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The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Announces Cancellation of Remaining Performances of the Classical Subscription Season, Announces Expansion of ASO Virtual Stage

Stability Fund Created to Raise Funds

ATLANTA -- COVID-19 has created unique challenges for arts and culture institutions across the country. Responding to the public health and financial impacts of the crisis, today the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra announced the cancellation of the remaining performances in its 75th classical subscription season, which was scheduled to conclude on June 14.

“While providing inspiring and uplifting musical experiences to our community is our mission and our passion, we realize that we must do so while providing for the safety of our patrons, musicians and employees,” said ASO Executive Director Jennifer Barlament. “Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. We made the difficult decision to cancel the remaining performances in our 75th anniversary season after consulting with public health experts and considering the continuing restrictions on public gatherings both in Atlanta and statewide. We feel that now, more than ever, it is vital for us to continue to share a message of inspiration and hope with the community. For now, in the interest of the well-being of all, we will do so remotely through the ASO Virtual Stage.”

The ASO had previously cancelled performances through May 11, including a planned trip to Carnegie Hall to perform as part of that institution’s “Beethoven at 250” celebrations. Concerts cancelled today include Mahler’s Fourth Symphony (May 14 and 16), the ASO conducting debut of violinist-conductor Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider (May 28 and 30), and the first full performance of Wagner’s epochal opera *Tristan und Isolde* in Atlanta, to have been performed in festival format over three nights on June 11, 13 and 14. Patrons holding tickets for cancelled performances may email the ASO at boxoffice@woodruffcenter.org or visit aso.org. The ASO staff and Board continues to monitor the situation and provide further updates as information becomes available.

Taking Action to Mitigate Financial Impacts

In addition to the impact on the Orchestra’s ability to stage public performances and rehearsals,

the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra has been dramatic, resulting in the loss of over \$3 million of ticket revenue between March 13 and the end of its season on June 27. Earned revenue from ticket sales for the Delta Classical Series, Family Series, Atlanta Symphony Hall LIVE and the Coca-Cola Holiday Series account for approximately 50% of the Orchestra's annual operating budget.

To mitigate the financial impacts on the institution, the ASO and the Atlanta Federation of Musicians, AFM Local 148-462 came to an agreement on an amendment to its collective bargaining agreement to reduce expenses, provide scheduling flexibility, and enhance media capabilities. This will include the ability to stream content from the ASO's archives and past recordings, the option to schedule an additional six weeks of rehearsals and performances during the summer, and a temporary 15% reduction in the musicians' compensation through June 27 which is the end of our 2019-20 season, supported in part by a gift from a generous anonymous donor.

"Our industry is being hit very hard by this pandemic," said Daniel Laufer, Associate Principal Cellist of the ASO and President of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Players Association. "The Musicians of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra are united in supporting the ASO through this challenging time, including by agreeing to a reduction in compensation and enabling the use of archival footage and recordings to enhance the offerings on our Virtual Stage. We look forward to the time when we can return to the stage to share our passion of music with our patrons. "

In addition, the ASO announced across the board reductions in administrative staff compensation, ranging from 5% to 15%, and the furlough of 11 full-time and 13 part-time staff members, primarily those whose work requires active participation in concert performances or other duties that cannot be done remotely. These employees are eligible for Cares Act funding and will retain their health benefits during the furlough period.

"We have never been more closely aligned in our support for one another, in our belief in the importance of our mission, and in our support for our community—particularly for the heroes on the front lines and those who are suffering," said Janine Brown, Board Chair of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. "These are truly unprecedented circumstances and the members of the ASO Board, as well as the Woodruff Arts Center Governing Board, are very grateful for the hard work and collaborative approach, and we look forward to the day when our Atlanta Symphony Orchestra musicians once again take the stage."

Extraordinary Generosity

The Orchestra is asking patrons to support the institution and its musicians by donating back their tickets to cancelled concerts, as well as renewing their subscriptions for the 2020/21 season, which was announced on March 31. The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, part of the Woodruff Arts Center, does not currently qualify for the Cares Act stimulus because of the 500-employee limit.

To help address the financial storm, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra created a new **Stability Fund**, which will match donations made through the end of June, including donations to the Annual Fund and donated tickets from cancelled performances. A special thanks to The John and Rosemary Brown Family Foundation, The Antinori Foundation, the ATL Symphony Musicians Foundation, and members of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Board of Directors for their generosity in supporting the fund. Since the match was established, donations of tickets from cancelled concerts increased by nearly 50%. To learn more about how you can support the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, visit aso.org/donate.

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Virtual Stage

The ASO also announced today the expansion of its "[ASO Virtual Stage](#)" a central hub of engaging online content including interviews, pre-recorded orchestral performances, educational programs and chamber music concerts with ASO musicians.

“In partnership with our musicians, we are sharing stories and music in new and creative ways, free and open to our community,” said Jennifer Barlament. Thanks to our new musicians’ agreement, we can now share gems from our archives, featuring performances from all our music directors, including Henry Sopkin, Robert Shaw, Yoel Levi and Robert Shaw, along with memorable guest artists. Recent videos available for on-demand streaming include performances with pianist Lang Lang, violinist Joshua Bell, and our last 2020 performance in Symphony Hall—a historic return to the ASO podium by Yoel Levi featuring legendary violinist Pinchas Zukerman.”

ASO Virtual Stage activities include a special thank-you message to Emory and Grady Hospital caregivers; content designed especially for patients and caregivers in hospitals and at home; online education programs for Atlanta Symphony Youth Orchestra and Talent Development Program students; and videos by student musicians, volunteer chorus members, and ASO members recorded from home.

“We are inspired by musicians around the world who are virtually sharing messages of hope and inspiration during these challenging times,” said ASO VP and General Manager Sameed Afghani, who is leading the ASO’s Virtual Stage effort. “The circumstances have fueled a tremendous amount of creativity from members of the ASO Family. We are thrilled to continue to share our music with people across the Atlanta and around the world through this new portal.”

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