



BILLINGS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA & CHORALE

2721 2nd Ave N, Ste 350 • Billings, MT 59101 • (406) 252-3610 • www.billingsymphony.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 28, 2020

The Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale to Receive Grant
from the National Endowment for the Arts

BILLINGS MT- The Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale (BSO&C) has been approved for the \$10,000 Challenge America grant to support *West Side Story: Symphony Concert Version*. This project will bring the modern day telling of Romeo & Juliet to area Title 1 schools. It illustrates the racism that confronted the Latino and specifically Puerto Rican residents in New York.

Overall, the National Endowment of the Arts has approved 1,187 grants totaling \$27.3 million first round of fiscal year 2020 funding to support arts projects across the country. The Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale is one of 14 Challenge America grant included in this announcement.

The Challenge America funding category offers support primarily to small and mid-sized organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to populations that have limited access to the arts due to geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability. Each grant is for a fixed amount of \$10,000 and requires a minimum of \$10,000 cost share/match.

“The arts are at the heart of our communities, connecting people through shared experiences and artistic expression,” said Arts Endowment chairman Mary Anne Carter. “The National Endowment for the Arts is proud to support projects like the Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale’s *West Side Story*.”

“We are delighted to receive support from the NEA. It allows us to continue to inspire people from the underserved communities through our music programs.” Said Ignacio Barrón Viela, Executive Director of the Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale. “Our educational outreach programs include artist talks about diversity, equality, and inclusion. We will visit schools, community organizations and correctional facilities. We are excited to perform *West Side Story* for the first time in Montana.”

In 1957, *West Side Story* broke the mold of the American musical by addressing violence, racism, poverty, and intolerance with a riveting musical score that underlined these issues with every note, issues we still face today.

The performance will include artists from Broadway, National, and International Tours. The artists will engage students and others by combining musical coaching with discussions about racism and diversity. Our goal to have the activities leading up to the performance and the performance itself, will inspire and



BILLINGS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA & CHORALE

2721 2nd Ave N, Ste 350 • Billings, MT 59101 • (406) 252-3610 • www.billingsymphony.org

embolden people to openly recognize the challenges our society faces today and work to change the narrative for a better future.

The Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale (BSO&C) is the largest professional orchestra in Montana. Established in 1951, the BSO&C strives to enrich lives through music. Consisting of over 135 musicians, the BSO&C serves a regional population of 400,000 people located throughout South Central and Eastern Montana, and Northeastern Wyoming by introducing music to children, youth, adults and seniors through *Explore Music!* the BSO&C's community engagement program.

For more information on projects included in the Arts Endowment grant announcement, visit arts.gov/news.

For more information about *West Side Story: Symphony Concert Version*, visit <https://billingsymphony.org/west-side-story-in-concert/>

Contact:
Michelle Dawson
Manager of Marketing & Public Relations
406-297-3712 | michelle@billingsymphony