

Back in Action!

By Trena Taralson



Halloween fun at YONA

After enjoying summer off, YONA Students returned to the program on September 11th eager to learn and make more music.

For our 11th year, YONA is pleased to welcome three new classes of students into the mix. There are 23 new students taking violin lessons with Teaching Artist Nathan Chan at St. Teresa School. Our St. Alphonsus site also had an intake of new students this Fall - 17 are learning flute with Alex Valle and six are new bass students taught by Andreas Wegner.

We're excited to have seven new staff members at YONA as well this year, all coming from diverse backgrounds. You can find out more about them in our "Meet the Team" section of the newsletter.

We're also thrilled to announce that Cosette Justo Valdés, Resident Conductor for the ESO, will not only be conducting our La Bruyere Orchestra, but our Community Orchestra as well this year!

This will be an exciting opportunity for students in our Community Orchestra, who will be taking part in 10 Tutti Rehearsals over the course of the year. This is more than double the amount of rehearsal time from last year, when we first started Tutti Rehearsals, and we know there will be an incredible benefit for students to be a part of these opportunities.



Cosette Justo Valdés
Photo by Eric Kozakiewicz

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There is a cost to increasing this rehearsal time. While YONA has an incredible relationship with the local school boards, who provide regular bussing to our students, these rehearsals are an added expense. Last year on Giving Tuesday, we raised enough money to cover these costs and we're hoping to do it again this year.

Help us raise \$10,000 to give our kids a lift this year! For just \$35, you can cover the cost of one student's rides to all their rehearsals this season.

Your donation will bring these students together to become a true community orchestra.

When you give before December 31, you can triple your impact! For every \$1 you give, EPCOR will give \$2 – up to \$25,000.

YONA would not be possible without YOU. It's your support that gives these children a place to go each day after school, where they receive group instrument lessons, nutritious snacks, homework help, and free time to play.

Thank you for your support over the past decade! We're looking forward to a fun year ahead! 🎵

To give, visit our website:
yona-sistema.com



Meet the New YONA Team Members!

We're so excited to have seven new YONA staff members this season. They come from diverse music and educational backgrounds and are committed to our mission of social change through ensemble music making. Here's a little more about them and the role they play at YONA.



Viktoria Grynenko

"I am a Ukrainian-born violinist. I perform in various genres as a soloist, in chamber groups and large ensembles. Continuing my PhD thesis (University of Alberta, 2021), which explored the relationship between violin and dance, I'm actively involved in multi-disciplinary projects with dancers. In August 2023, I released my debut album "Violin in Movement." Currently, I am working on four musicological publications, recording an album of contemporary Ukrainian music, various chamber projects, and teaching out of my violin studio. For YONA, I teach violin and viola class at the Winspear Centre."



Dina Dokic

"My name is Dina Milivojev Dokic. I have a bachelor's degree in music, majoring in the Viola. I have spent the last ten years teaching children of all ages both the viola and the violin. I was born in Serbia, finished my schooling in Europe and moved to Botswana, Africa where I was living and teaching the viola and violin for ten years. I love working with children and youth and being surrounded by their positive energy and eagerness to learn. I have a passion for music and teaching. I'm a viola teaching artist at YONA."



Yeganeh Sotudehnia

"My name is Yeganeh and I am excited to be living in Edmonton, my 3rd Canadian city, for a couple of months now. My musical journey started in Orff music classes in Tehran, Iran, and I have been occupying myself with one musical thing or another ever since. I have a great passion for social change and am interested in the role that music can play in this pursuit. I'm a violin teaching artist at YONA."



Naomi Reitzin

"My name is Naomi and I am the Site Manager at St. Alphonsus Catholic Elementary. I'm from Jamaica (where I received my training in violin) and have recently completed a Master of Arts in English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. Teaching high school English in Jamaica sparked in me a desire to pursue education and youth development. At YONA, I continue feeding that passion by helping to provide an exciting space for young people to learn music and see themselves as emerging leaders in their communities."



Jesse Cunningham

"I am the new YONA site manager at St. Teresa of Calcutta Elementary School. Although I have worked extensively as a musician (everything from Metis folk to African pop), an educator (adult second language education in English and Spanish) and with children (as a bike mechanic mentor and art gallery guide), this is my first job in Music Education for Children, and I'm pretty excited about that. I play about half a dozen different chordophones in the guitar family and am a novice accordion player. Outside of the classroom, I love cycling and being outside in the river valley."



Theron Woodman

"I believe that developing communication skills, experiencing self-growth, and building connections are easiest when making music. When I was introduced to music by my parents, a cellist and violist, I remember feeling as if cello could take me anywhere in life, especially as new and exciting things will always be available to learn. At St. T's Community Cello class, I want to see every student shine in ways that feel natural to them, while having fun! Make sure to attend our student concerts to hear how hard these kids have worked."



Alex Valle

"A graduate of the University of Alberta's Bachelor of Music degree, I've dedicated myself to the flute for over a decade. Under the instruction of former ESO Assistant Principal Flute, Shelley Younge and current ESO Principal Liz Koch, I have developed a deep-rooted love of all things Baroque and Classical. As a Flute Teaching Artist for YONA, I'm in charge of wrangling 17 of YONA's youngest participants and future flautists. As the Instrument Manager for YONA Sistema, I'm dedicated to creating and maintaining an organized system for YONA's ever-growing collection of instruments! When I'm not tucked away in the YONA instrument vault, I can be found reading up on historical performance practice and being Mozart's #1 fan."

YONA Spotlight: Korra, 2nd year violin student



Q. What do you love about YONA?

"Playing the violin and learning about new notes ... and the food is so good."

Q. Who is your teacher at YONA?

"Yeganeh."

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

"Playing twinkle."

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

"Watermelon, Watermelon, which is a new song Yeganeh taught us."

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

"It's super fun because I get to play the violin and I'm excited to take it home one day and play it for my family."

Volunteer with YONA!

By Naomi Reitzin, YONA Site Manager at St. Alphonsus School

If you're looking for a way to spend your time meaningfully and create a lasting impact on the lives of young people, volunteering at YONA is perfect for you! At the heart of the YONA program is creating social change through ensemble music-making and we are looking for extra hands. You could become a vital member of our team by helping with snack preparation, supervising children, providing academic support, and simply sharing your time with our students.

Heidi Diamond is in her second year of volunteering with us. She says, "When I leave after volunteering a day in their classroom and witnessing their happiness and eagerness to learn something new, my heart fills with joy. When a child smiles at me and asks for a hug, my day is complete. I'm proud to be a part of this beautiful offering to the children in their schools." Heidi has been working with children and youth in her community for many years and while this is an asset, it's not a requirement! Her favourite thing about being a part of YONA is seeing the children perform at the Winspear. She loves, "seeing them shine and being so proud of their accomplishments. They surprise you with an unexpectedly eager performance on a big stage in front of a huge audience."

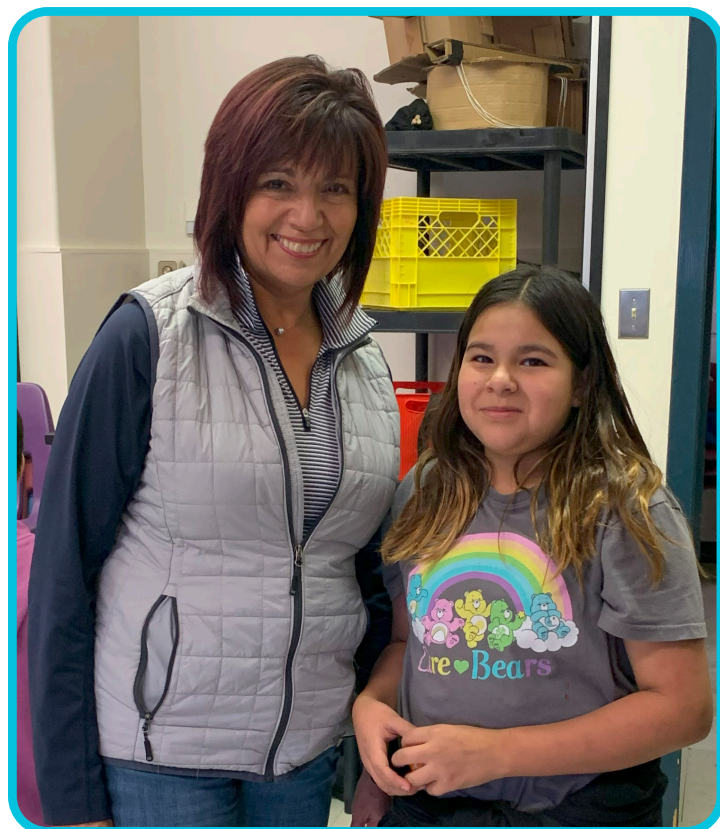
Carol Pawlenchuk, one of our veteran volunteers who has been involved with YONA since 2014, also holds a special place in her heart for the YONA students. In the early days of YONA, she remembers preparing snacks with Mrs. Jane, and after Covid, she took on the responsibility of picking up the grocery order from the supermarket. She says, "My favourite thing about YONA is seeing the growth in each child. Respect is very important for YONA, and you see it every day ... I love attending the concerts and seeing the pride on their faces as well as those of their families." She also delights in watching the students grow. She remembers one YONA student from five years ago who she recently saw coming from Grant MacEwan, where he studies

music composition. He uses this knowledge to help mentor the new class of wind instruments. "That's paying back, and it happens all the time!" she happily reported.

If you're ready to motivate, inspire, and make a positive impact, we invite you to join our team of enthusiastic volunteers. Together, we can create a vibrant future for our children.

You can support by lending a hand in snack preparation, supervision or academic support once a week. Your unique talents and skills will make a difference! 🎵

**To volunteer, please complete
the form on our website:
yona-sistema.com**



Longtime YONA volunteer Carol Pawlenchuk



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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