

Supporting the next generation of music lovers at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

# Fidelity FutureStage®

*This interview, conducted with Nan Ives, Vice President, Corporate Sponsorship, at Fidelity Investments, describes the Fidelity FutureStage program, which involves the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Merit School of Music, and Kelly and Hirsch Metro High Schools.*

Fidelity always has had a long-standing commitment to the arts. For many years, our corporate sponsorships focused on organizations in the Boston area since that's our home base. Three years ago, we made the commitment to go beyond Boston to partner with other deserving arts organizations.

The Fidelity FutureStage program that we launched in Chicago actually came about as an offshoot of a Broadway sponsorship that we started in New York City. That program was designed to nurture the next generation of theatre lovers. About 600-800 kids from local schools participated in the program. They received extensive experience in playwriting, with homework, coaching, and one-on-one feedback from theatre professionals. The capstone of the project was writing a play, with the chance to have it acted by fellow students and produced on a Broadway stage at the end of the year.



The night of that first Fidelity FutureStage Broadway performance was really something. There was so much energy and excitement in the air. It was the most inspiring evening! I've worked at Fidelity for 18 years now and this program really demonstrates what makes Fidelity such a great company. The next morning after the student performances, we stepped back and said, "Let's do the same kind of program in music." We're now doing the Fidelity FutureStage music program in four cities—Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, and Houston.

When we select schools to sponsor, we look for ones that have an existing music program in place. We just want to put some Miracle-Gro on it to help it expand. In Chicago, we identified two schools, Kelly High School and Hirsch Metro High School, which had the programs, students, and commitment to make Fidelity FutureStage work over a two year period. The Merit School of Music partners with us to provide ongoing mentoring and support to both schools, and the CSO has hosted visits, performed for students, and offered performance opportunities for a number of young students.

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Instrument donation is one very exciting part of Fidelity FutureStage. We donate \$25,000 worth of new instruments to each school based on the schools' needs and, to date, have donated more than \$500,000 in new instruments to students throughout the country. Earlier this year, we staged the donation to Hirsch students as part

of a day-long event at Symphony Center. The kids arrived at Buntrock Hall, got Fidelity FutureStage t-shirts, heard performances and comments from CSO musicians, lunched at The Club, and got their own backstage tour of Symphony Center. It was a full agenda of activities at the Hall, involving CSO staff and musicians, and officials from the Chicago Public Schools, Merit School of Music, and Fidelity. Toward the end of the program, we announced an “additional surprise” for the students, and then pulled open a curtain to reveal an array of brand new instruments that had been hidden on stage. CSO musicians then helped hand out the instruments to the students. It was a wonderful way to end the day.

This is the launch year, and we are evolving and constantly building on the model for the program. For example, similar to what we do in our Broadway sponsorship, we hope to include a composition project so students can create an original work, and have the chance to have a “grand finale” for their effort, either by performing it at their school or in a public venue. We’re also looking at the possibility of creating a documentary film to capture the students’ work and accomplishments. At the end of two years, we are looking forward to a very complete program that will add up to a memorable musical learning experience—one that, we hope, will last a lifetime.