



## CHARLOTTE SYMPHONY

CHARLOTTE, NC

### *The Mill Community Project*

The Charlotte Symphony's Mill Community Project, a unique facet of its extensive Community Partnership Program, explored and paid tribute to the disappearing history of the orchestra's home Piedmont region, once a thriving center for textile manufacturing. This multi-year, collaborative composition project grew from a suggestion by David Mills, the orchestra's principal tuba player, who worked in the mills in his youth. Encompassing scholarly research, oral history, and visual arts as well as music, the project resulted in a composition by David Crowe. This work, "Mill Village: A Piedmont Rhapsody," along with the visual art installations, discussions and symposia surrounding it, creates a deeply felt evocation of the mill culture that once dominated the area and built its economic base, but is now in danger of being buried by the modern age.

Tom Hanchett, staff historian at the Levine Museum of the New South, who collaborated on the project, says, "Having the symphony celebrate the mill history sends a powerful message. It says that this history is one of the foundations of this region, and that the people who made that history are of value. As classical music, it takes the celebration to a real height. To have mill workers celebrated in St. Peter's Episcopal Church downtown, with its Tiffany window, and when the symphony takes the time to come to Gastonia, which once had more looms and spindles than any other county in the US – that builds a really exciting bridge for everyone."

"Mill Village" has already had a dozen performances in the region and has been expanded from its twelve-instrument chamber version to one for string orchestra. Listeners are invariably touched by it, and by the images on the film that accompanies the work. Par Talbert, a musician whose parents grew up in the mills, heard the stories all her life but says, "I never thought of this as a culture in itself until I started working on this project. My mother, who is 79 and not a classical-music person, said when she heard the piece, 'That really did sound like the spinning room floor.' It was very moving to see the arts come together to preserve this experience and culture."

