



HANDBOOK

FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

2025-2026



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ABOUT THE NORWALK YOUTH SYMPHONY

The purpose of the Norwalk Youth Symphony is to enrich the lives of young people within a musical community. We provide the finest possible training, practice and performance opportunities, enabling our students to learn, share and enjoy the power of music.

In partnership with parents, teachers and schools we:

- provide exposure to diverse orchestral styles under the guidance of musical professionals,
- identify and educate motivated students regardless of financial circumstance,
- foster a sense of achievement and self-esteem through a developmental approach, and
- promote self-discipline and teamwork through respect for artistic standards.

Founded in 1956, the NYS has expanded since that time to include over 200 musicians from more than 30 area towns each year. Its reputation has also grown. Many alumni have gone on to study professionally at music conservatories and colleges such as Juilliard, Eastman, Manhattan School of Music, Berklee College of Music, Hartt College of Music, Northwestern and the New England Conservatory. Graduates have also played in college orchestras at Yale, Harvard, Dartmouth, Wellesley, Ithaca, Brown, Princeton, University of California at Berkeley, Williams, MIT, Hamilton, Boston College, Columbia and others. One alumnus is a three-time Grammy Award winner. All NYS members gain an invaluable discipline and musical experience that instills a lifelong appreciation of music and the arts.

STRUCTURE - The Norwalk Youth Symphony is comprised of five ensembles representing four levels of youth orchestras. The five ensembles, each with its own highly qualified conductor, allow the individual to progress with young musicians of similar ability. NYS also offers a Brass Ensemble.

- **Prelude Orchestra:** An entry-level string orchestra that performs student works in order to develop skills in string technique, music theory, and ensemble performance.
- **Philharmonia Strings:** A string orchestra that provides a transition from Prelude Orchestra to the more difficult repertoire that is performed by the Concert Orchestra.
- **Philharmonia Orchestral Winds:** Young woodwind and brass players receive the special attention needed to develop their technique, sound, musicality, and orchestral ensemble playing. This ensemble performs orchestral arrangements and periodically performs with the Philharmonia Strings.
- **Concert Orchestra:** This full symphony orchestra provides experience in rehearsing and performing a wide range of shorter works from the Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary periods.
- **Principal Orchestra:** Our most advanced symphonic orchestra performs demanding orchestral classical, romantic, and 20th century repertoire such as full-length symphonies, symphonic poems, overtures, and concertos.

Membership and placement are by audition only. Each player, including a returning musician from the previous year, is auditioned every year by the conductors in late August and the beginning of September to ensure correct placement according to individual ability.

The Norwalk Youth Symphony is sponsored by the City of Norwalk.

POLICIES FOR NYS MEMBERS

PLACEMENT AND ACCEPTANCE

The primary outcome of the auditions is assignment to one of the five Norwalk Youth Symphony orchestras. Acceptance and placement decisions are at the sole discretion of the conductors' considerable professional judgment and are final. Orchestra placements will be posted on the NYS web site during the week preceding the first rehearsal. Orchestra placement as well as seating assignments will be posted in the lobby at the first rehearsal.

SEATING ASSIGNMENT

The audition is also important as an aid to the conductors in determining seating assignments. Seating in an orchestra is not determined by ranking. Rather, it is done in the best interests of the individual musicians and the orchestra as a whole. String players will NOT necessarily be seated according to ranked ability but by the conductor in such a way as to best benefit the orchestra. Changes in strings seating may be made throughout the year. This may involve rotation back and forth between the first and second violin sections.

SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

NYS is committed to supporting and cooperating with school music programs. We are grateful for the support and referrals we receive from school music teachers; in turn, we believe that our members contribute back positively to their school music programs. Consequently, NYS does not operate as a substitute for school instrumental programs and NYS members are required to participate in their school instrumental programs, where they exist. Conflicts that prevent participation should be brought to the attention of the Executive Director as soon as possible.

PRIVATE STUDY

It is expected that all members will pursue private study on their orchestral instruments. Limited scholarship assistance for private lessons is available.

INSURANCE:

The Norwalk Youth Symphony's insurance policies do not cover instruments owned by individual members. Please check your own household coverage.

MUSIC:

Each player is responsible for the care of his/her music and for bringing it (in its binder) to all rehearsals. Music is distributed at the beginning of each concert period. There is a \$5 fee to replace music after the second rehearsal for each concert.

CELLPHONE AND OTHER DEVICES

While NYS welcomes communication with families and supports musicians in their relationships, NYS is first and foremost a learning environment. Deep relationships with the music and fellow musicians during rehearsals foster a high quality orchestral experience for NYS students. Engaging together without distractions gives musicians a bubble of time to focus on honing their craft. This goal is derailed when musicians have outside distractions from devices such as cell phones, smart watches, and other technology. As such, the use of communication technology is strictly prohibited during rehearsal time and orchestral breaks. Devices must be powered off and stored in a bag for the duration of rehearsal and snack time. Devices may not be stored in a coat/pant pocket, on a chair under the thigh, or on the music stand. If a family needs to contact a musician during rehearsal, the NYS cell phone is always on during rehearsals and concerts. Please text 203-515-1137 and NYS staff will relay the message to the

student. If there is a medical or safety concern that requires a musician to have their device at all times, please contact the Executive Director to discuss protocols.

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

The Norwalk Youth Symphony admits students of any race and does not discriminate on the basis of race or sex in administering its educational programs, admission or placement policies, scholarships or other programs.

TUITION AND FEES, 2025-2026 SEASON

ORCHESTRA PROGRAMS	Paying with Credit Card	3% Cash Discount
Prelude/Phil Strings & Winds	\$1,080 (\$800 tuition + fees)*	\$1,045
Concert Orchestra	\$1,130 (\$850 tuition + fees)*	\$1,095
Principal Orchestra	\$1,480 (\$900 tuition + fees)**	\$1,435

* Program fees include, snack fee (\$50), music fee (\$50), and 4 season tickets (\$180).

****Principal Orchestra also includes \$300 Carnegie Hall Participation Fee**

Families with more than one student are charged for one set of season tickets.

Chamber Ensembles (15 coachings for season)

\$400 with credit card \$385 paying with cash or check.

PAYMENT

NYS offers two payment options:

Option I: **Full payment at the first rehearsal.**

Option II: **Three equal payments** due September 7th, October 15th, November 15th.

Members who withdraw or become ineligible to participate in NYS will not receive a refund.

Please contact the office for scholarship applications and to discuss payment arrangements.

Scholarship applications are due September 7th.

CHECKS SHOULD BE MADE PAYABLE TO NORWALK YOUTH SYMPHONY
CREDIT CARD PAYMENTS MAY BE MADE WITH MASTERCARD, VISA or DISCOVER

ATTENDANCE

REHEARSAL ATTENDANCE

When joining the program, we ask that students make a commitment to the program and its rehearsal schedule and avoid scheduling other activities during the scheduled orchestra rehearsals and performances. Attending rehearsals strengthens the group as an ensemble and enhances the student's experience. Although we expect students to commit to attending every rehearsal, we know that there are cases such as religious commitments when conflicts are unavoidable. Students are allowed a maximum of two (2) absences during each concert rehearsal period. Requests for exceptions should be raised in advance to the Executive Director, who may consult with the Executive Committee if needed. Please note that there are mandatory rehearsals for each concert period. These dates are noted in the rehearsal schedule. Absences at mandatory rehearsals may result in the musician not performing in the concert or dismissal from the program.

Rehearsals start promptly at the time indicated on the schedule. Musicians should be fully warmed up and in their seats with their instruments tuned prior to the start of rehearsal. Excessive tardiness, at the discretion of the conductor, may affect seating placement or removal from the orchestra.

CONCERT ATTENDANCE

Concert attendance is mandatory. Absence from a concert may result in dismissal from the Orchestra for the season. Extraordinary circumstances will be reviewed by the Executive Director and the Executive Committee. Absence from the May concert may result in the inability to participate in the following season, subject to review by the Executive Director and the Executive Committee.

COMMUNICATION/ABSENCES

When reporting an absence please use the "Report an Absence" button. This link can be found on the NYS website and in the weekly NYS newsletters. Please do not phone or text your absence information, as we need to have a record of the absence.

SEVERE WEATHER PROCEDURE:

If bad weather causes a rehearsal cancellation, a message will be posted on our web site and Facebook page plus a text message will be sent. Please remember that NYS members come from over two dozen different communities, some of which have more severe weather problems than others. If a rehearsal is not cancelled and you have concerns about your child's safety in traveling to Norwalk, we urge you to use your best judgment. Such absences will not count as one of the two allowed absences of the concert period. Please submit an absence online if you decide not to send your child.

CONCERT BEHAVIOR

It is the tradition at NYS concerts that those members who are not performing sit in the audience while their peers play. This gives them a chance to hear the other orchestras and to get a sense of the continuity that the organization provides through its graded orchestra system. **As a courtesy to their fellow performers, all musicians are expected to remain until the final group on the program has finished its performance.**

There is a standard of behavior expected of those in the audience that is as follows:

- Musicians are expected to sit quietly in their seats.
- There is to be absolutely no talking during a performance.
- No one is to leave the auditorium except during breaks between orchestras and then only singly or in the company of **one** other musician.
- The same courteous attention should be paid to those on the stage as one would expect to receive when it is his or her turn to play.
- It goes without saying that horseplay and other such inappropriate behavior is not acceptable.
- Musicians' cell phones and other electronic devices are not to be brought into the auditorium.
- Parents, please discuss this important matter with your child before the concert. We all want the concerts to be special, so it would really be unfortunate if a few members marred the impression that our fine performances create for our audiences.

NYS CONCERT DRESS

WHY WE HAVE A DRESS CODE FOR PERFORMANCES

A dress code enables the orchestra to match visually the artistic unity and professionalism that it strives to convey musically in performance. If you have any questions about an article of clothing or need help in acquiring an item, please contact the Executive Director Sara. Review your performance dress well in advance so you don't find yourself unprepared the day of the performance.

All Orchestras

Required: Black shoes and black socks.

No sneakers, sandals, jeans, leggings or tight fitting pants.

No bare arms, midribs, legs or feet.

Prelude & Philharmonia Orchestras

Long sleeved solid white shirt/top

Plain black slacks/full black skirt

Long conservative dark tie (optional)

Concert and Principal Orchestras

Concert Black

Long solid black dress, ankle length skirt or black pants

Long sleeved solid black top or black button down

Optional Black Tie (optional)

ENRICHMENT

SMALL ENSEMBLES

NYS offers small ensembles to strings and woodwind players. Ensembles are in the form of trios, quartets and quintets. Coachings are held at City Hall on Sundays before or after the student's orchestra rehearsal.

CONCERTO COMPETITION

NYS sponsors a Concerto Competition each season for members of the Principal Orchestra. All who wish to do so may audition in December for this event. **MUSIC TO BE PERFORMED AT THE COMPETITION MUST BE SUBMITTED TO THE PRINCIPAL ORCHESTRA CONDUCTOR NO LATER THAN THE FIRST REHEARSAL IN NOVEMBER.** This insures that (a) the work being prepared is playable by the orchestra and (b) the music will not have to be rented. The winner will play a movement of a concerto with the orchestra at the Winter concert. Musician may only win the competition one time.

SECTIONAL REHEARSALS

Professional musicians and teachers are brought to rehearsals a minimum of two times during each concert period to work specifically with different sections of all five orchestras. Such sessions are invaluable in helping to prepare each member of the NYS for performance at concerts and in producing a unified sound within sections. The dates of these sectionals are listed in the NYS 2025-2026 schedule.

TRAVEL ABROAD

In the summer of 2008 NYS embarked on its first performance trip overseas. Members of the Concert and Principal Orchestras traveled to Prague, Budapest, Vienna and Salzburg. Since 2008 NYS has traveled biannually. Past tours include touring the Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Portugal. Our next Europe tour will be in 2026 to France.

MASTER CLASSES

From time to time we hold master classes, where participants in our program may perform in public for a guest instructor, who then coaches the students. Both audience members and performers can learn a great deal from these “open lessons.”

ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES

In order to enhance the performing experience for its musicians, the Norwalk Youth Symphony arranges for performances in such places as Carnegie Hall and Tanglewood. Concert Orchestra performs with INTEMPO and Principal Orchestra performs with the Norwalk Symphony each spring. These are considered to be an integral part of the musical education the NYS offers and participation is mandatory. For the first time Principal Orchestra traveled to Washington DC and performed at the Kennedy Center in February 2025.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Community Service concerts enhance the performance experience for NYS musicians, while thanking the community for the support it (and its musicians) receive. Therefore, there are occasions when the NYS orchestras and chamber music participants perform benefit concerts in the area. These are also mandatory activities.

YOUTH COMMITTEE

The Youth Committee is the representative voice of all orchestras of the NYS. Its purpose is to listen to the concerns and suggestions of orchestra members and to help make participation in the NYS a more rewarding experience. The committee meets once a month with a parent advisor who reports back to the Board of Directors as the Committee's messenger. Thus an opportunity for open communication between the orchestras and the Board is provided, and the Board receives information that helps it to run the NYS in a way that will ensure a positive musical experience for all members.

PARENT/GUARDIAN VOLUNTEER ENSEMBLE:

The most valuable contribution parents can make is to support their student's obligation to attend all rehearsals and to encourage them to prepare the music thoroughly. However, we also need parent assistance for many other things. Please volunteer your time and talent at concerts, special events, and weekly rehearsals. In addition, each family is expected to assist once with the rehearsal snack that is served to the musicians at every week-end rehearsal. NYS utilizes CivicChamps for volunteer registration and assignments.

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