



STRATFORD SYMPHONY
YOUTH ORCHESTRA

SSYO Handbook

2025 - 2026 Season

Stratford Symphony Youth Orchestra
32 Erie Street
Stratford, Ontario N5A 2M4

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Message from the Music Director



Welcome to the 5th season of the Stratford Symphony Youth Orchestra!

I can hardly believe how much our orchestra has grown year after year - it's amazing to see this community of young musicians come together. We're so fortunate to have a fantastic team of professional coaches guiding and inspiring our students every week, making sure everyone gets the support they need to shine.

This season is packed with exciting opportunities!

- **December Concert:** Our traditional holiday concert at Avondale United Church, complete with a sing-along led by the Festival Sounds Chorus.
- **April 11th – Symphony at the Cinema:** We'll share the stage with the Stratford Symphony Orchestra for two thrilling performances featuring *Hedwig's Theme*, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* suite (back by popular demand!), and another spectacular movie suite from the world of animation/musical theatre.
- **Stratford Kiwanis Festival:** For the very first time, we'll be performing at this community festival—an exciting new adventure for the SSYO!

We're also thrilled to welcome back **Gwendolyn Nguyen**, who will once again lead the J-SSYO strings in multi-level orchestra works.

On top of the music, we'll continue our **fundraising during SSO intermissions**, and we'll be looking for SSYO volunteers to help sell concessions (a fun way to support our ensemble and collect volunteer hours for school).

I'm so proud of what we accomplished last season, and I know this year will be even more memorable. Let's make music, make friends, and make this 5th season one to remember!

Musically yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Carbonneau". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

About the Stratford Symphony Youth Orchestra

Started in the fall of 2021, the Stratford Symphony Youth Orchestra aims to connect young musicians from Stratford and surrounding areas and create a community where young artists can learn the joy of symphonic music. While the SSYO does not replace private instruction, it helps to grow skills learned from their teachers, and becomes a launching point for any type of music making.

Focussing on classical music, the SSYO also performs selections from movie scores, musical theatre and opera. We welcome any young musician who is able to read music, plays an orchestral instrument, and is excited to join us for our weekly 1.5 hour rehearsals. The SSYO team works to arrange music to fit the ensemble, and has performed music from Bizet's *Carmen* and *l'Arlésienne Suites*, *The Pirates of the Caribbean*, the Shostakovich Jazz Waltz and more!

If you think you may be interested, but want to see what it's all about, we invite you to come sit in on a rehearsal to watch!

About the Junior Stratford Symphony Youth Orchestra

One of the greatest joys in working with the Youth Orchestra is that we immediately saw how large the appetite was for this type of ensemble. So much so, that we created a Junior program (J-SSYO) for those who weren't quite ready for a 1.5 hour rehearsal, and who are still gaining the fundamentals of their instrument.

The J-SSYO is open to string players who want to be a part of the SSYO, but aren't ready just yet. With weekly rehearsals of 45 minutes, the J-SSYO spends 30 minutes of rehearsal under the guidance of Gwendolyn Nguyen before joining the SSYO for the last 15 minutes. Each term, the J-SSYO will join the SSYO on stage at their recital for one piece on the programme, allowing them to share in the excitement!

Expectations of SSYO Members

Commitment and Preparation

Dedication to the SSYO is largely demonstrated through regular attendance to all scheduled rehearsals, concerts, and events as well as consistent, individual musical preparation.

Through each of its members' individual investment in playing their part to the best of their ability, the quality of the SSYO will continue to grow each season. Every member makes an equally important contribution to the SSYO experience.

Concert Dress

Musicians shall choose dress options appropriate to their gender expression.

The dress of orchestra musicians should reflect the tone of the event, a professional demeanour and be suitable for the stage.

All garments must be of true black, without pattern or visible logos.

Tops: Black top, black dress shirt. Sleeve length should be $\frac{3}{4}$ to full length.

Bottoms: Black pants, Black skirt long (below knees)

Shoes: Formal Black

Jewellery: We recommend little to no jewellery on stage

Formal one piece dress suits are also okay

Optional

Ties: If you do choose to wear, please wear a straight tie or bow tie.

Socks: Black socks or hose.

Black Suit Jackets optional

Private Lessons

Members are strongly encouraged to take private lessons as the aim of the SSYO is not to teach young artists how to play their instruments, but rather to learn how to play together as an ensemble. If you are having trouble finding an appropriate private teacher, please contact the music director who will be able to connect you with local teachers. We also recommend checking out the [Stratford Music Teachers online music directory](#).

Harassment/Bullying/Discrimination Policy

The Stratford Symphony Youth Orchestra is committed to providing an environment free of harassment, bullying and/or discrimination, where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity, can contribute fully and have equal opportunities to learn and grow.

Under the Ontario Human Rights Code, every person has the right to be free from harassment and discrimination. Harassment and discrimination will not be tolerated, condoned or ignored at the SSYO.

As part of the SSO, their *Policy on Workplace Harassment and Violence* applies to the SSYO staff, members and volunteers.

Please approach the music director privately if you feel you, or others, are being harassed, bullied or discriminated against. If you are uncomfortable approaching the music director directly, please contact info@stratfordsymphonyorchestra.ca to speak with a staff member of the SSO, who can raise your concerns in a private manner to SSYO leadership.

SSYO Tuition Schedule

Fee Schedule

SSYO joining in September: \$375

SSYO joining in January: \$275

Junior SSYO joining in September: \$275

Junior SSYO joining in January: \$175

This year we are billing online through our ticketing platform. To register, please [click here](#).

Should paying in one lump sum be a barrier for your family, please contact us to create a payment plan.

Refunds

The Stratford Symphony Youth Orchestra does not offer refunds for tuitions that have been paid following the member's first rehearsal with the ensemble. We offer a one week "trial" with the ensemble to see if it is a wonderful fit for the young musician, and will reimburse anyone who feels after their first week that it isn't a good fit.

SSO Benefits

A musical education includes attending live performances, and we are lucky to have the SSO perform six concerts at Avondale United Church each year. We encourage all SSYO members to attend as many concerts as they are able.

SSYO members are invited to attend all concerts for free. Should the SSO concert be sold out, we will work with the SSO team to see if we are able to attend the dress rehearsal. Families may certainly attend with the SSYO members: tickets may be purchased at <https://www.stratfordsymphony.ca/Concerts/>

Rehearsal Information

Rehearsal Expectations

Playing in an ensemble with other musicians is one of the most important skills and rewarding aspects of music making. The SSYO expects that all members follow appropriate orchestral etiquette:

- Attend all rehearsals, and notify the conductor in advance of any conflicts.
- Be ready to play on time. In orchestra being on time means having your instrument assembled and already pre-tuned before rehearsal begins.
- Prepare your music and practice in between rehearsals.
- During rehearsal, please raise your hand to ask questions, and always listen to the music director or your fellow musicians when they are speaking.
- If you are not playing a movement, or are not in a particular piece, please be quiet while your colleagues work. Feel free to bring a book, or leave the room if you would like until they have finished.
- Work collaboratively in sectionals, and treat everyone with respect.

What to bring to every rehearsal

- ☐ [Tuner app](#) on your electronic device (or you can buy [Tuners at L&M](#))
- ☐ Instrument
- ☐ Pencil
- ☐ Music prepared **in a binder**
- ☐ Instrument accessories (rosin, cello puck/strap, slide grease, reeds, mutes etc.)

Schedule

Junior SSYO rehearses 6:30 - 7:15 PM

SSYO rehearses 7:00 - 8:30 PM

Unless specified otherwise, all rehearsals are held at [Zion Lutheran Church](#)

Fall 2025

- September 8
 - **Strings only**
- September 15
 - open reh for new students
- September 22
- September 29
- October 6
- **October 13 - Week Off**
 - Thanksgiving
- October 20
- October 27
- November 3
- November 10
- November 17
- November 24
- December 1
- **December 8 - Dress Reh**
- **December 15 - Concert**
 - [Avondale United Church](#)
 - 6:00 PM call, 7:30 PM concert

Winter 2026

- January 12
 - **Strings only**
- January 19
- January 26
- February 2
- February 9
- **February 16 - Week Off**
 - Family Day
- February 23
- March 2
- March 9
- **March 16 - Week Off**
 - March Break
- March 23
- March 30
- **April 6 - with SSO conductor**
- **Friday April 10 - Dress rehearsal**
 - [Avondale United Church](#)
 - 7:00-8:30 (6:30 arrival)
- **Saturday April 11 - Concerts (2!)**
 - [Avondale United Church](#)
 - 2:30 call, 3:00 start
 - 7:00 call, 7:30 start
- April 13
Final rehearsal on Kiwanis material
- **April 20 - SSYO at Stratford Kiwanis**
 - [Avondale United Church](#)
 - Time TBD

Version September 8, 2025

This may be updated throughout the season, we will keep the most up-to-date version on our website at www.stratfordsymphony.ca/ssyo