

# Celebrating 60 Years

Since 1961, the Meridian Symphony has been a foundation for the performing arts in our community. From our humble beginnings with only forty-five musicians playing at the Meridian Junior College Auditorium to our current roster of eighty musicians in our present home at Mississippi State University's beautiful Riley Center, the Meridian Symphony Orchestra continues to be a jewel in the crown of the Queen City.

It would be impossible to say that the MSO has flourished in the last sixty years by chance. No, indeed, many dedicated individuals have contributed to the success we now celebrate. Founding member Dorothy Lerner, long-time patron and endowment founder Emma McCain, and champion extraordinaire Dr. John McEachin are but a few outstanding supporters who have established the symphony's place of prominence within the arts community. In addition to patrons and supporters, the MSO has been led by three maestros of elite caliber – founding conductor Vernon Raines (1961-1989), Dr. Claire Fox Hillard (1990-2011), and Dr. Peter Rubardt (2013-present). These gentlemen, along with hundreds upon hundreds of the country's best musicians and countless volunteers, have provided East Mississippi and West Alabama with more than three hundred classical and pop symphonic concerts, more than fifty children's concerts, the establishment of adult and children's choruses, and countless educational programs and community activities.

Under the leadership of Executive Director Susie Johnson (2010-2019), the Symphony began an intensive focus on music education, redefining its mission to include educational outreach programs for young people. With the help of a generous grant from the Phil Hardin Foundation, the Meridian Symphony Association established a school and community strings program, began an annual Link Up! concert in partnership with Carnegie Hall, and joined forces with the local, public school systems to strengthen the newly established Any Given Child initiative.

In the 2019-2020 season, as the orchestra was giving performances of a lifetime alongside acclaimed artists Sandra Shen, The Texas Tenors, and a host of local Broadway stars, the public health crisis involving COVID-19 emerged and life in the arts forever changed. To ensure the safety and well-being of patrons and musicians, the concert season was cut short, the music hall fell silent, and the chaotic sounds of young musicians learning and practicing new concepts were sadly hushed. However, as we have attempted to adjust to a new way of life, something remarkable has happened: the joy of music has ushered in a newfound unity that is most profound. Our community has been reminded just how important we are to one another, and how the sounds of our home bind us together no matter our age, race, or background.



There is so much to love about Meridian: good homes, good schools, delicious food, fabulous fashion, good jobs, strong community partners, high-level healthcare. Doesn't that sound amazing? Yes, **Meridian Sounds Amazing!** At the **Meridian Symphony Association**, we have come to realize that during the last sixty years the beautiful harmony between the old and the new resounds in our city.

As newly appointed Executive Director Carra Purvis and Maestro Rubardt mitigate the challenges of a symphony within the COVID-19 era, priorities and focus may change. But rest assured, the symphony is here to stay, creativity abounds, and it does truly sound amazing.

From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for your continued support of the Meridian Symphony and your patience during these unprecedented times. We thank you for the last sixty incredible years, and we are thrilled to walk into the next sixty with you by our side.

**#MeridianSoundsAmazing**

## COVID-19 SAFETY POLICY

As can be expected, this season will be unlike any other. The Meridian Symphony Association and The MSU Riley Center staff are working diligently to provide the safest concert possible. Our patrons can expect the following safety measures upon attending a MSO concert this fall:

- Stanchions and other COVID-19 mitigation to provide appropriate social distancing as you enter and exit the theater
- Thermal imaging cameras to screen for fevers
- 50% seating capacity allowing for approximately 4 feet of distance between parties
- Masks will be required inside the theatre
- Prior to each performance, the entire venue will be disinfected
- Elevators limited to 6 persons
- Enhanced Will Call services

**Due to what future guidelines may be required, please note that all of these policies are subject to change and/or expand at any time.**