

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **HOBBY CENTER TO EXPAND EXXONMOBIL DISCOVERY SERIES, DOUBLING STUDENT PARTICIPATION**

*Free Series Will Serve Up to 40,000 Houston-Area 5<sup>th</sup>-Grade Students*

**(HOUSTON, TX)** — The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts will once again welcome thousands of Houston-area students for the 2025–26 ExxonMobil Discovery Series, a free educational initiative designed to engage and inspire the next generation through live performance.

Building on this year's expanded reach of 20,000 students, next year, the program will double and serve up to 40,000 students by utilizing both the larger Sarofim Hall and the more intimate Zilkha Hall — opening the door for even more young minds to experience the power of the arts.

“The generosity of partners like ExxonMobil and others enables us not only to sustain, but also expand this free, life-changing program for Houston-area students,” said Mark Folkes, Hobby Center President and CEO. “Philanthropic support makes it possible for thousands of students to be welcomed into a world-class theater, connect to the artists and stories on stage, and dream bigger than they ever imagined. It’s an investment in their future—and in the future of our community.”

ExxonMobil will continue its role as the title sponsor of the series.

“The Discovery Series is a vital program for Houston, granting students the opportunity to experience memorable performances they might never have had the chance to attend,” said Alvin Abraham, global manager of corporate giving at ExxonMobil. “We are committed to supporting initiatives like these that broaden access to Houston’s arts and culture, inspiring the next generation.”

Early exposure to the arts nurtures the capacity for critical thinking and develops students’ creativity, communication, relationship-building, and leadership skills.

In 2025-26, the ExxonMobil Discovery Series will grow to serve 13 Houston area partner school districts including:

Aldine ISD	Houston ISD	Spring ISD
Alief ISD	Humble ISD	Texas City ISD
Dickinson ISD	Klein ISD	YES Prep
Fort Bend ISD	Pasadena ISD	
Galena Park ISD	Sheldon ISD	

Through thoughtfully curated, curriculum-connected performances presented during the school day, the ExxonMobil Discovery Series brings professional, high-quality shows to life for students from across Greater Houston. For many, it’s their very first time inside a theater.

After seeing *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, students from Hirsch Elementary School “came back beaming with excitement, raving about the incredible performers and the powerful storytelling,” said Hirsch Elementary Principal LaToya Patterson. “What impressed them most? That the artists took the time to answer their questions after the show. Our students felt seen, heard, and inspired.”

Anderson Elementary School saw a similar ripple effect. “Before we attended the show, only about half my students knew about the movie, and none of them had read the book or seen a stage production of this classic American story,” said Anderson Elementary Principal Kristin Falcon. “Since seeing the show, several of our students have requested *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* book from our library, and many of them have shared with me the connections they made between *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the new movie version of *Wicked*. Experiences like this help us improve literacy and build cultural competency in our children.”

This kind of meaningful impact is what the series aims to create—bridging the gap between the classroom and the stage and giving students a chance to experience storytelling in its most immersive form. In addition to engaging students and educators, the ExxonMobil Discovery Series leverages Hobby Center resources to amplify impact for other arts organizations by connecting them with expanded audiences and providing infrastructure for education and outreach.

For Houston-based artists, the ExxonMobil Discovery Series offers a platform to scale their work and connect with young audiences in unforgettable ways. “Being a part of The ExxonMobil Discovery Series at the Hobby Center has been an absolute game changer for Open Dance Project,” said Executive Artistic Director Annie Arnoult. “It allowed us to increase the audience reach of our school show by 500% in the 2024–25 Season.”

That growth is set to continue in the upcoming season. “Moving to Sarofim Hall at the Hobby Center in 2025–26 means that we will double that reach once again,” Arnoult said. “Presenting our dance theater adaptation of L. Frank Baum’s beloved novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* on the beautiful and illustrious Sarofim stage allows us to achieve the spectacular scope and scale for which the performance was originally designed. What a wonderful way to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the publication of this American literary masterpiece and Open Dance Project’s 10th anniversary!”

### **The ExxonMobil Discovery Series 2025-26 Season:**

**Sept. 24-26, 2025** | Open Dance Project | *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*

**Oct. 6-9, 2025** | Ars Lyrica Houston | *Orígenes: voice and percussion through the ages*. Curated by Cecilia Duarte & Jesus Pechuco (bi-lingual in English and Spanish)

**Oct. 21-24, 2025** | The Ensemble Theatre | *Don’t Worry Willy*

**Oct. 28-30, 2025** | YUNGCHRIS & Sonkiss’d Dance Concepts | *My Posse’s on Broadway* (originally commissioned by Performing Arts Houston)

**Nov. 11-13, 2025** | Cirque Mechanics | *TILT!*

**Nov. 18-20, 2025** | Houston Contemporary Dance Company | *Female Expression*

**Jan. 20-22, 2026** | Musiqa & NobleMotion | *Free Rein*

**Feb. 4-6, 2026** | Mercury Chamber Orchestra | *Mozart: Cats and Mice*

**Feb. 17-19 & 23-26, 2026** | Urban Souls Dance Company | *Colored Carnegie* (originally commissioned by Performing Arts Houston)

**Mar. 24-26, 2026** | Chapman Dance | *Dance to Connect*

**The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts** serves as a connector, convenor and incubator for all Houston audiences, artmakers and arts organizations. Opened in 2002, the campus houses two theaters including the 2,650-seat Sarofim Hall and the 500-seat Zilkha Hall. Delivering a best-in-class patron experience, the Hobby Center welcomes over 400,000 audience members annually to engage with high-quality arts programming including the Memorial Hermann Broadway at the Hobby Center series, Beyond Broadway series, Live at the Founders Club, and more. The Hobby Center is also home to a full season of musical theatre produced by Principal Resident Company Theatre Under the Stars, as well as a variety of diverse performances from both Houston-based and touring artists and companies. Education and accessibility initiatives are central to the Hobby Center's impact in Houston through programs like the ExxonMobil Discovery Series that welcomes thousands of fifth-grade students to free performances every season. Please visit [TheHobbyCenter.org](https://TheHobbyCenter.org). Follow the Hobby Center on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X](#).

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