



President and Chief Executive Officer
Seattle Symphony and Benaroya Hall
Seattle, Washington

*The Seattle Symphony unleashes the power of music,
brings people together, and lifts the human spirit.*

The Seattle Symphony (“the Symphony”) and Benaroya Hall seek a highly collaborative, strategic, and transformative leader to serve as its next President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Partnering with the Board, incoming Music Director, and the executive team, the CEO will lead the organization to its highest aspirations in its next chapter, elevating the Symphony’s stature as a premier orchestra in the United States and Benaroya Hall as a cultural beacon for the Pacific Northwest.

From its home in Benaroya Hall in the heart of downtown Seattle, the Symphony is known for its excellence in symphonic and contemporary music, inventive programming, community-minded initiatives, and superb recordings. Recognized as one of the “most vital American orchestras” (NPR), the Seattle Symphony, along with the Seattle Symphony Foundation and Benaroya Hall, has a combined annual revenue of \$38 million, a \$49 million endowment, and approximately 200 employees. With updates to Benaroya Hall in the works, audience numbers increasing annually, and the recent announcement of Xian Zhang as the next Music Director starting in fall 2025, the Symphony is positioned to continue its key role in the cultural life of Seattle and beyond, operating with the same entrepreneurialism and innovation as the city itself.

The CEO will advance a bold and inclusive vision for the institution; energize donors, members, volunteers, and community stakeholders; and set ambitious plans for the future. The next CEO will effectively and persuasively communicate the organization’s mission and the breadth of its work, expand offerings in Benaroya Hall, advocate for resources, and increase attendance and community partnerships. As downtown Seattle regains its vibrancy, the Symphony and Benaroya Hall stand at the heart of this renewal. This critical work will ensure the Symphony is accessible and relevant to audiences and patrons, both locally and globally.

Isaacson, Miller, a global executive search firm, has been retained to support the Seattle Symphony in this consequential search. Confidential inquiries, nominations, and applications may be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

ABOUT SEATTLE SYMPHONY AND BENAROYA HALL

Since its founding in 1903, the Seattle Symphony has built a reputation for inventive programming that includes contemporary music and American Repertoire. Originally located at Christiansen Hall, where the Seattle Art Museum now sits, the Seattle Symphony has been based since 1998 in Benaroya Hall, noted for its architecture and acoustics. The [Seattle Symphony Media](#) label launched in 2014, giving the Symphony full control of its recording output, which includes a catalog of over 150 recordings. The Symphony has received 27 Grammy nominations and five Grammy awards, was named Gramophone's 2019 Orchestra of the Year, and is one of the world's most recorded orchestras. The Symphony performs in Benaroya Hall in the heart of downtown Seattle's cultural district from September through July, reaching over 500,000 people annually through live performances and radio broadcasts.

The Symphony retains world-class orchestra musicians who perform for a 45-week season and also serve as the orchestra for the Seattle Opera. 88 musicians currently constitute the Basic Orchestra for each season. The Seattle Symphony and Opera Players' Organization (SSOPO) is the labor organization that represents the musicians of the Seattle Symphony and Seattle Opera, and stage crew employees are represented by IATSE Local 15. SSOPO is a self-governing chapter of the International Guild of Symphony, Theater, Opera and Ballet Musicians (IGSTOBM), an independent labor organization incorporated in Washington State. Their current four-year contract was [announced](#) in August 2023, and its collaborative approach has positioned the Symphony and SSOPO at the forefront of the industry.

Music Director, Xian Zhang

[Xian Zhang](#) was announced in 2024 as the Symphony's new Music Director and will begin her position in September 2025. Born in Dandong, China, Zhang moved to the United States in 1998 and is now one of two women currently leading a top-tier American orchestra. She is recognized for her commitment to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the arts, and for raising the profile of music composed by women and people of color. Her inspiring work with young musicians has led to numerous collaborations with the orchestras of the Juilliard School, which awarded her an Honorary Doctorate in 2023.

Zhang's boundless energy inspires a powerful sound and a strong connection with musicians and audiences. Throughout her career, Zhang has gained international acclaim, most notably in her eight seasons as Music Director of the New Jersey Symphony and in her recent appearances as guest conductor at the Metropolitan Opera, Philadelphia Orchestra (with which she won a GRAMMY™ in 2023), Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony Orchestra, among others. Zhang also holds the positions of Artistic Ambassador of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Conductor Emeritus of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano.

Staff and Board

The Symphony employs approximately 200 full- and part-time employees, including the musicians. The CEO supervises an Executive Leadership Team comprised of 7 members, including the Chief Operating Officer, Vice

President for Marketing and Communication, Chief Financial Officer, Vice President of Artistic Planning, Chief Development Officer, Senior Director of Education and Community Engagement, Director of People and Culture, plus an Executive Assistant. The CEO is supervised by the Board Chair on behalf of the board and is evaluated annually. The current Board Chair is [Susan MacGregor Coughlin](#), who assumed the role in September 2025. The board uses a committee structure to optimize Board members' time, focus, and expertise, and Directors exercise their responsibilities through service on various administrative and operational Board committees.

Operations and Finance

The Seattle Symphony operates in partnership with two affiliated entities, each overseen by a separate board of directors, with joint appointments to ensure cross-communication. The Benaroya Hall Music Center is leased from the City of Seattle and manages the concert hall's operations. The Seattle Symphony Foundation manages the endowed funds in support of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and Benaroya Hall Music Center.

The CEO is responsible for managing a consolidated annual revenue of \$38 million for Seattle Symphony, Seattle Symphony Foundation, and Benaroya Hall, and an endowment of \$49 million. The [2023/2024 season](#) saw meaningful growth in attendance and a healthy 27% increase in ticket sales over the prior fiscal year. Total earned income, including rental income, increased by 31% to \$16.9 million. Contributed income dropped, reflecting a one-time bequest in the previous fiscal year. Foundation assets grew from \$43.4 million to \$49.2 million.

[Benaroya Hall](#) is a flagship cultural venue and civic asset spanning an entire city block in downtown Seattle. It was completed in 1998 as a major investment in revitalizing the city's cultural core. The City of Seattle owns Benaroya Hall, and the Symphony is the primary resident and operator. The hall's main performance space is the 2,479-seat [S. Mark Taper Foundation Auditorium](#), designed for orchestral performances with acclaimed acoustics by Cyril Harris. The [Illsley Ball Nordstrom Recital Hall](#) is a 536-seat space that offers exceptional acoustic clarity in a more intimate space for solo and small ensemble performances. [Octave 9: Raisbeck Music Center](#) is a 2,500 square foot venue with capacity for 120 seats in a flexible open-concept design that accommodates a range of event types, from traditional performances to immersive audio-visual experiences.

A two-phase campaign is underway to restructure the facility for a wider variety of uses, highlighting it as a welcoming civic resource and community destination. The \$20 million [Amplify](#) campaign launched publicly in 2025 and stands currently at \$15.5 million. The first phase focuses on making the exterior more inviting with new digital signage and key improvements along 3rd Avenue. Phase two focuses on the experience of coming to Benaroya Hall, expanding it from solely a concert venue to a place to have a meal, and a public programming space that is open for local organizations and groups to book and gather. The physical plan is fully designed and executed, but the opportunities remain open for the new CEO to play a role in shaping how the Hall will be activated.

OPPORTUNITIES AND KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The CEO will lead with an inspiring vision, bringing an excellent track record and commitment to working collaboratively through challenges. The CEO will be expected to address the following opportunities and key responsibilities in the coming years:

Strategic Growth and Transformation

The organization is in a period of leadership transition with a new board chair, a new music director, and a new CEO. This has presented an opportunity to set a compelling and innovative vision, build the organization's brand, and set the direction for the future. The CEO will play an essential role in implementing the Board's recently approved strategic vision to expand offerings in Benaroya Hall, increase the use of venue assets, and strengthen ties to broader community programming, driving new revenue and audience growth. The CEO will lead and implement the Symphony's next strategic plan, finding creative solutions that ensure the long-term sustainability of the orchestra and the organization.

Artistic Excellence and Vision

The CEO and Music Director are essential partners in the success of the Seattle Symphony and Benaroya Hall. Xian Zhang is widely respected, experienced, and seen as a major asset by board members and musicians alike, and the musicians are energized and eager to build under Xian's leadership. The CEO will work in close collaboration with the Music Director, as well as with the musicians and other artists performing at Benaroya Hall and the Seattle Opera, building on the strong internal momentum toward growth and artistic excellence and the orchestra's high artistic quality. The CEO will partner with the Music Director, musicians, and artistic leaders in the endeavor to usher in a new era of creative initiatives, continuing to build upon an inspiring artistic vision.

Financial Management and Strategy

The CEO is responsible for managing the consolidated budget of three legally separate organizations: Seattle Symphony, Seattle Symphony Foundation, and Benaroya Hall. Strategic analysis and management of the Symphony's earned income, contributed income, and expenses is needed to stabilize and build the organization. The CEO must understand investment principles, financial stewardship principles, fund management for long-term growth, and foundation compliance requirements. As the lead fundraiser, the CEO will be expected to build the endowment, broaden the donor base, and ensure the growth and success of the Symphony's annual and capital campaigns.

Partnership and Facilities Synergy

The relationship with Benaroya Hall is a unique asset—the Symphony controls the Hall's programming and operations in a financially favorable arrangement. The CEO will ensure effective venue management of Benaroya Hall and explore the potential to unify operations between Seattle Symphony and Benaroya Hall, reducing inefficiencies and maximizing revenues and scheduling control. The CEO will direct the senior leadership team in

advancing a new operating model to improve efficiency and maximize earned income, including governance changes. They will work to expand earned income from leases, rentals, and commercial productions in accordance with tax-exempt status requirements.

Civic and Cultural Engagement

Seattle is home to a community that is diverse in its interests and exudes an entrepreneurial spirit. This contributes to a region that is culturally engaged and receptive to creative programming. Opportunities exist to expand the Seattle Symphony's role in civic life through strategic partnerships and more accessible and expanded offerings in music and non-music events. The CEO will bring a track record of community-engaged programming to leverage these assets for increased access and expanded reach, building and expanding relationships and partnerships to continue to serve as a leader in the Seattle arts and nonprofit communities.

Leadership and Organizational Culture

The CEO will be an inclusive leader who supports a culture of collaboration and brings a transparent leadership style that honors multiple opinions and builds mutual trust. The CEO will bring a deep understanding of the range of internal and external stakeholders inherent to performing arts organizations, and will cultivate a values-driven and positive work culture across the organization. The successful hire will model exceptional communication skills and work with the senior leadership team, staff, musicians, and the Board to continue facilitating broad collaboration, forthrightness, and vision across the organization.

Board Engagement and Development

The Board is committed to fostering a collaborative culture that values multiple viewpoints and robust discussion of key decisions' pros and cons. The CEO will foster and work effectively with an engaged Board, maintaining productive relationships with all Directors and cultivating prospective members of the Board. The CEO will sustain effective working relationships with the Chair and committee chairs in overseeing artistic, financial, and operational matters.

Qualifications

The desired candidate will exhibit the following experiences and track record:

- Substantial leadership experience in an organization of similar complexity and significance that has transformed its level of influence in its respective communities.
- Prior responsibility for the financial results of a business segment of an orchestra, performing arts organization, or non-profit.
- Proven donor cultivation and fundraising skills, ideally within the cultural and artistic worlds.
- Understanding of performing arts and/or orchestra venue management and performance production issues, and of capital facility maintenance, operations, and investment; ability to review with understanding contracts for both the Symphony musicians and other uses of Benaroya Hall.

- Passion for and commitment to the Symphony as a civic organization with the ability to create effective partnerships with other civic organizations. Track record of community engagement work and experience with performance opportunities outside the primary venue.
- Ability to develop and execute a plan for audience retention and growth. Expansive and creative thinking about the Symphony's potential impact on the civic arena and the Seattle downtown area.
- Interpersonal communication skills, charisma, emotional sensitivity, public speaking abilities, appreciation of and track record of working with diverse communities, and commitment to consistent and transparent external communication.
- Demonstrated history of strong collaboration with a Board of Directors.
- Ability to identify, analyze, and prioritize issues confronting the organization in terms of risk, both as to likelihood and severity.
- Track record of managing a complex organization or division with multiple functions that needed to work together cohesively. Experience building strong operating processes and systems, resulting in operational viability and sustainability.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION

The anticipated compensation for this position is a salary range of \$400,000-500,000, commensurate with experience, plus standard benefits. The CEO is expected to reside locally and have a regular presence at the office and events, ensuring visibility and accessibility with staff and the community. Periodic travel for conferences, events, and network building is expected.

APPLICATIONS, NOMINATIONS, AND INQUIRIES

Screening of complete applications will begin immediately and continue until the search process is completed. Inquiries, nominations, referrals, and applications with resumes and letters of interest should be sent via the Isaacson, Miller website for the search. Electronic submission is strongly encouraged.

Ben Tobin, Courtney Wilk-Mandel, Nella Young, and Cara Meyer
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/seattle-symphony/president-and-chief-executive-officer>

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The Seattle Symphony is part of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) program and has pledged to support Guard and Reserve employees.