YOLA National

YOLA National Festival
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

BASIC INFORMATION

What is YOLA National?
YOLA National brings together those who believe that music education has a powerful role to play in youth and community development. Designed to respond to the changing needs of the field, YOLA National offers an ever-growing number of opportunities for young musicians, teaching artists, program administrators, and other stakeholders to learn from and to create community with one another. Through this work, the LA Phil aims both to empower young people from populations that have been historically excluded from intensive music training and to foster a dialogue among practitioners that will help shape the future of the field.

What is the YOLA National Festival?
The **YOLA National Festival** is an opportunity for students from El Sistema-inspired and aligned programs throughout the United States to perform as part of a top-tier national youth orchestra. By offering young people the opportunity to learn from exceptional musicians, including world-renowned conductors and guest artists, students become ambassadors of their programs and engage with young people from diverse regions and backgrounds. The festival orchestra aims to develop a model for excellence and a national community of citizen musicians from historically excluded populations in the United States. Students will not only have access to top artistic and educational resources, but will also experience some of the world's finest learning institutions and concert venues.

What ensembles participate in the YOLA National Festival?
This year's festival will feature two large ensembles: a **Symphony Orchestra** for the most advanced musicians, open to students aged 14-18, and an **Overture Chamber Music Program** that is an opportunity for musicians aged 12-14. All students will have the opportunity to learn from a faculty of world-class artists and to rehearse and perform at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles.

What is the Overture Chamber Music Program?
This year's festival will also include the small ensemble program **Overture Chamber Music Program (OCMP)** for musicians ages 12 - 14. The YOLA National Festival Chamber Music Program provides a weeklong intensive program designed for our top young musicians, offering specialized training in chamber music ensembles. Participants will be grouped ensembles to study and perform at least one work. They will receive guidance from assigned chamber music faculty and take part in structured rehearsals and technique workshops. Additionally, musicians will engage in activities aimed at enhancing performance skills, understanding group dynamics, and attending specialized workshops. Each ensemble will have the chance to conclude their experience with a performance at one of the LA Phil venues.

What is the history of YOLA National?
YOLA National is the next phase in the evolution of the LA Phil's investment in progressive music education under the leadership of Music and Artistic Director Gustavo Dudamel, who is a product and champion of the El Sistema youth orchestra movement.

YOLA National

The LA Phil introduced the Sistema-inspired YOLA program in 2007. The program's influence grew rapidly, and in 2012, the Take a Stand initiative—a partnership between the LA Phil and Longy School of Music of Bard College—was introduced to promote social change through music on a national stage. The initiative resulted in an annual convening of Sistema-inspired music educators, a Masters of Arts in Teaching degree program, and in 2015, the creation of the student-centered National Take a Stand Festival.

In 2018 the LA Phil introduced YOLA National in order to unify and expand upon these activities, with the exception of the Masters of Arts in Teaching degree program, which continues to be administered by the Longy School of Music of Bard College, now in partnership with Heart of Los Angeles (HOLA) and Street Symphony. Under the "YOLA National" umbrella, the LA Phil seeks to be a nimble and expert resource for the field, continuing to host annual convenings for educators and students, but also introducing new programs and entering into new partnerships that respond to the changing needs of the field.

SELECTION PROCESS

How can I prepare for my audition?
We encourage students to review the audition materials carefully, practice their excerpts, consult with primary teacher(s), and record and send their strongest video take. Musicians can attend Seminario's hosted by the YOLA National team and our esteemed faculty that will help musicians prepare for the audition.

What are the criteria for choosing students?
A professional panel will review all audition materials and consider factors including but not limited to proficiency and musicality on the instrument, diversity in age, program, and geographic location, and alignment of students' personal statement with the Festival's goals.

When will I know if I'm accepted?
Notifications will be distributed by March 30, 2026. Accepted students will receive detailed information about travel, packing, and preparation in the spring.

Is there a waitlist?
Yes! Those who are on the waitlist will receive a notification date in which they are to be notified is a spot becomes available.

Will the same students who participated in the 2025 festival participate in the 2026 festival?
While past participants who are still eligible to apply may be accepted, they must re-apply to be considered for the 2026 Festival. All applicants will be evaluated using the same criteria.

Will I receive feedback on my audition?
Due to the high volume of applications, it is not guaranteed that an applicant will receive individual feedback unless requested to YOLANationalTeam@laphil.org. However, students are encouraged to speak with their local teacher(s) about ways to strengthen auditions.

YOLA National

DATES & LOGISTICS

What are the important dates?

November 10, 2025	Application Opens
March 2, 2026	Priority Deadline
March 9, 2026	Final Deadline - Application close
March 16, 2026	Recommendation Due
March 30, 2026	Notification distributed to applicants
August 3 – 11, 2026	YOLA National Festival

How will travel be arranged?
Travel, lodging, and meals will be provided for all students, at no cost. An LA Phil representative will work directly with families to coordinate travel arrangements. Each family will receive a travel stipend based on the estimated round-trip flight cost from their departure city. This stipend is provided so families can book the transportation option that best meets their needs. Families may use the funds at their discretion. Families located in Southern California will not receive a stipend. The LA Phil will ensure that students are in constant contact with the LA Phil Staff during travel, welcomed upon arrival, and safely sent home after the conclusion of the program. For local musicians in Southern California, driving instructions will be provided

What if my child has special dietary restrictions or needs special accommodations?
We will do our best to accommodate all students to ensure that they have as healthy and positive an experience as possible.

Is there a final performance? The Festival culminates with a performance at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Family, friends, and program supporters are welcome to attend at no cost.

Will the concert be livestreamed or recorded? No, the final concert will not be able to be recorded or livestreamed.

LIFE AT YOLA NATIONAL FESTIVAL

What repertoire will be chosen for Festival? Repertoire is chosen by our esteemed faculty - aiming to challenge and inspire young musicians. Each ensemble's repertoire will be announced closer to the Festival and practice packets will be digitally sent.

What does a typical day at the Festival look like? Each day includes a mix of full rehearsals, sectionals, workshops, and community-building activities. Students can expect to spend several hours rehearsing, balanced with meals, breaks, and social or recreational time in the evenings.

Where will the musicians be staying?
Students will stay in dorms on the college campus that are connected to their rehearsal spaces. Great care will be taken to ensure safety and accountability in these locations.

How many hours will we rehearse each day? Musicians generally spend 5–6 hours per day in rehearsal or sectionals. Rehearsal time is structured to balance focus and rest, ensuring students perform at their best during the final concert.

Will there be time for fun and relaxation outside of rehearsal? Absolutely! Evenings often include social events, recreation, or quiet time to rest and connect with peers. The Festival aims to create a balance between intensive musical work and meaningful personal connection.

Can I practice individually during the Festival? Personal practice is allocated during designated times. This time is not required or always guaranteed.

What if I'm struggling with the music? Section coaches and faculty members are available to help students who need extra support. The Festival environment is designed to be collaborative and encouraging, so students should feel comfortable asking for help.

STAFFING

Who will the teaching artists be?
A specially selected group of artists will serve as the teaching faculty and will share their talents as artists and mentors throughout the festival. Check our website for updates on current staff listings!

What steps will be taken to keep students safe?
Students will be carefully attended to throughout their time at the Festival. An experienced residential life staff and the LA Phil Staff will ensure that participants have the supervision and support they need, both during rehearsals and in their daily routines. Staff members will be available around the clock to assist with any personal, medical, or logistical needs, helping students feel safe, comfortable, and focused on their musical experience.

Is there a nurse or medical staff on site?
Yes! A nurse is available onsite with around-the-clock access for musicians. All medications will be distributed by the YOLA National nurse, with guidance from parents and musicians personal medical professionals.

Can a parent, teaching artist, or program director chaperone a student during the festival?
No. The festival will be fully staffed (24 hours) with adults responsible for students' musical growth, social well-being, and safety. While parents and adults are welcome to travel with students and attend the final concert, only those staff hired as music faculty and residential life staff are permitted to be present during the days of the festival to ensure the safety of all musicians.

YOLA National

ELIGIBILITY

Is my student eligible to attend?
Students applying for the YOLA National Festival Orchestras must meet program and age requirements in order to be eligible to participate. These requirements are explained below.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENT:

- Students participate in at least 5 hours of music on their primary orchestral instrument each week in a program emphasizing ensemble-based learning.
- The program's mission focuses on using music as a vehicle for social change and community development.
- The program is tuition-free programming or full scholarships are awarded or available to at least 80% of students, ensuring accessibility. No musician should be turned away from the program due to inability to pay.
- The program commits to supporting students from childhood through high school and into adulthood and evaluates success through both musical and behavioral development.
- The program collaborates with key partners in music and social development and is part of a national or regional network of El Sistema-inspired programs.

  **Please note that in-school programs are typically ineligible, however please submit a request for a formal evaluation.*

AGE REQUIREMENT

A. **Symphony Orchestra**: High school musicians (please note musicians must be enrolled in high school or in their summer after their senior year) between the ages 14-18 may apply to the Symphony Orchestra. This is a highly competitive large ensemble, open to the most advanced players from Sistema-inspired and aligned programs from across the country. Excerpts for the Symphony Orchestra can be found on the Audition Requirements page. Applicants who are 14 years old and apply to the Symphony Orchestra will automatically be considered for the Overture Chamber Music Program.

B. **Overture Chamber Music Program:** Musicians aged 12-14 are eligible for the Overture Chamber Music Program. Musicians who are 14 years old can either apply for the Symphony Orchestra **or** Overture Chamber Music Program but will first be and be considered for the program they apply for. Excerpts for the Overture Chamber Music Program can be found on our Audition Requirements page.

If you have questions regarding student/program eligibility, please contact YOLANationalTeam@laphil.org.