

SONATA

PHILADELPHIA SINFONIA

Sinfonia Orchestra News
Spring 2025

SPRING AUDITIONS

May 24 & 25 and May 31 and June 1. For details, see page 3.

SPECIAL ALUMNI EVENT

See page 7

Concert Season Warms the Winter of 2024 – 25!



Maestro White leads PS in concert: March 2, 2025.

As each season approaches, new and returning musicians enroll in one of our four ensembles, begin rehearsals in September, and work very hard for a few months.... Then, come concert season, our conductors can tell just how much each student and each ensemble has grown. Dress rehearsals and their subsequent performances — with an audience and recordings — pull everything

together. And the result can be powerful.

Like every other season, 2024 – 25 is showcasing remarkable progress across each area of the program. While a serious snowstorm in January unfortunately cancelled the first PS concert, its dress rehearsal the previous day clearly demonstrated just how far this advanced group had grown since Fall.

Maestro White emailed the group soon after the cancelled concert expressing his disappointment for their lost performance, but more importantly, sending his kudos and appreciation for the inspired dress rehearsal the day before. Moreover, two pieces on the cancelled concert were recycled to future performances, so little was lost.

While snow has dogged this winter from time to time, other Sinfonia concerts have proceeded as planned. PSS and PSP concluded lovely winter concerts in January and February, respectively (see pages 4 and 5), and happily, on March 2, PS performed what would have been its second concert at Temple's Performing Arts Center on a gorgeous brisk — but brilliantly sunny — afternoon.

What a stunning performance! The first half was especially captivating, from the classic “warhorse” as Maestro White referred to the *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*, exquisitely played, to Libby Larsen's contemporary *Six or Seven Dances*, a regional premiere.

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Principal Cellist Calls for a Sectional!

Sometimes we see remarkable examples of student leadership! And this is one of them.

Early in 2025, Micah Abraham, our PS Principal Cellist, sensed that his section, strong as it is, could use some extra time working together to improve and unify its playing — tightening its entrances, breathing *together*, keeping the back of the section unified with the front. These are all important qualities that he did not want to

wait to address until mid-March, when the PS sections were scheduled for coaching with professional musicians.

So, with Maestro White's endorsement, Micah called for a 45 minute cello sectional between two afternoon rehearsals on February 8. He asked our intern, Leigh Brown, an alum cellist, to join him in leading the sectional, and the musicians in his section showed up.

Micah had already had some experience a year ago leading a sectional when at the last minute a coach could not attend PS sectionals. Without hesitation, Micah, then in his first year as Principal Cellist, rose to the occasion, and led the sectional, whereupon — no surprise — he “learned a lot... and wanted *another* opportunity to lead a sectional.” He finds sectional work “great bonding opportunities for us as

Continued on page 3.

From the Podium

The selection of repertoire is a crucial part of a youth orchestra conductor's role. I have written about how the selection process works at Sinfonia in previous newsletters, with two quoted below. The second excerpt addresses our commitment to performing the "classical cannon" as well as introducing our students to new work and "music on the fringes," and there is something particularly compelling in that arena about *commissioning* work and performing it for the very first time.

As I hope you will see, my previous statements on repertoire lead directly to remarks I made literally "from the podium" on March 2, as PS and I were about to perform an unusual newly commissioned work at TPAC:

"I am often asked how we pick repertoire. Is it what we like to conduct? Is it what the audience likes? Is it what the students like? Honestly, it is all of those plus what helps each of our students to grow technically and musically into well-rounded musicians. It involves carefully choosing repertoire that challenges and motivates each orchestra's different constituents: string, woodwinds, brass, harp and percussion. In a way, it is a bit like a difficult puzzle to solve. So often my colleagues and I think we have the perfect repertoire selected, only to realize there isn't enough for the harp or trombones, or

there isn't any 21st century music – some piece of the puzzle isn't quite right."

~ Sonata; Fall 2023

"There is another component to our vital educational process and that is — carefully balancing the standard kind of repertoire a youth orchestra would be expected to play with more adventurous repertoire that may be brand new or not often heard.... In my conversations with Maestras Garrett and Dzwil, it is clear that all our conducting staff want to open our students' eyes to new works and music on the fringes as well."

~ Sonata; winter 2024

And now, from the podium on March 2:

"Philadelphia Sinfonia has a rich history of working with up-and-coming and well-established composers, giving many world, national, and local premieres. The experience of preparing a piece that has never been heard before is both exhilarating and terrifying, because of the responsibility we take on in presenting a new work to the world — hopefully performing it just as the composer imagined it or in a way the composer will approve of. This is an invaluable process for our musicians as they develop their advanced orchestral skills. Having access to a living composer's written and verbal words brings the piece alive for the musicians in a way that is completely unique.



Gary D. White, *Music Director & Conductor*

"This year we are proud to be a part of The Consortium for the Advancement of String Orchestra Repertoire and present prominent American composer Libby Larsen's "Six or Seven Dances for String Orchestra and Harp" for the first time to the Philadelphia area. The work is uniquely Americana, filled with great beauty, fun and a few quirky surprises designed to draw the audience in completely. Enjoy!"

Gary D. White
Music Director & Conductor

ORCHESTRA NEWS

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Edited by: Carol Brown

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Tom Gralish
Danielle Garrett
Kasey MacAdams

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PSP in concert at Trinity Center, February 16; see article on page 5.

Call for Spring Auditions

Going into its 29th season, the Philadelphia Sinfonia program includes several performance opportunities for each orchestra, varied and challenging repertoire, master classes and sectionals. We have four orchestras:

Philadelphia Sinfonia (PS):

advanced full symphonic orchestra for ages 14–23
Rehearsals: Saturdays, 2:50–5:30 PM

Philadelphia Sinfonia Players (PSP):

intermediate-advanced full symphonic orchestra for ages 11–18
Rehearsals: Saturdays, 9:50 AM–12:00 noon

Philadelphia Sinfonia Chamber Orchestra (PSCO):

advanced string orchestra | Open to any PS string player
Rehearsals: Saturdays, 12:20–2:00 PM

Philadelphia Sinfonia Strings (PSS):

string ensemble to build orchestral skills for musicians age 10–16 .
More information below.
Rehearsals: Saturdays 9:20–11:00 AM

Auditions take place at the Howard Center for the Arts, 1212 Wood Street, Center City Philadelphia

SPRING DATES FOR AUDITIONS:

Saturday, May 24: 10:00 AM–6:00 PM

Sunday, May 25: 10:00 AM–6:00 PM

Saturday, May 31: 10:00 AM–6:00 PM

Sunday, June 1: 10:00 AM–6:00 PM

For PS and PSP: Auditioning musicians are expected to perform two different movements from a concerto or sonata – one technical movement and one slower, more melodic movement — without accompaniment; perform major scales up to four flats and four sharps (3 octaves); sight read.

Percussion and harp: please check our website for specific requirements.

For PSS — Philadelphia Sinfonia Strings' Auditions: Perform 2-octave major scales up to 4 flats and 4 sharps; play a piece that demonstrates your technical ability; and sight-read music provided in the audition.

Openings available for all instruments!

Registration is available on our website: www.philadelphiasinfonia.com/auditions

Princial Cellist Calls for a Sectional!

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musicians,” especially when internally led.

The repertoire he chose for February 8 was Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*, due to be performed on March 2. “I felt that we could play [it] with a lot more expression... instead of being just loud or soft...” and also address the points mentioned above that would generally unify the section’s playing.

Micah credits Leigh for suggesting they tackle three small melodic sections in Tchaikovsky’s score that were each heartfelt and quite emotional and also for the way Leigh’s college and graduate experience leading sectionals contributed to their work together.

The love theme in *Romeo and Juliet* was one of those melodic sections, and as this writer observed them, the cellists’ work turning emotion into sound was intense and serious.



At the far right, Leigh Brown and Micah Abraham lead the cellos in this very special sectional.

How *does* love sound? What emotional qualities suggest love; how would they sound; and what techniques best elicit those sounds from the cello? Ultimately, a performer wants to convey that emotion to the audience, to move the listener; *that* is the unifying gift of music. Micah and Leigh challenged the cellists to discuss and work together to play the theme with new insight, and the musicians responded –

with ideas and technical suggestions until they ran out of time....

Micah would like to thank his section for their commitment and hard work. He also thanks Mr. White for encouraging this opportunity for the cello section. He is grateful, too, to Mr. White and Ms. Garrett for the support they have provided to him personally, over several years, fostering his growth as a musician.

With Ensemble Camaraderie, PSS Shines in January Concert

Ms. Beth, PSS Conductor, had a lot to say after the ensemble's January performance at the Howard Center. Noting how far the group had advanced in a mere five months, she said:

"I wish I had recorded the our first rehearsal so the students could hear how far they have come.... In the beginning it was a struggle even to get their instruments in tune with each other! Now they do slow scales, carefully adjusting their pitch to each other. They quickly respond to bowing instructions. Their ears are opening!"

Philadelphia Sinfonia Strings enrolls students who show promise on their

instruments but have little or no experience working and playing in a group. Ms. Beth is the ideal conductor to teach and conduct this elementary ensemble, though she credits the group with much of their progress:

"This is a particularly special group because of the deep camaraderie they share. It is one of the factors that makes them play so well together."

This element was evident throughout their performance but especially so in their third and final piece, Sibelius' *Finlandia*, in which they were joined by two guest musicians, Adam Silverman, PS double bass, and Micah Waggoner, PSP timpanist. They

conveyed emotional depth throughout this work that celebrates sorrow, struggle, and triumph of the Finnish people, for whom it was written at an important historical time.

Besides growing the ensemble's performance strengths, Ms. Beth is fostering her students' understanding of the musicology behind the work they play: its history, structure, etc., which was on display as each piece was introduced at the concert by one of her students.

Congratulations, PSS, on your growing strengths and for showcasing them in a lovely performance in January!



PSS warming up for its concert on January 18, 2025.



And the reward after the PSS concert: a grand buffet of treats!

Remaining 2024 – 25 Concert Schedule

PHILADELPHIA SINFONIA

Thursday, May 22, 2025

8 PM

Marian Anderson Hall

The Kimmel Center

With PSP and with soloist,

Alana Youssefian, violin

PHILADELPHIA SINFONIA

PLAYERS

Sunday, May 18, 2025

3 PM

Temple Performing Arts Center

With soloist Eric Schweingruber, trumpet

PHILADELPHIA SINFONIA

CHAMBER ORCHSTRA

Sunday, March 30, 2025

3 PM

Shannondell at Valley Forge

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

7 PM

Foulkeways at Gwynedd

PHILADELPHIA SINFONIA

STRINGS

Saturday, May 3, 2025

7 PM

Howard Center for the Arts

Concert Season Warms the Winter of 2024 – 25!

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Larsen used her charming piece to introduce the musicians to "extended technique," unusual uses of instruments, hand-clapping, and vocalized interjections, prevalent in some contemporary music, thoroughly engaging the musicians and audience alike and generating a lot of fun!

We were all brought back to earth in the second half, with Beethoven's iconic Sixth Symphony, the "Pastoral," that walks the listener through the uplift of nature's glory and the drama of a storm. Thoughtfully programmed, this concert was a fine comeback from the perils of winter.

PSS: Fostering Program Note Writing

With few exceptions, Sinfonia students write all our concert program “program notes” — the descriptions of each piece of music generally found in professional ensembles’ concert programs. These notes in professional concert programs are generally written by academic musicologists who provide contextual material and analyses of the pieces of music on the program.

Some Sinfonia students like to write; some are eager to learn in more depth the background of our repertoire; others like to *do* something for Sinfonia to acknowledge the value of their Sinfonia experience in some tangible way. For whatever reason,



Teddy Lewis-Smith reads his introduction to *Finlandia*.

given the opportunity, several students volunteer each year to write program notes.

PSS musicians are among our youngest students. They bring little or no experience working in an ensemble and are coming to the complexities of music for multiple instruments for the first time. Nonetheless, they are learning the rudiments of sophisticated program note writing!

Before each PSS concert, Maestra Beth elicits a student musician to preface each piece the group performs with a short verbal introduction. In January of this year, Noah Shannon, Christine Cha, and Teddy Lewis-Smith each introduced the three pieces performed as the concert progressed. While simpler, their introductions resembled the basic structure of program notes: a little biographical material about the composer and his or her historical context; a note about the group’s musical journey with the piece; and a simple description of the piece’s structure.

For example, Christine gave biographical context to

Adoration by saying that it “was written by Florence Price in 1951.”

For their PSS musical journey with the “Gavotte” from Edward Grieg’s *Holberg Suite*, Noah explained that “this is a light and airy piece.... When rehearsing this piece, we like to think of fairies frolicking in a field to remember to keep the tone light and airy.”

As for structure in Sibelius’ *Finlandia*, Teddy eloquently explained that “The piece starts out with a dark opening but eventually resolves in a triumphant finish depicting the victory of Finland.”

Though simple, each example represents a basic element of concert program notes. Fostered intentionally in PSS, they form the expectation that musicians will understand the material they play; that each musician is capable of contributing to the program in some way; and that program note writing is an essential part of performance for which each musician might volunteer.

Many thanks to Noah, Christine, and Teddy for providing our audience with verbal program notes and to Maestra Beth Dzwil for planting the seeds of leadership as well as intellectual scholarship among her musicians.

“Great Care and Intricate Playing:” PSP at the Trinity Center!

The words quoted above are those of Music Director, Gary White, who also praised PSP’s “musical maturity.” Maestra Garrett’s words to her orchestra in an email following that PSP concert on Sunday, February 16, were equally complimentary, citing, among other attributes, their “confidence and musicality.” Bravo to the musicians of PSP; these accolades were well-deserved!

A very full and enthusiastic audience greeted PSP as they came out to play at the Trinity Center for Urban Life, and the audience’s enthusiasm did not diminish with time. Ranging from rather familiar works — Sibelius’ *Spring Song* and Schubert’s *Symphony No. 3* to those less well-known (Samuel Taylor-Coleridge’s

Novelletten No. 1 and the *Concert Waltz No. 1* of Glazunov), the concert’s repertoire was handled with grace and accomplishment by the students in PSP. And the audience loved it.

Invited to play one piece of their repertoire on the first half of the concert, PSS showcased *Finlandia*, Sibelius’ iconic tribute to his country and its people. While less-experienced and generally younger than PSP, PSS nonetheless did themselves proud, also eliciting Mr. White’s compliments: “and again, our [PSS] students played with polish and great energy.”

In a very important and relevant note, he went on to say, “It is clear that Mastras

Garrett and Dzwil worked with the orchestras at a very high level, expecting and getting only the best.”

Training and learning, the teachers and the students, conductors and musicians... working together show that growth and accomplishment “take a village” — the whole community working “in concert together” — not to coin a pun. However, when we get on stage, the centerpiece of our youth orchestra performances are always our *musicians*.... With guidance from their conductor, it is their hard work, their dedication, their talent, and their personal desire for excellence that coalesces into music of some complexity and beauty.

ALUM PROFILE:

Matthew Koveal, Trumpet Player and Music Executive

Sinfonia alum – and music executive — Matt Koveal got his start in music with the trumpet in elementary school. He was a natural. “A big reason I learned so quickly was that I played at my church regularly—at least once a month for a decade. . . . [T]he music director gave me the freedom to play as often and however I wanted. This experience helped me develop a deep understanding of ornamentation, style, and musical expression.”

In middle school, Matt took private lessons, including with John Thyhsen, then principal trumpet with the Philly Pops, the opera and ballet. “He had a profound impact on my playing and remains one of the biggest influences on my musical journey.”

Matt joined Sinfonia his senior year of high school. He greatly appreciated Maestro Gary White’s rehearsal technique and teaching style. “He struck a great balance between letting us play and addressing challenging passages head-on. He had a positive approach to working through difficult sections. . . and dedicated time to discussing the ‘behind the scenes’ aspects of performing. He emphasized understanding the composer, the time period in which the piece was written, and the appropriate performance style.”

Not surprisingly, Matt loved Sinfonia’s tour of Argentina, his first time travelling without his family and performing before large audiences. “I’ll never forget some of those packed halls and the energy of the crowds there to see us. I felt like a rockstar, and I’ve been chasing that feeling ever since.”

After Sinfonia, Matt earned a degree in music education at Messiah University, traveled to Germany with a brass quintet, and performed as principal trumpet in various ensembles. He also performed under the Baton of Colonel Bourgeois, with the Messiah University Wind Ensemble. He then earned a master’s degree in trumpet performance at the University of Colorado and performed with the Colorado Symphony under the baton of Andrew Litton of the New York City Ballet.

Matt also developed skills that would eventually lead him to a career in arts administration. He began working in recording engineering, connecting with Bruce Leek, a renowned recording engineer who had occasionally visited Messiah. From him, he learned a variety of recording techniques and notes: “I had no idea at the time how crucial this experience would become.”

An embouchure (lip) injury in Matt’s junior year of college which could have threatened his studies and performance career led him to recognize “how unpredictable a musician’s career can be” and to diversify his skills. He recovered, completed Colorado’s master’s program, continued to work as a recording engineer and began a four-year tenure with the Colorado Symphony’s production and artistic department, where “my full-time administrative career began. . . .” “There, he had the opportunity to work with major artists in various styles of music, including Itzhak Perlman, Renee Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, The Flaming Lips, One Republic, and many others. Matt also met his wife — a violinist



Matt Koveal speaking at the first annual No Name Pops fundraiser, hosted by Jim Gardner and Amy Goldman.

from Manhattan — and moved back to Philadelphia.

Along the way, Matt learned: “Music doesn’t need to be perfect to be enjoyable. When I learned that performance wouldn’t be my major focus, I had a hard time just playing for fun. . . . In fact, I’m actually just starting to understand this right now. You don’t need to be playing at your highest level to enjoy music, or have others enjoy your music.”

He has great advice — from many perspectives — for Sinfonia members: “If you want to pursue a career in music, . . . [c]reate opportunities for yourself and see where they go. . . .” He recommends, for example, getting together weekly for an “open mic” night with others, finding opportunities to play and make connections. He adds: “Don’t be afraid to ask for . . . advice from a teacher, colleague, or someone you admire. . . . You won’t know [what you might learn] unless you ask. . . .”

And where has this led him? Matt has found a satisfying musical career: he is now the Executive Director of The No Name Pops — soon to be the “Philly Pops” again! Congrats, Matt!

We wish Matt well as he continues to produce and promote great music!

Please feel free to contact Matt at mkoveal@nonamepops.org.

~Diane Penneys Edelman

ALUMNI UPDATE:

In the Fall of 2012, we featured Sinfonia alum, Dave Tarantino, then a graduate percussion student at Boston University. With that BU degree in percussion performance, Dave has performed with multiple Philadelphia area ensembles, taught extensively, and been a substitute host at WRTI. Most recently, Dave accepted a tenure track position with the Israeli Philharmonic as a member of its percussion section — and he is already on the job, having received, he says, a very warm reception. Congratulations, Dave — keep us posted, and we wish you well.

ALUM PROFILE:

Lucy Silbaugh, poetry MFA student

When Sinfonia alum Lucy Silbaugh was eight years old, she saw Yo Yo Ma perform as a cello-playing bunny on the children's cartoon "Arthur" and decided that she had to play that instrument. Years later, Lucy joined Sinfonia for her last three years of high school. She has many fond memories of her friends from Sinfonia, "and, of course, of the great music we played," including Beethoven's 9th symphony, Tchaikovsky's 6th, and Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances*.

Lucy had always wanted to be a writer, and after high school, she studied literature and creative writing. She says that "cello and writing have often intersected for me: I remember being quite young and writing a story about a girl who played the cello. Then in high school, I got very interested in the Schumanns and Brahms, and for a while I was writing (very embarrassing!) fiction about *them*."

So — how did Lucy's poetry-writing career come about?

She shares: "I always thought I wanted to write fiction — and in high school, I did write a lot of fiction — but then in college — at Yale, I took a poetry class with Louise Glück and ended up jumping ship. I realized that I was very moved by poetry, very exhilarated by it — and also that I felt that the range of tones, topics, and effects I saw in poetry was much greater than the range I saw in fiction."

Lucy has also relished the connections between poetry and music. "There's the music of poems themselves, of course, which is a much more central element than in prose. And I've also found there's a lot of poetry about classical music. I often get a quarter of the way through a poet's selected works only to find a poem called something like, 'Faure's Second Piano Quartet' or 'Becoming Edvard Grieg.' I laugh when I see those poems. I always love them."

She has also continued playing cello: "I've definitely made more time for music after college than I did during college. I think the key step was reminding myself why I wanted to do it. I ultimately realized that I really do play music for myself — because I like it and I find it beautiful and it makes me happy. In college, part of me probably believed that I wasn't good enough at cello to devote a lot of time to it. But as I've gotten older, I've realized I'm just not interested in living my life that way. I love music."

Lucy has managed to keep up with the cello even as she's lived in several different countries. During college, Lucy studied Russian, and later she had a postgrad fellowship in Russia, where she worked at two literature museums. She played cello in a university orchestra there, and also got to watch all of the concerts in the final cello round of the Tchaikovsky Competition live in St. Petersburg. She then studied at Oxford for two years, and played in the university orchestra and in chamber



Poetry MFA student and cellist, Lucy Silbaugh.

ensembles. Now enrolled in a poetry MFA program at Johns Hopkins, where she also teaches undergraduate creative writing, Lucy feels "very busy again" but says she's "making a lot of time for music. I've realized that it's one thing I never regret spending time on."

And what is Lucy's advice for current Sinfonia members who plan to pursue a career in literature, poetry, or another field?

"I think my biggest piece of advice is very simple: do what really interests you. And that advice holds true within interests, too: write what interests you and read what interests you and play what interests you! I've also found that there's great value in maintaining many interests simultaneously. Having lots of interests doesn't mean you're unfocused! It means you're *hungry*!"

We wish Lucy well as she continues to feed her hunger for creativity!

Please feel free to contact Lucy at lucy.silbaugh@gmail.com. You can learn more about Lucy's writing career online as well.

~Diane Penneys Edelman

ALUMNI INVITED TO JOIN PS FESTIVAL CONCERT – ON STAGE; MAY 22, 2025!

Sinfonia Alumni: you are invited to join Philadelphia Sinfonia at the Kimmel Center Festival Concert in May!

Reconnect with fellow alumni, current students, and Maestra Garrett and Maestro White while joining the Philadelphia Sinfonia on stage, performing Meyerbeer's *Coronation March* at the Kimmel Center on May 22, 2025! This is a wonderful opportunity to come together and celebrate music. We'll also be hosting additional musical events throughout the week, and we would love to see you at as many as you can attend.

Here's the schedule:

Saturday, May 17th at 4:50 PM

*Dress rehearsal at the Howard Center for the Arts, 1212 Wood Street, Philadelphia (1 & ½ blocks from Roman Catholic High School; Broad & Vine Sts.

Saturday, May 17th at 5:30 PM

VIP Reception for all Alumni at the Howard Center for the Arts

Thursday, May 22nd 6:00-7:30 PM

Soundcheck at the Kimmel Center

Thursday, May 22nd at 8:00 PM

Philadelphia Sinfonia Festival Concert at the Kimmel Center

*If you are unable to attend the dress rehearsal, please attend the soundcheck.

Registration is open now! To confirm your participation kindly complete this [Google Form](#) by **April 28th**. (For those with a print copy of this newsletter, email the office at info@philadelphiasinfonia.com to receive a copy of the form.)

Even if you are unable to attend, please fill out the [Google Form](#) so we can receive your most up to date contact information. We are excited to let you know that each alumni participant will receive four tickets to the performance.

We can't wait to reconnect with you and share this memorable experience in May!



Gary D. White, *Music Director and Conductor*
Dr. Elizabeth M. Guerriero, *Interim Executive Director*
Danielle Garrett, *PSP Conductor and Program Manager*
Beth Dzwil, *PSS Conductor*
Kasey MacAdams, *Program Manager*

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Philadelphia Sinfonia
PO Box 996
Philadelphia, PA 19105-0996
Tel: 215-351-0363
Website: www.philadelphiasinfonia.com
E-mail: info@philadelphiasinfonia.com

Mission Statement

Philadelphia Sinfonia supports the artistic growth of young musicians in the Delaware Valley by providing high-level ensemble experience in a supportive educational environment.

We believe that the pursuit of excellence requires performers with integrity, working together toward a common goal. Thus our mission is three-fold: to provide ensemble opportunities for young musicians, to achieve the highest level of artistic advancement, and to educate young people broadly to be strong citizens and leaders as well as responsible musicians.

We recruit from a demographically diverse student population to provide an opportunity to anyone who musically qualifies and to enrich the experience of all members of the organization.



Winter Concert Highlights; Alumni Events & Updates; Student Initiatives!



PO Box 996
Philadelphia, PA 19105-0996