its YouTube channel for free access. Hosted by Sarah Hicks, principal conductor of Live at Orchestra Hall, the unique concert broadcast and digital project explored the intersection of music and well-being in partnership with the Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality and Healing. Musicians and guests shared ways in which music helps us process and express anxiety.



“Wonderful integration of mindfulness education and practice listening to music with intention.”

—MINNORCH PATRON



Thomas Søndergård explored Minneapolis landmarks with musicians in a series of popular video segments, **watched by more than 10,000 viewers on YouTube**. Here, Principal Oboe Nathan Hughes shares the history of Lake Harriet.

This Is Minnesota Orchestra by the numbers

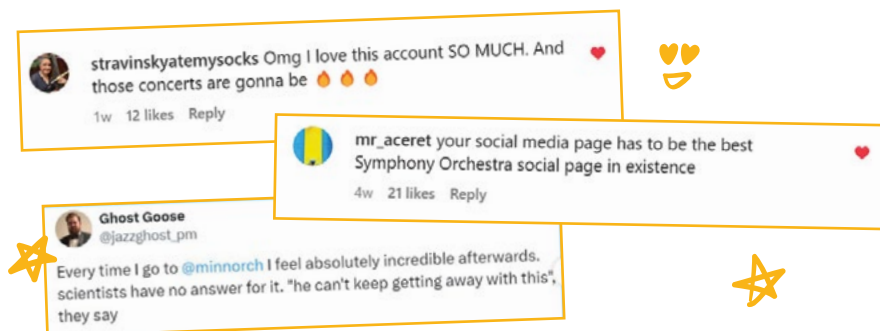
6,000 – the average number of viewers who watched *This Is Minnesota Orchestra* on TPT 2 during each of the four live broadcasts and in the week following. This is **3 times** the capacity of Orchestra Hall.

309 – total hours of encore *This Is Minnesota Orchestra* rebroadcasts shared statewide over the last year on TPT’s Minnesota Channel, which reaches **5 million households**.

144,810 – number of views in 2023–24 for *This Is Minnesota Orchestra* digital concerts through the Orchestra’s Digital Concert Hall platform.

KEEPING IT SOCIAL —

Did you know we're building a community online too? Through social media, we're broadening and deepening our connections with longtime and new audiences. Our social strategy increases awareness by engaging with cultural moments, showcasing our musicians and making audiences feel seen.



Cross-Platform Successes:

143,503 followers across
all major social media
platforms

5,767,787 impressions
(eyes on posts)

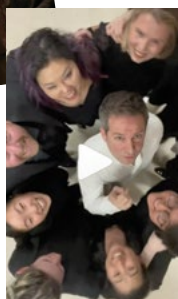
684,905 engagements
(reaction, comment or share)

Some top posts from 2023–24:



Bring Ya A**

A timely Minnesota moment, based on Timberwolves star Anthony Edwards' commentary to Charles Barkley during the NBA playoffs in May. The result? Love from our community and coverage on ESPN.



Viral Moves

Conductor Fabien Gabel and pianist Bertrand Chamayou were excellent sports joining MinnOrch musicians in a viral dance trend. A fun backstage musician moment—showcasing the human connection audiences crave.

 Find us on Facebook, Instagram, Threads, Twitter/X, TikTok, YouTube and LinkedIn!



WORDS FROM OUR AUDIENCES

Here's a sampling of comments from concertgoers shared via our post-concert surveys. Donors make these reactions and experiences possible!



Just wow! Our first time at Orchestra Hall! Amazing show, the sound was immersive and beautiful. Every single interaction with staff was top-notch. Can't wait to come back!

More excellent programming! **I haven't heard a better performance of Beethoven's 4th.**

Any event we have attended at MN Orchestra has been **uplifting, inspiring, community-building**. I am proud of our city which can support and appreciate cultural excellence.



Absolutely amazing! I can't explain how alive and energizing that made me feel! Wow!! Slightly in awe that none of the violins or cellos burst into flames!! Just **so powerful!**




I brought my 9-year-old who started playing violin this past school year. He **loved it** and told me he would be up on that stage one day! Thanks for a lovely evening.

We had the most amazing time. **The staff is the best staff at a venue we've ever had.** The concert was also amazing. We couldn't have been happier. "

THANK YOU!

Your support
makes this
magic happen.

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

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PHOTOS: Greg Helgeson, Chase Hentges, Darrell Owens, Courtney Perry, Emma Redinger and Ashleigh Rowe.