

2025-2026 Austin Youth Orchestra Handbook

Updated: November 14, 2025

Welcome & Mission

Welcome to the Austin Youth Orchestra!

Since our founding, AYO has been committed to enriching orchestra music education throughout the greater Austin and Central Texas Region. We are proud to offer a welcoming, dynamic, and supportive environment where young musicians can grow, challenge themselves, and discover the joy of ensemble music making.

With multiple ensembles designed to meet the students at different stages of their musical development, AYO nurtures musical excellence through high-quality ensemble experiences, thoughtful technical and artistic guidance, and inspiring performance opportunities.

Our mission is simple: to empower the next generation of musicians by fostering discipline, creativity, community, and a lifelong love of music.

Membership Requirements

- **Annual Audition:** All students must participate in a placement audition each year to ensure they are matched with the ensemble that best supports their growth.

Audition materials will be released in March of each year. **Annual and Mid-season** audition deadlines will be announced for Fall and Spring auditions each year. The Audition Upload portal will be made available and announced on the website.

- **School Ensemble Participation:**
AYO partners closely with the school music programs and believes strongly in the value of daily ensemble instruction.

Students whose schools offer band and orchestra are expected to be enrolled and actively participating. This is an essential part of being an AYO member.

- **Private Study for Students Without a School Program:**
If your school does not offer band or orchestra, we ask that students take weekly private lessons with a qualified instructor. This ensures they receive the foundational support they need to be successful in an orchestral setting.

- **Verification of Participation:**

AYO will confirm enrollment in school orchestra/band programs with directors by September 1st. If a student is unable to meet the participation requirements, we will work with families to explore next steps; however, continued enrollment in AYO requires active musical study.

TUITION & FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Tuition for the 2025–2026 season is based on ensemble placement and is due by the first rehearsal. If you need assistance or would like to request a payment plan, please contact the AYO Administrative Team at admin@austinyouthorchestra.org.

Symphony & Philharmonic: \$650 per year

Sinfonietta: \$500 per year

Serenata & Canzonetta: \$400 per year

Tuition covers instruction, venue rental, administrative staffing, and concert production and performance costs. Families commit to the full season when enrolling.

Payment Options

- Payments may be made online by credit card using the GiveButter Portal. Check or cash tuition payments may be given to staff members.
- Payments received after September 1st may incur a \$50 late fee unless a payment plan has been established.

REFUND POLICY

Because AYO makes financial commitments based on enrollment, all tuition and fees are non-refundable. Please review all dates and commitments carefully before submitting payment.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Regular attendance is essential for musical progress and for the success of each ensemble. AYO values reliability, teamwork, and respect for fellow musicians.

- Students may have up to **two absences per concert cycle**. Two late arrivals will count as once absence.
- **Consecutive absences or tardiness** can impact ensemble readiness and may affect participation in upcoming performances.

- All absences **must be submitted in advance** using the official [AYO Absence Form](#).
- **Concert absences** may be excused in cases of illness or family emergency; please notify us as early as possible so we can plan appropriately.
- Excessive or unreported absences may affect a student's ability to perform or continue in the program.

AYO is committed to supporting students' growth. Clear communication and consistent attendance help ensure the best musical experience for everyone.

AYO REHEARSAL LOCATION, TIMES AND PERFORMANCE CALENDAR

Rehearsal Location:

Austin High School

1715 W. Cesar Chavez St.

Austin, TX 78703

Symphony & Philharmonic: 5 PM to 7:30 PM, includes a 15 minute break

Sinfonietta: 5 PM to 6:30 PM

Serenata & Canzonetta: 5 PM to 6 PM

FALL 2025 REHEARSAL DATES

August: 24, 31

September: 7, 14, 21, 28

October: 5, 19, 26

November: 2, 9

FALL AYO CONCERT

Date: Sunday, November 16, 2025

Location: Westlake High School

Address: 4100 Westbank Dr, Austin, TX 78746

SPRING 2026 REHEARSAL DATES

January 11 - 1st rehearsal of spring semester

18 - 3 day weekend, rehearsal not required - Miguel Fusion Ensemble Improv Class from 3-4pm at Austin High

January 25

February: 1, 8, 22

March: 1, 8, 22, 29

April: 12, 19, 26

SPRING AYO CONCERT

Date: Sunday, May 3, 2026

Location: Bates Recital Hall

Address: 2406 Robert Dedman Dr, Austin, TX 78712

(University of Texas at Austin campus)

(Call times will be announced closer to the performance.)

NOTES

- There are no rehearsals on February 15 or March 15 due to scheduling conflicts and spring break.
- Attendance at all rehearsals and concerts is expected. Absences must be submitted in advance using the official AYO Absence Form, found on the website.

PERFORMANCE ATTIRE

Concert attire helps present a unified, professional ensemble appearance. Students may choose the option that aligns with their identity while maintaining formality. Dress codes vary by ensemble level and must be followed to participate in concerts.

SYMPHONY & PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRAS

Concert attire for these advanced ensembles reflects formal performance standards.

Option 1:

- Black tuxedo or black suit with black formal slacks
- White long-sleeved dress shirt
- Long black tie
- Black dress shoes (no sneakers)
- Black dress socks

Option 2:

- Floor-length black gown or black floor-length skirt with a black dress blouse
- Dresses and blouses must have sleeves (no sleeveless, strapless, or spaghetti straps)
- Black dress shoes (no sneakers or open-toe shoes)

SINFONIETTA, SERENATA, & CANZONETTA ORCHESTRAS

Concert attire for these ensembles is simplified but still unified and professional.

All Students:

- Black dress slacks or floor length dress (no jeans or leggings)
- Black long-sleeved dress shirt or blouse
- Black socks and black dress shoes (no sneakers or casual shoes)

Students may choose the concert attire option that best reflects their identity, as long as the overall appearance remains formal and consistent with the ensemble dress code.

CHAIR PLACEMENT AND EVALUATIONS

SYMPHONY, PHILHARMONIC, AND SINFONIETTA

Advanced ensembles use periodic evaluations to support individual growth and create balanced sections. Chair tests may be assigned by the conductor to:

- Place musicians in seating that supports the strongest musical outcome
- Encourage personal responsibility preparedness
- Offer experience with real-world audition processes

Requirements:

- Students must submit a video chair test as requested by the conductor.
- Missing deadlines results in placement at the back of the section.
- Failure to submit a required test after a warning may affect continued participation.
- All students are expected to practice outside of rehearsal and come prepared each week.

CANZONETTA, SERENATA, AND PRELUDE

In these developmental ensembles, the focus is on foundational skills, musical confidence and ensemble awareness. Expectations:

- Students must come prepared and ready to rehearse their music each week
- Conductors may assign brief playing checks or chair tests.
- Seating assignments — including leadership roles such as Concertmaster, Principal, and Section Anchor — are determined by the conductor based on preparation, consistency, and musicality.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS & CODE OF CONDUCT

Membership in the Austin Youth Orchestra is a privilege and an opportunity to grow not only as a musician, but also as a responsible and respectful member of a high-functioning ensemble. AYO is committed to creating a positive, safe and professional musical environment. Students are expected to:

1. Respect and Professionalism

- Treat peers, staff, volunteers, and facilities with respect.
- Refrain from disruptive behavior including talking during rehearsal.
- Follow directions and instructions from conductors and staff.
- Care for music, stands, chairs, and all school property responsibly.

2. Bullying, Harassment, and Discrimination

- AYO maintains a zero-tolerance policy for bullying or harassment of any kind. Students must contribute to an inclusive and supportive environment for all members.
- Bullying of any kind — including verbal, physical, social, or online — is strictly prohibited.
- Any form of harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, religion, disability, or background will result in immediate disciplinary review.

3. Preparedness and Materials

- Students are expected to arrive with all required materials:
 - Printed music
 - A sharpened pencil
 - A folding music stand (if applicable)
 - Any additional supplies required for their instrument
- Students must know their part and be prepared to rehearse. Individual practice is expected outside of rehearsals.

4. Attendance and Punctuality

- Students must arrive on time and be seated, tuned, and ready to begin rehearsal at least five minutes before the scheduled start time.
- Repeated tardiness affects participation and may result in reassignment of chair placement.
- Excessive absences may affect continued enrollment.

5. Cell Phones and Electronics

- Cell phones, smart watches, tablets, and all other personal electronic devices must be silenced and put away during rehearsal.
- Devices may not be visible or used during any part of rehearsal unless explicitly approved by a conductor.
- Use of electronics during rehearsal will result in a formal warning and possible removal from the rehearsal room.

6. Food, Drink, and Cleanliness

- No food or drink (except water) is allowed in the rehearsal or performance space.
- Students may bring water in a closed, non-glass container.
- Snacks may only be consumed during designated break times.
- All trash must be thrown away and personal belongings picked up at the end of rehearsal.

7. Rehearsal Etiquette

- Talking is not permitted during rehearsal unless prompted by the conductor.
- Students must give their full attention to the conductor and remain engaged even when their section is not actively playing.
- Appropriate posture and instrument handling are expected at all times.

8. Performance Behavior

- Students are expected to demonstrate mature and professional behavior at all performances.
- This includes proper concert etiquette, respectful interactions with all staff and audience members, and wearing appropriate concert attire.
- Students should be cooperative and flexible regarding call times, stage positioning, and warm-up procedures.

9. Consequences for Misconduct

Violations of this Code of Conduct will be addressed promptly and may include:

- Verbal or written warning
- Notification of parent/guardian
- Loss of chair placement or performance privileges
- Temporary or permanent dismissal from the ensemble
- No refunds will be issued for removal due to behavioral misconduct

10. Agreement

By participating in the Austin Youth Orchestra, all students and families acknowledge that they have read, understood, and agreed to abide by this Code of Conduct in its entirety. Google Docs will be emailed home for signature.

Instrument Insurance

Students are strongly encouraged to carry insurance coverage for their instruments, whether rented, school-owned, or privately owned. While every care is taken to ensure the safety of instruments during rehearsals and performances, the Austin Youth Orchestra is not liable for lost, stolen, or damaged instruments or equipment.

Why Insure Your Instrument?

Accidents can happen anywhere — at home, in transit, or during a performance. Quality instruments are valuable, and repairs or replacements can be costly. Having an insurance policy in place provides peace of mind and financial protection.

Recommended Providers

The following companies specialize in musical instrument insurance and offer coverage for students, educators, and professional musicians:

Heritage Insurance Services, Inc.

Website: <https://musicins.com>

Heritage offers policies that cover a wide range of instruments against theft, accidental damage, fire, and other unforeseen circumstances. They offer individual policies and work directly with musicians and music educators.

Clarion Associates, Inc.

Website: <https://www.clarionins.com>

Clarion provides comprehensive coverage for musical instruments and equipment. They offer flexible policies for students and professionals and have a long-standing reputation within the music community.

Things to Consider When Choosing a Policy:

- Replacement cost vs. depreciated value
- Worldwide vs. domestic-only coverage
- Deductible amounts
- Coverage for borrowed or loaned instruments
- Rental reimbursement while the instrument is being repaired

Instrument insurance is a personal decision, but for many families, it's a wise one. Please take time to explore these options and select a plan that best suits your needs.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The Austin Youth Orchestra is committed to making high-level music education accessible to all young musicians, regardless of financial circumstances. To that end, AYO offers a limited number of **need-based scholarships** each season.

- **Scholarships are awarded based on demonstrated financial need.**
- Applications are considered on a revolving basis.
- All applications are **reviewed with care and confidentiality** by the AYO Scholarship Committee.

- The application form can be found on the **AYO website**.

AYO believes that scholarship support is a partnership. Students who receive financial assistance are expected to give back to the community by **assisting with setup and tear-down** at weekly rehearsals and concerts. This responsibility helps foster a spirit of gratitude, teamwork, and leadership—qualities we deeply value in all our musicians.

We encourage families to apply early, and we are proud to support students who demonstrate dedication, responsibility, and a passion for orchestral music.

AUSTIN YOUTH ORCHESTRA MEDIA RELEASE FORM

This form will also be available to sign online. A link will be provided at the beginning of the season for convenient digital submission.

Media Release Consent

I hereby grant permission to the Austin Youth Orchestra (AYO) to photograph, video record, and/or audio record my child (or myself, if 18 or older) in connection with AYO activities, including rehearsals, performances, and special events.

I authorize AYO to use these images and recordings for educational, promotional, and archival purposes, including but not limited to:

- Printed materials (e.g., brochures, concert programs, flyers)
- AYO's official website and social media platforms
- Newsletters, press releases, and grant documentation
- Future promotional materials

I understand that this content may be used without compensation, and I waive the right to inspect or approve any final product. Student names will **not** be published without separate written permission.

Consent Option (please check one):

- ☐ **Yes**, I give permission for my child/myself to be included in AYO photos, videos, and media.
- ☐ **No**, I do **not** give permission for my child/myself to be included in any AYO media content.

AUSTIN YOUTH ORCHESTRA REHEARSAL AND LIABILITY WAIVER

This form will also be available to sign online. A link will be provided at the beginning of the season for convenient digital submission.

Participation & Liability Agreement

By participating in the Austin Youth Orchestra (AYO), I acknowledge and agree to the following terms:

- I understand that **regular attendance**, appropriate behavior, and preparedness are required at all rehearsals, concerts, and events.
- I agree to **respect all rehearsal spaces**, equipment, staff, and fellow musicians.
- I understand that **AYO is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged personal items**, including musical instruments, accessories, or personal belongings brought to rehearsals or performances.
- I acknowledge that while AYO staff and volunteers take precautions to ensure a safe environment, **AYO is not liable for injuries** that may occur during participation in rehearsals, concerts, or related activities.
- I agree to **follow all safety procedures**, including any venue-specific rules, and to report concerns to a conductor or AYO staff member immediately.

Acknowledgment (please check one):

- ☐ **Yes**, I have read and agree to the rehearsal expectations, personal responsibility terms, and liability waiver outlined above.
- ☐ **No**, I do **not** agree and understand that this may affect my participation in AYO.

MEDICAL AND EMERGENCY INFORMATION

To ensure the safety and well-being of every student, the Austin Youth Orchestra requires families to complete a **Medical & Emergency Information Form** at the beginning of each season. This form will be collected **online**, and a secure link will be shared prior to the first rehearsal.

The form must be completed before a student may participate in rehearsals or performances.

Families will be asked to provide the following:

- **Emergency contact information**, including a primary parent/guardian and at least one alternate contact.
- Details regarding any **allergies**, medical conditions, or health concerns relevant to rehearsal or performance settings.
- A list of **current medications**, if applicable.
- **Preferred hospital or clinic** and optional physician contact information.
- **Consent for emergency medical treatment**, allowing AYO staff to act in the event of a serious injury or medical emergency if a parent or guardian cannot be reached.

All information submitted will remain confidential and will only be accessible to authorized AYO staff and personnel.

Timely submission of this form is required for participation. If you have any questions or concerns about the form or your child's medical needs, please contact the AYO administrative team.

