

The Post and Courier

Report looks to turn sour notes around

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A long-awaited report released today lays out an action plan for the future of symphony music in Charleston.

A steering committee said the Charleston Symphony Orchestra should restructure its board, resize the orchestra, recruit an authoritative chief executive, raise one year of unearned income before restarting performances and restore trust among patrons and donors.



File

Charleston Symphony Orchestra

Failing that, a new organization should be formed, the report said. And regardless of whether the symphony survives, an umbrella arts organization should be established "to provide health insurance and other standard benefits to musicians performing orchestral work" and to support other musicians. it

advised.

Also recommended:

- Explore the feasibility of a regional orchestra based in Charleston.
- Create a music conservatory at the College of Charleston to draw young professional musicians, provide stable employment and pursue opportunities for arts education initiatives in the public schools.
- Form an "Orchestral Music Consortium" run by community leaders to foster collaborative partnerships.
- Create a cross-marketing platform for all orchestral ensembles in the area and forge administrative and artistic links between groups.
- Support other, smaller, music groups in case the symphony fails.

Idea generator

The report expresses the following "vision," based on the public response, research and consultation:

- Orchestral music will be relevant, dynamic and "an intrinsic part of the warp and woof of the 'Charleston Arts Scene.' "
- It will have a growing multicultural and cross-generational audience that reflects the community's shifting demographics.
- Professional musicians will be valued and respected, have opportunities for professional development and want to make Charleston their home.
- The music community will be large enough "to ensure deep participation and presence in the fabric of our community and our schools."
- The delivery of orchestral music will be trusted, sustainable, responsive, innovative and collaborative.

Several ideas for strengthening symphony music are assembled in an appendix of the report:

- Nurture four or five chamber groups that periodically combine to perform larger works.
- Create a year-round course of study for young players in the Spoleto Festival orchestra to ensure talented musicians are readily available.
- Establish a Charleston-based regional orchestra that performs throughout the state.
- Establish a statewide orchestra centrally located.
- Establish a single regional per-service chamber orchestra comprised of non-residents.
- Import other professional orchestras to Charleston.
- Make Charleston a "second city" for a professional orchestra based in a big city.

Survey

[The future of the Charleston Symphony](#)

The full report

[The steering committee's draft report](#) (169 page PDF)

Previous coverage

[Symphony members agree to new contract](#), published 12/1/10

The report, titled "Future of Orchestral Music," was issued after months of meetings, consultations and preparation. The March shutdown of the symphony prompted a community response that resulted in the formation of a steering committee led by College of Charleston President George Benson and Blackbaud President Marc Chardon.

Mayor Joe Riley said the report was "very helpful" because it affirms the

importance of symphonic music in Charleston and details the wishes of the community. The report, along with the contractual agreement reached Tuesday between symphony musicians and management, puts the CSO on a path to recovery, he said.

"This gets the symphony back in operation, fiscally sound, with an upward trajectory," Riley said, adding that it is essential for the community to sustain a healthy, world-class orchestra that can draw artists, businesses and new residents to Charleston.

The committee, with help from consultant Laura Deaton, organized a series of four public forums in June that drew nearly 400 local arts patrons and concerned citizens. The meetings, facilitated by the College of Charleston's Dianne Culhane, gave participants a chance to voice their ideas about orchestral music. The data are included in the final report.

The original timeline would have produced a set of recommendations by September, but disagreements and the complex nature of the project caused a delay, according to people involved in the process.

Benson said the steering committee wanted to offer "practical, implemental guidance to the community."

He said the College of Charleston's involvement as a cultural institution with resources makes sense for the arts community and for the school. The college includes among its core values a commitment to "the history, traditions, culture and environment of Charleston."

"We want to be part of the community, to take advantage of the assets of the community and take care of the assets of the community," Benson said.

Assessment of the current situation helps, he said, but much more can be accomplished.

"One way to do that, from an institutional perspective, is to start a conservatory," Benson said. Teacher-musicians can become part of the symphony and play in churches and schools. "We really want to see a large group of professional musicians living in Charleston."

The steering committee considered two previous independent reports prepared for the CSO in 2008 and 2009, but did not act fully on their recommendations due to budget constraints, market uncertainty and other problems. The committee also considered research compiled by nine other sources.

The report includes specific recommendations for the Charleston Symphony, including the need to develop additional programming, collaborate with other organizations and perform outdoors and in smaller venues.

The board of directors should be restructured, the report advised. Each board member should have a minimum contribution requirement of \$5,000 annually, personally or through fundraising.

If the symphony fails in its restructuring, endowment earnings (not principal) might be used to establish a new organization, the report said. George Stevens, president of the Coastal Community Foundation, said two endowments were created with the express purpose of supporting symphonic music.

The foundation, therefore, will monitor the viability of the symphony's restructuring and remain involved in conversations about its turnaround, Stevens said.

"The (foundation) board's role in this situation is to make sure the intention of donors is realized," he said.

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