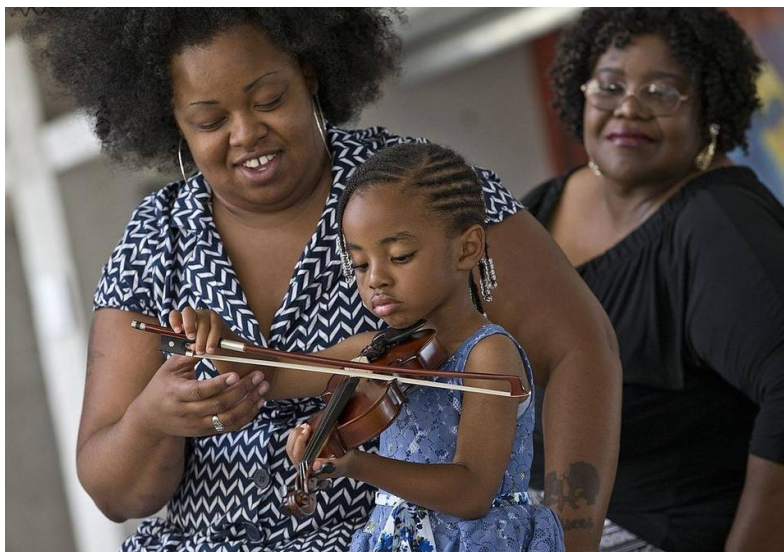


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South Florida Youth Symphony celebrates 50 years, 3 generations of musicians



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In the 1970s, Aundrea Wilder played her violin in the South Florida Youth Symphony, a local orchestra training program for young people. Wilder, 53, started playing at 8.

Her daughter Natalie Wilder-Kemp, 33, joined the youth symphony when she was in the fifth grade. She started playing violin and switched to cello after her sixth-grade year.

Wilder-Kemp's 4-year-old daughter Maya Kemp is now following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother as a third-generation member of the youth symphony.

Wilder-Kemp enrolled Maya in the beginners Suzuki class about three months ago.

"We're so proud of her," Aundrea Wilder said of her granddaughter. "I hoped she'd take an interest in music in some kind of way."

And Maya has. As she waited for her music lessons to start in the William Pawley Center at Miami Dade College North a few Sundays ago, Maya fidgeted in her mom's lap, reaching for her instrument case to take out the violin. Every time her mother pushed the violin case away from Maya, the girl would reach farther for it.

Maya's purple violin is still a bit too big for her. Her mom and grandmother bought a smaller violin for her to play until she gets a little older.

"She's loving music," Wilder-Kemp said. "Now she wants to switch to the cello like me. I don't know about that yet."

In addition to celebrating the addition of a third-generation member, the South Florida Youth Symphony is celebrating 50 years of music and mentorship.

"It's amazing how far we've come," said Marjorie Hahn, executive and music director of the youth symphony. "To think we only started with one orchestra."

Hahn has been a conductor and teacher for the youth symphony for 44 years. The program now boasts a three-orchestra program, introductory classes and training in myriad instruments, including strings, woodwinds and percussion.

Kids practice for four hours every Sunday from August to May. They learn from music faculty in Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Some of the music instructors are youth symphony alumni themselves.

"It's nice to know they liked what happened here enough to want to come back and teach other kids," Hahn said. "It makes me feel like we did something right."

After nine months of hard work and long practices, this year's group of 190 young musicians are wrapping up the season, which culminates in the youth symphony's 50th season finale concert at 4 p.m. Sunday, May 17 at Florida Memorial University, 15800 NW 42nd Ave. in Miami Gardens. Tickets are \$10.

Before Maya started playing her violin, she went to a youth symphony winter concert with her mom and grandmother.

"When we went to the winter concert, I recognized the music as some of the music we used to play in the 70s," Wilder said. "It really took me back. The kids get it — they can take the music and perform it at a level that an audience can really appreciate."

Wilder and her daughter haven't played their instruments for years, but having Maya in the youth symphony program may inspire them to pick them up again. "I've been thinking of dusting it off and playing with Natalie and Maya," Wilder said. "Natalie and I normally play for family around the holidays. I'm hoping this Christmas Maya can join."

For more information on the South Florida Youth Symphony, visit www.sfys.net or call 305-238-2729.

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