



HANDBOOK

2025-2026

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HYO PROGRAM OVERVIEW

1.1 THE ORCHESTRAS

The current HYO program consists of the following six Orchestras:

Huntsville Youth Symphony (HYS)

The Huntsville Youth Symphony is an advanced full orchestra open by audition to string, wind, and percussion students from across the Tennessee Valley. HYS is the most advanced performing ensemble within the Huntsville Youth Orchestra. The group performs frequently in a variety of concert settings. Students are expected to be enrolled in private music lessons or participate in their school band/orchestra program.

- **Conductor:** Joseph Lee
- **Rehearsals:** Mondays, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Sinfonia

Sinfonia is an intermediate full orchestra open by audition to string, wind, and percussion students. Wind and percussion students should have at least 2 years of experience in their schools band program and/or private lessons. Students must possess strong reading skills and should be enrolled in private lessons or participate in their school band program. Sinfonia performs frequently in various concert settings.

- **Conductor:** Dr. C. David Ragsdale
- **Rehearsals:** Mondays, 5:30 - 6:45 pm

Philharmonia

Philharmonia is an intermediate full orchestra open by audition to string students. Participants should be able to read music fluently and are expected to be enrolled in private lessons.

- **Conductor:** Joseph Lee
- **Rehearsals:** Tuesdays, 5:45 - 7:00 pm

Concert Orchestra

The Concert Orchestra is an intermediate-level string orchestra for young string players with at least two to three years of experience. In this orchestra, students continue to develop essential orchestral skills and techniques. The Concert Orchestra is designed to be a 2-3 year course. Students should be comfortable playing on and reading notes on all four strings in first position and able to play one-octave C, G, D, A, and F major scales. Students are expected to be enrolled in private lessons. Chair placement auditions occur at the beginning of the second semester.

- **Conductor:** Kelli Batraw
- **Rehearsals:** Tuesdays, 6:10 - 7:25 pm

Intermezzo Orchestra

The Intermezzo Orchestra is an elementary-level string orchestra for young players with at least one year of experience. Students begin developing skills essential to orchestral playing. Participants should be comfortable playing on the G, D, and A strings in first position; able to play one-octave G and D major scales; and read notes confidently in the key of D major.

- **Conductor:** Kelli Battrow
- **Rehearsals:** Tuesdays, 5:00 - 6:00 pm

Novice Strings

Novice Strings is a beginner-level course open to children with little to no experience. This program focuses on developing elementary techniques, note reading, and the art of string playing. Enrollment is for the entire year, starting in the fall semester. Late admissions may be considered at the instructor's discretion. Instrument choices and rentals will be discussed at the Parent Meeting and emailed out by the conductor. Students will begin playing their instruments in the first week of rehearsals.

- **Conductor:** Bethany Wing
- **Rehearsals:** Tuesdays, 4:30 - 5:30 pm

1.2 REGISTRATION AND TUITION FEE POLICY

Orchestra tuition fees vary by Orchestra and are for the entire year. They should be paid by the first rehearsal. Payment arrangements can be made in installments if necessary. Need-based financial aid is available for students for whom participation poses a financial barrier, and no student will be turned away due to financial constraints. Financial aid and payment plan applications are available on the website and should be submitted prior to the first rehearsal.

HYO's policy is that fees are non-refundable except in the following cases:

1. HYO cannot, or chooses not to, deliver the services for which fees were collected.
2. Significant and unforeseen changes in family circumstances warrant consideration of a refund.

Please note that \$50 of the orchestra fee is a non-refundable registration fee.

All students must complete the registration process, which includes submitting the registration and medical forms along with one of the following:

- Full payment of fees at the time of registration;
- A plan and schedule for paying all fees within the season; or
- An application for reduced fees (i.e., Financial Aid) with a commitment to cover any difference between the awarded aid and the full amount due.

Registration forms are available on the website. To be considered "registered," a player must submit the completed registration form online, including payment or payment plan, and have it signed by a responsible adult by the second rehearsal. Failure to pay or arrange payment at least one week before

the first concert following registration will result in the player being excluded from that concert. Contact the Executive Director if an extension is needed.

1.3 CHAMBER MUSIC PROGRAM

All students in HYS, Sinfonia, and Philharmonia are encouraged to join the HYO Chamber Music program, which is included at a nominal fee of \$50 with HYO membership. The program is also open to others in the community for a \$100 fee to defray program expenses.

Chamber music builds musicianship and camaraderie while enhancing orchestral ensembles. Smaller groups (typically trios, quartets, and quintets) study a different literature where lines are rarely doubled, and each musician essentially becomes a soloist. An experienced musician coaches, but does not conduct, each group. Players coordinate their performance, building precision, intonation, and confidence. Groups are encouraged to meet weekly from September 1st through April 30th, using the coach no more than twice per month. It is highly recommended that coachings and rehearsals alternate weekly.

Most rehearsals are an hour long and are typically hosted in a location chosen by the group. The informal setting is well-suited to chamber music and fosters the development of friendships. The high degree of musical interdependence requires a corresponding high level of commitment. Thorough preparation and punctual attendance at rehearsals are essential and reflect respect for fellow players.

Participants will be invited to perform at scheduled community events, such as the Symphony Guild's Silver Tea, outreach and recruiting events, receptions, nursing homes, and other opportunities as they arise.

While most young musicians do not pursue professional performance careers, those with chamber music experience gain lifelong enjoyment of music performance.

To join a Chamber Group, complete the Chamber Music Interest form on the website.

1.4 REQUIREMENTS FOR PARENTS

There are many activities where the Huntsville Youth Orchestra requires parent volunteers. Parents support the Board, conductors, staff, and players by recruiting new members, helping at rehearsals and concerts, chaperoning concerts and tours, transporting percussion and concert supplies, and assisting with other events as needed.

1.4.1 PARENT FUNDRAISING

Each HYO family is expected to assist with fundraising activities or generate \$75 in fundraising revenue, over and above annual fees and attire rental. Parents may fulfill this obligation by simply donating the \$75. Fundraising efforts may include selling program ads, securing corporate donations, chair sponsorships, and participating in other fundraisers that arise during the year. Sponsoring a student requires a total donation of \$100. If you would like to sponsor a student, please do so on the students registration form or contact the Executive Director if you wish to sponsor a student you are not registering.

Parents are encouraged to sell program ads or seek corporate sponsors and should coordinate potential buyers with the Executive Director.

Donations are acknowledged in concert programs by the following categories:

- **Conductor's Circle:** \$1,000.00 and above
- **Benefactors:** \$250.00 - \$999.99
- **Patrons:** \$25.00 - \$249.99
- **Friends:** \$10.00 - \$24.99

Advertisements in the concert season programs (over 1,500 printed each season) are an inexpensive way for individuals, businesses, and organizations to reach the HYO audience. To purchase an ad or identify a prospective purchaser, contact the Executive Director.

1.4.2 PARENT VOLUNTEERING

Every HYO family is expected to contribute time and energy to the Huntsville Youth Orchestra. This season, we have identified several key areas where parent volunteers are needed:

- **Fundraising:** Assist with fundraising activities, including selling program ads and seeking sponsors.
- **Production:** Help with concert production tasks, including setting up and managing concert logistics.
- **Chaperoning:** Serve as a chaperone during rehearsals, backstage at concerts, or coordinate with other parents for these roles.
- **Office Assistance:** Provide support with office tasks, including record-keeping and administrative duties.
- **Publicity/Marketing:** Aid in promoting HYO events through publicity efforts, marketing materials, and community outreach.

Parents have been asked to indicate their specific areas of interest to match their skills with our needs. You will receive emails based on your indicated preferences. If you wish to explore additional volunteer opportunities or change your selection, please contact the Executive Assistant.

1.4.3 COMMUNICATIONS

Email is the primary mode of communication between HYO and students/parents. Students and parents will receive regular communications from the HYO Executive Assistant, Executive Director, and Conductors. A parent/guardian email address is required for every member; a member/student email address is optional. If your contact information changes, notify the Executive Assistant immediately at info@hsvyo.org so you do not miss any communications.

Other Communication Methods include:

- Google Classroom
- Verbal announcements (reminding of info already emailed out) & handouts in rehearsals
- Remind 101 for brief announcements and reminders
- HYO Website www.hsvyo.org
 - Current Members Page

Current Members Website Page: The Current Member Page on our website can be accessed using the password emailed at the beginning of the season. Contact info@hsvyo.org if you are unable to find the password. This website contains important links such as the absence request form, sheet music PDF's, the handbook, rehearsal schedules, and other frequently referenced documents and information.

1.5 THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Huntsville Youth Orchestra (HYO) is a non-profit corporation whose purpose is to “foster, promote and provide the support necessary for students from North Alabama to experience musical education in an orchestral setting”. Founded in 1962 by the late Russell Gerhart, HYO is managed by a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of community leaders, musicians, and HYO parents. The Board employs HYO personnel, manages HYO property, and funds HYO operations. Revenue sources include corporate and individual donations, concert program ads, players’ annual fees, grants, and various fundraising activities throughout the year.

The Board of Directors seeks motivated individuals to help shape and guide HYO. Parents are welcome on the Board or to serve on Board Committees. To be considered for vacant positions or for more information, contact a Board officer or a member of the Nominating Committee.

HYO STUDENT GUIDELINES

2.1 PERSONAL PRACTICE

All students are expected to come to orchestra and chamber rehearsals with their parts practiced in advance. Conductors will often suggest specific sections that should be focused on between rehearsals. Students are encouraged to take any difficult sections to their private lessons to seek guidance from their private teacher.

2.2 REHEARSALS

Rehearsal Tools:

Ensure you bring the necessary "rehearsal tools" to every session, including:

- Pencil with eraser
- Extra strings, reeds, valve oil, slide oil, and other instrument-specific accessories
- A good selection of sticks and mallets (for percussionists)
- Working instrument: Instrument repairs are crucial for a student's success and should be planned around rehearsal times if possible. In the event that a student's instrument is in the shop, the student should coordinate finding a spare to borrow. The HYO has string instruments available for borrowing, but wind instruments should be borrowed from the student's school band program. If the student is unable to find an instrument to borrow, they should still attend rehearsal and follow along with their parts.

Arrival and Setup:

Arrive at least 15 minutes before each rehearsal to allow time to unpack and warm up. Rehearsals will begin and end on time.

Rehearsal Structure:

Rehearsals are organized so that the pieces involving the greatest number of players are typically rehearsed first. Members who do not perform in every piece may leave after their pieces have been rehearsed. If you are not playing in a particular piece but must remain in the rehearsal hall, please do so quietly and without disrupting the rehearsal in progress. This applies primarily for HYS and Sinfonia members.

2.3 INCLEMENT WEATHER

In the event of inclement weather, the Executive Assistant will notify all Huntsville Youth Orchestra families of any rehearsal cancellations via email and Remind 101. The HYO generally follows the Huntsville City Schools' cancellation decisions for weather-related issues. However, there may be situations that arise after school hours, in which case HYO staff and conductors will assess the conditions and make the final decision regarding rehearsals.

2.4 ATTENDANCE

General Expectations: All students are expected to attend every rehearsal and performance. Students should arrive at the rehearsal venue at least 15 minutes before the scheduled start time to allow for setup and warm-up. Tuning will begin five minutes before rehearsal time, ensuring that rehearsals start and end promptly as per the schedule. Attendance will be taken at every rehearsal.

HYS, Philharmonia, and Concert Orchestra students should not enter the rehearsal space until the orchestra before them (Sinfonia, Novice, Intermezzo) has completed rehearsal.

Absence Notification: When there is a need to miss a HYO rehearsal, the HYO must be notified as soon as possible, at least in advance of the missed rehearsal via the online absence request form. The absence request form is on the “Current Members” page at www.hsvyo.org.

- HYS, Sinfonia, & Philharmonia Students: Submit the absence request form only
- Concert, Intermezzo, and Novice Students: Submit the absence request form AND email your conductor directly with the students name, orchestra, date, and reason for absence.

Many HYO students have commitments to school, religious, sports, and other extracurricular organizations that may occasionally conflict with HYO. It is essential that students keep conflicting activities to a minimum. The commitment of all students and families is needed to maintain high musical standards and quality of musical experience for everyone.

Attendance Policy for Concert, Intermezzo, and Novice Strings:

Students in Concert, Intermezzo, and Novice Strings are strongly encouraged to attend all rehearsals, as each session is crucial for learning and developing new skills. Frequent absences can cause students to fall behind.

Students should aim to avoid missing more than two rehearsals per concert cycle. If a student misses more than two rehearsals, they may be required to pass off their music to the conductor before being allowed to participate in the concert.

Attendance Policy for Philharmonia, Sinfonia, and Huntsville Youth Symphony:

- **Absences:** Students with more than two absences during a concert cycle may face one or more of the following actions:
 - Conference with the student, parent, and conductor
 - Reassigned seating within the orchestra
 - Required to pass off the music to the conductor to be eligible to perform in the concert
 - Suspension from the upcoming orchestra performance
 - Absences for special circumstances (ex: traveling out of the country for an extended period of time) should be discussed with your orchestra conductor in advance for approval.
- **Tardiness:** Two tardies are equivalent to one absence. A student arriving late may be required to sit at the back of the section for the remainder of the rehearsal.
- **Suspensions:** Suspended members may rejoin the orchestra at the beginning of the next concert cycle. However, the substitute player who filled in during the suspension may have priority for seating. An absence from a dress rehearsal may result in immediate seat reassignment for the upcoming concert.

Chronic Absences: A pattern of chronic unexcused absences may lead to suspension or dismissal for the remainder of the year, including forfeiture of any fees, work/study scholarships, or reduced fees.

Concert Absences: If a student misses a concert for any reason other than personal illness or a death in the family, they may be moved to the back of the section for the next concert cycle at the conductor's discretion.

2.5 PRIVATE LESSONS

Private lessons or band instruction are required for all orchestras, except Novice Strings and Intermezzo. Students and the orchestras as a whole benefit greatly from personal musical instruction, which accelerates individual progress and enhances the overall performance of the ensemble. A list of vetted private instructors, recommended by our conductors for their exceptional teaching, is available upon request.

2.6 AUDITIONS AND SEATING

All returning students, new students, and students wanting to change to HYS, Sinfonia, or Philharmonia, audition in August prior to the start of the season. Information is available on the HYO website in early July each year. Students are not allowed to re-audition under any circumstances.

The woodwinds, brass, and percussion students will be seated in order as determined by their audition score. The conductor reserves the right to assign co-principals and rotate students throughout the course of the season. The string sections of HYS, Sinfonia, and Philharmonia may rotate per concert throughout the year. Sitting throughout the section provides the student with multiple educational opportunities. Concertmasters, Co-Concertmasters, and Principals may rotate at the discretion of the conductor.

New students are welcome to audition at any point throughout the season. A new student that enters after the first rehearsal of a concert cycle will be seated at the back of the section. This student will be assigned a new seat in the section for the following concert cycle. If a new student auditions after there has already been two rehearsals for a concert cycle, the conductor will have discretion to decide if the student will have to wait until the next concert cycle or join at that time.

2.7 SELF-DISCIPLINE

- Maintain orderly and attentive behavior during rehearsals. Encourage other members through your example rather than words. Students should not be doing homework or reading during rehearsals.
- Develop your listening skills to a fine point. Follow verbal directions the first time they are given. Make musical adjustments as you hear the need for them.
- Disruptive behavior is not permitted during rehearsals. If it occurs, a verbal warning will be issued. If it continues, the disruptive member will be asked to leave the rehearsal, resulting in an absence being recorded for that concert cycle. The member should return to the next scheduled rehearsal and future rehearsals with a renewed readiness to rehearse and behave well.
- Players should neither ask to play other people's instruments, nor offer their instruments to be played by others during any HYO activity, not even during breaks.
- Chemical substance abuses of any kind (alcohol or drugs) during any HYO activity will result in the immediate termination of membership, contact with the Parent or Guardian, and immediate return home (at Parent or Guardian's expense) if away from Huntsville on tour. Rehearsals and concerts are non-smoking events.

Please remember that you are a guest in our rehearsal facilities. Do not run, wander, or explore. Be quiet and orderly as other groups are often rehearsing. Be courteous to the people you meet there.

2.8 ADULT PARTICIPANTS

Musicians still in high school or 18 and under will audition for chair placement. Older musicians who wish to play in HYO may play but will not enter HYO competitions.

2.9 CONCERT ATTIRE

Novice Strings:

1. long sleeved white blouses and long black skirts with black hose/tights and black shoes
2. white long sleeved dress shirts and black dress pants with black socks and black shoes

Intermezzo Orchestra:

1. long sleeved white blouses and long black skirts with black hose/tights and black shoes
2. white long sleeved dress shirts and black dress pants with black socks and black shoes

Concert Orchestra:

1. long sleeved white blouses and long black skirts with black hose/tights and black shoes
2. white long sleeved dress shirts and black dress pants with black socks and black shoes

Philharmonia Orchestra:

1. long sleeved white blouses and long black skirts with black hose/tights and black shoes
2. white long sleeved dress shirts and black dress pants with black socks and black shoes

Sinfonia:

1. long (tea length), long sleeved black dresses with black hose/tights and black shoes (cellists may wear a long sleeved black blouse and black dress pants)
2. white tuxedo shirt, black bow tie, and black pants with black socks and black shoes

Huntsville Youth Symphony:

1. long (tea length), long sleeved black dress with black hose/tights and black shoes (cellists may wear a long sleeved black blouse and black dress pants)
2. black tuxedo, white shirt, black tie, and black cummerbund with black socks and black shoes

Tuxedos are available to rent. Information will be sent out about rentals in September prior to the first concert. Contact info@hsvyo.org for more information.

2.10 DRESS REHEARSALS AND CONCERTS

Any extra or dress rehearsals will be scheduled by the conductor. On the day of the concert, each group has its own designated warm up area where students gather and can leave instrument cases. Chaperones supervise the students backstage and throughout the concert. They also help Sinfonia, Philharmonia, Concert, and Intermezzo with bow ties, cummerbunds, etc.

Each group warms up, performs a sound check, and rehearses briefly on stage. They then return to their designated warm up area.

In general, concerts are held on Sunday afternoons. Performing students are expected to stay for the entire concert.

AUDITIONS, COMPETITIONS, SCHOLARSHIPS

Huntsville Youth Orchestra encourages students to take advantage of these musical opportunities.

3.1 MAJORIE SMITH CONCERTO COMPETITION

Contestants for this competition must be active HYS or Sinfonia members in good standing and must complete an application prior to the deadline. The selection to be performed must have an orchestration available. The score or piano reduction must be approved by the music director. Failure to acquire a score for the conductor's approval in advance may disqualify a winner. The applicant's private instructor, the conductor, and the applicant sign the application. The HYO office will contact the applicants with an assigned audition time. The audition must be performed with an accompanist. The contestant must memorize the music and provide his/her own accompanist for the competition. The judges will select one winner only. The judges reserve the right to no winner if no contestant qualifies to win. A student may only win this competition once during their time in the HYO.

3.2 GERHART SCHOLARSHIP

One scholarship of \$500 for a residential camp and/or two TVMF scholarships are given by HYO each year to help defray the costs of a summer music camp for HYS and Sinfonia students who agree to participate with HYO the following season. Forms will be available on the website and emailed out. The competition is typically held in February or March. The money is sent directly to the selected music camp. Students may only win this competition once during their time in the HYO.

3.3 ALL STATE ORCHESTRA

These auditions are held in the fall of each year. The winners meet to form an orchestra for one weekend in February. Information can be found at alabamaorchestraassociation.org. If you have any questions, feel free to contact our District 1 Strings Chair, Bethany Wing bethany@hsvyo.org.

3.4 HSO YOUNG ARTIST AUDITIONS

These auditions are typically held in late fall. The winners perform with the Huntsville Symphony. The HSO conductor must approve the choice of concerto movement to be memorized. Contact the HSO office at (256) 539-4818 for an application and details such as entry fee and deadline.

3.5 RUTH COLE WEBER SCHOLARSHIPS

These scholarships are given annually by the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra Guild to help string students attend summer music camps. Occasionally other instruments may be included depending on the year. Applications will be forwarded out to the HYO by the Executive Director

STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Conductors and staff are available to write recommendations for students. Students need to allow three weeks for letters to be written and mailed. Students should provide any needed information requested on the application or by the conductor or staff writing the letter, forms needed, and a stamped addressed envelope.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Email is the easiest way to communicate with us. If you call and we are unable to answer the phone email us and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Staff:

Executive Director: Taylor Barlow
taylor@hsvyo.org | (256) 880-0622
email preferred

Executive Assistant: Greg Lucero
info@hsvyo.org | (256) 714-0794
email preferred

Music Director: Joseph Lee
joseph@hsvyo.org

Conductors:

Joseph Lee - HYS & Philharmonia Conductor
joseph@hsvyo.org

Dr. Dave Ragsdale - Sinfonia Conductor
dave@hsvyo.org Please email info@hsvyo.org for all correspondence

Kelli Battrow - Intermezzo & Concert Orchestra Conductor
kelli@hsvyo.org

Bethany Wing - Novice Strings Conductor
bethany@hsvyo.org

Social Media

Website: www.hsvyo.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/huntsvilleyouthorchestra>

Instagram: @HSV_YouthOrchestra

Mailing Address

Huntsville Youth Orchestra
P.O. Box 2532
Huntsville, AL 35804

Physical Address

Sandra Moon Complex
7901 Bailey Cove Rd SE
Huntsville, AL 35802