

Summerville Orchestra Begins 20th Season Riding Wave of Success

Twenty years ago, a group of 15 friends with varying degrees of talent came together to play classical music for the pure pleasure of it. Little did they know that their humble group would endure and grow to the vibrant 75-member orchestra it is today, playing world premieres, commissioning new compositions, featuring world-class soloists and drawing new and enthusiastic audiences.

As it enters its 20th season with “A Platinum Jubilee” and its most ambitious season yet, the Summerville Orchestra (S.O.) is riding a wave of accolades, awards, new grants and impressive programming for the celebratory season including a commissioned work by noted composer Chris Pilsner in honor of the orchestra and the Town of Summerville.

Among the many accolades, the S.O. was named a finalist in several categories by the American Prize awards for its 2021-22 season, most notably for “Orchestral Programming” and “American Music Performances.” At the local level, the S.O. was named 2023’s “Best Musical Group” and “Best Musical Venue” by the Summerville Journal Scene.

In addition, the S.O. has been recognized by several funding agencies and philanthropic groups with more and bigger awards, allowing it to extend its musical reach to the youth in our community. A \$45,000 grant from the S.C. Arts Commission, for example, made it possible for the S.O. to host its first youth orchestra and summer camp, directly impacting more than 125 young musicians from the tri-county. Professional development funding has helped the orchestra increase its diversity, equity and inclusion awareness, while a digital accessibility grant has made it possible to improve digital technology. The S.O. is becoming a national leader among community orchestras for its efforts regarding ADA/handicap accessibility.

“I’m most excited about how all of these accolades and support will help strengthen the impact our organization has on our community,” said S.O. Executive Director Andrew Price. “The S.O. is evolving as the community itself is evolving. We are bringing new ears to the orchestral form, and we are loving it!”

S.O. Music Director Wojciech Milewski said, “When we returned to live performances in 2020 after the COVID-19 shutdown, we took a chance by undertaking something no other orchestra has done – a full season featuring only the music of American composers. We performed to

thunderous applause works by some of our most beloved American composers, like Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue.' But we also brought to light works by composers overlooked in their day. The shared experience for both the performers and audience was truly incredible!"

Indeed, the S.O.'s All American season was showcased by Milewski and Price this spring at the League of American Orchestras National Conference. "Others are now following in our footsteps," Milewski said with a big grin.

The 2023-24 Platinum Jubilee will feature masterworks like Gershwin's "American in Paris" and Sibelius's "Finlandia," while also including fan favorites from the movies "Coco" and "Aladdin." Also on the season's program is Mason Bates's techno groove tune "Mothership" and Polish composer Mieczyslaw Karlowicz's "Eternal Songs."

"That's what makes each season unique," explained Milewski. "Each concert has a singular focal element that features different instruments and musicians."

The season finale? Pilsner's commissioned piece created specifically for the town and the orchestra's 20th season.

This year "community" is the word that best describes the Summerville Orchestra. A fully volunteer orchestra entering its third decade, the S.O. is more involved with the community than ever before, from the Beat Beethoven 5k race this past spring, to the formation of the youth philharmonic as well as the many ensemble performances throughout the community. The S.O.'s relationship with its audience, with local municipalities and with a growing number of business partners makes it all about "community serving community." The Summerville Orchestra's 20th season is not to be missed!

For more information and to purchase tickets go to SummervilleOrchestra.org, and if you are interested in becoming involved with the orchestra either on the stage or behind the scenes, visit SummervilleOrchestra.org/get_involved.