



Welcome and congratulations on being accepted into the Omaha Area Youth Orchestras! Founded in 1958, and now part of the UNO School of Music, OAYO has enriched the lives of thousands of musicians for over 65 years. We look forward to continuing the rich traditions of this program and are glad to have you join OAYO!

Please refer to this handbook as your primary resource for OAYO policies and important dates. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Karen Fannin  
Director, UNO School of Music

### **STAFF DIRECTORY**

#### **Manager of Youth Music Programs and Operations:**

Cassie Fritch

Email: [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu)

Phone: 531-350-0180

Please contact Cassie with any questions about tuition, scholarships, programs, and logistics.

#### **Head Operations Manager:**

Julissa Ramirez

#### **Youth Symphony Conductor:**

Dr. Matthew Brooks – [matthewbrooks@nebraska.edu](mailto:matthewbrooks@nebraska.edu)

Please contact Dr. Brooks with any YS music questions.

#### **Youth Philharmonic Conductor:**

Mrs. Debbie Martinez – [djmartinez@nebraska.edu](mailto:djmartinez@nebraska.edu)

Please contact Mrs. Martinez with any YP music questions.

**Youth Concert Strings Conductor:**

Ms. Rose Rydberg – [rrydberg@nebraska.edu](mailto:rrydberg@nebraska.edu)

Please contact Ms. Rydberg with any YCS music questions.

**Director of Chamber Music:**

Ms. Sophia Potter – [spotter@nebraska.edu](mailto:spotter@nebraska.edu)

Please contact Ms. Potter with any chamber music questions.

**COMMUNICATION**

Our information to families is distributed through email and Constant Contact.

**Please keep us informed of your family's current email addresses and send email address adds and/or changes to Cassie Fritch at [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu).**

Please allow emails from OAYO according to your email provider. **If you are not receiving communication, check your spam folder.**

**If you need to reach us right away on rehearsal days, please call or text Cassie Fritch at: 531-350-0180.**

**Website**

All information about the Omaha Area Youth Orchestras, including the Student and Family Dashboard, can be found on our website. Please check the Dashboard for the most up to date information at our website:

[oayo.unomaha.edu](http://oayo.unomaha.edu)

**Announcements**

Announcements are often made at the beginning of rehearsals regarding upcoming events. Please listen carefully as they often contain important information that is pertinent to your ensemble. Memos with essential information or details about an upcoming event are emailed to you.

**Facebook**

Like our Facebook page (Omaha Area Youth Orchestras) to stay informed about OAYO news and events!

**Bad Weather and Cancellations**

If the facility or venue is closed (for example, due to weather), we will close. OAYO reserves the right to cancel any rehearsal or event, even if the venue is open, if we have determined it is unsafe for musicians to travel there. If musicians traveling a long distance to a rehearsal or concert are unable to attend due to weather or travel conditions, please contact Cassie Fritch at [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu) as soon as possible.

## **PRIMARY REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE VENUE**

University of Nebraska at Omaha– Strauss Performing Arts Center  
6001 Dodge Street  
Omaha, NE 68182  
OAYO Office Phone (Cassie Fritch): 531-350-0180

## **ORCHESTRA INFORMATION**

### **Rehearsal Schedules**

Below are the regular rehearsal times and locations for OAYO's full-year programs. All rehearsals take place on Sundays.

#### **Youth Symphony**

1:30-3:30 pm

UNO Strauss Performing Arts Center, Concert Hall

#### **Youth Philharmonic**

4:00-6:00 pm

UNO Strauss Performing Arts Center, Concert Hall

#### **Youth Concert Strings**

4:15-6:00 pm

UNO Strauss Performing Arts Center, Room 109

#### **Prelude Strings**

Time and locations TBA

OAYO's eight-week Prelude Strings program has multiple rehearsal sites and runs in the Spring. For more information about specific Prelude sites or questions, please email [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu).

#### **Chamber Music**

**Youth Symphony** chamber music coachings will be from either 12:15 - 1:15pm or 3:45-4:45 pm every Sunday that the orchestra meets.

**Youth Philharmonic and Youth Concert Strings** chamber music coachings will be from 3:00-3:45 pm every Sunday that the orchestra meets.

#### **Special Events**

Throughout the season, individual OAYO students, OAYO orchestras, and OAYO chamber music ensembles may be offered opportunities to perform for special events not currently listed on the season calendar. Specific information for these events will be communicated via email to those students involved.

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

*Note: It is the musician's responsibility to check the rehearsal schedule and OAYO season calendar to be present at all events that require your attendance. Families should avoid scheduling ACT/SAT prep, driver's education, family or social events, and non-school or college related travel on Sunday afternoons that OAYO rehearses. Please make sure you have all dates in your family calendar so that conflicts don't catch you by surprise.*

All rehearsals are required.

As soon as a musician becomes aware of a conflict with the schedule, they must submit an absence request form for consideration for approval by the conductor.

**[Click here to access the Absence Request Form](#)**

- The latest a request for an **expected** absence may be submitted is **the Friday before rehearsal at 11:59pm. Failure to do so will incur an additional 1/2 absence.**
- **Chamber music** participants must **also** contact Sophia Potter at [spotter@nebraska.edu](mailto:spotter@nebraska.edu) if they will be absent from chamber rehearsal.
- All absence requests must be submitted through the Absence Request Form. After submitting an absence request through the Absence Request Form, you will receive notification of approval or denial, or a request for more information. **Failure to submit an Absence Request form will result in an additional half absence.**
- All absences will count towards your maximum number of two (2)-absences per concert cycle. This includes school music events, illness, and sporting events.

Maximum Number of Absences:

- **No more than two absences for any reason are permitted per concert cycle** (a concert cycle is the period between concerts. For example, the beginning of September to the concert in November is a concert cycle).
- Absences **for any reason** will count towards your maximum number.
- A third absence will result in the need to re-audition and may prevent a student from performing in a concert.
- **Students with more than 2 unreported or unexcused absences in a concert cycle who choose to drop OAYO will not receive a prorated tuition refund.**

**Attendance at all concerts and dress rehearsals is mandatory.**

**There are no excused absences from dress rehearsals**, except if a musician has a school-related music performance at the same time as an OAYO dress rehearsal. Musicians must still complete the absence request form AND email [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu).

If the musician will miss a concert due to a school-related music performance at the same time, the student must let both their Conductor and the Manager of Youth Music Programs, Cassie Fritch, know as soon as possible as it may affect seating and instrumentation.

It is your responsibility to look over your season schedule and reconcile the concert dates with your other activities. You will not be able to play the concert if you are absent from a dress rehearsal for reasons other than illness or a required school performance.

**For Chamber Music**, only **2 absences for any reason** are permitted for the **entire season**. If you miss more than 2 chamber music rehearsals without prior approval from your coach and the chamber music director, you may be removed from your chamber group and required to pay the \$100 chamber withdrawal fee.

**For long term ongoing commitments that you know about in advance such as sporting events, potential tournaments, college visits, etc.:**

- Email the Manager of Youth Music Programs and Operations at [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu) with a list of confirmed AND potential absence dates as early as possible. Example: If there is a tournament happening on a Sunday that your team *might* be part of, let us know about that.
- Please ALSO complete an absence request form for each confirmed absence.

### **Tardiness**

All musicians must be in their seats at least five minutes prior to the start of rehearsals. Musicians are considered tardy if they are not in their seats, tuned with their music on the stand by the beginning of rehearsal or after the break. **Coming late or leaving a rehearsal early is counted as one-half (1/2) of an absence.** Late arrivals will sit in the back or at the end of the section during the rehearsal.

***Note: For events with the Omaha Symphony, tardiness will not be tolerated.***

This is a special encounter. The potential for our orchestra to sound truly professional is within reach if we minimize absences from rehearsals. Ensemble playing, community building, and orchestral technique is established at every rehearsal. Each absence brings our overall performance down a notch. If the student does not show at rehearsal with the Omaha Symphony without notifying the OAYO staff, they cannot play at the concert.

### **Illnesses or Emergencies**

- In case of **illness or emergency with less than 24 hours' notice** before a rehearsal, **you must complete an absence request form as soon as you become aware of the need to be absent.**
- For illness or emergency, please also email [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu) or call or text 531-350-0180.

- **Failure to report an absence** that the musician and family were aware of (**scheduled events**) and completing the form less than 48 hours before the missed rehearsal will result in an **additional half absence**.

## **REHEARSAL ETIQUETTE**

During rehearsals, OAYO musicians are expected to...

- Check in at the welcome table. Failure to check in will result in being counted as tardy.
- Be seated and ready to play at least 5 minutes before the rehearsal start time.
- Be prepared with your instrument, necessary accessories (mute(s), rockstop, etc.), folder, music, and a #2 pencil with an eraser to every rehearsal and concert.
- Be respectful and attentive to the conductor and any guest artists present.
- **Cell phones and tablets must be turned off and put away** during all OAYO rehearsals, sectionals, concerts and events.

### **Phones:**

- If use for tuning, please put it under your seat after tuning.
- Please keep your phone in your bag or your case during rehearsal. You may use your phone during the break. If your phone becomes a distraction during rehearsal or sectional, we reserve the right to confiscate your phone for the duration of rehearsal.
- Food, drink (except for water bottles), and gum are prohibited in all rehearsal and concert spaces.
- When taking a break, you are responsible for the safety of your instrument. Do not leave instruments or bows out of their cases if you are not holding them yourself.
- Rehearsals are open to family members and friends. They are welcome to sit in the back of the rehearsal room or hall, by the doors. We ask that all guests' electronic devices be silenced. The ensemble conductor reserves the right to ask anyone engaging in distracting behavior to leave.
- **Failure to observe rehearsal etiquette will result in the following actions:**
  - First warning: the conductor or rehearsal manager will ask the student to discontinue the specific behavior or action.
  - Second warning: if the conductor or rehearsal manager observes the student violating rehearsal etiquette a second time (either in the same rehearsal or on a different day), the student will be asked to stop the behavior or action AND their parent or guardian will be notified via email and/or phone call. Depending on the violation, a meeting with the student, parent/guardian, and conductor may be required as well.
  - Final warning: if the student is observed violating rehearsal etiquette a third time, the student may be removed from OAYO programs without a tuition refund. The student may be allowed to re-audition and join OAYO in the future at the discretion of the conductor.

## **BEHAVIOR AND CONDUCT**

OAYO's supervisory responsibility for student musicians extends only to the scheduled times of all functions. Students are expected to remain in specified areas at all times. OAYO cannot assume responsibility for students leaving specified areas.

As OAYO's musicians are considered young ambassadors to the community, appropriate behavior is expected at all times. By participating in OAYO, musicians agree to the following rules:

- There will be no distracting communication of any kind (including but not limited to: hand or facial gestures, note passing, texting, etc.) or disruptive activity at any event, including rehearsals.
- **Cell phones** - please see above.
- Food, drink (except water in a water bottle), **and gum** are not allowed in the rehearsal or concert areas.
- Possession or use of any item which might inflict personal injury or property damage is prohibited.
- Foul language will not be tolerated.
- Members are expected to display common courtesy and respect to all OAYO staff, coaches, guest musicians, parent volunteers and to fellow musicians at all times.
- Please leave the venue in the same condition as we found it. Students must pick up after themselves. Damage to or destruction of property is prohibited.
- Abusing and/or not taking proper care of the OAYO/ UNO/other venue equipment or music will not be tolerated.
- Bullying will not be tolerated.
- Unruly behavior can become dangerous and will not be tolerated. Physical or verbal assaults or any act or words that show threat to harm or endanger the safety of others will not be tolerated.

**Failure to comply with any OAYO regulation will result in disciplinary action at the discretion of any member of the OAYO staff.** Violation of any policy may result in disciplinary action such as expulsion from the OAYO program and forfeiture of any tuition and fees paid. See "**Rehearsal Etiquette**" for how OAYO handles violations of the behavior policy.

All OAYO rehearsal and performance venues prohibit smoking on or around the property. Additionally, the consumption of alcoholic beverages, the purchase, sale or use of drugs or controlled substances is not permitted during any orchestra activity. At no OAYO-sponsored event will cohabitation be tolerated. Failure to comply with any of these regulations will result in the automatic expulsion from OAYO and forfeiture of any tuition and fees

## MUSIC

OAYO musicians are responsible for their music folders and for all the music given to them throughout the season. It is the responsibility of each musician to keep the ENTIRE season of music in their folders and bring it to every rehearsal, in case their stand partner is absent. Any markings in music should be made with a #2 pencil only. If music is damaged or lost, please contact [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu) for a replacement part or ask a rehearsal manager at rehearsal.

## SEATING, CHAIR PLACEMENTS AND PART ROTATION

Near the beginning of each rehearsal cycle, Principal chair auditions will be held for strings only. The purpose of String Principal Chair Auditions is for the conductor to check in with musicians and assess their progress. These are mandatory and will be due by the deadline. If these are not submitted, students will record their audition in one shot at rehearsal, recorded by one of the rehearsal assistants.

**If your video is not submitted by the deadline, you will be pulled out of rehearsal to be recorded.** After the principal chairs have been decided, the seating will remain the same until the concert. On rare occasions, seating may be changed prior to a concert at the discretion of the conductor. Wind, brass, and percussion parts are assigned at the discretion of each conductor.

### **Youth Symphony and Youth Philharmonic Seating**

Principal Chair Audition videos (strings only) will generally be due a few weeks into each concert cycle (dates will be announced each semester). Seating of strings will be rotational with chair placement seating closer to the concert. Concert seating will generally be finalized by a few weeks after the auditions are due with string players sitting in rotational seating until then. This will give the conductor time to get to know students' strengths and understand their unique abilities and contributions to the section. A winds and brass part/chair placement process may take place between concert cycles. Wind and brass players may rotate parts based on director's discretion and the needs of the ensemble.

### **Youth Concert Strings Seating**

Seating will be rotational for each section. Every student will be assigned a stand partner and each stand will be rotated every rehearsal, with the exception of the first stand. Auditions for the principal stand will take place in October (this will be announced in advance via email and at rehearsal). The principal stand positions will be re-auditioned in January for the spring concert. Any member of YCS is eligible to audition for the principal stand position within their section. Excerpts will be chosen from the music for the upcoming concert and will be made available to musicians at least one month prior to the audition.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **Preparation & practice**

Music is chosen to challenge and educate. Each musician is expected to prepare their music for each week's rehearsal. In an orchestra, it is essential for every member to know their parts well to play together. If you do not know your parts, the whole orchestra will not play or sound well together.

### **Private instruction**

We encourage all musicians to study with a private teacher and work on their orchestra music with their instructor.

### **School music programs**

OAYO is intended to supplement the individual school music programs and is not intended to supersede the music education currently being provided in the schools. It is expected that students will be members of their school music program.

### **Instruments**

OAYO is not responsible for any damage that occurs before, during, or after rehearsals or concerts to personal or school instruments.

### **Cello and Bass students**

Must provide their own rock-stops for rehearsals and concerts.

### **Brass players**

Must provide their own mutes (required occasionally)

## **CONCERT INFORMATION**

### **Concert Dress (Concert Dress Code)**

Concert Dress is the "dress code" for musicians during **concerts**. Students are allowed to wear whatever they wish during **rehearsals** (*we encourage them to follow their school's dress code*), but during concerts, we ask that they wear concert dress. The purpose for the following dress code is so the audience will stay focused on the music during the performance and won't be distracted by individuals in the ensemble. It has been made to create the best-looking and most uniform appearance at the lowest cost to the families. Therefore, if a musician comes to a concert in unacceptable attire, they will not be allowed on stage until the problem has been resolved.

### **Youth Symphony:**

#### **Option 1**

- Black dress shirt/blouse (**at least 3/4 length sleeves, full-length preferred**)
- Black pants, skirt, or dress (**skirts/dresses must be knee length or longer**)
- Black socks or **opaque** black tights
- Black **DRESS\*** shoes

### **Option 2**

- Black tux/suit jacket
- White dress shirt
- Black bowtie
- Black slacks
- Black socks
- Black **DRESS\*** shoes

\*Dress shoes are dress shoes.

Please do not wear sneakers, tennis shoes, crocs, or flip flops.

Please keep jewelry to a minimum and **do not** wear perfume. No bows, sequins, patterns, or sheer materials.

### **Youth Concert Strings and Youth Philharmonic:**

- White button-up dress shirt (**at least 3/4 length sleeves, full-length preferred**)
- Black pants or skirt (**skirts must be knee length or longer**)
- Black socks/**opaque** black tights
- Black **DRESS\*** shoes

\*Dress shoes are dress shoes.

Please do not wear sneakers, tennis shoes, crocs, or flip flops.

Please keep jewelry to a minimum and **do not** wear perfume. No bows, sequins, patterns, or sheer materials. No coats or ties, please!

### **Prelude Strings**

For everyone: Nice clothing, dress or skirt below the knees. Party/church clothes.

### **When to arrive on Concert Days**

Please check the calendar and your email for exact times.

"Call time" means you are inside the performance venue with your instrument unpacked and tuned.

### **Concert Tickets**

Concert ticket information will be shared with families in advance of performances.

Due to copyright and facility restrictions, no recordings or videotapes are allowed **at any time** during concerts, unless prior permission has been given by both OAYO and the venue.

### **Outside event tickets**

Occasionally, OAYO will receive tickets from other performing groups in the area that will be made available for OAYO students at either no cost or reduced cost. OAYO will update every student via email communications regarding these opportunities.

## **CHAMBER MUSIC**

A chamber music ensemble is a small group of musicians who perform on their instruments together without a conductor. Each musician in the group is the only one on a part, so you learn to be more independent. Students who are active participants in the chamber music program improve greatly as leaders and musicians and develop new friendships. Chamber Music Ensembles are coached by local professional musicians and public or private teachers. Chamber groups will perform one or more formal concerts. More advanced chamber groups may be given the opportunity to perform on all-orchestra concerts.

Groups are formed over the summer by the Chamber Music Director. Students must participate in YS, YP, or YCS for the full season in order to participate in chamber music. OAYO chamber music rehearsals are one hour long and take place before or after orchestra rehearsal for YS. Chamber music rehearsals are 45 minutes long and take place before orchestra rehearsal for YCS and YP. YS, YP, and YCS chamber music rehearsals will take place on Sunday afternoons at UNO Strauss Performing Arts Center. **If you miss more than two chamber music rehearsals TOTAL for any reason, you may need to re-audition for your coach.** If your coach determines that you will not be able to continue with the group, it will be treated as a cancellation after the start of the season and charged the \$100 late withdrawal fee.

## **CONCERTO COMPETITION**

The OAYO Concerto Competition is an opportunity to perform before a panel of judges, receive written comments and compete for one opportunity to perform as a soloist with Youth Symphony. The OAYO Concerto Competition is limited to musicians who are members of Youth Symphony or Youth Philharmonic in both the season in which they audition and the season in which they perform. Members may audition on any instrument and are **not** limited to the instrument which they play in OAYO in Youth Symphony or Youth Philharmonic. Winners may audition again after three years. There is no minimum age requirement, however the entry into the competition is limited to members of the Youth Symphony and Youth Philharmonic.

The Competition is designed for all instrument divisions, i.e. winds, brass, percussion, strings, harp, guitar, and piano. A single competition winner will be announced.

The repertoire is to be one movement of a standard concerto or concert piece performed from memory. Applicants must provide their own collaborative pianist (accompanist) on the day of the contest. Additional competition and forms will be sent via email communication in January

The Concerto Competition for the 2026-2027 season will be held in late April 2026.

## **TUITION AND PAYMENT SCHEDULE**

### **OAYO Tuition**

Billing information will be emailed to families prior to the start of the season. Payments will be accepted online through UNO's CircuiTree platform. Payments (whether paying in full or in monthly installments), must be set up by Monday, September 1, 2025 for your child to participate in the first rehearsal of OAYO. For families who pay in monthly installments in CircuiTree, please monitor your account to ensure that consistent monthly payments are being paid. If payments stop early for any reason, students may be denied from participating until the payments are set back up.

If a musician chooses to drop membership of any OAYO orchestra or chamber music, all fees are still payable unless written notice is received from the office. Notice of dropped membership must be sent to Cassie Fritch at [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu).

### **Scholarships**

The OAYO Scholarship Assistance Program is designed to provide access for as many students as possible, regardless of financial situation. This is a "pay what you can" scholarship program pending available funds. After notification of acceptance into OAYO, families are invited to complete a scholarship form no later than July 1 for each child who is planning to enroll. Notification of scholarship awards will be sent prior to the registration deadline of July 15. Information is available at [oayo.unomaha.edu](http://oayo.unomaha.edu).

Please contact Cassie Fritch at [cfritch@nebraska.edu](mailto:cfritch@nebraska.edu) with any questions.