



Final Farewell: Southwest Florida Symphony to close June 30

After more than six decades of presenting outstanding orchestral performances for the enrichment, entertainment and education of the community, the Southwest Florida Symphony announces its decision to permanently close. The Symphony will continue operations through the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2025.

“We are so proud of the countless joyous experiences and treasured memories that the Southwest Florida Symphony has provided to residents, visitors and music lovers across our community over 64 years,” said Tom Uhler, president of the board of trustees for the Southwest Florida Symphony. “We are honored to have the longtime support of many donors, supporters and concert goers who have shared our love for orchestral music over the years. While we bid farewell to this chapter, the Southwest Florida Symphony team remains committed to preserving the rich legacy of orchestral music and its impact on the community.”

As Lee County’s only professional orchestra and one of the oldest symphony orchestras in Florida, the Southwest Florida Symphony has created a legacy in Lee and Charlotte counties, playing a substantial role in helping members of the community discover and enrich their love of music. Established as the Fort Myers Symphony in 1961 as a community orchestra consisting of 24 volunteer musicians, the Symphony spent its early years performing a handful of concerts in community centers, schools and churches, growing a following throughout the region. In 1981, it merged with a chorus and became the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra & Chorus Association.

The Symphony later grew to a roster of 70 world-class musicians. Each season, the orchestra presented a series of Masterworks Concerts, Pops Concerts, and Holiday Pops Concerts at multiple smaller venues throughout Lee and Charlotte counties. In addition to expanding its

concert series to multiple communities throughout Southwest Florida, the Symphony has also performed in other cities throughout the state.

The unfortunate fact is that classical music is struggling to thrive across the country. There are very few suitable, cost-effective venues in Lee and Charlotte counties and the costs of performances have grown to be very expensive. There is also an abundance of live entertainment options competing for the community's attention.

As a nonprofit that relies heavily on donors and sponsors, with ticket sales covering a fraction of the orchestra's budget, this reality has resulted in annual operating deficits. Despite financial prudence and tireless efforts to persevere, repeated annual deficits that the Symphony experiences due to operational restrictions, increased performance costs and loss of state funding are no longer viable.

“After much consideration and given recent leadership departures at the staff and board levels, the Board of Trustees has determined that the only course of action is to close the Southwest Florida Symphony,” adds Uhler. “It was a difficult decision, and I'm proud of the board's commitment to the Symphony with consideration for the staff, the musicians, the donors and community. We appreciate everyone's support over the years.”

About Southwest Florida Symphony

The Southwest Florida Symphony debuted as a community orchestra on April 15, 1961, playing in schools and community centers with a roster of only 24 volunteer musicians. Today, the symphony boasts a roster of 70 world-class professional musicians and is Lee County's only entirely professional orchestra. The Southwest Florida Symphony's 64th year marked the orchestra's tradition of artistic excellence and innovation as Interim Artistic Advisor Maestro Stilian Kirov led a season of spectacular performances.