



Grand Opening of Williams Family Symphony Hall Celebrates Paducah's Musical Heritage

Paducah, KY – March 3, 2025 – Paducah is proud to announce the grand opening of the newly restored Williams Family Symphony Hall, located within the historic Walter C. Jetton Jr. High School. This milestone event marks the culmination of a \$16 million transformative initiative, the Dunlap Project, aimed at revitalizing the school into a vibrant community hub for arts and education. As a UNESCO Creative City of Crafts & Folk Art, Paducah is deeply committed to preserving its cultural and architectural heritage. The completion of this ambitious project underscores that dedication while fostering accessible creative expression in the community.

Grand opening festivities for the Williams Family Symphony Hall will commence on Saturday, March 8, 2025, with an event hosted by the Paducah Symphony Orchestra (PSO). The Grand Opening concert will feature Dr. Grace Woodworth, PSO Principal Oboist and Academy Director, and Miss Kate Lee, pianist, who will assist in dedicating a new Steinway Spirio Grand Piano. The PSO invites guests to join them to reflect on local history and celebrate the future of the organization.

The following day, Sunday, March 9, the celebration continues with a special Paducah-themed concert by the Paducah Singers, the region's only professional choral group. The ensemble will perform a selection of roustabout songs, transcribed by local musicologist Mary Wheeler in the early 20th century and arranged by William Averitt, a native of Paducah who attended Walter Jetton Jr. High School in his youth. These songs, traditionally sung by laborers known as roustabouts who worked on riverboats and docks, played a significant role in the development of early jazz and blues music. The performance of these pieces offers a rare opportunity to experience the rich cultural tapestry of the American inland waterways, reflecting the city's historical connection to river commerce and the diverse communities that contributed to its growth.

This concert will feature the world premiere of a commission composed by Averitt, with text by famed choral conductor, Robert Bode. The piece, titled *Music in the Soft Air*, captures pivotal parts of Paducah's history such as the 1937 flood ("Cow on the Porch"), and the Illinois Central Rail Line, as well as iconic Paducah institutions, like Hotel Metropolitan and Washington Street Baptist Church. The event will also include a performance by The Wheelhouse Roustabouts, a local bluegrass band known for their dedication to preserving the musical traditions of the inland waterways.

The restored Williams Family Symphony Hall will serve as a central venue for recitals, choir concerts, and community events in Paducah. The restoration of this historic venue not only preserves an essential piece of Paducah's architectural heritage but also reinforces the city's commitment to fostering a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable creative economy.

Tickets for the Paducah Symphony Orchestra concert on March 8 are available at paducahsymphony.org. The Paducah Singers concert on March 9 is free and open to the public.

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