



Road to Joy 2024: YAY for YONA By Rudy Howell

On behalf of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, thank you to everyone who attended our 11th annual Road to Joy concert presented by EPCOR, on May 29, 2024. We were fortunate to share this special evening with our community, with more than 1200 tickets distributed for this event, to watch the performance of over 200 YONA students from all five sites.

At the end of each school year, Road to Joy brings our students together to proudly share what they have learned with family, teachers, volunteers, and community supporters. The concert is an important annual opportunity for teamwork, sharing, and confidence-building, while raising much needed funds for the program.

The evening was a tremendous success, raising \$127,000! This would not have been possible without the generosity of our audience and presenting sponsor, EPCOR.

This year's Road to Joy theme was mentorship, a key element of our program's philosophy. One of the most rewarding aspects of YONA is seeing our older students mentor their younger peers. As always, we saw this heartwarming behaviour displayed at Road to Joy as our more advanced students helped direct others on and off stage, turned pages for their stand partners, and reminded their peers of what notes to play if they got lost.

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Our concert began with an upbeat performance featuring every level of YONA. For the first time on the Winspear stage, the La Bruyère Orchestra accompanied while the YONA Juniors and Community level youth sang, and excitedly performed a song together. We were also pleased to welcome the KEC Singers back to the Winspear Centre to perform an “Honour Song” on behalf of Kipohtakâw Education Centre (KEC) and Alexander First Nation.

Understandably, it did not take long before parents became emotional watching their children play their instruments on the Winspear stage; some could not help but film every moment. For many families in our region, learning to play instrument is not an option without YONA. Knowing this, the impact of Road to Joy cannot be overstated.

It is always a pleasure to see all our YONA sites come together at the end of the year to collaborate and contribute to Road to Joy. We were treated to a traditional performance of “Kahkiyaw Oskâyak” by our violin and flute students from KEC, as well as excerpts from “The Carnival of the Animals” by our hard-working junior flute and double bass students from St. Alphonsus. We also saw performances by our Community and La Bruyère orchestras, which

demonstrated the power of ensemble playing and the flourishing musicianship of our intermediate and advanced students.

ESO musicians proudly joined our YONA students on stage for the evening’s final two performances, “The YONA Medley” and “Happy” by Pharrell Williams – an adjective used by students throughout the evening to describe how YONA makes them feel. As this music played, an overwhelming sense of community overtook the hall. The audience clapped along while younger students waiving streamers danced through the aisles. At this moment, everyone understood the value of YONA.

As our students entered the Winspear lobby after the concert, they were met with big hugs and high-fives from their supporters. To celebrate the conclusion of an extraordinary evening and year, the kids were treated to wagon wheels, flowers, and balloons from loved ones before heading home for some well-deserved rest.

Thank you to all our generous donors and our presenting sponsor, EPCOR, who made Road to Joy and YONA possible. We look forward to making new memories in YONA Year 12. 🎵



YONA's First Post-Secondary Scholarship to be Awarded

By Trena Taralson

Thanks to the generosity of two YONA donors, Phyllis A. Arnold and Maurine Maslen, YONA is getting set to award its first scholarships to students heading into post-secondary studies.

Both ladies share a belief that the value of YONA extends far beyond the musical teachings the students receive.

"As an educator I support any program that helps children, especially from the inner city, further their talents. It was YONA's code of conduct for participants ("the YONA way") that convinced me to support the program," says Arnold.

Maslen, having attended multiple YONA concerts and events, notes the teamwork and inclusion she's witnessed over the years.

"That young adults, who have been part of the YONA program, return to be mentors to give assistance to the present YONA members, clearly indicates to me that YONA is like a family that helps each other. A family helps its members to go out into the world as contributors of society. Higher education may be needed to achieve an individual's aspirations. That takes financing.

I believe that music is the key to the success of these children as they go out into the world. Helping them financially to advance their dreams beyond the YONA program will help them become citizens of the world. I am also certain that each one of the benefactors of the scholarship will pay it forward to assist many others following in their footsteps."

Students were able to apply on the YONA website and alumni were personally invited to apply. To be eligible, students/alumni must have completed at least one year of YONA, intend to pursue a program of study leading to a recognized license, certificate, diploma, undergraduate or professional degree in a program that is at least 9 months long. Applications closed on June 24th and successful recipients will be notified this summer. 🎵

If you are interested in contributing to this scholarship fund, please contact Trena Taralson at ttaralson@winspearcentre.com.



Donor Profile:

YONA Founding Donors Angus and Heather Watt

By Trena Taralson

YONA would not be possible without the support and vision of a few people who first believed in the program when it began 11 years ago. Angus and Heather Watt are two of those people. Since then, they have been supporters and strong advocates for YONA in the community.

Angus remembers attending YONA one day in its first year, "I watched the 20 young students play together, snack together, play their instruments, and learn about respect for each other, their teachers, and their instruments. The group was half boys and girls, all having fun and probably from 15 different countries. To me, this was exactly the type of program Heather and I needed to support."

While Watt's musical background is limited to attending a boys' choir at church in Toronto where he grew up, he knows and appreciates how music can transform lives and build essential life skills.

"Some students might continue to develop their music and education, or just focus on their education, to become a doctor, lawyer, or scientist. But they are all better prepared to contribute to our world. They have also learned to grow, to be better and stronger, in their own way.



Angus Watt, YONA Founding Donor

Heather and I would ask that everyone considers supporting YONA. Once you let it into your heart, you will never let it go. This program lets us feel that our personal support is directly helping children in our community become not only good citizens, but strong family members as well. The impact of YONA extends beyond music: it makes us all better." 🎵

YONA Spotlight: Emry, First Year Kipohtakâw YONA Student



Q. What do you play?

I play the recorder.

Q: How long have you played?

Since September 2023.

Q. What is your favourite thing about YONA?

I like the songs we learn!

Q. What is your favourite song?

Kahkiyaw Oskâyak by Sheryl Sewepagaham. We performed this song for Road to Joy and the song means "all the young people."

What are YONA kids excited about for summer?



**“I’m going to go home and play soccer and play Roblox and go swimming!”
– Samir**

**“Swimming! And going to my neighbours house and going shopping
and watching video games.” – Betiel**

“I’m going to play Roblox all day.” – Mathews

“Camping and K-days and I might go on a trip.” – Adalia

“I’m excited to ride my bike!” – Shelley

**“I’m excited about K-days. It’s a festival for the whole family that includes food
and focused towards kids. It’s really fun and I love going on all the rides.”
– Joshua**

**“I’m excited for when I get back to YONA in the fall. I’m going to be
in the La Bruyère Orchestra!” – Mario**

“Going camping and for my brother and sister’s birthdays.” – Evania



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.

Visit online to donate:
WinspearCentre.com/Support

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Thank you to our supporters

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

Thank you to to all our partners and sponsors:

