

Road to Joy: A Virtual Fundraising Success!

by Trena Taralson

On the evening of June 8th, students, staff, and supporters of YONA all tuned in to their devices to see the culmination of a year of hard work come together in a beautiful, one-hour virtual concert event.

The road to our annual fundraising concert was filled with a lot of twists and turns this year, thanks to the pandemic but the result was a heartfelt evening filled with beautiful music and memories from the past year.

Hosted by YONA student, Ben, and Janis Irwin, MLA for Edmonton Highlands Norwood, the event mixed live segments from the emcees with pre-recorded elements from the students. Each YONA cohort got a chance to record a segment of the show, which was then edited by the YONA team and pieced together for smooth transitions.

For co-emcee Ben, it was a fun experience but quite different than the normal Road to Joy event that would take place live in the Winspear Hall. "It was definitely weird. Usually during Road To Joy, the hall is full with people and families. It was different."



He says he's looking forward to hopefully playing with everyone in person again next year, but said it was an amazing experience being able to host with Irwin.

The last two pieces of the evening, *Juba Dance* and *Ode to Joy*, were grid-style videos with carefully mixed audio and video elements in order to have the students all playing together at once.

"It was wonderful to get to showcase YONA-Systema and the important work they do, especially after an extremely challenging year."

- Miriam Ayles

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“There was a lot of prep work involved on all sides of the production. We had several tech rehearsals leading up to the event to make sure the camera, lighting, audio, and streaming platform would all work together,” says Miriam Ayles, digital production manager of the event.

“There were other members of the team who put in quite a bit of work on the content side, as well, whether it was working with the hosts on the live segments or putting together the puzzle that is a program. It was a huge collaborative effort.”

After a brief audio glitch, Ronda Metszies, ESO cellist, closed out the event speaking eloquently about her experiences with YONA and delivered a passionate speech about the support needed to carry on the good work in the program.

“I would particularly like to give a shout out to Ronda, who maintained her grace and poise during the brief technical difficulties that occurred,” remarks Ayles. “It was wonderful to get to showcase YONA-Sistema and the important work they do, especially after an extremely challenging year.”

While a return to an in-person event is hoped for in the coming year, YONA Site Manager at St. Teresa of Calcutta School, Kristin Swirles, sees the silver lining in hosting a virtual event. “It would be cool to be able to stream online some of our live performances in the future, so family or friends far away could still tune in.”

In total, over \$30,000 was raised for YONA during the fundraiser. That money will go towards expanding the program this Fall. 🎵

Student Summer Plans

This summer I am going to...

Brennan:

“Go on a trip maybe.”

Fernando:

“Play with my skateboard.”

Enzo:

“Definitely gonna go camping for a month.”

Marian:

“Going camping and summer camp.”

Ms. Elaine:

“Hang out with extended family, finally get closer together and hug people. And read stories to my grandniece.”

Ms. Vicky:

“Learn how to drive a tractor!”

Ximena:

“Going to a river, and maybe to the Spray Park in Sherwood Park because it’s a good one, the water is very warm.”

That's A Wrap!

by Amanda Banister



As the eighth year of the YONA program comes to a close, the phrase that comes to mind is, "We made it!" Against all odds, despite every challenge thrown our way, and in the face of a global pandemic, our incredible community continued to gather online to experience the joy of making music and to support one another.

To the YONA students and families, we celebrate you! Thank you for demonstrating amazing leadership by showing up your online lessons on time and ready to play. Thank you for sharing your energy and enthusiasm with your teachers, and for keeping the music going. A special shout out goes to all the parents, guardians, and family members for your tireless support and encouragement, for helping students record their pieces, and for listening to these young musicians practice.

Next, our incomparable YONA Teaching Team. You navigated the ups and downs of online teaching with patience and persistence. Thank you for trialing new lesson ideas, software programs, and teaching techniques. Your countless runs to students' homes to tune and repair instruments, deliver sheet music, and fresh produce was so appreciated this year. Thank you for providing individual lessons, group lessons, homework help, and social hang-out time. You have truly gone above and beyond to meet students where they are at and keep engagement high during this tough time.

Against all odds, our incredible community continued to gather online to experience the joy of making music and to support one another.

Last but not least, we celebrate each of our YONA donors, sponsors, and community partners. Thank you for your belief in us, and for your continued support throughout a year that has been challenging in its own ways for everyone. We could not do this amazing work without you!

As we look ahead to the next year of YONA, we are full of gratitude, hope, and anticipation of a bright future. There are new YONA students, instruments, and sites on the horizon. We cannot wait to share more details with you in very soon.

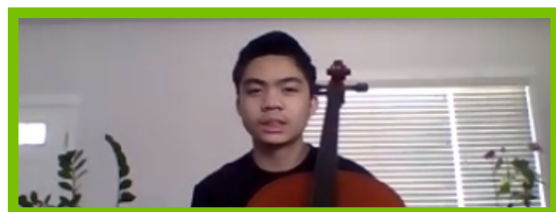
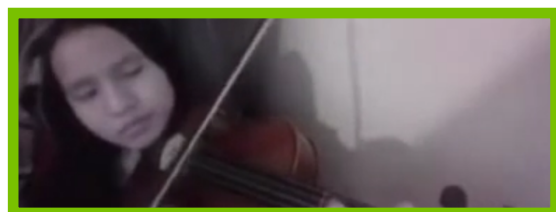
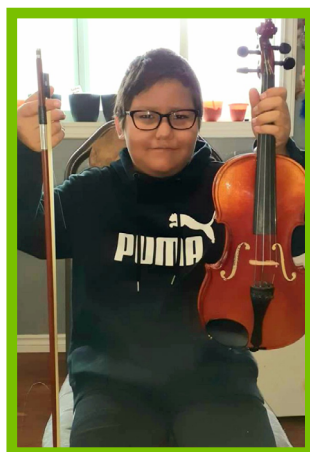
Have a wonderful summer, and we will see you in September for YONA Year Nine! 🎵

YONA Students Set to Attend Sistema Toronto Music Camp

by Trena Taralson

May-Bell:

“I think it will be fun and welcoming.”



This summer, four YONA students will be taking part in an exciting virtual summer camp opportunity hosted by Sistema Toronto.

Due to the camp being held virtually this year, Sistema Toronto encouraged students to join from other El-Sistema Inspired programs across Canada who have at least one year experience playing violin, viola, cello or bass. Programs, like YONA, were able to nominate up to five students to join in the experience.

Gerard, a seven-year cello student in YONA, says he's looking forward to meeting and learning with new students. "I've known many people from this YONA group, so it'll be fun to play with new students across Canada."

The music camp will be a first for May-Bell, a 4-year viola player, who is also excited about the opportunity. "I think it will be fun and welcoming," she says. May-Bell has two other siblings in YONA and jokes that the camp will help her stay competitive with them. "I'm excited to meet new people and

improve playing my viola. My siblings are improving a lot faster than I did and it terrifies me!"

According to YONA Site Manager, Jacquie McNulty, the camp is an example of one of the many ways that the El Sistema inspired community across Canada has come together during the pandemic. "Attending the virtual Sistema Toronto summer camp is such an incredible opportunity for our YONA students. They will be making new friends with students across Canada and working with the Sistema Toronto's excellent teaching staff. It's yet another opportunity to build community and expand the ways we can support our students."

The camp will run four afternoons a week from July 19 to August 20. 🎵

YONA Spotlight: Gerard

Interview by Trena Taralson

“When playing, I’m able to play snippets of songs I listen to without learning the music and just play by ear.”

Gerard has been a cello student in YONA for the past seven years.

Q. What do you like about playing your instrument?

I like that the cello is quite a strong instrument because you can play both the melody and the harmony.

There aren’t many solo compositions that are made but you can easily play other pieces that were composed for other instruments.

I like to play both the melody and harmony.

Q. What do you love about YONA?

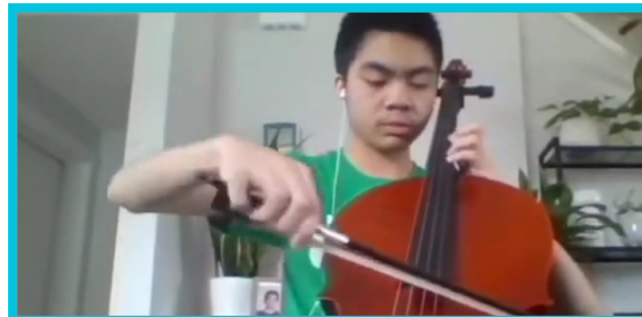
The organization allows you to do a lot of things and has lots of extra activities. The staff is amazing and are always there to help students. The instructors are very friendly and dedicated to helping students and are fun loving people.

Q. Who is your teacher at YONA? Can you tell me more about them?

I have had several cello teachers before, but Ms. Nava, is my current teacher for almost three years now. She’s been great, she’s helped me a lot with advanced things, she’s patient and shows me lots of new techniques to improve my cello playing.

Q. What is something you’re proud to have learned with your instrument?

When playing, I’m able to play snippets of songs I listen to without learning the music and just play by ear.



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

My favourite part is the pieces I’ve learned. They taught me more about the cello I didn’t know already. We also have one-on-one lessons once a week with my instructor which is beneficial because the teacher is focused on you and allows you to learn easier than in a group.

Q. What’s your favourite piece of music to play and why?

Bach’s Cello Suite No 1. It’s a beautiful piece and offers lots of techniques to learn about and a good composition for cellos.

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

YONA is a caring group that lets students explore their possibilities and discover more about themselves. It provides a wide range of topics that students can learn and find new things they like and thought they couldn’t do.

With different ethnicities and ages, no matter how diverse we are, we can still make beautiful pieces together. 🎵

Calling All Volunteers!

As we anticipate a return to in-person programming in the Fall, consider spending some time with us at YONA!

Our volunteers are a valuable part of our program, offering help in many areas including snack preparations, academic support, and supervision.

If you're interested, please fill out the volunteer form on our website:

www.yona-sistema.com/volunteer

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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

Thank you to our supporters

The support of our incredible donors allows YONA to grow and thrive, and means more now than ever. Thank you!

Thank you to all our partners and sponsors:

