

Donor & Volunteer Spotlight



Glen & Susan Binnington

by Trena Taralson

Music has always been at the core of Glen and Susan Binnington's relationship. They started donating to YONA back in 2016 after learning about the program at an ESO concert.

Since then, the couple have been monthly donors but it wasn't until they attended an Open House Tour at St. Alphonsus School, the main site for YONA, that they understood the full scope of the program. After attending, Susan says, "I'll always remember the feeling and how it made me want to cry."

"Once we learned more about the program, I wanted to give all my charitable donations to them. There's a million places I could donate my money, but I like this because I can see that it's helping people in my own community and making a difference to children who are our future."

One of Glen's favourite memories has been watching the students perform at the Winspear Centre during the Road to Joy Fundraising Concert each year. "I think watching the kids on the stage with the Symphony Orchestra was really just mind-blowing, seeing what they could do was amazing, really. That for me was a big thing."

Since then, the couple have been champions for the YONA program throughout Edmonton. They have brought friends each year to the Road to Joy fundraising concert. Susan recalls, "The first year we went with two friends but after that I wanted to fill the whole auditorium! I tell everyone I know!"

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Glen Binnington:

“Watching the kids on the stage with the Symphony Orchestra was really just mind-blowing.”

Before the COVID-19 pandemic shifted YONA programming online, Susan also started volunteering weekly with the students. It’s something she hopes to be able to continue once in-person programming is able to resume.

“I was really enjoying it when I was allowed to. I never initiated a hug but it’s so wonderful. One of the first days I was there, one of the kids just came over and gave me a big hug and I didn’t even know this child yet and it was just so lovely. Then when I went to volunteer at the St. Teresa site, one of the kids who I knew from the previous year said, ‘Hello Ms. Susan’ and came over and gave me a big hug and that was wonderful.”

Susan Binnington:

“...I like this, because I can see that it’s helping people in my own community and making a difference to children, who are our future.”

Both Susan and Glen say they have felt and seen the transformative effects of music on the lives of young people, including their own children. They say they will continue to support the program because they believe it will change the life of every child that has the good fortune to be in the program. 🎵

YONA Bottle Drive Recap

by Trena Taralson

The sun was shining on YONA's first-ever Bottle Drive fundraiser held in the parking lot of Screen Craft Industries on April 17.

Thanks to everyone who came by and donated their bottles or provided cash donations. In total we raised \$8,655 for our students!

We are so incredibly thankful to everyone who got involved from students to volunteers and donors.

There was a tremendous outpouring of support from our community. Vehicles were lined up before we even "officially" got underway at noon and after only one hour, we had already filled one trailer full

In total, we raised \$8,655!

of bottles! We quickly ordered another and were able to fill more than half of it as well before wrapping up the day.

A huge thank you to Triple H SouthSide Bottle Depot for the use of their trailers and to Robert Spindler of Screen Craft Industries for the use of their parking lot and for making us signs to promote the event!

We can't wait to do it all again next year! 🎵

Below: St. Theresa Site Manager Ms. Kristin and Mr. Norm, one of our YONA volunteers, pose in front of our second trailer of bottles

Right: Ms. Kristin with Taylor, one of our senior violin students who brought by bottles.

Bottom right: Twinning! Percussion teaching artist Ms. Jen and violin student Emnet show up in matching outfits!



YONA Spotlight: Rive!

Interview by Trena Taralson

“I really like making music, learning music, and making new friends. YONA always encourages me to do better!”

Rive is a percussion student in her second year with YONA.

Q: What do you love about YONA?

I really like making music, learning music, and making new friends. Yona always encourages me to do better.

Q: Who is your teacher at YONA?

Ms. Jen. She's very caring and always encourages you, no matter what. She always makes your day better and is very easy to talk to. She cares about all of us equally.

Q: What is something you're proud to have learned with your instrument?

On the xylophone, I've learned a few different songs and on the timpani I played “Ode to Joy” once.

Q: What do you like about playing percussion?

For the xylophone, I like the high pitch noises it can make and on the timpani, I like the low sounds.

Q: What has been your favourite part of YONA this year?

Getting to do music no matter what happens, with Covid or without!

Q: What's your favourite piece of music to play?

“Ode to Joy.”

Q: What is something you want everyone to know about YONA?

It's very encouraging and it's very fun! 🎵



Rive, a YONA percussion student.

Online Composition: A Unique Way to Collaborate

by D.T. Baker

Most of the COVID-era YONA-Sistema updates have tended to focus on workarounds that the students and Teaching Artists have discovered or invented as a way of compromising, of making the best of a situation no one would have preferred over the in-person interactions of a Sistema-based program like this.

But the composition project launched by the St. Alphonsus consort, led by Teaching Artists Jen Delainey and Andreas Wegner, uses the online platform – born of necessity – as a means of creating something that would not have been possible any other way.

“With this composition project, the students are involved in every step of creation,” Mr. Andreas explains. “Most of the work is done by the students themselves. They can hear what they have written instantly, revise anything they don’t like, and collaborate in real time.”

“This group had a really amazing bond and collaborative ability after our first project together, recording a grid style video,” adds Ms. Jen. “Because of this, and the interest they showed in the technology that we used for the recording project, I wanted to

propose to the kids a way to further explore technology that they had begun to work with, both to further develop the comprehension of scores and their role in the orchestra, as well as to tailor our lessons to the group’s keen interests!”

Eight students are working on composing a piece of music, together but apart. If we’re describing it the way it would appear in a program of “classical music,” it would be called a multi-movement work: a slow introduction followed by a more celebratory final section.

Or, as the students ended up titling it, *Slow Day Relaxing at Home – Dance Party at the End*. It’s in G Major, continuing our program notes description, in 4/4 time. Or at least it is so far. It’s still a work in progress, and the students’ creativity is being drawn out of them each step of the way.

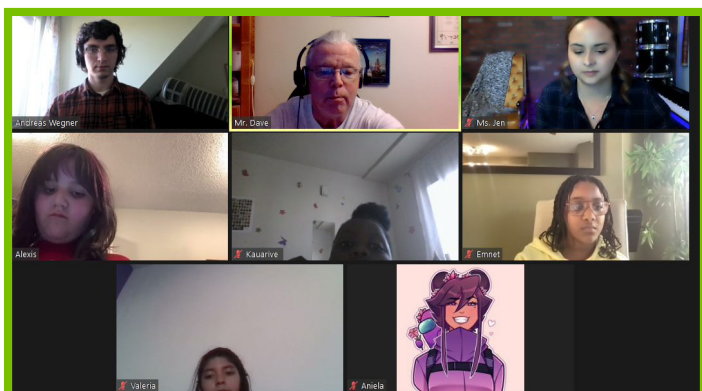
“We went back and forth a little bit on different ideas of what sort of projects we could do,” says Ms. Jen, “but after a few ‘spaghetti to the wall’ attempts of giving the kids the freedom to explore and create, it was clear that sparks were flowing and they wanted to continue.”

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"The idea behind the piece was to address some shortcomings that are involved with creating a 'split screen recording' that is very common these days," as Mr. Andreas notes. That was the sort of project the St. Alphonsus cohort undertook for the Winter Celebration online performance. "In that kind of project, students record their part individually. There is a lot of pressure to play the whole piece accurately to the metronome in a continuous take, as well as dealing with poor audio and video quality. There are also difficulties involved with the students then uploading the files, which can be large. In this whole process, students are generally isolated from each other in the creation process and don't know what their part will sound like as part of the whole until the end."

versa. We will be talking about the role of melody, harmony, rhythm and tasking students with providing these elements."

"I intend to open up some discussions about harmony, balance, melodies and countermelodies, and how we create them," adds Ms. Jen. "We've been talking lots about triads and intervals, and we've been having lots of fun building chords! We will also talk about percussion's super fun and unique role of adding so many different textures to sounds, and the many forms of sound effects we can create. My hope is that the kids will take the discussions we have together and implement some of the things we talk about into the duo and trio portions of Mr. Andreas' lessons."



Mr. Andreas:
"With this composition project, the students are involved in every step of creation."

Ms. Jen:
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Slow Day Relaxing at Home – Dance Party at the End is still in its infancy, with the plan to unveil it at the online year-end YONA presentation that will have to take the place of the Road to Joy concert that would typically end the YONA school year. And because each COVID-divided cohort in YONA this year is split up by school group, rather than instrument families, the still-gestating work is for a fascinating combination of instruments.

Two violins (Aniela & Emmet), two basses (Larry & Jasmine), two flutes (Valeria & Magda), a clarinet (Brennan), and a glockenspiel (Alexis) form the octet. Mr. Andreas has begun the work, scoring two bars on an app deliberately created for online music collaboration and creation (called Flat), and leaving gaps to be filled in by the students. Right now, the students are each scoring two bars independently, but the idea will be to add various combinations of other instruments, and build the work that way.

"I'm providing guidelines on the orchestration, and groupings of trios and duos is next," Mr. Andreas notes. "If needed, I can provide more guidance, such as providing the notes but not the rhythm or vice

Chatting with the students following one of their composition classes, some of them say they have already given composition a try, on their own, before. Those that have say that adding their own creative material to a piece, music that needs to "blend in," is a whole new challenge. But it's also a unique way to incorporate the ideas of collaboration, listening, and responsibility that are core to the Sistema principles.

The world premiere of Slow Day Relaxing at Home – Dance Party at the End is slated for June 8, during the year-end celebration standing in for the annual Road to Joy concert. More details are coming – as is the dance party at the end! 🎵



The 30-Day Practice Challenge

by D.T. Baker

Marian and Nils: challenge participants!

Practice. We've all heard the clichés. It makes perfect. It takes 10,000 hours of the stuff. It's how you get to Carnegie Hall. And it's how you drive many a young musician bonkers.

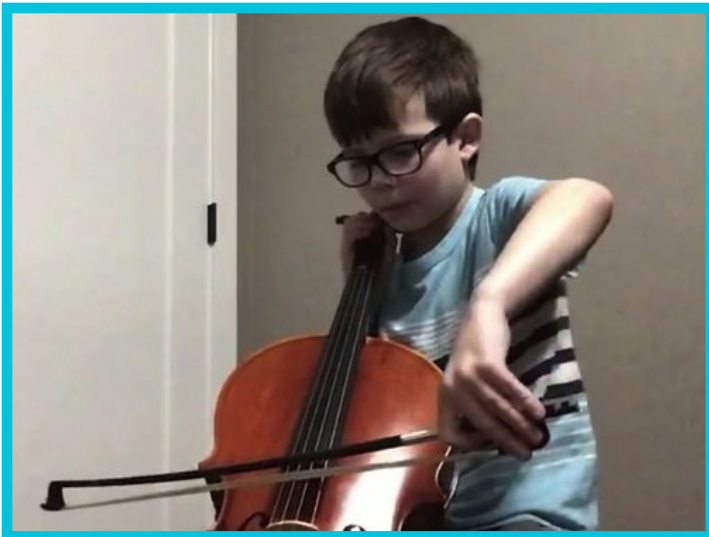
But it's crucial – no doubt about it. So finding ways to keep musicians engaged, especially in these trying times when the experiences cannot be shared in the usual way, is equally crucial. And for Ms. Natalie, woodwind Teaching Artist for YONA-Sistema, the solution has been, well, incremental.

It's called the 30-day challenge. "To get the idea was very easy – Sistema Moncton, I saw on Facebook was doing the same thing," she admits. "They announced their 30-day challenge on Flipgrid and I immediately thought, 'What a fantastic idea!'" Flipgrid, by the way, is a simple-to-use, video discussion app designed for educators of students of all ages. And it's free. "They all have devices,"

explains woodwind Teaching Artist Natalie Boisvert of the full range of YONA students, "but a lot of them are too young to have e-mail addresses, or their parents don't want them to have one yet. This is what Flipgrid allows them – they get the app, and it's basically a click and go. It allows the kids to see each other's videos, it allows us to see the videos and comment on them – and it's ridiculously easy for them to deal with."

The challenge submitted to all YONA students was to make sure they practiced every single day, and post a video to prove they were doing so. "They're expected to upload a one-minute video of themselves practicing every single day," Ms. Natalie states. The buy-in, not unexpectedly, was mixed, but overall, it seems to have worked well. In particular, four young cello students gained attention for their perfect attendance record. Mind you, Enzo, Marian, Shiva, and Nils were all willing to admit that they

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Enzo showing off his cello skills.

practiced every day because of the challenge, and now that this original 30-day thing is done, they might not necessarily do it quite as “daily.” “I’ll keep practicing some days, but not all days,” Nils said.

For Ms. Natalie, however, she’s sure she’s on to something. “I’m going to keep using it for my own students,” she feels, adding the technology really helps. “It’s so easy to post something for them to play along with, or to give them a tip or demonstrate a skill, so that will be a way of connecting with my students on a much more frequent basis than just seeing them on their lessons once a week.”

Necessity has been the mother of this invention, of course, and the pandemic isolation of students has made the crucial collaborative nature of YONA’s Sistema-based program much harder to realize. But the posted practice videos, Ms. Natalie feels, are a great way for the students to stay connected.

“Even though we can’t make music together, we can make music for each other in a special way with this,” she reports. “We have over 4,000 views of the videos, so there seems to be a fair bit of engagement,” she reports. “And a lot of the teachers are posting videos of tips. So for some students, it’s been really amazing. And absolutely, there’s opportunity for the older students to mentor the younger ones.”

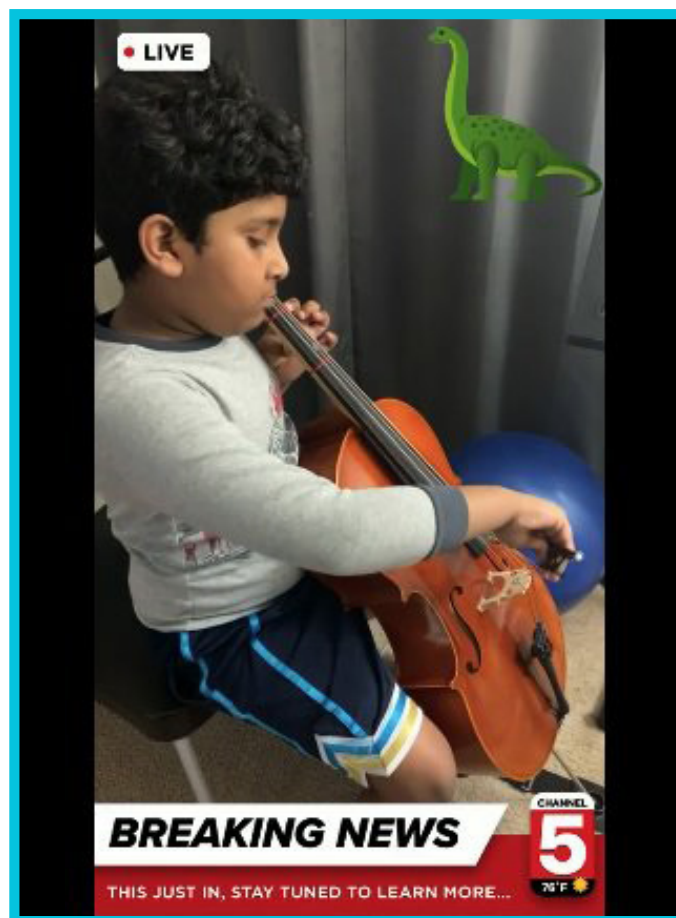
The videos certainly helped inspire the four cellists, according to them. Mind you, some of them are harder to impress than others – their assessment of the videos they watched go from “great” to “not bad,” depending on the cellist (everyone’s a critic!). But all four agreed that more challenges, from learning new scales to learning whole new pieces, are a good idea to keep them invested.

Ms. Natalie:

“Even though we can’t make music together, we can make music for each other in a special way with this.”

But now that this first practice experiment is done, and completed successfully, Ms. Natalie says it’s time to relax a bit. “For the next two weeks, we’re going to ask them just to post something celebrating YONA, since we’re all tired now and we need to say positive things to each other,” she says. “When we come back from spring break in April, I do expect that there will be a much bigger thing, because we’re preparing a big year-end project. So that will be an excellent platform to work on the piece together – in groups and so on.”

That’s certainly the way to Carnegie Hall. 🎵



Breaking news! Shiva is a practice challenge master.

Save the Date!

You are invited to join us for

YONA: Road to Joy Fundraising Concert!

Presented by EPCOR

Tuesday, June 8, 2021 • 7:00 PM
Join us from your living room!

We will be emailing a virtual watch link for the event closer to the date.

Follow us on Facebook or Instagram for more information!



facebook.com/yonasistema



instagram.com/yonasistema



More info coming soon at:
WinspearCentre.com/RoadToJoy

Donate to YONA

You can support the future of YONA by donating money, time, or instruments.

When you give, you put a musical instrument in the hands of a child. This can become so much more than a simple vessel for sound – it can become an instrument for growth, development, and change. Every gift, great or small, makes a difference in the life of a child and contributes to social change in our community.

Visit online to donate:

WinspearCentre.com/Support

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