



LEADER
David Hyslop

BUDGET
\$1M — \$4,999,999

GEOGRAPHY
South Dakota,
Native Nations

YEARS ACTIVE
Founded in 1922

INNOVATION STORY **No 1**

SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

SHARING THE SOUND OF COMMUNITY

South Dakota Symphony Orchestra (SDSO) uses music as a vehicle to build bridges between cultures, advance cultural understanding and create an environment of openness through music. At a time when many regional orchestras are struggling to remain relevant, SDSO is thriving, with a unique focus on serving the community.

“IF I’M SUPPOSED TO LOVE MY NEIGHBORS AS MYSELF, I NEED TO LEARN WHAT MY NEIGHBOR LOVES.”

— DELTA DAVID GIER, SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

STORY BY MICHAEL TODD

INNOVATION

SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

SDSO IS MOVING THE REGIONAL ORCHESTRA EXPERIENCE TOWARD A MODEL THAT SHARES THE POWER OF MUSIC WITH THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY

BREAKTHROUGH



SDSO is driven by the concept of harnessing music's power to build a better culture of understanding between different parts of their community. Their success comes from the work they've done to build inclusive and collaborative working groups to design their growing portfolio of community-focused programs.



A Symphony of Service

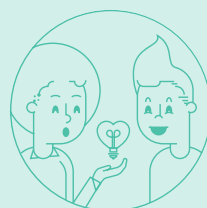
SDSO's small size helps it stay nimble—a vital quality in adjusting its approach toward a model of service. They also worked hard to build trust—spending years listening and learning from Lakota communities before launching the Lakota Music Project. The program now brings music to communities across the state.



Composing the Strategy

The move to a service model helped SDSO regain some of the community relevance it had lost leading up to its near-collapse in 2010. Both symphony musicians and community leaders had input in designing their new strategic plan, a move that helped identify new challenges and opportunities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INNOVATION



WELCOME IDEAS



VALUE EXPERTISE



REPRESENT COMMUNITY

INNOVATION STORY NO. 1

SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



THE LAKOTA MUSIC PROJECT

Before Maya Eagle stepped up to the mic, her high school gym was a little chaotic.

More than 300 of her classmates were gathered there, along with teachers and South Dakota Symphony Orchestra staff and musicians. Like at many school assemblies, the crowd of students was loud and a bit hard for the adults to control. But Maya had no problem commanding the room.

Maya was there to introduce a piece she had written for wind quintet. Titled “No Shadows,” the music is led by a bassoon motif, which represents her uncle who had passed away only a week before she wrote it. The melody is a plaintive one that the flute, oboe and clarinet attempt to brighten.

But faced with the darkness embodied by the French horn, the piece ends heartbreakingly.

Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate, SDSO composer-in-residence, acted as a “living encyclopedia,” a resource for students like Maya when they composed their own works. “Her delivery was magical, and she's got that perfect balance of strength and love. You could hear a needle drop.”

“SHE HAD THAT WHOLE SCHOOL IN THE PALM OF HER HAND,”

— JEROD IMPICHCHAACHAAHA' TATE, SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

“Towards the end of the song, the solo part that the bassoon has is dark again, and the shadow comes through,” Maya explained in a video that SDSO has now played at performances around the state. “The last five measures of the song are like what you’d hear when someone dies in a hospital, when they’re hooked up to a monitor.”

Clearly, the piece and its significance resonated with her classmates.

“When it’s over, there’s huge applause, and everybody’s giving her hugs,” says Jarod. “That’s a brand-new experience for that community right there.”

“IT WAS THE FIRST TIME A LAKOTA PERSON HAD CREATED A WIND QUINTET IN HISTORY.”

— JEROD IMPICHCHAACHAAHA' TATE, SDSO COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE

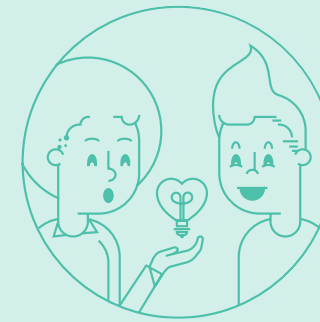


SDSO, STAFF

INNOVATION STORY NO. 1

SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

INNOVATION No 1



WELCOME IDEAS

“Bridges go both ways”: It’s a phrase commonly heard among South Dakota Symphony Orchestra staff, and points to the value they place upon learning from other cultures. And it’s a precise phrase, too. Former executive director Jennifer Boomgaarden says she hates the term “outreach.” Whereas outreach can connote one-directional teaching of “Here’s our way, take it or leave it,” a bridge can stand for the sharing of knowledge, meeting in the middle where cultures join together and learn from each other. As maestro Delta David Gier puts it, “SDSO can then do the right thing for the right reasons in the right way.”



DELTA DAVID GIER

A Symphony of Service

The initiative that supported Maya in writing her quintet—which itself was part of the Lakota Music Project (LMP), a multifaceted, years-long program—represents just one way the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra sees the community as conductor.

“How do we create a conduit or a ladder for people to climb?” asks SDSO music director Delta David Gier. “We want them to be the leaders in the community. I guess at the bottom of [our mission] is if I’m supposed to love my neighbors as myself, the first thing to do is to learn what my neighbor loves.”

Always at the forefront of his mind are the ways SDSO engages with other populations that need amplification, such as the state’s Muslim, Somali and Chinese communities. These thoughtful, organized partnerships are what Gier calls “bridge projects.” He realizes that this

CHARACTERISTIC No 2



REPRESENT COMMUNITY

Now, as it enters its 13th year, the Lakota Music Project is transitioning from breadth to depth, with a new phase that values spending more time in fewer communities—starting with only two: the area around the Black Hills in the western half of the state, and Sisseton, South Dakota, a small town in the northeastern corner. Sisseton Arts Council founder and director Jane Rasmussen says, “The arts are a language and an experience we can use to find commonality.” Specifically because of the orchestra’s work, Rasmussen says further steps toward understanding have been made possible, such as the town’s new crosswalk design, which incorporates elements of Native American beadwork and Scandinavian folk art.



MUSIC AS MEDICINE

model of service and partnership is simply easier to connect to than a modern-day orchestra’s usual goings-on.

“If the focus is on recording touring and only on artistic excellence, you get this ivory-tower syndrome, that not only most people can’t relate to, but they see it as completely irrelevant to their lives and who they are,” Gier says.

Gier came to Sioux Falls, where the orchestra is based, in 2004 after spending 15 seasons as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic. The reason an orchestra in South Dakota was able to turn toward service faster than, say, the Philharmonic’s East Coast counterparts comes down to two things, Gier says: the nimble quality of a small but driven organization, and the can-do attitude of the surrounding community.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



SDSO OFFICES

With those ingredients, the orchestra has sent their string quartet and wind quintet to serve as in-residence teaching ensembles in high schools to perform for children who are hospitalized, and in behavioral health or after-school care facilities.

Rather than performing only classical music or playing pops concerts, SDSO also tells stories of those who are often unheard to help join together the people of South Dakota. They coordinate programs such as Memoirs, where residents at health care facilities meet with a local storyteller to put their life and experiences into a narration, which SDSO’s Dakota Wind Quintet accompanies with music.

IT’S ALL ABOUT BECOMING ACQUAINTED WITH HOW EACH UNIQUE GROUP USES MUSIC TO SOLVE ISSUES.

SDSO's flagship bridge project, the Lakota Music Project, began in 2005 with three years of meetings across the state with tribal leaders to break down barriers and create trust. Through the LMP, a Native American drum group has performed simultaneously with the orchestra, commissions have set music for Native instruments and orchestral instruments to play together, and cities and reservations throughout the state have hosted performances.

So far, the program has gone through two phases, the first of which included a tour to three Native nations and two South Dakota communities. Phase two included a partnership with the South Dakota Humanities Council on the South Dakota tour of the Smithsonian's New Harmonies project, a celebration of America's roots music. Phase two also included a new commission by Jeff Paul for Native American flute and chamber orchestra, along with a four-site tour.

"Using music as language, we've had experiences that sometimes transcend what can happen in a conference where you address an issue," says Jane Rasmussen, founder and director of the Sisseton Arts Council, which has partnered with SDSO. "We experience something that speaks to our hearts and souls. It shows what happens when you look for commonalities rather than differences, when you overcome obstacles in combining a drum group with a symphony."

Composing the Strategy

SDSO is now nationally recognized as an orchestra on the leading edge of innovative programming. But it wasn't always this way.

Just as other orchestras around the country have struggled to reach a wider audience, SDSO was on the brink of closing in 2010 when newly installed executive director Jennifer Boomgaarden delivered an update to musicians: They were going to mount one final effort to save SDSO.

"I was probably six weeks into my time with the SDSO," Boomgaarden says. "We knew there were issues. We determined they were deeper and more urgent than they previously understood."

TO OVERCOME THE FINANCIAL ISSUES, THE ORGANIZATION PUT IN PLACE A SIX-YEAR PLAN TO RETURN TO FINANCIAL STABILITY.

The plan included three phases—crisis management and infrastructure creation, difficult decisions and, finally, sustainability. In practice, Boomgaarden says, the plan was far from linear, but was ultimately a success.

INNOVATION STORY NO. 1

SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

INNOVATION No 3



VALUE EXPERTISE

"Three or four years in, we were struggling with the transition from crisis management," Boomgaarden says of SDSO's sustainability plan. "The crisis was over, we could pay our bills, we'd stabilized the organization. We had a vision for what we wanted to be, but we really didn't have the tools to get there. We started bringing in some outside expertise to assist us in increasing the effectiveness of our fundraising and marketing models."

Thanks to the help of a fundraising consultant, SDSO has set a goal of doubling their annual fund by 2020 and will embark on an endowment campaign to align with their 100th anniversary in 2021.



MUSIC INSTRUCTOR WITH YOUTH

THE ORGANIZATION PAID OFF THEIR ACCUMULATED DEBT TWO AND A HALF YEARS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE.

They also created a significant cash reserve and dramatically strengthened their cash position.

More importantly perhaps, the crisis that led to the sustainability plan was proof that SDSO had lost some relevance within the community. Therefore, a shift toward service has not only been the altruistically right thing to do but has paid off from a financial standpoint—partly because the community is simply more interested in giving because of that shift.

Today, the orchestra is centering their efforts on SDSO 2020, a new strategic plan that is in many ways a continuation of the sustainability plan, but challenges the organization to answer their primary question: How do we realize the vision of service?

In 2016, SDSO formed a futures committee—a broad-based group of both symphony musicians and community leaders—which helped identify the biggest challenges and unrealized opportunities facing the region. SDSO’s vision of service now focuses on four areas, which the committee decided were of utmost importance: embracing growing diversity, strengthening the education system, workforce development and addiction and its impact on families.

So far, the results are promising. Where donors were once interested in just sponsoring concerts, they now are interested in these more engaging programs and how their support might have more impact.

And the impact can be immediately tangible. Speaking about the Music as Medicine program, which brings live classical music to health care facilities, Gier says the stories of patients’ improved lives, because of the orchestra’s work, are what stick with him. He recalls one winter when, due to illnesses or the weather, only one player out of the string quartet, the principal cellist, was able to make it to the Sanford Hospital.

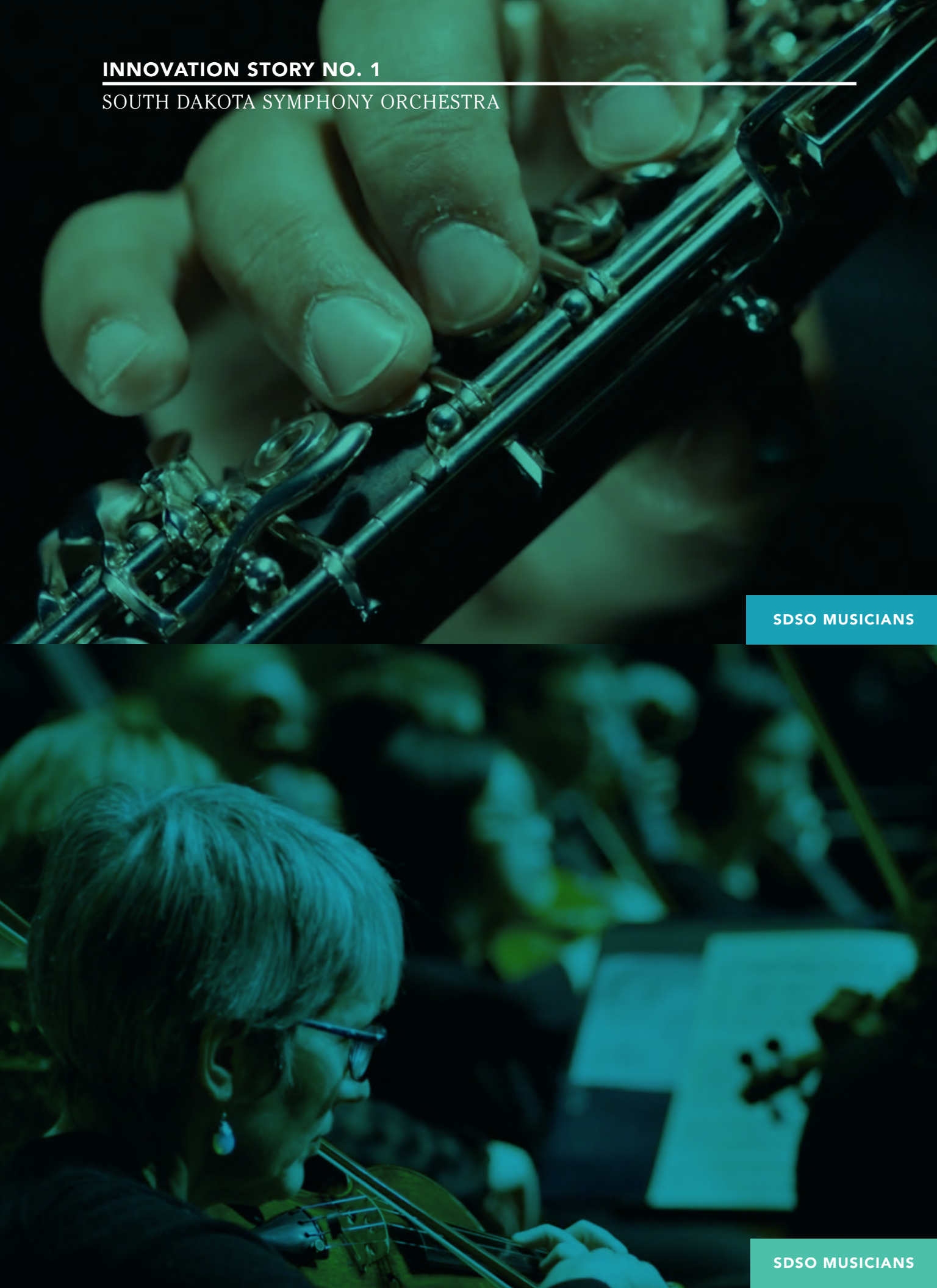
“He just sat down in the middle of this lobby and started playing Bach by himself. Doctors, staff and patients, they were arrested by this. The music of Bach has a special effect. It’s healing just to hear it. To hear it in that context, if you were coming in for cancer treatment, imagine that sense of peace and comfort.”

**“WE’RE MUSICIANS;
THAT’S WHAT WE
CAN DO.”**

— DELTA DAVID GIER, SOUTH DAKOTA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

INNOVATION STORY NO. 1

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SDSO MUSICIANS

SDSO MUSICIANS

