

SAN DIEGO
YOUTH SYMPHONY



San Diego Symphony.

RAFAEL PAYARE | MUSIC & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Building Relevance, Connection, and Community through Early Childhood & Youth Programming

Presented by
Kate Battenfeld, Executive Director, San Diego Youth Symphony
Stephen Salts, Director of Impact and Innovation, San Diego Symphony

ACSO 2026 Annual Conference, Santa Rosa, CA

Opening Activity

Carnival of the Animals Intro (with Scarves) (Camille Saint-Saëns)



Session Overview

1. Introductions: Who's in the Room Today?
1. Creating connections:
 - SDYS Early Childhood Programs ChIMES and Music Discovery
 - San Diego Symphony and ChIMES early childhood series partnership
1. Hands-on practice developing songs to create a safe and inclusive space
1. Brain development and music, current research and its impact on cultivating community
1. Wrap-up, final thoughts, and comments

Who's in the Room?

- Works in education or community engagement.
- Has an admin role at an orchestra
- Teaches music
- Performs with an orchestra.
- Serves children under age five.
- Exploring new community partnerships.



SAN DIEGO YOUTH SYMPHONY

SDYS At a Glance:

Founded in 1945 - Entering our 81st season

Annual Budget: (FY27) \$2.4M

Students and Families Served: 3,500+ annually through 15 ensembles, community programs, and early childhood initiatives



SDYS Early Childhood Programs



MUSIC DISCOVERY

ChIMES Is...

- Playful, participatory hands-on weekly classes for children ages 0-5 with parent/caregivers
- Residences in Preschools and UTK classrooms, outreach programs and community events

Music Discovery Is...

- Bridge between ChIMES exploration and skill-building as a way to introduce children to orchestra ensembles. Ages 5-7.
- Emphasizes building love of music, trust, and identity. Ensembles are introduced as an *invitation*, not the only goal.



ChIMES Community Partnerships

- Weekly ChIMES classes in all CVESD Preschools (28 school sites)
- Weekly ChIMES classes in all SDUSD Preschools (19 school sites)
- [Lullaby Project | Carnegie Hall](#) for Garfield High School teen parents (2022-2025), as well as SD Central Library group lullaby event
- ChIMES programs at a variety of locations such as SD libraries and museums, community celebrations
- ChIMES and San Diego Symphony Early Childhood Partnership:
Symphony Kids Series (ages 0 - 5)



Music as a Way of Life

“In most non-European cultures, music is regarded almost as part of technology, that is, as one of the skills of staying alive and well...”

- Christopher Small, from Music, Society, Education



Music is a Basic Human Skill

From birth, children are hard-wired to sing in tune and move with accurate rhythm.

Recent studies show that we are born with the capacity to be musical (*The Sector*, [Born musical: new research shows that musicality is present from birth](#)).

Pairs Activity

Think for a moment about a song from your childhood– did someone sing it to you, or was it a recorded song? What are your memories around it? How did (or does it still) it make you feel?

1. Turn to the person next to you and share for a few minutes each
1. Whole group share-out



Connecting Through a Song

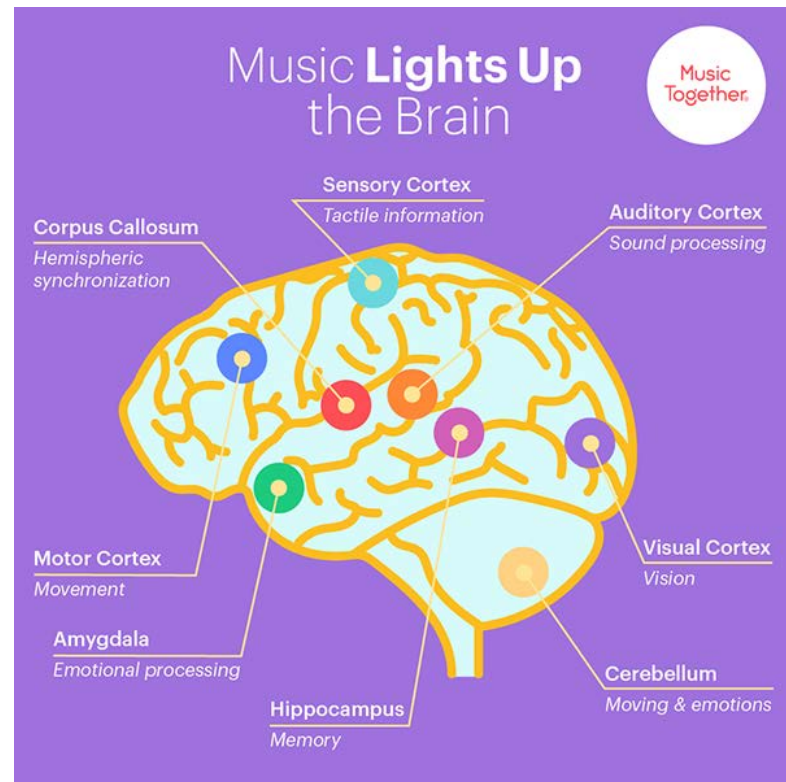
- Music, in particular singing, pays tribute to personal memories and the historical relevance of songs.
- Cultivating a community of singing and music in early childhood classes and among families fosters an appreciation for the historical context, personal connections, and cultural links that can be made through the exploration and the singing of songs.



Benefits of Early Music Learning

The brain is at its most receptive during the **first five years**, which leads to early experiences having a major impact on the development of neurological connections.

Primary role models (parents/caregivers/teachers) play an essential role in children's music development.



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Is your organization...

- Performing early childhood programming?
- A youth-serving organization, or do you have early childhood experts on staff or in the orchestra?
- Curious about where to start?

Let's dig into an early childhood framework for orchestras

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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Programming

- 30 mins. MAX
- Weekend mornings
- 2+ time options
- Smaller performance space



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)

Programming

- Likely a chamber ensemble
- Consider a HOST (more on this soon...)



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Programming

- Use visuals!
- Write a script
- Level down the ticket price
- Consider open seating



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Programming

- Singing, moving, counting, dancing!
- Repertoire for musicians + Repertoire for toddlers



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Programming

- Structure and consistency
 - Hello Song
 - Meet the Instruments and Musicians (solos)
 - Ensemble plays together
 - Sing-alongs, musical stories, counting, motor skills
 - More repertoire
 - Goodbye Song

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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)

Rehearsing

- Prepare the musicians!
- They are scripted
- They engage directly with the audience



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)

Rehearsing

- They will move around the stage, sometimes with the instrument



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Hello Song by Stephanie Leavell

Say hello

From your head

To your toes

‘Cause it’s time to say hello

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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Hello Song by Stephanie Leavell

Say hello

With your hands



‘Cause it’s time to say hello

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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Hello Song by Stephanie Leavell

Say hello

With your feet



‘Cause it’s time to say hello

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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



Rehearsing

- Consider a host!
- Nathalia Palis
 - Music and Family Therapist
 - Performer
 - Preschool Teacher
 - Engaging



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Rehearsing

- Prepare your musicians for a REAL dress rehearsal
 - Entrances, Exits
 - Script
 - Music
 - Production cues
 - NO stopping



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Performance Day

- Pre-Concert Activities
 - Coloring
 - Crafts related to a concert theme
 - Instrument Exploration
 - Reading Corner



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Performance

- Be ready to amplify as audience noise creeps up



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Sensory Friendly

- Parent and Caregiver Planning
- Visual Schedule or Social Story
 - Website
 - Know Before You Go
 - Lobby Screens
 - Printed Program



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)

Sensory Friendly

- Family Restroom
- Quiet Room
- Fidgets and other Sensory Supports Available



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Sensory Friendly

- Avoid extremes in production:
 - Sound
 - Volume
 - Lighting



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)

Sensory Friendly

- Sensory Inclusive Venue Certification via Kulture City
 - Sensory Kits
 - Headphones
 - Glasses
 - Mood Meter
 - Weighted Blanket



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Symphony Kids Series (0-5)



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Sensory Friendly

- Consider a Community Partner
- Neurodiversity specialty
 - SDSU Center for Autism and Developmental Disorders
 - Concert Buddies



ChIMES & San Diego Symphony Symphony Kids Partnership



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- **Symphony Kids Series:** For our youngest music lovers (ages 0–5), these 30-minute interactive concerts are sensory-friendly and include sing-alongs, rhymes, and dances while introducing them to the instruments of the orchestra.
- **ChIMES team** brings instruments and staff so little ones have engaging, hands on experiences with each instrument family.
- **Benefits:** ChIMES program information in Symphony marketing materials, and San Diego Youth Symphony receives free tickets through SDSO's Music Connects ticket program.



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Building a Musical Ecosystem

Build relationships, not transactions. Not every child will join an ensemble, and that's ok.
Success = musical identity, confidence, belonging.

Consider: what pathways already exist in your organization that you may not be naming?



Why it Matters

Studies in brain science show that when people make music together, it can trigger and align similar neural pathways in all participants.

[Cognitive Crescendo: How Music Shapes the Brain's Structure and Function - PMC](#)

Preschoolers engaged in music and movement activities demonstrate more cooperation, group bonding, and prosocial behavior.

[Joint music making promotes prosocial behavior in 4-year-old children - Evolution and Human Behavior](#)

WolfBrown: A Report to the Bernard van Leer Foundation

Music Making in the Well-Being of Young Families

[Making a Joyful Noise: The Potential Role of Music Making in the Well-Being of Young Families](#)

Recent research highlights that the musicality of infancy plays a crucial role in the development of early communication.

[The impact of the home musical environment on infants' language development - ScienceDirect](#)

Wrap-Up, Questions, Comments

Stay in touch!

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Thank you!
