



2026-2027 HANDBOOK

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@unomaha.edu

Phone: 531-350-0180

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

Head Operations Assistant:

Julissa Ramirez

Youth Symphony Conductor:

Dr. Matthew Brooks – matthewbrooks@unomaha.edu

Please contact Dr. Brooks with any YS music questions.

Youth Philharmonic Conductor:

Mrs. Debbie Martinez – djmartinez@unomaha.edu

Please contact Mrs. Martinez with any YP music questions.

Youth Concert Strings Conductor:

Mrs. Rose Rydberg – rrydberg@unomaha.edu

Please contact Mrs. Rydberg with any YCS music questions.

Director of Chamber Music:

Ms. Sophia Potter – spotter@unomaha.edu

Please contact Ms. Potter with any chamber music questions.

COMMUNICATION

Our information to families is distributed through email. **Please keep us informed of your family's current email addresses and send email address adds and/or changes to Cassie Fritch at cfritch@unomaha.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

Announcements

Announcements are often made during rehearsals regarding upcoming events. Please listen carefully as they often contain important information that is pertinent to your ensemble. Announcements will also be written on the whiteboard near the attendance table. Fliers of upcoming events will be posted on the whiteboard and handed out in rehearsal.

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. 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@unomaha.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

OAYO's eight-week Prelude Strings program runs in the Fall and Spring. For more information about Prelude Strings, please email cfritch@unomaha.edu.

Chamber Music

Youth Symphony chamber music coachings will be from either 12:15 - 1:15 pm 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.

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.
- Attendance at all concerts and dress rehearsals is mandatory.
- 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.
- All absences (for any reason) will count towards the maximum number of two (2) absences per concert cycle. This includes school music events, illness, and sporting events.
- A third absence may require a re-audition and may affect a student's eligibility to perform in the concert.
- The latest a request for an **expected** absence may be submitted is **the Friday before rehearsal at 11:59 pm. Failure to do so will incur an additional 1/2 absence.** In case of **illness or emergency with less than 24 hours' notice** before a rehearsal, students **must complete an absence request form right away.**

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

- Email the Manager of Youth Music Programs and Operations at cfritch@unomaha.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.

Conflicts with school concerts:

- 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.
- Students will not be able to play the concert if they are absent from a dress rehearsal for reasons other than a required school performance.

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 for tuning. **Coming late or leaving a rehearsal early is counted as one-half (1/2) of an absence.**

For **Chamber Music Ensemble attendance policies**, please see the Chamber Music section in the Handbook.

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

Because participation in an orchestra requires students to be present to collaborate with others, if a student is frequently absent, it may be determined by the conductor that their absences are detracting from the experience of the other students in the orchestra. OAYO staff reserve the right to remove these students from the program but encourage them to re-audition in future seasons if their availability changes.

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), rock stop, 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.
- During breaks, 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.

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 and tablets must be turned off and put away** during all OAYO rehearsals, sectionals, concerts and events except for tuning and during the break. If your phone becomes a distraction during rehearsal or sectional,

OAYO staff reserves the right to confiscate your phone for the duration of rehearsal.

- 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.

1. First warning: the conductor or rehearsal manager will ask the student to discontinue the specific behavior or action.
2. 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.
3. 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.

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. 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@unomaha.edu for a replacement part or ask an OAYO staff member at rehearsal.

SEATING, CHAIR PLACEMENTS AND PART ROTATION

Near the beginning of each semester, Principal Chair Auditions will be held for **strings only**. Strings students will participate in rotational seating prior to chair placement auditions. This allows the conductor to become familiar with students' strengths and understand their unique abilities and contributions to the section.

The purpose of String Principal Chair Auditions is for the conductor to check in with musicians and assess their progress. Dates, audition materials, audition excerpts, and submission instructions will be announced in advance. Strings Principal Chair Auditions are mandatory and will be due by the deadline. **If your video is not submitted by the deadline, you will be pulled out of rehearsal to be recorded.**

Concert seating will generally be finalized by a few weeks after the auditions are due. Seating assignments will be based on audition results as well as the educational needs of the ensemble. On rare occasions, seating may be changed prior to a concert at the discretion of the conductor.

Youth Symphony and Youth Philharmonic Wind and Brass Seating

A winds and brass part/chair placement process may take place between concert cycles at the director's discretion. Wind and brass players may rotate parts based on director's discretion and the needs of the ensemble.

Youth Concert Strings Seating

Chair placement auditions are mandatory for all students and will be held once each semester.

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)

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 tie
- Black slacks
- Black socks
- Black **DRESS*** shoes

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!

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 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 (trios, quartets, quintets, etc.) who perform together without a conductor. Each musician in the group is the only person on a part. Students who are active participants in the chamber music program improve greatly as leaders and musicians and develop new friendships. Each Chamber Music Ensemble is coached by a local professional musician or public or private teachers. Chamber groups will perform one or more formal concerts. More advanced chamber groups may be given the opportunity to perform at the beginning of OAYO orchestral concerts.

Groups are formed over the summer by the Chamber Music Director. **Please note that placement in a chamber music ensemble depends on instrumentation, space, and coach availability, so not all students wishing placement in a**

chamber music may be placed. Students must participate in YS, YP, or YCS for the full season in order to participate in chamber music.

Only two absences for any reason are permitted for the entire season for chamber music participants. If students miss more than two chamber music rehearsals, they may be asked to re-audition for their coach. If the coach determines that the student will not be able to continue with the group because their absences have negatively affected the other students in the group, OAYO staff may remove student from the chamber group. Chamber music participants must fill out an absence request if they will be absent and **also** contact Sophia Potter at spotter@unomaha.edu.

Special Events

Throughout the season, 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.

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 must consist of one movement of a standard concerto or concert piece. Applicants must provide their own collaborative pianist (accompanist) on the day of the competition. Additional competition information and forms will be sent via email in January.

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

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. A non-refundable deposit is required by July 15 to reserve a spot in OAYO. Payments (whether paying in full or in monthly installments), must be set up by September 1, 2026 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.

Scholarships

The OAYO Scholarship Assistance Program is designed to provide access to students for whom tuition is a financial barrier. 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.

Please contact Cassie Fritch at cfritch@unomaha.edu with any questions.