

# YONA

## A NIGHT TO REMEMBER



**By Trena Taralson**

June 4th was a special evening at the Winspear Centre, as YONA students took to the stage for *Road to Joy*, presented by EPCOR. This annual fundraising concert is always a highlight of the year—a chance to celebrate the incredible growth and accomplishments of our students and to share the powerful impact YONA is having in our community.

The night featured joyful performances from the YONA choir, as well as the junior violin class at our St. Catherine site, the Community Orchestra, and the La Bruyère Orchestra, who had the unique opportunity to perform alongside members of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra.

Under the baton of Cosette Justo Valdés, conducting her final Road to Joy before stepping down as YONA's Artistic Director and expanding her international career, the students gave a tremendous performance—filling the hall with music, energy, and heart.



One of the most moving moments of the evening came when Valaria, a 6th year YONA student, took the stage to thank Justo Valdés for her years of mentorship. Fighting back tears, she presented her with a vinyl copy of "Voy en mi carusel," an album Justo Valdés grew up listening to in Cuba. It was a heartfelt sendoff from a student whose life had been deeply shaped by her guidance.

Even with game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final going on at Rogers Place, nearly 800 guests filled the Winspear Centre that evening—cheering, clapping, and showing their support. As was announced from the stage, YONA is currently raising funds to expand to an additional site within Edmonton Public Schools. Since our program is entirely supported through community giving, this expansion can only happen with your help.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of our audience and the incredible support of EPCOR, we're excited to share that over \$110,000 has been raised since that night to support YONA's mission!

If you haven't had a chance to give yet, you can still donate and help **YONA grow** to reach even more students.

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*\*With your support, our goal is to fundraise 13.2% of our organization's budget to support music performances, and education programs such as YONA. Fundraising costs represent 3.4% of our operation.*

## WE'LL MISS YOU, MS. COSETTE!



### By Trena Taralson

After six amazing seasons with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and YONA, Cosette Justo Valdés is moving on to the next exciting chapter of her international career. And while we're so proud of her, we're also really going to miss her.

Ms. Cosette has been much more than a conductor. She's been a mentor, a role model, and a joyful, powerful presence in the lives of YONA students and staff.

"Cosette has had a huge impact on the program," says YONA Teaching Artist Natalie Boisvert. "Her love of people and passion for music are contagious. As someone who grew up through a lot of hardship, she connected with the kids immediately—especially with the joy and energy she brought at every visit. Cosette has a special talent for connecting with the 'inner musician' people don't realize exists inside them—and bringing it out."

That sentiment is echoed by Valeria, a 6th year YONA student, who shared this personal message from the stage at Road to Joy:

“I’m very excited to see her new journey, as she moves forward in her career, however, she will be very missed from our YONA ensembles. She means a lot, especially to me. She has led me on a path of success, and I’ll forever be grateful for having the opportunity to play and learn from her these past few years.”



To say thank you, the YONA team and students created something truly special. Justo Valdés loved an old Cuban children's album as a kid—but it was misplaced when her family moved when she was little. We located a used copy in the U.K., made a new arrangement of one of the songs, and performed it at Road to Joy. We also surprised her with a custom score, signed by YONA students and staff.

Ms. Cosette, your impact is unforgettable. Thank you for sharing your music, your story, and your heart with us. You’ll always be part of the YONA family.



## YONA VISITS GRETA ARCADE



On June 5th, students from the Winspear, St. Catherines, St. Teresa and St. Alphonsus sites were treated to an amazing party at GRETA Arcade Downtown. After suspending their liquor license for the afternoon, GRETA welcomed 150 YONA students for 2 hours of appetizers, pop, and unlimited arcade video games. Students got to relax after a year of hard work and an amazing Road to Joy on June 4th.

This is the second year in a row that GRETA has hosted a party for our students. For many of our students, these celebrations are their first experience at an arcade. Last year's trip incited much excited discussion about when we could return. This year, students have one thing to say: Thank you, GRETA for the best party of the year!

## A COMMUNITY OF CREATORS



*YONA Students Mathews, Samir, Joaquin outside the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts*

### **By Booker Diduck**

On May 29, the St. Alphonsus Community Bases walked to the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts for a chance to see what other artists around Alberta Avenue do. Led by Jared Quinney we were given a tour of the entire facility. Starting in the gallery itself, we got to have a conversation with Jared about what a gallery is and how the community members spend their time there. After, we saw the textiles area, the screen-printing station, the ceramics room, and the painting area. We saw pieces that have taken years to complete and we made the connection that these pieces have been in the production stage for as long as we have been playing the bass at YONA. Jared finished with the “wall of fame” where each person who has presented works at the Nina gets a piece of theirs hung on a wall.

This wall served as a symbol of comradery and shared devotion to a craft. Not everyone gets an opportunity to be on such a wall or to have a small piece of their craft be part of a bigger legacy. I don't feel as though this was lost on our bass players as they took their time admiring and hopefully thinking about what they saw, what they liked, or what they did not like. Hopefully they will still be asking themselves these questions for the rest of their lives.

Through the tour our bass players took in what community means. We're all trying to create something that we're proud of, with people that mean something to us. These people are neighbors with us when we're at school, and when we're at home. This visit served as way to see the same people in our neighborhood working together in

a place that encourages creativity for the sake of creativity. These same people we see at the grocery store, maybe at your church, walking their dogs, or tending their gardens all have a story and like YONA, the Nina can help tell our story.

This visit started as an idea to bring performance opportunities for our musicians within our community, and that still is the case and we will pursue every chance given to us to play our instruments for people, but we can look at this in many more ways since visiting. It was a clear reference point for how powerful the arts is. Hopefully, next time we visit we will be showcasing what we have been studying on our instruments as a thank you for the Nina community sharing with us what they're creating.

## YONA SPOTLIGHT: AYEZHA, FLUTE STUDENT



*Ayezha is in grade 5 at St. Alphonsus School, 2nd year at YONA.*

### **How would you describe YONA?**

YONA is an afterschool program where you play an instrument, sing in choir, and do lots of other fun things.

### **What is your favourite part of YONA?**

Rehearsals, especially Community Orchestra rehearsals. I like how different schools come together to play and you hear all the different parts.

### **What is your favourite song to play?**

How to Train Your Dragon.

### **What has been your favourite performance so far?**

The YONA Winter Concert during my junior year- it brings back good memories and celebrations.

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You can keep up to date on all of the happenings at YONA, learn more about our amazing students and staff, and what they're working on.

Instagram: [@yonasistema](https://www.instagram.com/yonasistema)

Facebook: [YONA-Sistema](https://www.facebook.com/YONA-Sistema)

## THANK YOU



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Edmonton Symphony Orchestra & Winspear Centre 9720 102 Ave Edmonton, AB T5J 4B2