

A S O Y E
H A N D B O O K
2025-2026

Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Youth Ensembles

Prelude Orchestra

Academy Orchestra

Youth Orchestra (ASYO)

Website: <https://www.arkansassymphony.org/e-lee-ronnel-music-academy/youth-programs/youth-ensembles/>

ASOYE

As a member of the ASOYE (Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Youth Ensembles) you will have numerous opportunities to develop your talents in an atmosphere of musical excellence. We hope you will find it to be a most rewarding and enjoyable experience musically, socially, emotionally and intellectually. Like professional musicians, you will be expected to be present and on time for all rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and performances. The commitment is a major one, but the benefits can be enormous. We are sure you will find the investment of your time and talent very worthwhile.

Parents and students: Please read the material in this handbook carefully (even if you are an ASOYE veteran). Keep it handy and accessible. You will find it a useful resource throughout the year. Feel free to call the ASOYE offices at (501) 666-1761, ext. 116 for clarification and elaboration of any of the policies listed in this handbook.

ENROLLMENT

Enrollment in the program should be completed by **July 30th** of each year. The [enrollment form](https://www.arkansassymphony.org/e-lee-ronnel-music-academy/youth-programs/youth-ensembles/aso-youth-ensemble-enrollment/) may be completed online. It will automatically be forwarded to Durham Hill at the ASO offices.

<https://www.arkansassymphony.org/e-lee-ronnel-music-academy/youth-programs/youth-ensembles/aso-youth-ensemble-enrollment/>

COMMUNICATION

It is very important that the ASOYE office and the Attendance Parents for each ensemble have current, up-to-date information on each student through the online enrollment database. Any deviation from what is printed in the Handbook is communicated directly by e-mail. Rehearsal schedules are posted online and updated as needed. **If you are not receiving frequent e-mails from your Attendance Parent, then something is wrong.** Please notify them of any problems or changes with your e-mail.

YOUTH ORCHESTRA CONTACTS:

Attendance:	Sara Batcheller	asyoyouth@gmail.com (501)472-5167
Assistant:	Joanna Choate	celloduo@yahoo.com (501) 733-0917
Librarian:	Libby Lee	libby_lee@comcast.net (501) 786-0295
Set-Up Coordinator:	Zhen Wu	zhenwu.liu1982@gmail.com (501)615-3290
Snack Coordinator:	Stephanie Byers	shbyers027@gmail.com (501) 590-6819
Conductor:	Gabriel Bruce	gbruce7041@pcssd.org (501) 339-3262

ACADEMY ORCHESTRA CONTACTS:

Attendance:	Rebecca Cunningham	academy@arkansassymphony.org (501) 416-7119
Asst/Librarian	Nancy Hidalgo	Nancyhellen@gmail.com (501) 282-9325
Set-Up Coordinator:		
Snack Coordinator:		
Conductor:	Tom McDonald	TommcDonald5506@comcast.net (501) 580-5601

PRELUDE ORCHESTRA CONTACTS:

Attendance: Yen Egbe yenma2007@gmail.com

(501) 349-6241

Assistant: Alejandra Reyes alereyes94@aol.com

(908) 986-7411

Set-Up Coordinator:

Snack Coordinator:

Conductor: Kiril Laskarov laskarov@hotmail.com

(501) 944-6557

Conductor: Drew Irvin drewirvin@gmail.com

(501) 960-0396

STAFF CONTACTS:

ASOYE Manager: Durham Hill dhill@arkansassymphony.org

(501) 666-1761 ext. 131

Director of Education and Community Engagement: Beth Robison brobison@arkansassymphony.org

(501) 666-1761 ext. 116

TUITION

Tuition per school year is due by October 1. Tuition is \$400 per year.

You may [pay online](#) or by check, **payable to ASOYE** to:

P. O. Box 7328, Little Rock, AR 72217

A student is not allowed to enroll if tuition remains unpaid from a previous semester.

Tuition is non-refundable if the student withdraws for any reason.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The ASOYE has worked hard to establish and develop scholarship funds to ensure that no qualified student shall be denied membership because of an inability to pay the full tuition fee.

[Scholarship applications](#) are available on the Youth Orchestra section of the ASO website and will automatically be sent to Durham Hill at the Arkansas Symphony.

Please complete the online scholarship application no later than **October 1**. Scholarships do not carry over from year to year. *A new application must be completed each year.*

REHEARSALS

The [rehearsal schedules](#) for all ensembles are posted on the ASO website:

<https://www.arkansassymphony.org/e-lee-ronnel-music-academy/youth-programs/youth-ensembles/>

REHEARSAL ETIQUETTE

Prelude, Academy, and Youth Orchestra members are expected to be **in their seat and ready to play at least 15 minutes prior to the scheduled rehearsal time**. If you are on time, you are late. It is imperative to be present for tuning, and to avoid distracting others by arriving late.

You should have your instrument and all proper accessories including mutes, rosin, rockstops, extra strings, reeds, percussion mallets, and a pencil with an eraser, as well as your music in the proper folder. Do not rely on your stand partner for music.

- Bring your music, instrument, accessories, and pencil.
- Be early!
- Be attentive! If your conductor is speaking, you should not be.
- Cell phones are not allowed in the rehearsal space, and should be left in the rack in the education wing. They can be accessed at break.
- Sit with feet flat on floor.

- No one is excused early from any rehearsal.
- No hats shall be worn during rehearsals.
- No chewing gum.
- Breaks are scheduled for getting water, using facilities, etc. Do not leave your seat during rehearsal unless an emergency.
- Parents, pick up your children promptly at the end of rehearsal.

Consequences for repeated tardiness, excessive absence, or displaying inappropriate etiquette, may be one or more of the following: 1) Re-seating within the section; 2) Loss of solo opportunities; 3) Restriction from participating in masterclasses or concerts; 4) Removal from the orchestra.

PREPARATION

Review the rehearsal schedule carefully and have your music well prepared. If able, please bring your music to a private lesson teacher or your school music teacher. Plan to devote at least 30 minutes of practice time each day to ASOYE music. Bring all necessary instrument supplies such as rockstops, extra strings, bow, rosin, reeds, valve oil, and mutes to each rehearsal and concert.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance at all rehearsals, dress rehearsals and concerts is REQUIRED. Any extenuating circumstances that affect attendance should be discussed in a timely manner with your Attendance Parent and/or Conductor.

Please refer to our ASOYE schedules before making travel or vacation plans and/or work schedules for older students. In most cases, special considerations can be made with employers and other school ensembles. You are responsible for notifying your Attendance Parent of any conflicts that affect your attendance. ***Please notify the Attendance Parent by e-mail as soon as an unavoidable absence becomes apparent.***

Maximum allowable absences for each orchestra, per concert cycle are:

Attendance for Prelude Orchestra

Students in the Prelude Orchestra are allowed a maximum of 3 absences for the fall semester (prior to Mid-Winter Concert) and 2 absences for the spring semester (prior to the Spring Concert). *Those students missing more than the allowed maximum will not be allowed to play the concert for that semester. Absences due to school orchestra competition or state competition are excused; notify the Attendance Parent of such conflicts.*

Attendance for Academy Orchestra

Academy Orchestra students are allowed a maximum of 3 absences for the fall semester (prior to Mid-Winter Concert) and a maximum of 3 absences for the spring semester (prior to the Spring Concert). *After the 3rd absence, the student will be required to play for the conductor to determine eligibility to continue the season.*

Attendance for Youth Orchestra

ASYO students are allowed a maximum of 3 absences for the fall semester (August through December) and a maximum of 3 absences for the spring semester (January through April). *Late arrival to rehearsal (arrival after scheduled start time) will result in a tardy. 3 tardies = 1 absence. Missing a required event and/or exceeding the maximum allowed absences will result in re-seating, suspension or removal from the ASYO for the remainder of the season at the discretion of the conductor.*

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

In the event of inclement weather, students will be notified of the rehearsal or concert cancellation at least two hours prior to the normally scheduled start time via email from the Attendance Parent.

SCHOOL MUSIC PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

All ASOYE members attending a junior or senior high school are strongly encouraged to participate in their school's instrumental music program.

It is important that Youth Ensembles members participate in their school Band and Orchestra Programs. Our student participation in these school ensembles strengthens the school's music program, and as a result strengthens music programs district and statewide. Part of the ASO's mission is to promote music education throughout Arkansas. Critical to this effort is our students' participation in those programs that DO exist in order to perpetuate their existence and make them stronger.

ASOYE attendance policies apply regardless of extra-curricular involvement or commitment to a school music program. Each ASOYE member is solely responsible for managing his or her schedule and negotiating terms of involvement with other ensembles.

PERFORMANCES

ALL STUDENTS SHOULD REMAIN IN ATTENDANCE FOR ALL COMBINED PERFORMANCES OF YOUTH ENSEMBLES.

Fall Concert (all groups)

October 26th, 2025 7:00pm Bryant High School

Youth Orchestra recording/concert

December 14, 2025 7:00pm Morgan Hall, ASO Music Center

Academy Orchestra lobby performance at ASO Home for the Holidays Pops concert

December 21, 2025 2:00pm Robinson Center street-level Lobby

Mid-Winter Concert/Side by Side (all groups)

February 1st, 2026 6:00pm Robinson Center Auditorium

Spring Residency Concert (all groups)

April 24th, 2026 7:00pm Mills High School

Hot Springs/Hot Springs Village Concert (Academy and Youth Orchestras)

April 26th, 2026 3:00pm Woodlands Auditorium, HSV

Academy Orchestra lobby performance at ASO Pops 4 concert

May 9, 2026 7:00pm Robinson Center Historic Lobby

Additional performances for any ensemble may be scheduled at the discretion of the conductor and will be communicated via email from the Attendance Parent.

CONCERT DRESS

Our dress code is not intended to be gender-specific or restrictive. Wear the option that is most comfortable and feels most appropriate for you.

All Ensembles: Black *ankle-length* or *below knee-length* dress or skirt; black dress blouse; black dress pants; black dress shoes with black hosiery or socks. Black dress blouses may be worn under black dress jackets. Please no leggings, stirrup pants, tights, jeans or casual pants.

Academy and Youth Orchestra: Black Suit consisting of matching suit pants and suit jacket, black dress shirt, black necktie, black dress shoes, full calf-length black socks.

Prelude Orchestra: Black slacks with black button-front shirt, black shoes, black socks. Necktie not required.

CONCERT ETIQUETTE – ALL ASOYE CONCERTS

ALL members of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Youth Ensembles – Prelude, Academy and Youth – are **REQUIRED** to stay for the **ENTIRE** performance of any concert of the combined groups. Each group will be designated a place in the concert hall where the conductor and their fellow students may sit together for the performances.

AUDITIONS

All audition requirements for each ensemble, including application and \$20 audition fee, are outlined on the ASO Youth Orchestras section of the ASO website. Once a student has auditioned, they will be informed of their status and the student should download the ASOYE Handbook and pay tuition.

Auditions are held twice yearly in January and May/June. January auditions are for students new to the program, but not for students to advance to the next ensemble. To ensure the continuity of the program within each group, students are not allowed to move from one orchestra to another mid-year. **Woodwinds and Brass members will be required to re-audition each year to remain in the ensemble.**

CHAIR AUDITIONS

Each orchestra has their own process for doing chair auditions within each section. It is up to the conductor of each orchestra to determine if, when, and how they will conduct chair auditions within their group.

Youth Orchestra seating process:

Seating within the ASYO is determined by several factors. Early in the fall semester, each STRING PLAYER will take a chair audition. This is an opportunity for students to demonstrate how well they can prepare a few short excerpts of orchestral music. Chair audition excerpts from music to be performed will be made available at the annual retreat.

Factors that are considered in determining ALL seating (woodwinds, brass and strings) include:

- Musical needs of the entire ensemble (what will make us sound best)
- Physical requirements of each piece performed
- Experience as a player
- Consistency of performance at rehearsals and concerts
- Equitable distribution of opportunities
- Seniority
- Attendance
- Leadership skills
- Auditions
- Consistent level of preparedness (last but certainly not least)

Principal chairs are the 1st chair within each section. These positions will rotate throughout the year. If a wind section does not rotate for a year, it is likely that members are building experience through consistency. All students should expect and be willing to sit in different seats over the course of the year. String seating generally rotates on a per concert basis, whereas wind seating may alternate on a single program. Wind part assignments generally are made for each piece of music.

Concertmaster position will also likely rotate during the year. To be considered for the concertmaster position, a violinist must take the concertmaster audition. These will occur on the same day as chair auditions, but are by sign-up. There will be additional audition excerpts. Members of the Violin 2 section may take the concertmaster audition by preparing the added concertmaster excerpts and the regular violin 2 excerpts. All students who sign up for a concertmaster audition must also take a regular chair audition the same day.

ASO CONCERTS

TICKETS TO ASO CONCERTS

The ASO offers, exclusively to Youth Ensembles parents and students, the following:

Any student of the ASOYE can attend a mainstage concert, EXCLUDING specials, for free with an Entergy Kids Ticket. The Entergy Kids tickets are for all children Kindergarten – 12th grade.

For other adults attending the concert, the ASO offers the following promo code for online transactions for \$10 tickets to mainstage concerts, EXCLUDING specials: **ASOYE10**. This code may be used in the Promo code field online. Promo code seats are Purple (C Level), Orange (B Level), and Blue (A Level) seating.

Lobby Pre-Show Performance or Mainstage Performance

All students performing in an ASO mainstage concert (either on stage or a lobby performance) are eligible for **two complimentary tickets for that concert series**. These tickets can be booked through the ASO box office. **If you know your child is performing, do NOT buy tickets before securing your complimentary tickets, as all ticket sales are final.**

Contact the Box Office for help or information regarding tickets to ASO Concerts, (501) 666-1761 ext. 1.

ASO CONCERT CONVERSATIONS One hour prior to each ASO Masterworks Concert on Saturdays and Sundays (6:30 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. respectively), our conductor will provide an informative, educational, and entertaining preview of the concert repertoire. Many times the guest artist will also discuss their portion of the concert. This is a “not to be missed” part of the concert for all ASOYE students who attend the Masterworks Concerts.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

MENTORING PROGRAM String players in the Youth Orchestra are encouraged to sign up as a mentor for students in the Prelude Orchestra. This requires attending and participating in a minimum of two Prelude Orchestra rehearsals per semester. Mentors are responsible for checking in with the Orchestra Conductor and participating, per their instruction. All [rehearsal schedules](https://www.arkansassymphony.org/e-lee-ronnel-music-academy/youth-programs/youth-ensembles/) are posted on the ASO website, <https://www.arkansassymphony.org/e-lee-ronnel-music-academy/youth-programs/youth-ensembles/>

CONCERT VOLUNTEERS Students in the Academy and Youth Orchestras are encouraged to volunteer as ushers at ASO Concerts. Email your interest in ushering to [Durham Hill](mailto:dhill@arkansassymphony.org), dhill@arkansassymphony.org.

Volunteer letters can be provided by the [Director of Education and Community Engagement](#).

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra is committed to providing a safe and protective environment for children participating in ASO programs. The ASO will not tolerate abuse, neglect, or harassment of any child by staff members, volunteers or other children.

DEFINITIONS:

Abuse, neglect or harassment – any act or failure to act that results in imminent risk of serious harm, death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation.

Suspected abuse, neglect or harassment – involves observation of a child that results in the observer having an uneasy feeling or concern that the child has been or is subject to an act or failure to act that could result in imminent risk of serious harm, death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation.

Responsibilities to parents – The ASO will provide a safe and protective environment for all children participating in ASO programs. Parents may visit ASO programs in which their children are participating at any time and are encouraged to visit with the ASOYE Manager about any concerns they might have regarding their child's participation.

If a parent or volunteer feels that a child has been placed at imminent risk as per the definitions outlined above, they should inform both the Director of Education and the Executive Director of the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra Society. If the complaint involves either of the above-named individuals, the parent or volunteer may go directly to the ASO Board Chair.

Complaints will be promptly investigated, and the complainant will be advised of the findings and conclusions. All ASO employees and volunteers are expected to cooperate fully in such investigations. To the extent feasible, all internal investigations and/or actions taken to resolve complaints of abuse, neglect or harassment, shall be confidential.

Please help us make your child's musical experience a positive one and support each conductor not only in his efforts to help your child grow musically, but in strength of character as well.