



SMSO

SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

2025 ANNUAL APPEAL
& IMPACT REPORT

Celebrate 75 Years of Music!

GIVE \$75 TO CELEBRATE 75!

This season marks the **75th Diamond Anniversary** of the Southwest Michigan Symphony Orchestra; **we need your help** to make it unforgettable... and **set the stage for what's next.**



YOUR SUPPORT *LITERALLY* KEEPS THE MUSIC PLAYING!



DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT



Your donation—of any size—makes a difference. Whether it's \$7.50, \$75, \$750, or more, **your financial gift** will go twice as far thanks to a generous **\$40,000 match challenge** from the Frederick S. Upton Foundation!



Bigger audiences mean more concerts. Based on last year's attendance, **if everyone brought just two extra friends** to each concert this season, the boost in ticket sales could mean **adding back concerts next season!**

Join the celebration. Make your gift today!

ONLINE

Visit www.smso.org or scan the QR code below to donate securely online via SMSO.org, PayPal, or Venmo



CALL

(269) 982-4030

MAIL

SMSO

2755 E Napier Ave,
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Office located inside Grand Upton Hall
at LMC Mendel Center
1100 Yore Ave, Benton Harbor, MI 49022

WHAT WE DID, WHAT'S NEXT...

AND WHERE WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

What amazes me most about SMSO is **how adventurous our audience is**—you've embraced everything from a saxophone quartet concerto to improvised solos in a dazzling light and video show. That **spirit of curiosity makes southwest Michigan special**. I'm so thankful for everyone who **stepped up to save the symphony**, from generous community foundations, corporate partners like Corewell Health, to hundreds of individual donors. Our **local collaborators**—Lake Michigan Youth Orchestra, Chorlennium, and incredible school music programs—are top-notch, and it's a joy to showcase them. As we look to the future, **we want to perform more often and for more people**, but that only happens with your continued support: more seats filled and more gifts to keep the music alive. **Together, we can make it happen.**


MATTHEW AUBIN
MUSIC DIRECTOR



We know **meaningful outreach is just as important** as our core orchestra programs. To kick off SMSO's next chapter, we're excited to **uplift and support mental health** in our community by leaning into what we do best: sharing the transformative power of music with **Radical Acts of Music**. This new initiative has just launched its first two pilots and we're eager to discover **new partnerships**. We look forward to bringing more memorable **live concert experiences, enriching music education opportunities, and making the orchestra accessible to all through outreach programs** like our free Pop Up! concerts.




JESSICA ISHMAEL
PRESIDENT & CEO

Your response to last year's "Save Our Symphony" Campaign sent a message loud and clear that **our community values the SMSO**. Your support erased a long-standing deficit and allowed us to open a milestone 75th season. Navigating an operational restructure and relocation is not easy, but **the encouragement that poured out made the journey worth it**. Together we adapted, persevered, and kept the music playing.

Every dollar, no matter the size of your gift, helps us continue creating powerful musical experiences that inspire, educate, and connect. Additionally, ticket sales made up just 9% of our income last year, and there is tremendous opportunity to grow. By **inviting friends, family, and neighbors to experience our concerts**, you help expand our audience, stabilize and strengthen our future, and improve and enrich lives in southwest Michigan!

Here's to another 75 years
of **brehtaking music,**
community connection,
and **rising together!**




BILL DOWNEY
BOARD CHAIR

SEASON REVIEW



07.03 | A Salute to America



07.27 | Peter and the Wolf



10.26 | Beethoven & the Heavens



12.21 | Merry & Bright



02.22 | Bach & Assad



03.07 | Education Concert



05.17 | Symphony: Unexpected

7 SMO
ORCHESTRA
CONCERTS

3,647 SEASON
ATTENDANCE



EDUCATION CONCERT

CAPTIVATE, ENGAGE, INSPIRE

Tailored for 3rd and 4th grades, this **free to schools** concert captures the attention and imagination of students—right as many school band & other music programs open to the age group—**putting musicianship on their map** of exciting possibilities for the future.

13

PARTICIPATING
SCHOOLS

1,170

3RD & 4TH GRADE
STUDENTS & CHAPERONES



LAKE MICHIGAN YOUTH ORCHESTRA

AWARD-WINNING MUSIC EDUCATION

2

SEMESTERS

SMSO proudly offers a music education program that provides **orchestral repertoire**, **ensemble experience**, and **performance opportunities** to young student musicians across southwest Michigan. Whether **supplementing** school music programs **or creating a pathway** for homeschool families and students without access to school-based opportunities, LMYO **opens doors to musical growth** and inspiration.

3

ENSEMBLES

24

SCHOOLS
REPRESENTED



125

INDIVIDUAL
STUDENTS





DID YOU KNOW? | National studies from professional realtor groups show homes near cultural resources like the SMSO maintain higher values.

POP UP! CONCERTS

SHARED MUSIC WITH EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE

Small ensembles perform **free** Pop Up! Concerts in public settings to deliver shared music experiences to our local communities. This year we were excited to **partner** with **local groups**, **community celebrations**, and **expand into south county**, creating new **connections** and **relationships**.

6

NEW
PARTNERSHIPS

9

UNIQUE
LOCATIONS

2,538

ESTIMATED
ATTENDEES

Lest We Forget at Tiscornia Park, St. Joseph • Monday Musical Club at First Congregational Church, St. Joseph • Juneteenth Celebration, Benton Harbor • John E.N. Howard Bandshell, St. Joseph • Harbert Community Park, Chikaming • Lions Pavilion Park, New Buffalo • Union Pier Social, Union Pier • Caretel Inns, St. Joseph • Riverfront Park, Niles

RADICAL ACTS OF MUSIC

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH WITH MUSIC

Since 2013, **Mental Health is cited as the No. 1 priority** in Berrien County’s Community Health Needs Assessment.



Recent figures show up to 1 in 4 individuals in our county faces mental health challenges, regardless of age, gender, or background. The report calls for the creation of more accessible services & programs to help prevent or address mental health.

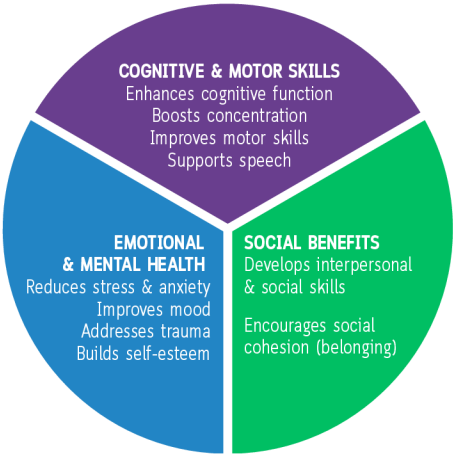
*Radical Acts of Music directly connects what we do to the **REAL NEEDS** of people in our community in ways that MAKE SENSE & MAKE A DIFFERENCE.*

This fall, one of two pilots launched at the Pine Ridge Nursing & Rehabilitation Center



MUSIC’S IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

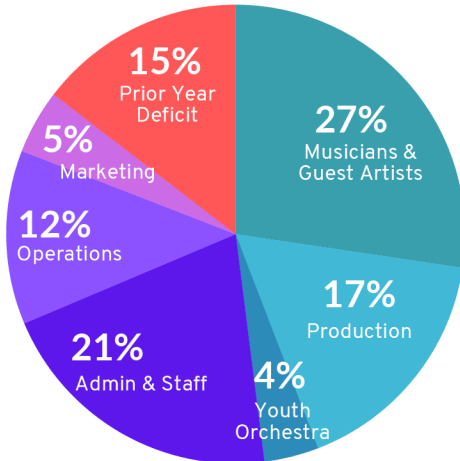
Based on research by the National Institute of Mental Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>



A FULL STAGE | SMSO & LMYO perform *Mothership* by M. Bates, side-by-side

\$681k FISCAL YEAR
BUDGET

2024-25 EXPENSE

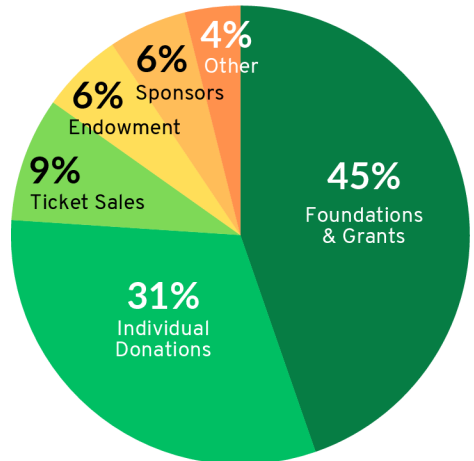


Nearly half—48%—of our annual expenditures are directly invested into **Programs & Services** that bring music to life in our community. This includes producing innovative **live concert** experiences, offering enriching **music education**, and delivering **outreach programs** to make our orchestra accessible to all.

2024-25 REVENUE

Last fiscal year's operations were sustained by generous support from foundations & grants. However, many of these were **one-time awards**. With **ongoing reductions in federal and state arts funding**, we face a more uncertain landscape this year.

That's why your individual contributions are more vital than ever.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED JUNE 1, 2024 - MAY 31, 2025

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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*When **talented working professionals choose** where to build their careers and raise families, **communities with professional symphonies consistently rank higher.** The symphony isn't just entertainment—it's proof we're a sophisticated region worth investing in. **That's why forward-thinking business leaders support the SMSO.***

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*Generosity comes in many forms: through gifts of time, talent, treasure
—or a combination thereof. ALL were instrumental to make a fantastic
2024-25 Season. THANK YOU!*