



**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**SYMPHONY OF NORTHWEST ARKANSAS**  
**Fayetteville, Arkansas**  
[Symphony of Northwest Arkansas](#)



The Aspen Leadership Group is proud to partner with Symphony of Northwest Arkansas in the search for an Executive Director.

The Executive Director will assume responsibility for the management of all human and financial resources needed to achieve the symphony's mission. The Executive Director will be the 'face' of the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas (SoNA) in the community and serve as its chief fundraiser. Many of the most prominent and influential members of the community are connected to SoNA, and the Executive Director will benefit from a supportive, diverse, and highly skilled network. The successful candidate will forge new relationships and build SoNA's visibility, impact, and financial resources while designing and implementing a comprehensive plan to achieve ambitious fundraising goals.

Founded in 1954, Symphony of Northwest Arkansas has provided 65 years of performances and educational opportunities and has, in the most recent past, become a cultural leader in the region. Under the musical direction of nationally-recognized Paul Haas, SoNA presents classical and pops concerts throughout the region and arts integrated education in area schools. While it is a resident company of Walton Arts Center, SoNA also performs in Benton County in locations as varied as John Brown University, the AMP, and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Other important collaborations include those with the Jones Center for Families, the Bentonville Film Festival, University of Arkansas, and libraries in Fayetteville, Prairie Grove, and Springdale.

SoNA's commitment to its mission has generated support from a broad array of community members. Philanthropic organizations who have supported SoNA include the Walmart and Walton Family Foundations, the Baum Charitable Foundation Trust, Arkansas Arts Council, Bogle Family Foundation, Starr Foundation, Willard and Pat Walker Charitable Foundation, Endeavor Foundation, and the League of American Orchestras.

With its masterworks and holiday programs at Walton Arts Center and through partnerships with Crystal Bridges, John Brown University, the Walmart AMP, Cooper Chapel, and others, SoNA now performs for over 20,000 people of all ages in Benton and Washington counties each year.

In education, SoNA has served over 3,000 elementary students since 2013 and this year, it begins a mentorship program with 500 high school string students in Bentonville, Fayetteville and Rogers. Its musicians will join these students in a special performance for elementary schools in the Springdale district in May. New this season, SoNA is proud to offer free tickets to children under 18 to its concerts at WAC.

## REPORTING RELATIONSHIPS

The Executive Director will report to the Chair, Board of Directors, Julianne Brown, Ph.D.

## PRINCIPAL OPPORTUNITIES

*The Symphony of Northwest Arkansas occupies a prominent place in the region's arts community and benefits from meaningful artistic, philanthropic, and strategic partnerships. After a period of sustained growth, SoNA now operates at a \$1 million annual budget with a \$1.2 million portfolio. A loyal subscriber and donor base, a high sales rate, and annual budget surpluses put SoNA in position for innovation. The next five to ten years will hold opportunities for further audience development through new performance outlets and concert formats designed to reach deeper into the community, and alignment with several innovative emerging arts partners and entities who are shaping the region's cultural offerings.*

*SoNA is governed by a 13-member Board of Directors comprised of C-suite level executives, community leaders, and arts advocates. Additionally, one SoNA musician attends meetings as a representative of the Musicians Committee. SoNA prioritizes transparency, which has created a climate of communication and understanding between management and orchestra.*

–Julianne Brown, PhD, Board Chair

## PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

The Executive Director will

- support, communicate, and advocate for the mission and vision of SoNA;
- enhance and enable the future of the SoNA through strategic planning, community collaboration, and participation;
- in partnership with the Board of Directors, design, implement, and track multi-year business plans for the future with measurable goals, taking into account the changing realities of the environment, locally, regionally, and nationally;
- seek out, cultivate, and steward relationships with potential and existing donors, including individuals, foundations, and corporate partners;
- serve as a key strategist and partner in the cultivation, stewardship, solicitation, and retention of individual and institutional fund development and planned giving, and related meetings and activities;
- oversee administrative staffing to ensure that the organization is effectively structured and staffed;
- provide leadership to staff to ensure maximum effectiveness through coaching, feedback, staff planning, support, and accountability;
- assist Board committees in developing and implementing their goals and objectives;
- develop strategies to inspire, mobilize, and utilize non-board volunteers in support of SoNA and its programs;
- provide leadership for the organization to meet standards of excellence in governance, fiscal responsibility, and human relations;
- actively participate in Board meetings and key committees;
- maintain a strong working knowledge of symphonies, innovations, and new trends in the field for arts organizations;

- maintain positive relationships with orchestra personnel;
- ensure a strong multi-year budgeting and forecasting system, including programming costs, operating, and capital expenses;
- ensure all financial policies and procedures are followed, including audit recommendations;
- provide regular and persuasive internal and external communications to increase enthusiasm for SoNA activities among stakeholders and new audiences; and
- serve in partnership with the Board Chair and Music Director as the primary spokesperson in the press and community in advancing TSO's mission and vision.

## ARTISTIC LEADERSHIP



**Paul Haas**

### **Music Director**

Paul Haas was at the start of a promising conducting career when he devised and produced a concert project called REWIND in 2006, featuring composer and musician colleagues and violin soloist Anne Akiko Meyers. REWIND was a reaction against the staid nature of the standard classical music performance: audience members surrounded the performers, then left and started playing behind the audience on all sides. There were mirrored sculptures by Kate Raudenbush hanging from the ceiling, interacting in multifaceted ways with the subtle theatrical lighting design. Music started before the audience arrived, and it continued without pause – even between pieces – until after the audience left. A laptop artist injected samples of the orchestra and the audience into the texture.

The success of REWIND prompted Haas to found Sympho, an organization devoted to the creation and performance of symphonic experiences in unusual venues. The inspiration for Haas' work comes from a wide array of spiritual and ecological sources, including a longstanding meditation practice and a deep connection to the Earth that finds Haas, along with his wife Suzette and two young girls, in the process of beginning an organic homestead that aims eventually to be self-sustaining.

One result of Haas' immersion in this creative process is his emergence as a composer: over the last decade, fifteen commissions have come in from a wide variety of iconic venues, including the Park Avenue Armory and Rubin Museum of Art in New York, Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, the Anchorage Museum of Art in Alaska, and the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design in Arkansas. Haas is the first artist ever to receive two separate commissions from the Oliver Ranch Foundation in Sonoma County, California, creating installations for Ann Hamilton's groundbreaking Tower. An equally rich part of Haas' professional life is his service as Music Director of SoNA, a position he has held since 2011.

Haas is a graduate of Yale University and The Juilliard School, where he studied conducting as a Bruno Walter Fellow with Otto-Werner Mueller. His other conducting teachers include Michael Tilson Thomas and Leonard Slatkin. He also studied opera conducting in Dresden, Germany, at the Hochschule für Musik. Haas is currently Music Director of the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra. He resides in Germantown, New York with his wife and three children.

## KEY COLLEAGUES



**Julianne Brown, Ph.D.**

**Chair, Board of Directors**

**Global Director Talent Management, John Deere**

Julianne earned her Ph.D. in Industrial-Organizational Psychology in 2010 before joining Walmart where she held multiple roles in Talent Management, overseeing executive assessments and selection, executive education, coaching, and executive development. Julianne also led teams responsible for strategy and design of top talent leadership programs, functional talent strategies, and served as project manager for the President's Global Council of Women Leaders before leading C-level and VP-level pipeline programs. In 2018 Julianne joined Deere & Co. as Global Director, Talent Management. In this role, she is responsible for the strategic direction for the company's talent management solutions, including succession, learning, leadership development, assessments, analytics, and coaching. She also guides and directs efforts aimed at the achievement of high employee engagement. In addition to her role as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas, Julianne serves on the Board HR Committee for Make-A-Wish of the Mid-South, and likes to spend evenings at OrangeTheory Fitness, planning travel, or finding local live music.



**Ben Harris**

**Director of Operations and Annual Giving**

As Director of Operations and Annual Giving, Ben is responsible for schedules, venues, guest artist, and Music Director travel, and equipment moves, as well as Annual Campaign, gift processing, database management, and special events and fundraisers. Ben is a professional musician, college music professor, and booking agent. Originally from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, Ben studied classical guitar at Western Kentucky University and jazz at the University of Arkansas (Little Rock) where he completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in Music. He earned a Master of Arts degree in Music Composition from the University of Arkansas (Fayetteville) in 2008. Ben has an active teaching career with experience at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the Benton County School of the Arts, the University of Arkansas, and currently, Northwest Arkansas Community College. He is an active member of the Fayetteville Jazz Collective and owns his own booking agency, Porter Jones Entertainment.



**Aaron Bleidt**

**Board of Directors Member**

**Principal, Doxa/Vantage**

**Founder, Vantage Point Communications**

With 19 years of leadership experience in media, marketing and publishing, Aaron Bleidt served from 2000 to 2010 as founder/publisher and executive editor of *CitiScapes Metro Monthly*, Northwest Arkansas' longest running regional lifestyle magazine. Upon selling the publication, he established Vantage Point Communications in 2010. Through Vantage Point, he has led numerous successful marketing and public relations campaigns, particularly in the mid to large nonprofit, arts/culture, tourism, and

community development sectors. A native of Fayetteville, Arkansas, and a longtime participant in civic/community affairs, Aaron has served on a number of government and nonprofit boards, including a gubernatorial appointment to a state commission and being elected to three terms in office representing Fayetteville on the Washington County Quorum Court, the county's legislative body. He was selected as a volunteer intern to the White House during the Clinton Administration as part of the Arkansas II White House program, working in the Executive Office of the President and National Economic Council. In the nonprofit arena, he has had the pleasure of supporting and serving on the boards of Habitat for Humanity, Single Parent Scholarship Fund, Abilities Unlimited, Fayetteville Downtown Partners, Fayetteville Underground, NWA Museum Foundation, and most recently on the board of the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks and as an ambassador for Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art. Aaron recently received a C-suite Award from the *NWA Business Journal*, recognizing area CEO's and C-level leaders for career achievement. On the personal front, Aaron is an avid art collector, and can often be found on his mountain bike or kayak exploring the great Northwest Arkansas outdoors. He also enjoys travel writing, and sharing with the world just how great his hometown region really is!

### **PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS**

Symphony of Northwest Arkansas seeks an Executive Director with

- a resourceful and entrepreneurial perspective and the ability to work in a collaborative style and maintain balance in a demanding and fluid environment;
- exemplary communication skills and the ability to communicate effectively, build rapport, and relate well to people with varying age and values;
- a commitment to consistently placing a high value on SoNA's extensive network of internal and external stakeholders with a keen focus on listening to, understanding, and appreciating feedback;
- a demonstrated ability to connect dots, see the big-picture, and recognize long-term effects and future trends;
- a demonstrated ability to oversee major gifts cultivation, stewardship and solicitation; and
- a demonstrated ability to prioritize and complete tasks necessary to meet or exceed the mutually agreed upon expectations while being accountable for personal and professional actions.

A bachelor's degree is required for this position. Five to seven years of management experience in a performing arts institution is preferred.

### **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION**

The Symphony of Northwest Arkansas does not discriminate against employees or applicants on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, marital status, political affiliation, or reasonably accommodated physical handicaps.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion is a top priority of SoNA's mission and board efforts. In the past five years, SoNA, with the support of a strategic consultant partner, worked to build out and focus efforts on serving diversity with the NWA community. Taking part in events focused on the Hispanic community, free events at smaller venues, and an effort to plan more chamber

opportunities throughout the community are some of the ways in which SoNA feels that it can reach a broader audience and make music more accessible.

When it comes to hiring a new Executive Director, considering a diverse slate of candidates is very important to SoNA. SoNA has intentionally grown diversity within its Board of Directors and has been proud to expand that effort with recent significant additions to its artistic leadership. SoNA welcomes guidance and best practices on how to make this a truly diverse and inclusion-driven search and effort.

### **SALARY & BENEFITS**

Symphony of Northwest Arkansas offers a competitive salary and benefits package.

### **LOCATION**

Northwest Arkansas (Washington and Benton counties, including Fayetteville, Bentonville, Springdale, Siloam Springs, and Rogers-Lowell) is the state's center of commerce and culture. It is home to a world-class art museum (Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art), the state's largest live-music amphitheater (Arkansas Music Pavilion), and a treasure trove of distinctive historic downtowns, four state parks, hundreds of miles of prime hiking and biking trails, an ever-evolving culinary and craft brew scene, college and professional sports teams, and so much more. Driven by a deep tradition of philanthropy and conscious quality of life initiatives, the region has grown exponentially in the past fifteen years to reach an MSA population of 500,000. At the same time, living in Northwest Arkansas is manageable and friendly, with both small city charm and rural elements, alongside unparalleled art, food and performing arts. Fayetteville itself is a quintessential college town, home to the University of Arkansas. The region enjoys year-round temperate climate and easy access through Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport.

There is a reason NWA is chosen as a "best place to live" by magazines and the news from multiple angles every year. It is truly that "hidden gem" and it almost gets old hearing visitors say "I never knew!" Whether it's someone that loves the outdoors, wants to focus on family events or the best schools, or someone that wants access to a serious art and food scene – NWA truly has something to offer. The community is so proud and so invested in making NWA successful that it's easy to get engaged and make an impact. SoNA is fortunate to be surrounded by such an invested, connected, and active community. This is also what will make the Executive Director position unique – navigating so many invested voices, donors, and a long-history of pride in this region means a lot of relationship building and maintenance at the highest level. SoNA is proud of the area and how much it has to offer; the new Executive Director will no doubt find a quick rhythm and support system.

## APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

All applications must be accompanied by a cover letter and résumé. ***Cover letters should be responsive to the mission of Symphony of Northwest Arkansas.*** Review of applications will begin immediately and continue until the successful candidate has been selected.

*To apply for this position, visit:*

[Executive Director, Symphony of Northwest Arkansas.](#)

*To nominate a candidate, please contact Anne Johnson:*

[annejohnson@aspenleadershipgroup.com](mailto:annejohnson@aspenleadershipgroup.com).

*All inquiries will be held in confidence.*