



Music Director

Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras

Chicago, Illinois | Reports to Executive Director

Who We Are

With a rich history dating to 1946, Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestras (CYSO) is committed to educating, encouraging, and empowering student musicians so that they may pursue personal excellence both on and off the stage. Bringing together young musicians from diverse backgrounds in a collaborative environment that develops self-confidence, teamwork, and leadership, CYSO provides one of the most comprehensive music training programs in the country that inspires both musical and personal growth.

As one of the country's leading youth orchestras, CYSO serves nearly 800 young people (ages six to eighteen) from across the Chicagoland area and neighboring states. CYSO students perform in Chicago's great concert venues from Orchestra Hall at Symphony Center the Tito Stage at Lollapalooza to the Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park and the historic Studebaker Theater at the Fine Arts Building. CYSO students have had the opportunity to collaborate with Yo-Yo Ma, Anthony and Demarre McGill, Ben Folds, and Justin Timberlake, as well as perform with Chance the Rapper on the Late Show with Stephen Colbert. The students in the top orchestra tour internationally every other year, performing for global audiences and dignitaries as ambassadors for not only Chicago, but the nation.

Now in its 80th season, CYSO is committed to providing high-quality musical and educational experiences to its students. CYSO has grown from one orchestra to a comprehensive music training destination with 13 on-site ensembles ranging from full symphony orchestras, string ensembles, jazz orchestra, and steelpan orchestras; chamber music and composition programs; multiple school-based programs; and robust community engagement activities.

Position Overview

The Music Director (MD) will be the chief artistic voice of CYSO, leading first and foremost through a compelling artistic vision that inspires young musicians, engages audiences, and advances the organization's reputation for musical excellence.

The MD will shape and elevate CYSO's artistic identity through:

- Inspired and collaborative artistic leadership
- A dynamic and engaging podium presence that motivates musicians and connects with audiences
- Thoughtful, ambitious, and expansive programming that reflects both artistic excellence and contemporary relevance
- Deep engagement with the broader music field, including music education, performance, the city of Chicago, and other spaces that enrich CYSO's artistic life

The MD will cultivate a culture of musical excellence while serving as the principal member of the artistic staff and reflecting CYSO's commitment to inclusion, access, and belonging. Through artistry, mentorship, and vision, the MD will inspire musicians and audiences alike and help position CYSO as a globally recognized, premier youth orchestra program.

In partnership with organizational leadership, the MD will also contribute to CYSO's development, strategic, and financial goals, ensuring that artistic ambition and institutional strength reinforce one another. Preference will be given to candidates who apply before October 31. Residing in or near Chicago is important to successfully support the organization, its musicians, and its many stakeholders.

Artistic Leadership

- **Partner with the Executive Director (ED)** to define CYSO's unified artistic vision and brand, positioning the organization as a premier destination for exceptional musical training and transformative youth development. Contribute to the organization's Strategic Plan and other major initiatives.
- **Serve as Principal Conductor** for both the Symphony Orchestra and Philharmonic Orchestra and all related activities, executing programming that challenges and inspires. Activities can include but are not limited to:
 - Rehearsals, auditions, concerto competitions, and concerts
 - Staff and student retreats
 - International tours
 - Annual galas
 - Community concerts
 - CORE (Classical Orchestral Repertory Ensemble)
 - Artistic partnerships, including guest artists
 - Commissioning projects
 - Other possibilities requiring expertise and direction from this role
- **Center the student voice and perspective** in scope of planning and curriculum. Develop opportunities for student leadership. Prepare students aspiring to elite collegiate and conservatory music programs by:
 - Building a diverse repertoire that develops technical mastery and artistic depth
 - Teaching professional etiquette and best practices for ensemble membership

- Creating experiences that mirror the expectations of competitive music programs
- Continuously elevate **artistic standards**, positioning CYSO's orchestras as distinctive voices in the youth music education field.
- **Lead rehearsals and performances with excellence**, while continuously innovating to advance youth music education and CYSO's competitive positioning.
- **Build a collaborative artistic culture** with all artistic staff, striving for industry-leading artistry and pedagogy, visiting rehearsals, attending various performances as possible, communicating with a regular cadence, and fostering an inclusive and generous spirit within the community.

Advancement & Engagement

- **Recruitment:** Together with the Program Director and Director of Strategic Growth and Partnerships, lead recruitment efforts across the local region and throughout the Midwest, building relationships with industry professionals and educators. Prioritize outreach in underserved Chicago communities and utilize masterclasses, workshops, guest appearances, and creative strategies to expand CYSO's reach.
- **Partnerships:** Together with the Executive Director, Program Director, and Director of Strategic Growth and Partnerships, evaluate, cultivate, and expand partnerships to increase the organization's community impact.
- **Development:** Act as a critical partner to the Development team in identifying, cultivating, and communicating with donors as required. Support the Development team through grant writing, network with potential donors, and advocate for resources within the wider community.
- **Artistic Spokesperson:** As needed, represent CYSO across communication channels and community relationships. In collaboration with Development and Marketing staff, craft and deliver polished messaging that drives recruitment and fundraising and elevates the organization's profile locally and nationally.
- **Community Building:** Energize engagement with the CYSO with a dynamic and friendly presence throughout the music field, the city, and in all relevant spheres of community and influence.

Organization & Administration

- **Educational Vision:** Together with the artistic staff and the Executive Director, define a unified and comprehensive pedagogy and annual artistic plan (due each January) that ensures musical excellence across all ensembles.
- **Board & Leadership:** Attend Board meetings to communicate updates and needs on behalf of the artistic staff. Contribute to strategic financial and administrative planning as needed. Ensure that the artistic plan (above) includes an accurate prediction of incremental budget needs for the upcoming season and beyond. Update the Board on trends and opportunities in the music field. Be present with administrative staff,

attending full staff meetings and meeting regularly with administrative staff leadership and artistic directors.

- **Student Experience:** Oversee entrance and seating auditions and placements in partnership with the Program Director and artistic staff. Partner with the ED to ensure CYSO initiatives ensure equitable pathways and high student retention.
- **Gala, Special Projects, & Events:** With guidance from the ED and Development team, contribute to the artistic vision and development strategy of the annual gala, balancing musical storytelling and entertainment with programmatic goals to meet and exceed ambitious fundraising targets. Contribute to special projects and events as needed.

Qualifications & Skills

- **Musical Excellence:**
 - Advanced degree(s) in music performance - conducting, and/or music education are highly preferred. Graduate degrees are a plus for this role.
 - Extensive and ever expanding knowledge of symphonic repertoire and deep engagement with a vibrant and growing professional network in the music field (i.e. guest conducting, Board or committee service, artistic collaborations, etc.).
 - Respected professional reputation (including reviews, media coverage, etc.) as a dynamic artist on the podium.
 - Professional experience as an educator, whether in a youth orchestra, educational institution, or equivalent.
- **Programming:** A proven track record of diverse, innovative, and industry leading programming, including the commissioning/premiering of new works.
- **Leadership & Communication:** Ability to lead with care, work respectfully with others, and maintain professional decorum at all times with all constituents. Exceptional public speaking and interpersonal skills are a must.
- **Development Aptitude:** Success in and enthusiasm for seeking investment and a track record of cultivating and stewarding major philanthropic donors.
- **Operational Collaboration:** Work collaboratively with all departments (Programming, Marketing, Development) to advance the goals of the organization.

Work Life

The Music Director position is a Chicago-based artistic staff position. Rehearsals for this position are on Sundays. This is a hybrid position and specific days in the office will be determined together with the Executive Director. CYSO's administrative work week is Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm. On occasion, this role requires additional weekends or evenings as needed to support concerts and fundraising events like the annual gala. This position also accompanies students and donors on CYSO's international and domestic tours.

Compensation & Benefits

- \$95,000 - \$105,000 annual salary, commensurate with experience and expertise.
 - Health/dental insurance, 80% premium paid by employer for employee coverage.
 - 403(b) retirement savings plan with employer contribution up to 5% match after one year.
 - 10 vacation, up to 10 personal (can include religious holidays, 3 federal holidays, sick days), and 8 federal holiday days per year. Additionally, the office is closed the last week of the year and on the Friday after Thanksgiving.
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HOW TO APPLY

Screening begins immediately and continues until the position is filled. Preference will be given to applications received no later than November 15, 2026. Candidates must submit to HR@CYSO.ORG:

1. Cover letter
2. Curriculum vitae or resume
3. Links to video recordings of recent rehearsals (if available) and performances
 - a. Please provide dates and context of each video
 - b. Please identify segments to view, approx. 15 minutes for each
4. Your teaching and artistic philosophies
5. Three references
 - a. Please include context of your relationship
 - b. Contact information including email and telephone number
 - c. Professional titles and organizations of employment, where applicable

We value the unique role and contribution of every team member and recognize the importance of a staff that reflects our students' experience and background to equip them to excel as the next generation of leaders. CYSO is an equal opportunity employer.