



The Triumphant Return Of Road To Joy!

by Kyra Droog

On June 8, 2022, youthful, excited energy filled the Winspear Centre for the first time in over three years. Nearly 200 YONA students, many preparing to perform on the Winspear Centre stage for the first time, stepped off their school buses and walked in through the front doors, reveling in the excitement of the day to come.

Road to Joy is an incredibly important part of YONA – it is equal parts a celebration of YONA students and their accomplishments over the past year and a fundraiser to ensure that the program is able to continue to create positive change in our community for years to come. What brings Road to Joy together, you ask? Let's take a behind-the-scenes look at the Road to Joy experience.

Students receive their very own YONA t-shirt, uniting them as a group of musicians before they take their spot on the stage for the first time. Each cohort is led onstage by their teaching artists, and they rehearse their performance for an empty hall. As they play, you can see their eyes wandering, wondering what it will be like when the hall is full of people in just a few hours. Some of these students only received their instruments in January, so the fact that they are onstage preparing a concert is truly incredible. The excitement in the air is undeniable.

After rehearsal comes one of the most energetic parts of the evening: dinner. Cartloads of pizza

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arrive at the front doors of the Winspear and are carefully organized and shared with each YONA class. As the students eat, talk, and laugh, it really starts to sink in: they are about to play onstage for a huge audience. Nervous energy is worn off through games, songs, and even a trip out to Churchill Square to ensure that students are ready to put everything they have towards their upcoming show.

“There’s so much joy in being in-person, making music together, and learning new things.”

- Ms. Lauren Dykstra

After the students return to the Winspear and the front doors open to welcome the audience in, the energy inevitably returns. Students wave frantically from the third-floor balcony and

call out to their parents and friends as they catch glimpses of them getting their tickets scanned. Families wave up to the students, grins on their faces, and try and catch the chaotic energy on video. This performance onstage at the Winspear is an experience that none of these YONA students will ever forget.

For some of the students, Road to Joy is a well-oiled machine. They’ve performed for Road to Joy at the Winspear for many years, but the 2022 Road to Joy was still different. After two years of no in-person events like this, they feel the butterflies returning to their stomachs as if it was their first time. Their excitement and nervousness culminates in the feeling of returning, the energy that they know they will feel as soon as they set foot onstage.

The crowd roars with excitement, and the students grin at each other backstage. As they take their first steps out into the spotlight, they suddenly feel at ease: it’s time to show the world just how much YONA has taught them. They proudly lift their instruments, and under the direction of their instructors, they



play. When the audience cheers for them, leaping to their feet to celebrate their incredible performance, their grins are so wide that their masks can't hide them. In this moment, they aren't students or children: they are musicians.

We are so proud to announce that thanks to you, Road to Joy 2022 raised over \$100,000 in support of YONA. YONA exists because of the generosity of our community, and experiences like Road to Joy are made possible because of you. To everyone who joined us for our triumphant return to the Winspear Centre, thank you. To EPCOR, who sponsored this event, thank you. To everyone who supports YONA, thank you. You make life-changing moments like these possible for everyone involved. 🎵



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YONA During the Summer: Preparing for YONA Year 10

by Kyra Droog

The final day of YONA is full of excitement mixed with the bittersweet realization that it will be a full two months before YONA sites are filled with that energy once again. Students say their goodbyes, promising their friends that they'll see each other over the summer and telling their instructors how excited they are to see them again in the fall. Their teachers hand them their instruments, as well as workbooks that are chock full of opportunities to practice and learn new music over the summer break. With that, the students head home, and the YONA sites are officially closed for the summer.

So, what happens at YONA between the end of June and September? In short, a lot.

"There's a ton of work that goes on behind the scenes at YONA during the summer," says Jacquie McNulty, YONA Lead. "The summer months give YONA staff the opportunity to connect, debrief, plan for the upcoming year, and explore how we can best provide support for our new and returning YONA students."

One of the most powerful parts of the summer for Jacquie happens in June, when all YONA staff and instructors come together to debrief the past year. They discuss the positives, challenges, and ways that YONA can improve going forward. "It is important to hear everyone's feedback as to best improve YONA and it's an exciting challenge to improve upon the complex systems that exist within YONA," says Jacquie. "This year, we spent a lot of time focusing on our new YONA curriculum, which debuted in-person in YONA Year 9 (2021-2022). Following our debrief, we have some thoughts on how to continue improving it moving forward." The summer also provides an important opportunity for YONA staff and instructors to have one-on-one check-ins, to ensure the instructors have everything they need to succeed, and to discuss the instructors' plans for the upcoming YONA year.

After the debrief comes the planning stage for the next year of YONA: how many students the

program can intake, which instruments are available for those students, and whether or not more YONA instructors are needed to support those students are just some of the considerations that the YONA staff have to keep in mind. A key part of this process revolves around music: what music will YONA students be practicing and performing in YONA year 10, at events like the YONA Winter Concert and Road to Joy? Decisions like these are ideally made early on to ensure that arrangements and sheet music are ready so YONA instructors can prepare their students well in advance of any events. "There are a lot of decisions to be made, and a lot of prep work to do for the upcoming season," Jacquie says, "and it's always done with YONA students, families, and instructors first in mind."

"We've come so far in these past 9 years and can't wait to see where the next 10 take us."

- Ms. Jacquie McNulty

Planning for this year is particularly special, as YONA is celebrating its 10th anniversary serving the Northern Alberta community. "We've come so far in these past 9 years and can't wait to see where the next 10 take us," Jacquie smiles. "We're so lucky to have the incredible support of our donors, volunteers, sponsors, partners, and community members. Together, we bring this program to life and help to make our communities better, more kind places, both now and in the future."

While plans for YONA Year 10 are still in the works, it's certainly going to be a special year for everyone involved. We can't wait to share with you what we're planning for our special anniversary, so keep an eye on your inboxes and on our social media accounts so you can be the first to receive updates! 🎵

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You can support the future of YONA-Sistema 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.

Through YONA-Sistema, youth in Northern Alberta’s priority neighbourhoods will experience an extraordinary opportunity for social, emotional, academic, and musical development. They will develop lifelong values and skills that will promote the future success of these youth and of their communities.

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