



A Decade of YONA – Highlights from Year 10

By Alexandra Stout and Lilian Belknap

As Year 10 of YONA winds down and the students get ready for summer vacation, everyone is reflecting on what a success this year has been. It has marked growth and success for all the students. Twenty violin students joined at St. Catherine's School and 10 flute students joined at St. Alphonsus School. This means that in total there were 235 students in grades 1-12, learning violin, viola, cello, bass, percussion, flute, clarinet, trombone, and horn.

At Kipohtakâw YONA, there was an intake of 20 students for recorder, meaning 90 students in grades 2-8 were enrolled. Two teaching artists

travelled to Kipohtakâw Education Centre twice weekly to teach violin, recorder, and flute classes. Grade 5-6 classes, having begun lessons on recorder last year, graduated to a new instrument: flute!

Year 10 at YONA has also seen the return of large-scale ensembles, with weekly rehearsals of the La Bruyère Orchestra at the Winspear Centre, monthly rehearsals of Community Orchestra rotating between school sites, and all junior and community students singing together in choir class.

The safe return of the full audiences and orchestras allowed for a wonderfully successful YONA Winter

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Concert in February, and opportunities for YONA students and their families to attend Edmonton Symphony Orchestra concerts. The year was capped off with the most exciting event of all: Road to Joy.

It's almost impossible to choose the best moments from the year, but one notable highlight was that the senior violin students at Kipohtakâw YONA were invited to join the La Bruyère Orchestra for the YONA Winter Concert and continued to travel to Edmonton weekly to rehearse additional repertoire for Road to Joy. Kipohtakâw Education

Centre also hosted the La Bruyère Orchestra for a special workshop with composer Cris Derksen, which was the first opportunity for students from Edmonton to visit Alexander First Nation. Read on to learn more about the workshop!

This year was supported by our incredible sponsors. With their help, we have ensured that every YONA student receives nutritious snacks, musical education, and the transformative experience of being in a music ensemble. Thank you! 🎵

Cris Derksen Workshop

By Alexandra Stout



Cris Derksen

In April, Cris Derksen – an internationally celebrated Indigenous cellist and composer – performed a workshop at Kipohtakâw Education Centre. YONA sites from the city were bussed to Alexander First Nation, and the students, Winspear staff, and the Nation all chatted in the gym and ate dinner together.

Cris Derksen explained her approach to composition and showed the students how she creates evocative and unique sounds on her cello: running her finger up the inside of a string to mimic a seagull noise or using a loop pedal

to become her own orchestra. Every student was invited to find a new way to play their instrument to invoke the sound of wind or of an animal. Flute students tried to make whooshing noises. Other students playing string instruments tried other techniques Cris Derksen demonstrated, such as lightly or strongly bowing their instruments.

Cosette Justo Valdés, YONA's conductor, also conducted an open rehearsal for community members to watch. The orchestra practiced a piece Cris Derksen composed specifically for YONA – “Prairie Promise.” Cosette led the orchestra through

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the piece multiple times, occasionally stopping in certain spots to focus on an instrument section. She asked them to think about melding their

“The best part [about YONA] is seeing my family in the crowd. Seeing their smiles and their presence is the best feeling of all. Three years ago, I lost one of my biggest fans, my sister Talayna. I wear her picture when I perform as a reminder that she’s still with me, watching me play.”
– Taya

sections together more strongly or playing certain sections bouncier.

The evening was capped off with speeches by students from Kipohtakâw YONA. Three students spoke about what YONA means to them and how being musicians has affected their lives. One of the senior violin students, Taya, described how her life has changed in the last six years that she has been a part of YONA. She says: “The best part [about YONA] is seeing my family in the crowd. Seeing their smiles and their presence is the best feeling of all. Three years ago, I lost one of my biggest fans, my sister Talayna. I wear her picture when I perform as a reminder that she’s still with me, watching me play.”

The workshop was a special occasion and a moving event for all involved. The whole YONA team is so thankful for Cris Derksen leading the event and for Alexander First Nation and Kipohtakâw Education Centre for hosting everyone. 🎵

Road to Joy – Year 10

By Alexandra Stout

Dozens of boxes of pizza. Hundreds of students. Over 1,000 committed supporters of YONA. Immeasurable joy! That was this year’s Road to Joy, which marked a decade of YONA.

Road to Joy’s sponsor EPCOR opened the event and welcomed audiences before the powerful Honour song from the KEC singers from Alexandra First Nation. This year’s emcees for the event were Yun and Sejutee. They were two of the original 20 YONA students, and they shared their favourite memories of YONA and their plans for post-secondary education.

Each cohort of YONA then performed, with students from the classes introducing each piece.

These performances were interspersed with tear-jerking videos of what YONA means to students, volunteers, and parents, and a fun mock news-reporter video with student reporters at each site!

The evening was capped off with the ESO joining all of YONA on stage for a medley of everyone’s favourite songs from the past 10 years. Students danced in the aisles, waving ribbons, and singing along!

One YONA team member shared that the best moment for her was after the show, watching a bass student be wrapped up in a big hug from their dad. It’s events like these that remind us

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of the community that YONA builds and the transformative experience of playing in an ensemble.

With your help, and a major contribution from EPCOR, we were able to celebrate ten years of YONA with over \$115,000 dollars raised to change young lives through music! An additional \$14,000 will be contributed by an anonymous donor because of new or increased sustaining monthly gifts. Thank you for investing in the future of YONA and our community, at Road to Joy.

Do you want to invest in YONA too? Click the button below! 🎵

Visit online to donate:
WinspearCentre.com/Support

At this year's Road to Joy fundraising concert, we raised **over \$115,000**, with an additional **\$14,000** matched by an anonymous donor because you pledged a sustaining monthly gift!



Road to Joy concert on May 31, 2023

Surprise Letter from a Community Member

By Alexandra Stout

At this year's Road to Joy, we received a special letter from Joseph Lai. Joseph is a pianist and music educator in Edmonton. He generously hosted a piano recital with a student of his named Pierce Bentz and donated all proceeds to YONA. Thank you, Joseph and Pierce!

Concerning his reasoning, Joseph explained that he was reflecting on his own financially challenged musical beginnings and was wondering how to support budding musicians in similar situations. A friend of his suggested fundraising for YONA. The whole YONA team is incredibly gratified by Joseph's generous contribution.

Check out Joseph's concert poster and program below:

REMEMBRANCE-CELEBRATION

Ravel Lai (March 16, 2011- August 16, 2019)



JOSEPH LAI- Pianist

in Recital

Sunday, May 7th, 2 p.m.

The Piano Centre

10460-170 st.

Admission by Donation

All proceeds go to Youth Orchestras of North America (YONA)

Concert poster

REMEMBRANCE-CELEBRATION

Ravel Lai (March 16, 2011-August 16, 2019)

Bachianas Brasileiras #4-Prelude (Jan. 2014- 2 yrs. 11 months) H. Villa Lobos

4 Piano Blues #1 & #3 (Apr. 2013- 2 yrs. 1 month) A. Copland

Sonata #3- 3rd movement (Feb. 2013- 1 yr. 11 months) A. Scriabin

Intermezzo Op.116 #4 (Mar. 2013- 2 yrs.) J. Brahms

The Bridge of Liason- Pierce Bentz

Firth of Fifth-Genesis

The Rose- Amanda McBroom

Etude Tableaux Op.35 #8 (Oct. 2012- 1 yr. 7 months) S. Rachmaninov

Etude Tableaux Op.32 #5 (May 2020) S. Rachmaninov

Autumn Leaves "Les Feuilles Mortes" Joseph Kosma/Jacques Prevert

Au Lac de Wallenstadt (Oct. 2012- 1 yr. 7 months) F. Liszt

La Vallee des Cloches (May 2013- 2 yrs. 2 months) M. Ravel

Starr Gazer- A Birthday Tribute (Premiere) J. Lai

Cancion y Danza #8 (Oct. 2017- 6 yrs. 7 months) F. Mompou

#10 (Nov. 2017- 6 yrs. 8 months)

Gone Too Soon- Larry Grossman/Buz Kohan

In remembrance: Manson Lai, Tosca, Aero, Piper, Beaker, Buster, Bandit, Buttons, Bernie Schwartz, Robert Stewart

Gracious thanks to Brent Hay, Guy Lorieau and The Piano Centre for the donation of the beautiful showroom space and the Steinway Concert Grand Piano!!

Concert program



Donate to YONA-Sistema

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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WinspearCentre.com/Support

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