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THE FLORIDA ORCHESTRA RECEIVES MOCKINGBIRD FOUNDATION GRANT FOR DETENTION CENTER STRINGS PROGRAM

ST. PETERSBURG, FL — The Florida Orchestra has been awarded a $10,000 grant from the Mockingbird Foundation to expand its Detention Center Strings program, an innovative partnership that engages vulnerable youth with classical music.

The grant will help The Florida Orchestra grow violin and cello instruction sessions from 14 weeks to 16 weeks at Department of Juvenile Justice facilities in Hillsborough County. Participants receive hands-on music education, culminating in performances inside the detention centers, at retirement communities and as part of the orchestra's Lobby Performance program at major performing arts halls throughout Tampa Bay.

"We are grateful to the Mockingbird Foundation for investing in the power of music when these young people need it most," said Ignacio Barrón Viela, President and CEO of The Florida Orchestra. "This support helps us bring meaningful musical experiences to vulnerable young people at a pivotal time in their lives. Through music, we can foster confidence, connection and hope while helping students develop skills that can positively shape their futures."

Detention Center Strings is part of the orchestra's Strings Project, an ongoing commitment to education, wellness and community partnership throughout Tampa Bay. The program uses music as a tool for personal growth, self-expression and connection, helping students develop discipline, teamwork and creative confidence.

"A Detention Center Strings student once told me, 'Learning the violin proves that I can make people proud and do good things in life,'" said Bethany Thompson, TFO's Senior String Specialist, who specializes in prison and juvenile justice music education. "We are deeply grateful for this grant, which will enable more incarcerated youth to experience that same moment of possibility. Being recognized for their potential can open up a whole new world of possibilities for how they envision their future."

The grant was awarded as part of the Mockingbird Foundation's latest round of music education funding. Founded and operated entirely by volunteer fans of the band Phish, the Mockingbird Foundation has awarded 793 grants totaling more than $3 million to music education programs across all 50 states since 1996.

The Florida Orchestra was one of 12 organizations nationwide selected in the Foundation's 31st round of competitive grants, which drew 939 initial inquiries requesting more than $6 million in funding. Due to such high demand, Mockingbird's two-tiered online application process remains one of the most competitive in the nation.

As The Florida Orchestra wraps up its 58th season, this investment comes at a time of significant growth for the orchestra's music education programs. In the 2025-26 season, the programs increased their reach in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties and continued collaborations with the Boys & Girls Club. Annually, the orchestra serves more than 150,000 through concerts and innovative education/community programs combined – more than 60,000 of those for free or low cost.

About The Florida Orchestra

The Florida Orchestra's mission is to INSPIRE | EDUCATE | UNITE to build community through the power of music. Celebrating our 58th season in 2025-26, The Florida Orchestra is the largest professional orchestra in the state and the only

arts organization that bridges the bay. TFO employs 70 full-time professional musicians and conductors, under the artistic leadership of internationally acclaimed Music Director Michael Francis. Each season, the orchestra performs more than 100 concerts in venues throughout Tampa Bay, including a wide range of classical, popular, film and family-friendly music, as well as performances with global stars such as Wicked star Cynthia Erivo. Beyond the concert halls, TFO programs bring the transformative power of music to schools, youth and senior centers, to underserved areas and to those who would not have such opportunities otherwise. Through concerts and education/community programs combined, TFO serves more than 150,000 residents each year – nearly half through free or low-cost programs. For tickets and information: FloridaOrchestra.org. The Florida Orchestra is a non-profit 501(c)3 EIN: 59-1223691 CH#1830. To learn more about how you can support the power of music in building community, contact: sweymouth@floridaorchestra.org To donate now: FloridaOrchestra.org/donate

About Mockingbird Foundation

The Mockingbird Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that has been operated entirely by volunteer fans, with no office, salaries, or paid staff, since its inception in 1996. Mockingbird is now a leading provider of historical information about the band Phish and its music, having cultivated intellectual property through Phish.net since 1994. Also a leading grantmaker in music education for children, the Foundation has now made 792 grants in all 50 states (including 26 so far in 2026) and totaling more than $3 million. Proceeds are generated by celebrating the music of Phish through books, recordings, art, donations and special events, including the upcoming Eleventh Annual Runaway Open golf tournament.