



Catalyst Guide

Orchestras in Health and Wellness

By Theodore Wiprud with Dr. Karen Yair

League
of American
Orchestras

The Maryland Symphony Orchestra's Music & Well-Being program operates throughout the region.
Photo courtesy of the Maryland Symphony Orchestra.



COVER PHOTO:

Houston Symphony orchestra musicians join Community-Embedded Musicians in performances at Amazing Place and CarePartners, where musicians have a regular monthly presence for interactive concerts as part of the Dementia Center Performance Series. Photo by Melissa Taylor.

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The Lima Symphony
Orchestra performs inside of
an Ohio prison. Photo courtesy
of the Lima Symphony.



Renée Fleming and Dr. Sanjay Gupta host Music and Mind with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Emory University, Wounded Warrior, and the WHO. Photo by Erin Shopf Photography.

Introduction

As evidence grows of music's profound impact on health and well-being, orchestras are increasingly recognizing the potential to lead in this space.

While some orchestras have been involved in health-related partnerships for decades, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising need for mental health support have accelerated this movement. Expanding programming with a focus on health and well-being is deepening orchestras' community engagement while also demonstrating their role as vital contributors to public health, social connection, and local resilience.

Momentum continues to build through major conferences and cross-sector partnerships. In 2016, Renée Fleming helped launch the [Sound Health Network](#), a collaboration between the National Institutes of Health, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Kennedy Center. More recently, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, working with Fleming, the Jameel Arts & Health Lab, and Performance Hypothesis, presented [Healing Arts Atlanta](#) in 2024, an ambitious initiative bringing together diverse partner organizations.

This resource is designed to guide orchestras in the early stages of working with health and well-being providers, while drawing on the insights of established programs.



Children at the MD Anderson Cancer Center are given a menu of musical options, devised through collaboration between a Houston Symphony musician and a hospital music therapist. The menu gives the child agency in picking the music they want to hear, and also allows the music therapist to guide the child towards types of music (e.g. “soothing” or “sing-along”) that support clinical goals. . Photo courtesy of the Houston Symphony.



Emerging Themes

Many orchestras are still relatively new to prioritizing health and well-being. As they navigate this space, they are gaining valuable experience in designing and delivering programs that not only make a meaningful impact on local communities but also engage and inspire orchestra staff and musicians. The emerging best practices outlined below reflect these evolving efforts.

Respond to local needs and opportunities

Every community is unique, with its own health and wellness challenges that music may be able to address. Identify potential partners, listen to their needs, and then begin to dream.

Partner with healthcare institutions, healthcare professionals, and therapists

Those who work with patients and clients every day are the ones qualified to work with musicians to design effective practices. Consistency, commitment, and regular visits build trusting relationships and improve outcomes.

Prepare musicians for new settings and listeners

While some musicians attain certification as therapists, most commit to this rewarding yet demanding work following careful orientation, shadowing, and consultation with healthcare professionals.

Start small and build incrementally

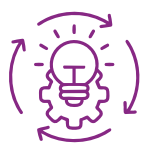
A modest initial commitment enables an orchestra to test drive a partnership, and enables a group of musicians to discover their love for working in health care, build their skills, and help lead the effort.

Align internally on the priority of health and wellness initiatives

Robust initiatives draw on all of an orchestra’s functions, not just community engagement, and require a clear commitment from board and leadership.



Knoxville Symphony Orchestra UnStaged events pair music and community partners. The Flow event paired music with yoga. Photo courtesy of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra.



Promising Initiatives

In the fall of 2024, the League surveyed member orchestras to learn what initiatives were under way in the broad area of health and well-being. The 80 responses revealed that many orchestras are exploring their role in community health—bringing live music into healthcare settings, developing programs to support mental well-being, creating sensory-friendly performances for neurodivergent audiences, hosting events that promote relaxation and general wellness, and even collaborating on medical research. Each section below highlights one orchestra's initiative in depth, alongside additional case studies drawn from responses to the League survey.



Improving Patient Outcomes in Healthcare Settings

Partnerships with healthcare facilities have enabled many orchestras to create meaningful musical experiences that enhance patient care and improve health outcomes. These initiatives include compassionate bedside solos tailored to individual medical needs, interactive chamber performances designed for specific wards or community institutions, and uplifting concerts in public spaces for patients, families, and caregivers. Across settings, healthcare professionals play a vital role in supporting musicians finding their way into this deeply impactful work.

Houston Symphony orchestra musicians join Community-Embedded Musicians in performances at Amazing Place and CarePartners, where musicians have a regular monthly presence for interactive concerts as part of the Dementia Center Performance Series. Photo by Melissa Taylor.



Houston Symphony: Music & Wellness

Building Hospital Partnerships Step by Step

Some decades ago, the Houston Symphony (HS) partnered with the [Center for Performing Arts Medicine at Houston Methodist](#)—part of the [Texas Medical Center](#)—to receive specialist care for its musicians and visiting artists. The opportunity for the orchestra to reciprocate came with the 2015 creation of HS's [Community Embedded Musicians](#) (CEMs), orchestral musicians primarily devoted to education and community engagement. CEMs began working within other Texas Medical Center institutions, initially making brief bedside visits at [Texas Children's](#). There they learned to pick up on cues from patients and their families that could guide them in sharing the most comforting sounds.

Five years ago, the collaboration expanded to [MD Anderson Children's Cancer Hospital](#), with musicians working alongside music therapists to address clinical goals for pediatric oncology patients and their caregivers.

Most recently, CEMs and other HS musicians began playing monthly chamber concerts at two dementia day care centers. They perform music that stimulates memories, especially arrangements of old pop tunes. On top of all that, the full orchestra performs annually in the lobby of Houston Methodist, with music streamed to rooms of patients unable to join in person.

Allison Conlan, Senior Director of Education & Community Engagement, oversees Music & Wellness. She notes that this work is not for every musician, and that the right person for the job “may not yet know they are the right person.” Musicians interested in participating first sit in as a listener and, if they feel comfortable, go in paired with an experienced musician. Conlan adds that finding the right healthcare partners is key. They need to prepare musicians on what to expect and give guidance on what instruments and ranges of sounds and tempi might be most helpful in specific circumstances.

Zachary Gresham, Program Director of Arts in Medicine at MD Anderson Cancer Center, says that “proven benefits of Arts in Medicine programming—such as our partnership with Houston Symphony—include stress reduction, reduction in perceived pain levels, and improved mood. And the music can be used as a distraction tool for young patients and families that are in the hospital.”

Charlotte Symphony Orchestra: Healing Hands

For over 20 years, the Healing Hands program has sent musicians into area hospitals, libraries, senior care centers, and recreation centers to enrich the lives of patients, residents, and community members. The program includes partnerships with Atrium Health Levine Children's Hospital and Carolinas Rehabilitation, developed through the CSO's [Innovation Hub](#)—an open forum for innovative ideas from musicians and staff.

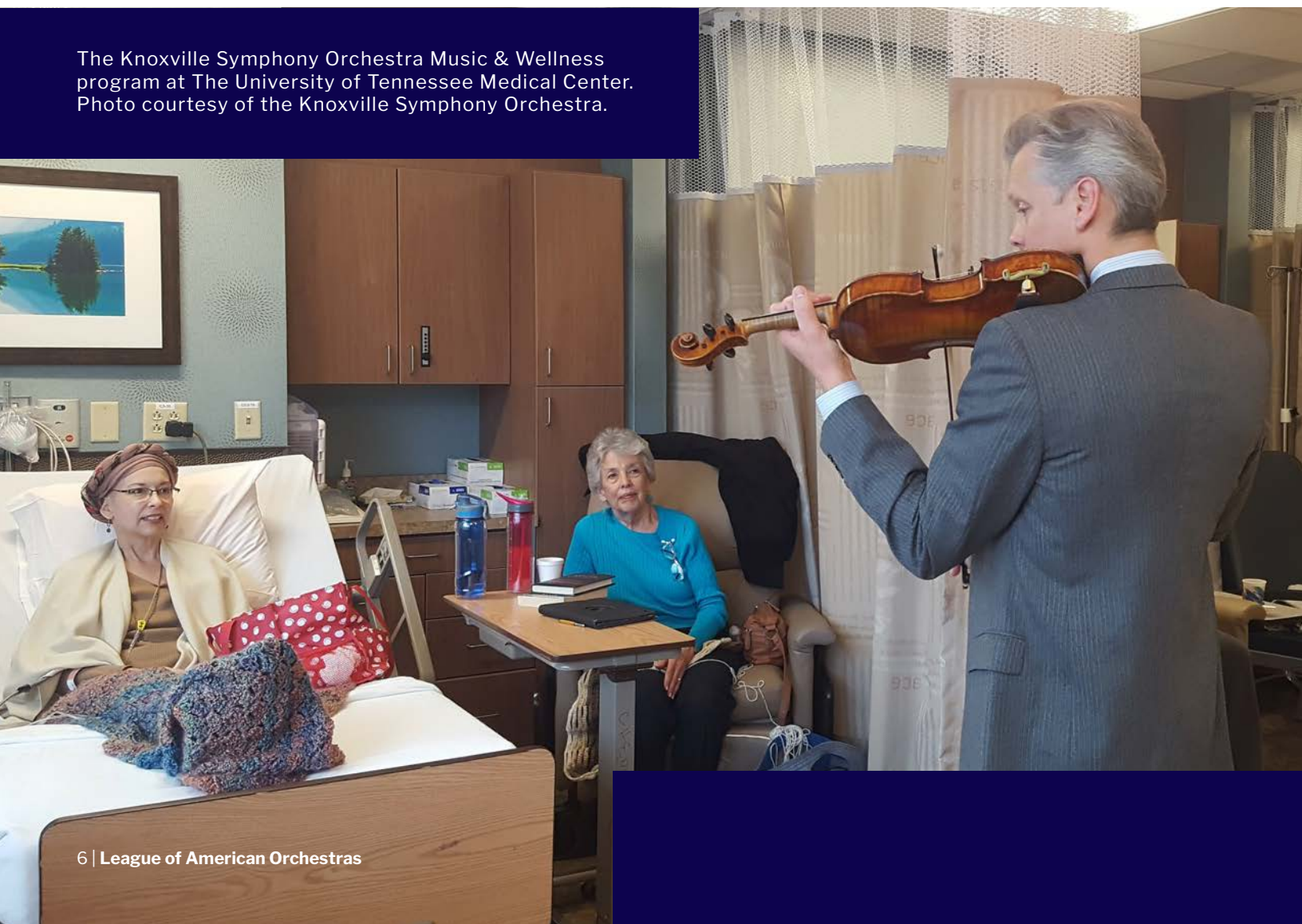
Knoxville Symphony: Music & Wellness

The Music & Wellness Program provides live musical performances that enhance the healing process and benefit patients, visitors, and staff in healthcare settings like waiting areas, rehabilitation facilities, senior care centers, and chemotherapy facilities. Musicians have trained to gain certification in music therapy. Covenant Health, Tennova Healthcare, East Tennessee Children's Hospital, and the Metro Drug Coalition provide funding as well as staff support for musicians.

Bozeman Symphony: Joy Program

The new Joy Program provides music once a month at the Bozeman Health Cancer Center to help reduce stress and anxiety, provide comfort, and, where possible, spread joy to cancer patients and their loved ones.

The Knoxville Symphony Orchestra Music & Wellness program at The University of Tennessee Medical Center. Photo courtesy of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra.



Fox Valley Symphony Orchestra: In Harmony

The In Harmony program brings a quartet and music therapist to sites serving students or adults with special needs, assisted living facilities, and memory care communities for Alzheimer's and dementia residents.

New Jersey Symphony: Music and Wellness Program

The Music and Wellness Program helps promote healing through music for patients, team members, and caregivers through chamber ensemble performances and/or customized bedside visits by Symphony musicians in hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and hospices.

Orchestra Lumos: Music and Wellness

Led by conductor and music therapist Barbara Yahr, in collaboration with Stamford Health hospital staff, Music and Wellness is designed to address patient needs by improving mood, pain tolerance, and mental outlook, and providing a personal human connection.

Oregon Symphony: musicNOW

"musicNOW" pairs music therapists with symphony musicians to provide engaging, participatory performances in memory care facilities or other centers serving adults with disabilities. Oregon Symphony also partners with [JoyRX/Children's Cancer Association](#) every December to perform holiday music in a livestream that is broadcast to over 30 partner children's hospitals.

South Carolina Philharmonic: Healing Harmonies

Healing Harmonies brings small ensembles of South Carolina Philharmonic musicians into homeless shelters, food banks, skilled care facilities, assisted living facilities, day care facilities for disabled adults, and local hospitals. SCP partners with the Veterans Administration and with Prisma Health.

The Jackson Symphony: Music and Healing

Twice weekly, Jackson Symphony musicians visit the Kirkland Cancer Center to play for patients receiving treatment, as well as once weekly at the West Tennessee Healthcare Hospital for patients and monthly in long-term, memory care, and veterans' home facilities.

Detroit Symphony Orchestra: Health and Wellness

DSO partners with Corewell Health to bring music to patients and staff at all 16 of its hospitals. A partnership with Alzheimer's Association Greater Michigan Chapter provides chamber performances and open rehearsal attendance. And at Gesher Human Services, adults with disabilities and chronic mental health challenges participate in a Creative Expressions Program in which clients explore their musical talents in a supportive group music setting, with support from two Board-Certified Music Therapists and DSO musicians.



The Lima Symphony Orchestra performs inside of an Ohio prison. “Music is therapeutic. Music unites us. It just transcends our place and the limitations of our current reality,” said the Executive Director of the Lima Symphony, Elizabeth Brown-Ellis. Bringing an experience like this to a community that is often overlooked and stereotyped gives inmates hope for the future of their rehabilitation. Photo courtesy of the Lima Symphony.



Supporting Mental Health and Resilience

For people living with mental illness or experiencing addiction, music can be a powerful source of healing, connection, and emotional relief. Orchestras that collaborate with therapists, crisis centers, shelters, and prisons are creating musical experiences that offer comfort, reduce stress, and support recovery. These partnerships not only provide meaningful moments for participants but also deeply resonate with musicians, fostering empathy and shared understanding through the transformative power of music.

Lima Symphony Orchestra: Healing Through Music

Responding to the Opioid Crisis

When the League's [American Orchestras Futures Fund](#) offered the opportunity to dream big, Executive Director Elizabeth Brown-Ellis knew what the Lima Symphony needed to do. A classmate of her son had died of an opioid overdose: there was no bigger need in the community. The executive director of the local Mental Health Recovery Services Board jumped at the chance to bring live music to patients struggling with addiction. An LSO string quartet started monthly visits to a drop-in center for youth, a temporary living facility, a long-term residential facility, and Mercy Health/St. Rita's Hospital. When word got out about the program, the local prison chaplain called. The LSO found additional funding to send an ensemble there, "and for two hours," says Brown-Ellis, "[the inmates] closed their eyes, and they were somewhere else."

The pandemic brought a pause to the program and a chance to reassess. Brown-Ellis trimmed the program from five sites to two, going where the impact was greatest: the hospital's behavioral health unit, and the prison.

Music is only part of the story. Conversation throughout the performances invites patients' participation and stresses everyone's shared humanity. "Just by being there," says Brown-Ellis, "we're telling people we're here for you; you have not been forgotten."

"We are not music therapists," Brown-Ellis stresses. "Music is just another tool for recovery." She and mental health professionals have honest conversations with musicians about what's needed. One musician reflected on their musical skills, "I didn't realize this was what my training was for." And musicians are getting creative. An LSO percussionist has started Drumming Up Hope, a participatory drumming circle for the prison visits.

Brown-Ellis finds it difficult to communicate the importance of this activity to Lima's typical concertgoers, since the therapeutic nature of the string quartet's work precludes media coverage. But when the full orchestra ventured into the prison to perform alongside a 100-member inmate chorus, featuring music composed by a former inmate—that got attention. "There's a real sense of pride."

Los Angeles Philharmonic: YOLA Crisis Prevention

YOLA (Youth Orchestra Los Angeles) partners with [Open Paths Counseling Center](#) for staff training in crisis prevention and understanding trauma.

Street Symphony

Street Symphony is a community of Los Angeles-based musicians creating performances, workshops, and new songs with neighbors recovering from addiction, homelessness, and incarceration.

Oregon Symphony: The Lullaby Project

"The Lullaby Project" (developed and shared by the [Weill Institute of Music](#) at Carnegie Hall) uses the creative process of songwriting to improve well-being and child bonds with parents experiencing housing insecurity and other challenging life situations. Through a partnership with a homeless shelter serving families with children, and together with musicians from the Oregon Symphony and local singer-songwriters, parents and parents-to-be create personal lullabies for their children, expressing their hopes and dreams for the future.

Johnstown Symphony Orchestra: Sound Support

Sound Support is a grief support group for ticket holders who lost a spouse or partner and have difficulty returning to the concert hall. A local therapy organization provides two trained and licensed grief therapists to lead monthly group discussions beginning with the theme and music of an upcoming concert, seeking ways the music can address their grief. This program is private and confidential; participants come through word of mouth from board, staff, and participants.



A child dances along with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's Relaxed Performance for neurodiverse audiences on April 27, 2019. Photo by Jag Gundu.



Serving Neurodivergent Audiences

Neurodiverse individuals are an integral part of every orchestra's community, and can find great value in attending concerts. However, traditional orchestra settings may present sensory or accessibility challenges. Sensory-friendly and adaptive performances are designed to create a more inclusive experience, ensuring that all audience members can engage with and enjoy the music comfortably.

Maryland Symphony Orchestra: Performances for People with Special Needs

"Many of our participants had previously felt excluded from traditional concert settings, where the atmosphere often demands silence, stillness, and rigid expectations," says Director of Development Jennifer Sutton. "By creating a space where people could engage with the music on their terms—whether by moving around, expressing themselves, or simply being in a calming, supportive environment—we witnessed the profound and transformative impact these performances had."

Music & Well-Being concerts are designed to promote self-healing by inviting attendees to experience music in a way that honors their individual needs. Since 2022, the MSO has brought dozens of these ensemble concerts per year to public parks, community spaces, and other open areas as a source of healing and connection for individuals facing physical and intellectual challenges, as well as those with sensory sensitivity. Over time, MSO musicians have learned what to expect and how to engage with audiences of children and adults with a wide range of intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"Music & Well-Being has really resonated with people," says Sutton. A group of health care professionals have come together to match contributions to a fund that enables the MSO to provide these concerts free of charge. Everyone on the MSO's small staff gets involved: the marketing director connects with hosting institutions and the orchestra manager handles production.

The key has been partnering with numerous organizations, most recently [The Arc of Washington County](#), whose expertise is with neuro-divergent populations. Sutton has found that healthcare professionals have great ideas about how to incorporate music. "Every time you try to invent something it takes resources," she notes. "They're already working with the population. We can provide the music if you provide the guidance."

Rochester Philharmonic: Care & Wellness Initiative

A free, sensory-friendly concert celebrating the solar eclipse of 2024 was presented in a relaxed setting where listeners were encouraged to get up and move freely. A therapy dog was available just outside the concert hall. For attendees with auditory sensitivities, noise-reducing headphones were provided, and the orchestra never played louder than mezzo-forte. Other accommodations included a quiet room and materials sent ahead to help concertgoers prepare for their concert hall experience.

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra: Adaptive Concerts

The education team at the Atlanta Symphony have worked to create a know-before-you-go social narrative and Spotify playlist allowing families familiarity before their trip to the hall. Upon arrival, there is an option for a quiet room outside of the concert hall, with its own live feed of a performance in progress, to provide a space for neurodivergent audience members to enjoy music in their own way. As part of its accessibility commitment, the ASO also provides sound-dampening headphones for attendees in the hall who can be disturbed by sudden loud sounds, including some with autism spectrum disorder.

Lincoln Center: Big Umbrella Festival

The annual Big Umbrella Festival offers theatre and music designed with and for neurodiverse audiences—kids, teens, and young adults. The April 2025 festival featured *When The World Turns*, an immersive theatrical experience that invites audiences into a wondrous landscape of foliage, light, sounds, and shadows; a reinvention of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* by Teatro La Plaza where the stories of people with Down syndrome take center stage; an outdoor “spinning tops” installation by Esrawe and Cadena; Comedy Night with ReelAbilities Film Festival; and the Chamber Music Society in two relaxed musical performance workshops, created for children with sensory and autism spectrum disorders.



Audience members attending Lincoln Center’s Big Umbrella Festival. Photo courtesy of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Photo by Shelby Antel.

National Symphony Orchestra Sound Health Fridays
Morning Sing participants. Photo courtesy of the
National Symphony Orchestra.



Cultivating Community Well-Being

“We are facing a national mental health crisis that could yield serious health and social consequences for years to come,” according to the American Psychological Association. The COVID-19 pandemic’s continuing effects are compounding the stresses of work, the economy, and family life, with disproportionate effects on the less advantaged. In an effort to counter the crisis, orchestras and presenters are inviting listeners into intimate spaces to experience live music in ways designed to calm and enable self-care.

National Symphony Orchestra: Sound Health Fridays

Since April 2024, NSO has offered free Sound Health Fridays to the general public. At 10:00am, prior to 11:30 Coffee Concerts (about six per season), the NSO hosts several concurrent workshops at the Kennedy Center’s new Reach facility. A Friday Morning Sing, with the City Choir of Washington, includes audience participation. NSO musicians play for workshops in yoga or tai chi or artmaking or even memory preservation. Many of the 60-120 participants are retirees attending the Friday matinee, or families with young children. Xavier Joseph, Manager of Community Engagement, says that based on survey responses, “people love the activities, and leave feeling refreshed and fulfilled.”

[Sound Health](#) is the NSO's expanding initiative that focuses on the intersection of music and wellness. For decades, the NSO has performed annual orchestra concerts at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and more recently ensembles have gone into Children's National Hospital and the National Rehabilitation Hospital, alongside music therapists, to play for staff and patients. Musicians, mostly existing chamber groups within the orchestra, are recruited via a weekly newsletter that also covers a wide variety of performance opportunities through [In Your Neighborhood](#).

The related Sound Health Network was initiated in 2016 by the Kennedy Center, where the NSO resides. Under the leadership of Renée Fleming and Dr. Francis Collins of the NIH, the Sound Health Network initiated a partnership between the Kennedy Center and [National Institutes of Health](#), in association with the [National Endowment for the Arts](#), exploring potential health benefits of music.

Carnegie Hall: Well-Being Concerts

Well-Being Concerts combine world-class musical performances, both solos and small ensembles, with elements of self-care and mindfulness. Each Well-Being Concert is created through a collaborative process that involves feedback from artists, advisors, wellness experts, potential audience members, and partner organizations. The hour-long concert experience takes place in an immersive, nurturing space, with audience members surrounding artists and welcome to recline on floor mats and cushions. A host shares prompts and breathing exercises with the participants and encourages them to share thoughts and reflections with their fellow audience members.

Augusta Symphony: Tuning In

Tuning In is a free program that combines guided mindfulness practices with live music experiences to help participants be in the moment and in the music. The program is led by the Augusta Symphony's music therapist and select orchestral musicians, enabling community members to tune in to self-care and manage stress.

Coeur d'Alene Symphony: Music Wellness Class

In Spring 2024, the Coeur d'Alene Symphony in Idaho offered a series of free Music Wellness Classes along with [Music4Life](#). Designed by music therapist and violinist Judith Pinkerton, the series promised "not just melodies but a therapeutic journey through the 'Six Habits of Music Medicine.'" Symphony musicians are training as Music Medicine Advisors in order to take the healing power of music into more venues, and to address rural mental health challenges and substance abuse.

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra: Vaccine Awareness

The Georgia Department of Health has awarded a grant to the Atlanta Symphony to provide live chamber music at a number of locations where the uninsured or under-insured can receive vaccinations. Eight string quartet appearances during the spring of 2025 are intended to enhance patients' experience and lead to more vaccine uptake.

Canton Symphony Orchestra: Mindful Music Moments

The Canton Symphony Orchestra sponsors local schools to access 4-minute audio segments for 40 weeks of daily in-school listening, supported by classroom resources that encourage mindfulness. It delivers this initiative in partnership with [The Well](#), which makes Mindful Music Moments available to schools across the country. The goal is to prepare students for learning-readiness and combat developmental trauma in a district disadvantaged by redlining and lack of quality food resources. This is part of a wider effort, including Kinder Concert programming, centered around health, nutrition, and wellness.



Rainel Joubert, Community-Embedded Musician with the Houston Symphony, performs during bedside visits at the MD Anderson Cancer Center. Photo courtesy of MD Anderson.



Contributing to Medical Research

Partnerships between orchestras and scientific research centers are proving mutually beneficial. Researchers seek to deepen their understanding of how music influences neurology, physiology, and mental health, while their studies provide orchestras with valuable insights into the impact of their work. Though quantitative findings are still in the early stages, these collaborations hold great promise for advancing knowledge of music's role in healthcare and exploring ways to enhance its benefits.

Phoenix Symphony: Music and Alzheimer’s Research Initiative

Valerie Bontrager, Director of Education and Community Engagement, came to the Phoenix Symphony with a background in science education. Her brief was to find a role for the orchestra in health care, and to develop an understanding of the field beyond testimonials for communicating with public officials.

“Testimonials are huge,” says Bontrager, “but we also need quantitative results to explore the program’s impact and contribute to the larger narrative.”

Bontrager collaborated with ASU’s Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation to study the impact of live music on advanced dementia patients, their caregivers, and musicians by measuring cortisol (a stress marker) in saliva levels during weekly music events. The study, supported by the League’s [American Orchestras Futures Fund](#), collected samples on days with and without live music. Though COVID-19 disrupted the study and formal results are pending, reports suggest calmer patient behavior and improved staff satisfaction through the day after these performances. This research, says Bontrager, both informs the Phoenix Symphony’s program design and aims to demonstrate live music’s positive impact on well-being.

Bontrager oversees the Health and Wellness performances, which include regular visits to local shelters, memory care sites, and palliative care with hospice. Phoenix Symphony musicians collaborate with healthcare staff to create responsive programs aligned with institutional goals, ensuring the music supports both patient care and the facility’s mission. During the 2023-24 season, 44 ensembles of Phoenix Symphony musicians traveled 7,950 miles to deliver 131 performances to health and wellness partners.

Los Angeles Philharmonic: Music Education and Brain Development

LA Phil and the Brain and Creativity Institute of the University of Southern California, along with LA Phil’s YOLA community partners Heart of LA and Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, partnered on two longitudinal studies between 2012-2020 to understand the effects of instrumental music training on children’s socioemotional, cognitive, and functional and structural brain development. Beginning at the age of six, children were assessed prior to the start of music training and thereafter using psychometric evaluations of socioemotional and cognitive functioning, EEG, and fMRI. Music participants were compared with an active group (enrolled in sports programs) and a passive control group of peers.

The findings from the research program indicate that music education induces a degree of brain and behavioral changes in developing children that cannot be attributed to pre-existing biological traits and developmental abilities. Elsje Kibler-Vermaas, LA Phil’s Head of Learning Strategic Initiatives, writes that “thus far, the results have provided support for the positive impact of music training on auditory processing development, increased [engagement of the cognitive control network](#), and earlier development of inhibition skills, behaviorally. In addition, our music participants showed macro and microstructural brain changes.”

Lead researcher Dr. Assal Habibi has written, “we firmly believe that music and other arts are essential components of childhood development that will promote skill learning and will give children access to creative imagination in a fundamentally enjoyable and interactive context. It is the responsibility of every education policymaker to consider these findings seriously and to ensure that we keep in place the financial and educational structures that provide all students—irrespective of their socioeconomic status, ethnic, or geographic background—access to a complete and balanced education with high standards for every subject including music and arts.”

Utah Symphony | Utah Opera: Designing a Program Based on Research

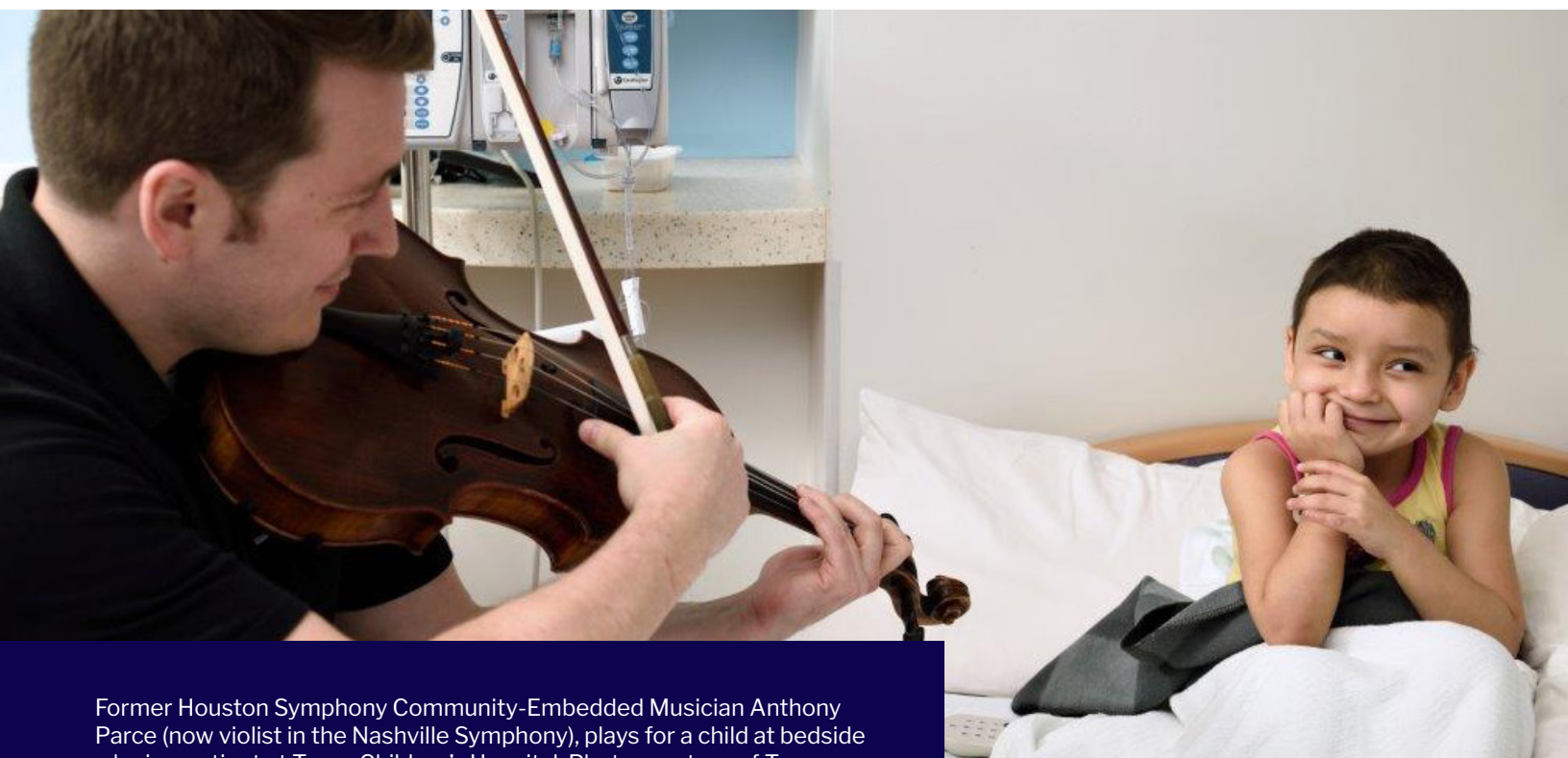
The University of Utah's Department of Psychiatry provided data on anxiety and depression among Utahns that prompted the Utah Symphony | Utah Opera to design a series of Well-Being Concerts to begin in spring 2025. The University will be a research partner on the series, evaluating the impact of the performances in real time.

Atlanta Symphony Orchestra: Partnering with Alzheimer's Research

The Goizueta Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at Emory University has begun working with the Atlanta Symphony to bring groups of Alzheimer's patients with their caregivers to ASO concerts. These are group sales, with no added costs to the orchestra. The research center is assessing impacts on these patients, with reports due this year.

Carnegie Hall: Well-Being Concerts

Carnegie Hall partners with the Social Interaction Lab at the University of California, Berkeley, to study the impact of music on individuals living with chronic, noncommunicable diseases—one of the leading causes of death and disability worldwide. As part of a Jameel Arts & Health Lab-Lancet research series, this work is assessing how specially designed concerts affect well-being, raising awareness of existing evidence of how helpful these kinds of concerts can be, and providing recommendations to strengthen global policy on integrating the arts with health, education, and social care.



Former Houston Symphony Community-Embedded Musician Anthony Parce (now violist in the Nashville Symphony), plays for a child at bedside who is a patient at Texas Children's Hospital. Photo courtesy of Texas Children's Hospital.



An Atlanta Symphony Orchestra musician performs at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights as part of the Healing Arts Atlanta events. Photo by Erin Shopf Photography.



Looking Ahead

The pace of innovation and partnership building we are seeing among orchestras strongly suggests that community well-being is rapidly becoming an important, ongoing part of orchestra programming. This work is blossoming across orchestras of all sizes in every part of the country and every kind of community. It roots orchestras in people's lives. It gives agency to musicians and helps them build new skill sets. It builds networks and draws in new donors. It deepens the impact of the music and the artistry we are dedicated to sharing. For patients, caregivers, families, and musicians alike these developments could not come too soon.

American Music Therapy Association

A service organization for music therapists, with a mission to advance public awareness of the benefits of music therapy and increase access to quality music therapy services in a rapidly changing world. The AMTA provides [fact sheets, resources, and bibliographies](#) on music therapy for specific populations, as well as [links](#) to journals and other resources.

Art Pharmacy

Healthcare providers (primary care, behavioral health, oncology, etc.) enroll as Prescribing Partners, receiving training to support the arts prescribing process. Art Pharmacy's team then matches patients with the most effective arts engagements and addresses barriers to access (such as the need for caregiver or transportation assistance). Orchestras—among others—make tickets available for Art Pharmacy to provide to patients. Art Pharmacy provides a helpful [outline of the process for cultural partners](#).

Berklee College of Music Community Health Musician Certificate

A nine-month program blending remote coursework with in-person weekend intensives, empowering musicians and community leaders to use their musical skills to enhance the well-being of others. The curriculum covers music, health, and well-being; arts in health research and practice; ethical and cultural considerations; musicianship tools; and community program development.

Center for Music and Medicine at Johns Hopkins University

A network of initiatives spanning research, clinical care, and education, with a dual mission: making music and rhythm an integral part of neurological illness treatment and improving the health of musicians worldwide.

Comfort Sound Drumming

A drum circle experience designed to reduce pain, distress, and anxiety, and improve mood and energy, and a potential model for orchestras to emulate. Developed by John R. Beck, percussion instructor at Wake Forest University, in partnership with Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center.

International Association for Music and Medicine

A membership organization encouraging and supporting the use of music in medical contexts, including research into the benefits of music and its specialized applications in healthcare. [Membership](#) provides opportunities to network with members around the world, access to the journal Music and Medicine, and attendance at its biennial conference.

Jameel Arts & Health Lab

A global initiative to measurably improve health and well-being through the arts. With a focus on overlooked and underserved communities, the Lab leverages scientific evidence, artist-led advocacy, and capacity building to drive the integration of the arts into mainstream healthcare. Partners include the World Health Organization, New York University Steinhardt, Community Jameel (a global philanthropy), and Culturunners (a UK nonprofit). Orchestras may access [resources](#) including a toolkit for [introducing social prescribing at a local community level](#) and a report on [how arts engagement can help to build vaccine confidence](#).

The Jed Foundation

A nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults by building resiliency and life skills, promoting social connectedness, and encouraging help-seeking and help-giving behaviors through nationally recognized programs, digital channels, and partnerships, as well as through the media. The Foundation's website includes useful language on [how music can improve mental health](#).

Louis Armstrong Department of Music Therapy at Mt. Sinai Beth Israel

Music therapists at the Louis Armstrong Department of Music Therapy conduct daily sessions with patients in intensive care, maternity, neonatal intensive care, pediatric emergency, oncology, and pain medicine and palliative care, including hospice. The department publishes findings on a wide variety of [music therapy research projects and an extensive bibliography of studies](#).

Music and Mind Live with Renée Fleming

Nineteen-episode series of videos featuring Renée Fleming in conversation with scientists and practitioners working at the intersection of music, neuroscience, and healthcare. Fleming is also the editor of a comprehensive guide to the scientific evidence for music's impact on health and wellness: [Music and Mind, Harnessing the Arts for Health and Wellness](#).

National Alliance on Mental Illness

The Alliance provides a comprehensive resource for information on mental illness, training for families, caregivers, and mental health professionals, and [links](#) to reports on critical, emerging issues to help inform the public about the importance of effective mental health policy.

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

"Music and Health: What You Need to Know" provides a summary of useful language and findings on music's impact on a wide range of disorders, from one of the Institutes and Centers of the NIH.

National Institute on Aging

One of the Institutes and Centers of the National Institute of Health, NIA leads a broad scientific effort to understand the nature of aging and to extend the healthy, active years of life. Site contains descriptions of studies funded by NIA on effects of music on dementia, potentially useful in program design.

NeuroArts Blueprint

The NeuroArts Blueprint: Advancing the Science of Arts, Health, and Wellbeing Initiative sits at the intersection of science, the arts, and technology. A partnership between the Johns Hopkins International Arts + Mind Lab Center for Applied Neuroaesthetics and the Aspen Institute's Health, Medicine & Society Program, the initiative aims to strengthen, standardize, and advance the transdisciplinary study of how the arts and aesthetic experiences measurably affect the brain, body, and behavior—and how this knowledge can be applied to improve health and well-being.

Social Prescribing USA

The principal American hub calling for the use of the arts, volunteerism, nature, and local community organizations as medicine for patients of all ages, Social Prescribing USA supports advocacy and research, connects local organizations engaged with this work, identifies best practices, and builds a national group of implementers, including physicians, to put into practice and promote social prescribing with cultural organizations across the country in a range of medical settings.

Sound Health Initiative

A partnership of the National Institutes of Health and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in association with the National Endowment for the Arts, aiming to expand understanding of how music interacts with brain circuitry, explore ways to enhance the potential for music as therapy for neurological disorders, identify future opportunities for research, and create public awareness about how the brain functions and interacts with music. The initiative also provides [links to studies on music and health](#).

Sound Health Network

Promoting research and public awareness about the impact of music on health and wellness, the Sound Health Network engages a broad range of multidisciplinary stakeholders—including scientists, music therapists, musicians, clinicians, patients, music and arts organizations, funders and the general public. Through its coordinating role, it facilitates individual and collaborative efforts that promote the quality, quantity, and relevance of research at the intersections of music, neuroscience, health, and wellness across the lifespan, advancing the potential of music to improve everyone's lives.

The Well: Mindful Music Moments

Brief audio content for 40 weeks of daily in-school listening, supported by classroom materials that encourage mindfulness. Orchestras can access and curate Mindful Music Moments for local schools.



About the Authors

Theodore Wiprud is a composer and a consultant in arts and education, and was the longtime Vice President, Education at the New York Philharmonic. He has been active in multiple equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, including the launch of The Catalyst Fund in 2019.

Dr. Karen Yair serves as the Vice President of Research and Resources at the League of American Orchestras. Under her leadership, the League has become the go-to location for orchestra data and insights, with a focus on providing the orchestra field with the actionable, evidence-based intelligence needed to drive meaningful change.

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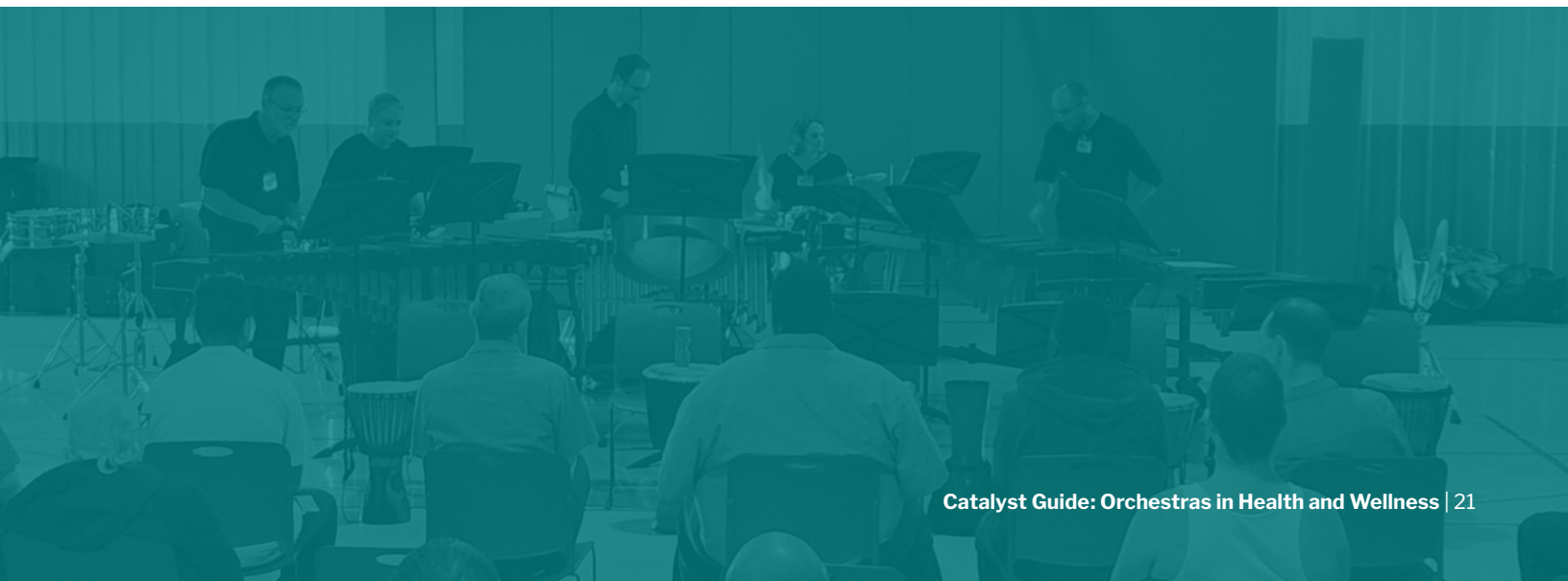
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Drumming Up Hope, an extension of the Healing Through Music program, explores the healing effects of community drumming. Engaging in the drumming experience allows individuals to connect more easily with others, express themselves openly, and release negative emotions. Participating in a community drumming experience reduces feelings of isolation and gives an opportunity to create something that's both personal and collaborative. Drumming Up Hope works with inmates at the Allen/Oakwood Correctional Institute. The drums necessary for the success of this program were generously donated by Lima Pallet Company, Radio Hospital and Mid-American Cleaning. The LSO is sincerely grateful for such outstanding support as we continue to engage our community in unique and meaningful ways. Photo courtesy of the Lima Symphony.





The Knoxville Symphony Orchestra Music & Wellness program in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Chemotherapy Treatment and Oncology Inpatient Floor of The University of Tennessee Medical Center. Photo courtesy of the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra.

League of American Orchestras

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