OVERVIEW

EarShot is the nation’s first ongoing, systematic program for cultivating relationships between orchestras and emerging composers. A national network of new music readings and composer development programs, EarShot identifies fresh voices reflective of the rich stylistic and cultural diversity present in communities across the country. The program is completely customizable; activities are focused to serve each orchestra’s programmatic goals and community-defined vision.

EarShot is a program of the American Composers Orchestra, in partnership with American Composers Forum, the League of American Orchestras, and New Music USA.
In 2018, EarShot reached over 2,000 new community members through multiple neighborhood performances at Grand Rapids Symphony, integrating the orchestra and participating composers with the highly visible ArtPrize festival.

In 2018, Earshot curated a showcase of orchestral works by emerging women composers for the Philadelphia Orchestra. It resulted in all six composers being commissioned.

In 2019, EarShot supported the Detroit Symphony Orchestra’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by facilitating a call for scores and recruitment strategy that cultivated a robust pool of Black American composers, with educational programming integrated into the readings experience.
OUTCOMES

- Each reading generates 8-12 high level orchestral works from emerging composers, aligned with programmatic priorities.
- Composer-orchestra relationships extend beyond the EarShot readings. On average, 1-2 works by participating EarShot emerging composers are programmed on a future concert by partner orchestras; many orchestras commission new works from one or more of the participant composers.
- Past participants indicate that EarShot is a defining moment in their early careers, jumpstarting relationships with professionals in the field and building artistic and civic practice skills towards future commissions and residencies.
PROGRAM COMPONENTS

- National call for scores, identifying orchestral composers who have had less than 2 pieces performed by professional orchestras via ACO’s vast network of emerging composers and institutional partnerships
- ACO-led preparation of scores, in partnership with copyists and partner orchestras’ librarians
- 2-3 reading services with orchestra, selected composers, and established mentor composers
- Opportunities for feedback from orchestra musicians, librarian, and conductor, leading to score revisions
- Relationship building and professional development opportunities
- Composer-led activities in community spaces and educational settings
- A pipeline to extended commissioning opportunities via ACO and the League of American Orchestras
DIVERSITY

EarShot recruits and selects emerging composers that reflect the rich stylistic and cultural diversity present in the communities our partner orchestras are privileged to serve.

In the 2019-2020 season, participants were:

- 58.5% Cisgender Men
- 35.5% Cisgender Women
- 6% Transgender and Nonbinary
- 34% Asian
- 29.5% Hispanic and/or Latinx
- 21% White
- 17.5% Black
- 5% Indigenous
ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

ACO provides:

- A detailed production schedule and optimal timeline created in collaboration with the partner orchestra’s administration
- Facilitation of EarShot composer applications including: call for scores and active recruitment; receipt, acknowledgement, and processing of submitted materials; assembly and administration of review panel
- Selection of mentor composers, in collaboration with orchestra’s artistic staff, to coach EarShot composers before and during the readings
- A professional music engraver, to facilitate production of professional parts
- Curriculum and panelist recommendations for professional development workshops
- Marketing materials, including composer bios/images, EarShot logos and funding credits
- Air travel for participant composers to/from the Readings

ACO accomplishes its work in collaboration with the League of American Orchestras, American Composers Forum, and New Music USA, each of whom assists with recruitment, publicity, and program design.

Partner Orchestras provide:

- 2 or more orchestral services
- Conductor and venue for readings
- Input from the partner orchestra’s Artistic Director and/or conductor on final composer selection
- Lodging for 1-2 ACO staff, up to three mentor composers, and up to six participant composers
- Catering for working meals
- Venue space for all feedback sessions
- Quality recording of at least one reading made available for each composer’s personal reference (in compliance with section VII.C. of the 2020 IMA)
- Library support for preparation and dissemination of parts and scores; return of performance materials to each composer
- Conductor and musician mentors for feedback and prep sessions
- Press release about program and participant composers
- Honoraria and travel for mentor composers
- Copyist/engraver fees for final score and parts review
- Score review fees for submission review panel
- Honoraria and travel for Professional Development guest speakers
- Commitment to commissioning one of the final participant composers for a future performance
- Board and/or patron event in connection with readings
- Onstage discussion and audience Q&A after the final reading/recording
CASE STUDY #1

Detroit Symphony Orchestra
Side-by-Side Educational Programming

Summary: The Detroit Symphony Orchestra integrated their Education department with the EarShot readings in 2019. Three days before the readings, the chosen participant composers worked alongside ACO Education Director Kevin James, guest artist Jessie Montgomery, and DSO Teaching Artists to create and implement learning modules for students K-12 in local public schools. The learning modules presented at the local schools used the music that the composers had written for the readings to teach concepts of rhythm, improvisation, and harmony. Students were invited to the readings of full works later in the week. The experience spanned 9 days, including 2 days of readings and related educational programs.

Outcomes:
- Reached 500 students and 40 adult educators in one day
- Solidified partnerships with local public schools
- Built relationships with 4 Black orchestral composers

Detroit Symphony Orchestra EarShot Education 2019, Photo by Aiden Feltkamp
"EarShot Education was an energizing whirlwind of a weekend that proved to me that beyond the art we create, one of the most useful and powerful skills we as artists can develop is the ability to articulate what we do for audiences of all backgrounds."

-EarShot Detroit Participant Composer

"EarShot has helped me to get in gear as I prepare to teach a 4-week summer course at a prestigious university in terms of planning a mode of engagement / interaction. It has made me approach how I would engage a classroom in a different way."

-EarShot Detroit Teaching Artist

Detroit Symphony Orchestra EarShot Education 2019, Photo by Aiden Feltkamp
CASE STUDY #2

Grand Rapids Symphony
Building Community through ArtPrize

Summary: Grand Rapids Symphony planned their EarShot readings amidst the city’s 2018 ArtPrize festival. ArtPrize is an annual, 18-day international art competition which takes place in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Symphony closed the reading rehearsals to the public but performed the works 4 times as part of the ArtPrize competition. The widely-publicized performances were held in an art museum that was open to the street with speakers amplifying the orchestra’s music on the sidewalk, encouraging passersby to come in and participate. The readings consisted of 2 rehearsals & 4 short concerts (for a total of 4 services), and spanned 5 days.

Outcomes:
- Over 2,000 new contacts added to symphony’s mailing list
- Commissioned new work from one of the participating composers
- Work by a participant composer won an ArtPrize competition award, amplifying the symphony’s visibility
"EarShot was one of the most meaningful experiences I have had as a composer. The program was structured in such a way that facilitated making connections that go deeper than networking. The level of care that I felt on every organizational level made the week into a true celebration of music, community, and humanity."

-EarShot Participant Composer

"EarShot provided an invaluable opportunity for me to gain experience working with a professional orchestra as a composer. It was clear that the musicians, orchestra staff, and mentor composers were committed to the development of each of the participants' work. I look forward to utilizing their feedback not only in the piece that was workshopped but also in future pieces that I will compose."

-EarShot Participant Composer
CASE STUDY #3

Houston Symphony
Discovering Latinx Composers

Summary: The Houston Symphony focused their EarShot readings on the works of Hispanic and Latinx composers. At their request, ACO executed a call for scores and recruited with this demographic focus. Call for scores received 137 applications; 20% from marginalized genders, 7% from Indigenous artists, and 20% from countries outside the United States.

Outcomes:
- Working relationship established between the Symphony and 7 Hispanic/Latinx orchestral composers from North and South America
- 4 new works chosen to be read, all Hispanic/Latinx, 2 women and 2 men

Composers (clockwise, starting top left) Marco-Adrián Ramos Rodríguez, Diana M. Rodríguez Aguilar, José G. Martínez R., Patricia Martínez
ALUMNI

Selected EarShot Alumni

- Julia Adolphe
- Andy Akiho
- Lembit Beecher
- Courtney Bryan
- Saad Haddad
- Jonathan Bailey Holland
- Niloufar Iravani
- Carlos Simon

Selected EarShot Partner Orchestras

- Aguascalientes Symphony Orchestra
- Berkeley Symphony
- Buffalo Philharmonic
- Colorado Symphony
- Detroit Symphony Orchestra
- Grand Rapids Symphony
- Fort Wayne Philharmonic
- Jacksonville Symphony
- Nashville Symphony
- New York Philharmonic
- San Diego Symphony
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