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Baltimore Symphony Orchestra plans to raise \$65 million

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Peter Kjome is CEO of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.
JOSHUA GORDON

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra plans to raise \$65 million — the biggest fundraising campaign in its 101-year-old history.

The campaign, called "Resounding: The Campaign for the BSO's Second Century," will raise \$50 million toward the orchestra's endowment, \$10 million to advance its educational programs and \$5 million to support its annual fund. The organization has already raised \$42.6 million toward its goal, with a goal of completing the campaign by December 2019.

Chairwoman Barbara Bozzuto said in a statement the campaign "will help secure the best possible future for the BSO."

"Strengthening our endowment and expanding the reach of our stellar educational programming will ensure that the BSO continues to remain a cultural gem," Bozzuto said.

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra looked at models from other top orchestras around the United States in developing its campaign, CEO Peter Kjome said. A major part of the campaign includes increasing the endowment so it can sustain the orchestra's future growth.

Growing the endowment will help the orchestra attract and retain top musicians, Kjome said. He described a competitive market for musicians, saying that more than 100 people apply when a position opens.

Musician contracts were also one of the first items on Kjome's agenda when he became CEO in December 2016. At the time, Kjome also said at the time he wants to grow the BSO's "family of audience members and donors."

The orchestra's endowment is also used to provide new, innovative programming, like the popular Pulse series that paired classical music with prominent indie and alternative artists. Another popular event series allows the audience to watch films from the Harry Potter series while the orchestra performs the score live. The orchestra also performs a "Cirque de la Symphonie" where its music is accompanied by acrobats.

"We are attracting the next generation," Kjome said. "We want to expand our audience but realize it's important to play our core repertoire, as well. Things like Pulse and having acrobats performing with the orchestra combine music with visual appetites. They create new ways for us to do different things."

Some of the money from the endowment will also be used to ensure affordable pricing options for patrons.

Expanding the orchestra's youth program, OrchKids, is also priority. The after-school program, spearheaded by Music Director Marin Alsop, aims to get children more involved with music. It is free children and held at six Title I schools in the city. BSO wants to use the \$10 million to expand the program to more school and reach more students.

"Involvement in the program helps encourage discipline, helps children stay in school and stimulates cognitive development," Kjome said.

Alsop said in a statement the BSO is "positioned to be a transformational force that transcends socioeconomic barriers to bring people together."

"This campaign will ensure that the BSO has the appropriate resources needed, both today and in the future, to sustain the artistic excellence of this world-class orchestra and continue the important work of bringing music into the communities we serve," Alsop said.

Some of the money being raised will also be used for the organization's youth orchestras to provide talent and need-based scholarships.

Finally, \$5 million will also be raised to increase the BSO's annual fund over five years. The fund accounts for about 60 percent of the organization's \$27 million annual operating budget.

The campaign does not raise any money for capital improvements to the Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall. While the 35-year-old building is in need of upgrades, Kjome said the BSO is focused on its current campaign before moving onto another one.

The BSO will adopt a new five-year plan later this year, Kjome said, which will likely include capital improvements.

Kjome declined to disclose who any of the campaign's donors have been so far. The campaign has received support from board members and previous donors, he said. The organization will release more details about who gave once it gets closer to reaching its goal.

Kjome said he is confident the organization will complete its goal by December 2019, noting that there are ongoing "important conversations."

"It will take us this year and next to reach the goal," Kjome said. "That said, I would be delighted to reach the goal early."