



THE STATE OF

# THE VIRGINIA SYMPHONY

ORCHESTRA

# The Virginia Symphony Orchestra: The Valiant Struggles Of A Cultural Jewel

*Music is edifying, for ... it sets the soul in operation.*

— John Cage, "Silence" (1961)

*"Darwinism is at work, and American orchestras must adjust: to smaller dreams, fewer orchestras serving wider areas, fragmented listenerships, hopes for some kind of government help and, above all, a way of preserving the past, electronically if not by word of mouth."*

— Bernard Holland, "How to Kill Orchestras"  
(*The New York Times*, June 29, 2003)

These are turbulent times for American orchestras. The San Antonio Symphony declared bankruptcy, as have the Louisville Symphony and the Florida Philharmonic. Symphonies in Colorado Springs, San Jose, Savannah and Tulsa have played their final notes. Salary freezes and salary cuts for orchestral musicians are a nationwide phenomenon and even the estimable Chicago Symphony Orchestra has encountered severe financial difficulties.

## The Virginia Symphony: Some Background

The Virginia Symphony Orchestra, despite its long history, still might be viewed as an orchestra in the early stages of development. It was founded in 1920, interestingly the same period in which such orchestras as those in Baltimore, Cleveland, Los Angeles and Rochester (N.Y.) were formed. But it was not until 1979 that it took a decisive step by pulling together the region's musical resources, incorporating players from the Peninsula Symphony Orchestra, the Virginia Orchestra Group and the Virginia Beach Pops Symphony.

While the Richmond Symphony, founded in 1957, is the only other orchestra of similar size in the state, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra (VSO) serves the southeastern part of the state, from Williamsburg to Virginia Beach. In approximately 150 performances a year, the symphony brings a wide range of musical experiences to a total audience that numbered about 50,000 in the 2002-03 season.

The VSO's performance season focuses upon several series, each offering a distinctive style of music. The Classical Masterworks Series presents 11 programs yearly that include standard pieces from the orchestral repertoire, as well as new works and noted soloists. In recent years, such international stars as violinists Itzhak Perlman and Isaac Stern, pianist Andre Watts, flutist Sir James Galway, mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne and percussionist Evelyn Glennie have given memorable performances in this series.

The annual Beethoven Festival, begun in 1997, moves the orchestra to Williamsburg for a long weekend in the late summer. Chamber music complements performances of this pivotal orchestral composer's works. The only downside is that, while this series may satisfy the thirst for Beethoven for some, it does not attract large audiences.

Several venues in Williamsburg, Newport News and Hampton are used in the Peninsula Treasures Series, which generally requires only the core members of the orchestra. This series offers an opportunity for symphony members to appear as soloists, and it also uses the Symphony Chorus in both smaller, infrequently performed pieces and larger, multimovement works such as settings of the Mass. This series, once known as "Mozart & More," has not been performed in Norfolk for several years. There is currently discussion of reintroducing concerts in Norfolk for small ensembles, probably in some of the restored venues downtown on Granby Street. And, on the Peninsula, the attractive new 500-seat hall at Christopher Newport University, the Ferguson Center for the Arts, will soon provide another excellent venue for the core orchestra.

There is a very strong audience in Hampton Roads for a light classical and pops repertoire, which is performed in a series supported by Norfolk Southern Corp. The most well-known featured performer in the current season was Glen Campbell, and conductor Rob Fisher has been a frequent guest.

Two series introduced in the 2003-04 season have brought the orchestra to new venues. The Spotlight Series has presented Al Jarreau, Kenny Rogers and k.d. lang with the symphony in Old Dominion University's Ted Constant Convocation Center, where the state-of-the-art seating configuration allows the creation of a 3,000- to 4,000-seat space for these concerts. The 700-seat hall in the Communication and Performing Arts Center at Regent University also has been used for classical programs, with some repetition of music from the Masterworks and Peninsula series.

**The addition of these new venues not only addresses the goal of reaching new audiences, but also reflects the frustration the VSO experiences with its primary performing space, downtown Norfolk's Chrysler Hall. This 2,361-seat hall, while a little large for the audience that attends the symphony performances, is still the best location in the area for the Masterworks and Pops series. But Chrysler Hall, which rents both the main hall and rehearsal space to the VSO, is used by many other organizations and in recent years has appeared to downgrade the symphony's position in its priorities.**

Members of the symphony play for productions of the Virginia Opera, which travels to both Richmond and Fairfax. The time commitment has varied as the opera season has been either expanded or shortened. However, in the 2003-04 season, the Richmond Symphony was used for one of the opera's productions, a practice that will continue in the next season.

The "core" VSO consists of 54 full-time musicians. For the Masterworks Series, as many as 25 additional players are regularly hired, even more when the repertoire dictates. Partly for financial reasons, almost all of these musicians supplement their income by teaching privately, teaching in the public schools, performing in chamber music groups, or doing administrative work for the symphony and other arts organizations. In the summer, which is outside the 42-week contract season, many of the musicians teach or play for festivals around the country.

Education, which is of critical importance for building both audience numbers and musical comprehension, is a thread through many of the symphony's programs. Specific projects include the Peanut Butter & Jam concert series for children and the master classes given by visiting soloists to high school and college students. Symphony 101 is a lecture/discussion series offered to the public. Probably the most direct educational efforts in this area are the talks given before the Masterworks concerts and the question-and-answer sessions held afterward. These are also important ways to develop a more personal relationship between performers and their audience.

## Music Director JoAnn Falletta

A most important key to the artistic and financial success of any orchestra is its music director, whose artistic skill, temperament, reputation and wise judgment are crucial. The VSO's music director, JoAnn Falletta, has done more than any other single person to bring the larger orchestra, formed in 1979, to its current position as a regional orchestra of growing status. She is now completing her 12th season here, and the indications are that she plans to stay. Her fifth three-year contract with the symphony is now being negotiated. When she came to Hampton Roads in 1991, the symphony was going through a budget crisis that forced several changes to her plans for that season. Perhaps this prevented her from making extensive changes right away, but

that is not her style anyway. Instead, she has slowly built the orchestra's level of performance by choosing superior musicians to take positions as they have become available. Today, the orchestra's woodwind and percussion sections are particularly strong, and the brass performers are a close second, their only challenge being an inconsistency in performance quality. While the string section continues to improve, it still does not produce as full a sound as might be desired and, if there are intonation problems, they will most likely be found in the violin section.

At the same time that Falletta has worked to build this orchestra's strengths, she has taken on more challenges elsewhere. In 1998, she became music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, a larger organization with a much greater national reputation. In addition, she is firmly established on the guest conductor circuit, having led the orchestras of Philadelphia, Montreal, Houston and Rochester, as well as many others of similar stature. Internationally, she has conducted, among others, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (Belgium), the Singapore Symphony and the Czech National Symphony. She was the first woman to lead the Mannheim (Germany) Orchestra, which traces its history back to the time of Mozart.

**It is interesting to survey the repertoire in concerts Falletta conducts elsewhere, knowing that she may have first learned a piece and conducted it in Norfolk. Indeed, when she has repeated a composition here after a period of several years, it has been quite apparent how much her interpretation has developed. She is taking what she has learned here to appearances around the world, and also bringing back the results of her out-of-town experiences. Her globetrotting benefits everyone with whom she works.**

As Falletta's reputation has grown, she has taken the Virginia Symphony Orchestra with her to important debuts at Carnegie Hall (1997) and the Kennedy Center (2000). The Carnegie Hall concert included local and nationally known composer Adolphus Hailstork's Piano Concerto, which she premiered in her second season here. Another work that she premiered with the orchestra, Behzad Ranjbaran's Cello Concerto, composed in 1998-2000, is featured on the symphony's newest CD, "The American Cello," released by Albany Records in 2004. The 2003-04 season has included local premieres of music by Astor Piazzolla, Lowell Liebermann, Christopher Rouse, Anthony Iannaccone and Aaron Copland.

Falletta has won – eight times consecutively – the ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) award for creative programming. Individual concerts are generally organized around a theme that often compares composers of a particular country or region. Over a period of time, she has conducted here most of the orchestral works of two of her favorite composers, Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss. Mixed-media productions have enriched the understanding of the orchestral works. Both Mendelssohn's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet" were performed within the context of the Shakespeare plays. Prokofiev's "Alexander Nevsky" accompanied a screening of Sergey Eisenstein's 1938 film. This season, Falletta programmed (but did not conduct) a similar pairing – Carl Dreyer's 1928 film, "The Passion of Joan of Arc," with Richard Einhorn's recent oratorio, "Voices of Light."

Falletta's dramatic flair enlivens the late Romantic Movement repertoire that she favors. It also gives depth to the neoclassical composers of the 20th century and is the means she uses to present more avant-garde music to a skeptical audience. While her interest in the emotional effect of music is quite apparent, it often seems that she is less comfortable with music that depends primarily on clear, formal explanation through performance. The classical period and early 19th-century composers, from Mozart to Mendelssohn and including the most significant, Beethoven, may not receive in-depth explanation through her interpretations. Even the music of Brahms, a later exponent of the classical tradition, tends to lose the power of the structural experience. As both she and the orchestra mature, a better understanding of this foundation of the orchestral repertoire will certainly grow.

When Falletta is away, the orchestra enjoys the contrasting styles of guest conductors. Associate Conductor Shizuo Kuwahara and Chorus Master Robert Shoup also provide consistent strong leadership in her absence. Both men have growing careers outside the symphony, Kuwahara as director of orchestral activities at American University, and Shoup as director of the Virginia Chorale and of choral activities at the Breckenridge Choral Festival.



# The Symphony's Financial Travails

After almost a decade of financial deficits, and having accumulated a debt of approximately \$2 million, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra ended its 2002-03 season with a balanced budget. A surplus of \$25,000 was recorded out of an expenditure budget of \$4.5 million.

By contrast, in the 2001-02 season, the VSO's revenues from all sources totaled \$4,065,467, while its expenses were \$4,345,125. Thus, it incurred a deficit of \$279,658. The deficit reflected several factors, but especially an almost 20 percent decline in ticket sales between 1999 and 2001.

Two factors have been paramount in the symphony's recent financial turnaround. First, a strong attempt was made to hold expenses down wherever possible. Second, The Norfolk Foundation provided a "50 percent" challenge grant (a similar lifesaver to the one used by the New York Philharmonic). The grant stipulated that the foundation would "reward" the symphony for attracting new donors and convincing current donors to increase their contributions. The plan worked, bringing in 700 new donors. The campaign resulted in an increase in gifts of \$200,000 (a 30 percent jump over the previous year), and The Norfolk Foundation matched this with \$100,000. This resulted in a \$300,000 increase in the VSO's income for the year. Table 1 reveals that private individuals dominated gifts to the symphony in 2002-03.

Corporations (Including \$167,500 from the Business Consortium for Arts Support)	\$588,000
Individuals	\$1,072,000

The VSO's 2003-04 budget is \$4.7 million, a modest increase over the previous year. Executive Director John Morison, an indefatigable fund-raiser and exponent for the symphony, has stated that he expects this year's budget once again will be balanced. Several measures have been taken to hold down expenses. For example, when one office staff member resigned, that position was not filled. Print advertising was reduced substantially in the early part of 2004. To the public, the most apparent change was the replacement in the late February Masterworks concerts of Igor Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" – which requires an unusually large number of extra musicians, plus extra rehearsal time because of its difficulty – with a relatively uncomplicated piece by Dvorak.

**Even so, the VSO does not yet reside on Easy Street, for it has an accumulated debt of \$2 million that must be addressed in the coming years. The plan is to generate surpluses in the coming years to pay off this debt. Realistically, however, this would take several decades at the current rate of progress, if indeed it can be sustained. There is talk of a capital campaign, maybe in three years, one purpose of which would be debt reduction.**

For the 2003-04 season, subscriptions increased dramatically – 14 percent, though this generated only a 4 percent increase in revenue – primarily because of the Peanut Butter & Jam and Regent University series. In 2002-03, approximately 50,000 tickets were sold for all series, of which 22,000 were sold for the Masterworks series. In contrast to subscriptions, single-ticket sales have been at the same level for several years. This year, significantly low attendance at three events just after Hurricane Isabel was offset by the additional tickets sold for the James Galway concert.

## TICKET PRICES

Ticket prices were increased 3 percent to 5 percent for 2003-04. Nevertheless, by urban symphony standards, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra remains an entertainment bargain. Table 2 reports the VSO's ticket prices.

TABLE 2

## 2003-04 VSO TICKET PRICE RANGES

Concert Series	Prices	Price Per Concert
Full Masterworks Series (11 concerts)	\$129 - \$549	\$11.73 - \$49.91
Masterworks Mini Series (5 concerts)	\$86 - \$291	\$17.20 - \$58.20
Pops Series (5 concerts)	\$89 - \$329	\$17.80 - \$65.80
Peninsula Treasures Series (6 concerts)	\$47 - \$91	\$7.83 - \$14.17
Peanut Butter & Jam (4 concerts)	\$45 - \$73	\$11.25 - \$18.25

The 2003-04 price range for single tickets to the Masterworks series was \$19 - \$70. By comparison, the Richmond Symphony's range for its Masterworks series single tickets was \$25 - \$65. Subscriptions to this Richmond series of eight concerts ranged from \$156 - \$435 (cost-per-concert range of \$19.50 - \$54.38). With fewer concerts in the series, the Richmond price per concert was forced substantially higher than in Hampton Roads.

Volunteer work is of huge importance for any orchestra, and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra estimates that 200 people have donated their time this year. Jobs have included helping in the office, ushering for concerts and fund raising by telephone. The Virginia Symphony League provides important support through educational programs and housing of guest artists. Money is raised through sales at the league's boutique and its car raffle.

## MUSICIANS' SALARIES

**A major expense of any orchestra is the salaries it pays the musicians. The current contract between the Virginia Symphony Orchestra and its musicians is a three-year pact that will terminate in mid-2005. VSO musicians played without a contract during the 2002-03 season while the current contract was being negotiated. An agreement between musicians and management to continue negotiations kept the orchestra playing through the fall of 2003. Finally, the contract was approved in January/February of 2004.** For a 41-week season, the 54 core musicians have rehearsals and performances that ordinarily require an average of 17.5 hours per week. It is expected that additional time will be spent individually to prepare all music to performance level. A recent advertisement for the vacant fourth-horn position (one of the core/salaried positions) in the 2004-05 season stated a salary of \$23,486. If the musician who fills this position spends 30 hours per week with her music, she will earn about \$19 per hour, which is substantially more than the minimum wage, but dramatically below the rates charged by other professionals such as attorneys.

The new VSO employment contract includes three types of employee insurance – health, disability and instrument – and a pension plan. Position announcements for additional (non-core) string players in the coming season advertise a per-service rate of \$85.66. By comparison, the Richmond Symphony currently advertises a non-core violin position with a pay rate of \$94.86 per service. (A "service" is either a three-hour rehearsal or a concert performance. In hourly terms, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra pays \$28.55, but, of course, there is the expectation of practice time outside rehearsal and hence the actual wage rate is only a fraction of this.

Maestro Falletta's "other orchestra," the Buffalo Philharmonic, currently has a second-oboe opening that pays \$41,000 for a 39-week season. Obviously, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra is not at that level in many ways. Within the Commonwealth, however, the "per-service" pay difference with Richmond is a significant indication that the VSO lags financially. This explains why some VSO musicians held out for better offers during the long negotiation process for the current contract. However, given the precarious debt position of the symphony, they may have been hoping to squeeze blood from a turnip.

## ENDOWED SYMPHONY POSITIONS

Thirteen positions in the orchestra, including the first chair for almost every instrument, have been endowed in the names of past musicians or major donors. With market fluctuations, these endowments provide a variable proportion of the musicians' salaries, but are of significant help to the overall budget.

The work of the VSO and the three conductors on staff is supported by the management team (administration, development, finance and marketing) of 18 full-time and four part-time employees. John Morison, retired after 26 years as president and CEO of WHRO, has successfully led the symphony to two seasons of economic stability, following the sudden resignation of David Gaylin. An extensive national search resulted in the announcement this March of the selection of Carla Johnson to take over as executive director in June. For the last nine years, she has held several positions with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, rising to vice president and general manager. That orchestra went from a budget crisis to renewed stability between 2003 and 2004, and Johnson's experience in that turnaround should be helpful to the VSO.

## Ranking The Virginia Symphony Orchestra

Evaluating and ranking symphony orchestras is a notoriously difficult task. Some would argue it is primarily a subjective endeavor, though the musical consensus of experts suggests there is more uniformity to evaluation than some might believe. Where does the Virginia Symphony Orchestra stand in comparison with the rest of the nation? Some indicators have already been mentioned. Musical America, a periodical resource serving the performing arts industry, groups orchestras by annual budget, among other things. It identifies nearly 25 with budgets of more than \$10 million. This group includes the country's top five – Boston, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and Cleveland – and a secondary group that includes Baltimore, Buffalo, Atlanta, San Francisco, St. Louis, Pittsburgh and Los Angeles. These orchestras attract the top players and are able to hire larger full-time string sections, an important factor in obtaining a higher level of performance.

The next group of orchestras has budgets between \$3.6 million and \$10 million. The Virginia Symphony Orchestra (current annual budget, \$4.7 million) is in the bottom half of this cluster, which includes the orchestras in Richmond, Syracuse, Toledo and Honolulu (the latter having a budget of \$6.4 million and about \$1 million in accumulated debt), as well as the North Carolina Symphony, which serves the eastern half of the state. There are many more orchestras in the categories with budgets below \$3.6 million.

Compared to many Eastern symphony orchestras, the VSO is a young whippersnapper, because it is only 25 years old as a unified regional entity. As it matures, many of its musicians and, indeed, its conductors, will mature in terms of depth and consistency of performance.

**Morison believes the VSO has reached a level of quality to be included in the top 20 in the nation. Of its performance at Carnegie Hall in April 1997, The New York Times commented, "The remarkable performance by the Virginia Symphony Tuesday night at Carnegie Hall ... was energetic, committed and finely polished." Of its performance at Washington, D.C.'s, Kennedy Center, The Washington Post said, "If the members' work was any indication of their usual standards, this is a fine ensemble." The group also performed on National Public Radio and has finished recording its seventh compact disc.**

In August 2000, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra was accepted into the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians. This honor officially inducted the group into the "major league" of symphony orchestras, alongside such well-known groups as the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and the Boston Symphony. No other fine and performing arts group in the region has attained a comparable distinction.

Perhaps the financial foundation for maintaining and extending this excellence will materialize. One can only hope that Morison's excellent "just in time" leadership will be followed by a new director who will further strengthen the orchestra's finances. The major impediment to this ultimately may not be the quality of the VSO, but rather the relatively narrow appeal of the symphony to the region's diverse population, an issue we consider in the next section.

# Subsidies For The Rich?

In the minds of many Hampton Roads residents, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra is a Norfolk symphony. The symphony argues that it serves the entire region, but the residents of Virginia Beach and the Peninsula in particular have not always warmed to this assertion and support orchestras that compete at some level with the VSO. Further, the clientele of the symphony is predominantly Caucasian and has been growing older. Some observers believe that public support of the VSO represents a subsidy from all citizens to wealthy individuals who should pay their own way. The VSO's supporters, however, argue that public subsidies also support numerous popular-music events at venues such as Town Point Park, Queen's Way, the Hampton Coliseum, the oceanfront and Ntelos Pavilion.

**On occasion, then, the financial support for the VSO has become entangled in economic class and racial considerations in addition to "this section of the city versus that section of the city," according to a Norfolk civic leader. Further, while the symphony is a regional entity and performs consistently from Williamsburg to Virginia Beach, it is nonetheless seen as a "Norfolk thing" in the eyes of many.**

Viewed historically, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra has attempted to imitate the traditional role of European orchestras, most of which have long received healthy public subsidies. In Europe, orchestras often became a city's most important musical institution, not only offering concerts, but also playing for operas, dividing into small groups for chamber music, and passing on skills through teaching at universities and the growing number of music conservatories. In Europe, symphonies are an object of civic pride and there has been relatively little argument about the public subsidies that support them, whether the government was democratic or communist. Great cities have great symphony orchestras, some argue, and they cite Professor Richard Florida's recent research ("The Rise of the Creative Class," 2002) on why some cities and regions prosper, while others do not, as support for their views.

Florida, who holds a professorship at Pittsburgh's Carnegie-Mellon University, asserts that four things usually determine the quality of life of a particular city or region:

1. Lifestyles, including support and tolerance for the unconventional;
2. Environmental quality;
3. Vibrant music and arts scenes; and
4. Natural and outdoor amenities.

He goes on to provide empirical evidence that cities and regions that have this elusive "quality of life" grow more rapidly and are more prosperous. Symphony supporters nationally have seized on this evidence to justify the expansion of public subsidies for a variety of quality-of-life initiatives, including music.

**The question of public subsidies for music and the arts has never been dealt with in the United States in the same way as it has in Europe. Without question, government support for music and the arts in the United States is less than that in Europe. Consequently, American orchestras always have looked to grants from businesses and gifts from individuals to balance their budgets. This generalization also has applied to Hampton Roads, where corporate benefactors such as Norfolk Southern have been generous supporters of the fine and performing arts.**

However, some community leaders believe that virtually any public subsidy of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra is inappropriate because of what they perceive to be the relatively narrow nature of the symphony's support base. "The majority of my voters couldn't care less whether the symphony lives or dies," commented an acerbic elected official. "What they're interested in is their next meal and how they are going to get to work, and if they can keep their job." This official sees no justification for public subsidies of the VSO and believes that symphony patrons "should get out their checkbooks and support it if they really want it."



# The Economic Importance Of The Arts In Hampton Roads

The arts act as both a direct and indirect contributor to any region's economy. According to the U.S. government's Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 1998 consumers spent \$9.4 billion on admissions to performing arts events. This was \$2.6 billion more than expenditures on movie admissions and \$1.8 billion more than was spent on spectator sports. Between 1993 and 1998, consumers increased their spending on performing arts events by 16 percent, or by \$1.2 billion. Nonprofit arts entities employ 1.3 million people full time. Arts activities generate \$790 million in annual revenue for local governments, \$1.2 billion for state governments and \$3.4 billion for the federal government. In Virginia, the arts supported (in 2001) 18,850 full- and part-time jobs, contributed \$849 million in revenue for state businesses and generated \$307 million in value-added income for the work force. Virginians for the Arts reports that Hampton Roads is a leader in this regard and was responsible for more than 56 percent of paid admissions by out-of-state tourists attending arts and cultural events in Virginia in 2000.

Festival music events, most of which offer live music, including performances by the VSO, are attractive to many in the Hampton Roads area and attract tourists as well. A study of the 1999 Virginia Arts Festival conducted by Old Dominion University economists Vinod Agarwal and Gilbert Yochum found its direct and indirect economic impact to approximate \$6 million. More than 85 percent of the festival's spectators were Hampton Roads residents and more than 90 percent said they were likely to return.

**Supporters of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, armed with these data, assert that they provide justification for an increase in public subsidies to the VSO. The public, they argue, likes the symphony. Hence, they believe there is no reason why the region should support minor league baseball teams, circuses, jazz performances and even tractor pulls, but exclude the Virginia Symphony Orchestra.**

## Final Thoughts

Nationally, most symphony orchestras have suffered in recent years from declining attendance, increasing fund-raising difficulties, rising costs and the perception by some that they are elitist institutions out of touch with contemporary musical tastes and an increasingly diverse American populace. These factors have made the financial positions of many symphonies rather precarious. "If you have the potential to help us and be a hero, then call us," Florida Philharmonic Orchestra Executive Director Trey Devey pleaded. His sentiment could well apply to Hampton Roads and the Virginia Symphony Orchestra.

**The VSO is an orchestra of high quality with a talented music director in JoAnn Falletta. Given the size of Hampton Roads and the region's sometimes divisive nature, the Virginia Symphony Orchestra has done well, perhaps remarkably so. It compares very favorably to the Richmond Symphony and other mid-tier orchestras with annual budgets in the \$4 million to \$8 million range. Yet, this cultural gem has an accumulated debt of approximately \$2 million, and prospects for eliminating that debt within the decade are not good, absent an angel of financial mercy. The VSO also must perform in Chrysler Hall, whose acoustical qualities are problematic.**

Ultimately, the symphony will rise and fall on its ability to attract younger and ethnically more diverse individuals to its concerts and on the generosity of its donors. Whether it can succeed in this circumstance, or whether any similarly situated symphony nationally can do so, is not clear.