



MYSO

Milwaukee  
Youth  
Symphony  
Orchestra

IMPACT REPORT 2023-24

**“I think being able to experience classical music, or any music, no matter what you do, is such a gift. And I’ve been fortunate enough to not take it for granted, not take my music or my ability to play for granted. I think I’ve been really, really fortunate.”**

– Adela Ramirez, Senior Symphony Cellist

Photo by JP Russell



**“At our last concert [at the Royal Concertgebouw] you could just feel the energy. I usually never smile when I’m performing because I have to be really focused. But the energy of the audience and the musicians around me was just so powerful... I couldn’t help but smile.”**

– Akilah Muhammad, Violist and 2024 Grad



**“I am such a different person than I was last year when I was first in this band. I was so shy, and it was harder for me to interact with everyone. But now, I feel like I’ve really come out of my shell thanks to MYSO.”**

– Alex Lewis, Seel Pan Musician



**“The first thing I tell my students: don’t worry about it. Make as many mistakes as you can, because you’re going to learn from those mistakes. Of course, every once in a while, I get to talk about that as a life metaphor, too.”**

– Tim Rush, Steel Band Director and Alumnus

Photo by Roost Photography



# Our Mission

We nurture, challenge, and inspire young minds through music, profoundly changing lives and our community for the better.



Photo by Ron Oshima

## Who We Are

**1,000**

NEARLY 1,000 YOUNG MUSICIANS SERVED WEEKLY

**8-18**

MUSICIANS ARE AGES 8-18

**200 SCHOOLS**

MUSICIANS ARE FROM 200 SCHOOLS AND 90 ZIP CODES

**50%**

OF MYSO MUSICIANS ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR

**620K**

WE PROVIDE NEARLY \$620,000 IN FINANCIAL AID AND SUBSIDIES

**6,000**

WE REACH 6,000 YOUNG AUDIENCE MEMBERS THROUGH 25 COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL CONCERTS

**25K**

WE HOST 25,000 AUDIENCE MEMBERS AT 150 CONCERTS

# Dear MYSO Family and Friends,

Thanks for making 2023-24 a season of milestones for our students at the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra.

Because of you,

- MYSO musicians returned to world touring and showcased their talents in Belgium and the Netherlands;
- We delivered music education to nearly 1,000 students and reached another 6,000 who attended our free Community Concerts;
- We helped to fulfill the wish of a young Milwaukee vocalist in a first-time collaboration with Make-A-Wish® Wisconsin
- We celebrated 20 years of Community Partnership Programs—expanding equitable access to music education;
- Our Pathways to Success signature event raised a record \$365,000 to support financial aid for young musicians in need.

You helped make 2023-24 a season of resilience and growth, for our students—and our organization. In a challenging time for arts organizations, your support kept MYSO financially strong, able to provide high-quality music education and performance opportunities.

We know there's more to do—to reach more students who can thrive through the power of music...to raise public awareness of the impact that you're helping us make...and to strengthen our leadership in the community. And we look forward to meeting these challenges—seizing these opportunities—with your help.

We're happy to celebrate your wonderful impact in 2023-24.

Thanks to you, our students could hear and see you in music—nurturing, challenging, and inspiring them to change lives and our community.

In gratitude for your partnership,

Linda J. Edelstein  
CEO

Amy Croen  
Board Chair



# Our Stories: Musicians

## Composing a Life: Claire Fifarek's MYSO Story

Photos by Roost Photography, Ron Oshima

**When sixth-grader Claire Fifarek first picked up her viola to audition for MYSO, she couldn't have foreseen how profoundly it would shape her future. Now, in her senior year, Claire reflects on a journey that has redefined her world.**

MYSO quickly became more than just an after-school activity. It was a place where Claire's musical talents were developed and refined. Playing both viola and oboe, she found herself immersed in challenges that pushed her beyond what she thought possible. "I would not be who I am today without MYSO," Claire says.

In the orchestra, Claire discovered a new language of leadership. She learned to communicate without words, guiding her section through the subtle projection of her sound. This silent dialogue of music became a metaphor for her personal growth, teaching her to listen, adapt, and lead in all aspects of her life.

One pivotal moment stands out in Claire's memory. During a rehearsal, she found herself frozen, instrument forgotten, as she listened in awe to a fellow musician's solo. It was then that Claire truly understood the power of the community she had joined.



MYSO's impact extended far beyond the concert hall. Claire's newfound confidence spilled into her academic life, sharpening her focus and amplifying her achievements. As she looks toward a future in engineering, Claire knows that the skills honed in MYSO—attention to detail, time management, and the ability to harmonize with a team—will be invaluable.

**"I would not be who I am today without MYSO," Claire says.**

"It's scary to think that I won't have the continuation of MYSO next year," Claire admits, "but it is huge to me to see that I can step out and create something else similar or even completely new." With the foundation MYSO provided, Claire stands poised to orchestrate a future filled with promise and possibility.





# Our Stories: Musicians

## Harmony in Growth: Lileth Gayle's MYSO Journey

Photos by Michelle Hoffman, Ron Oshima

**In the bustling halls of the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, 12-year-old Lileth Gayle has found her second home. A talented clarinetist in her third year with MYSO, Lileth embodies the power of music education.**

As a member of MYSO's Wind Ensemble, Lileth has discovered more than just musical skills. "It's given me a chance to make new friends and meet new people," she says with a smile. Her journey with MYSO began in fifth grade in the Prelude Wind Ensemble program, and the changes in her personal growth have been remarkable.

"I've become a little more outgoing," Lileth reflects. "In fifth grade, I would have said I'm not really an outgoing person. I liked to keep to myself. But now, I will make new friends and be really kind toward other people when I'm talking." This newfound confidence is a testament to the nurturing environment MYSO provides.

Beyond social skills, Lileth's musical education has had a profound impact on her academic life. "One of my hardest subjects is math. Since I started MYSO, I've been finding I could keep up with math a little bit more," she explains. "I'm counting more and using my head when I'm playing my instrument. I can also put my skills to work when I'm doing math."

Lileth's mother, Sharveta Parker, notes another crucial skill her daughter has developed. "Participating in MYSO and the arts has taught her how to be more of a cooperative learner," she observes. "She's able to be successfully independent while understanding her role as part of a team or an ensemble."



Looking to the future, Lileth hopes to continue with MYSO through high school. Her aspirations include pursuing architecture with a minor in clarinet performance, showcasing how her musical education has shaped her long-term goals.

**"I've become a little more outgoing," Lileth reflects. "In fifth grade, I would have said I'm not really an outgoing person. I liked to keep to myself. But now, I will make new friends and be really kind toward other people when I'm talking."**

For Lileth, MYSO is more than just an after-school activity. "This place has become a second home to me," she says. "The community is just really awesome, and people make me feel happier and confident that I can do more difficult things."

As MYSO continues to nurture young talent like Lileth, it's clear that the organization's impact extends far beyond music. It's shaping confident, well-rounded individuals ready to face the world's challenges with creativity and collaboration. Lileth's journey is a shining example of how MYSO is not just creating musicians, but empowering future leaders.



## 2023 Belgium and the Netherlands Tour

**Our top orchestra is regularly acclaimed for its international tours, including our July 2023 performance and cultural tour to Belgium and the Netherlands.**

Photos by Liyu Chen, Mark Goldstein, Kathy Morency, Carter Simmons

**The 97-member orchestra performed in Queen Elisabeth Hall, in Antwerp, Belgium; Parkzaal at Muis Sacrum, in Arnhem, Netherlands; and the tour culminated in a concert at the famous Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam on July 17. The then-American consul general to the Netherlands, Kate Nanavatty, introduced MYSO and thanked the orchestra for a “simply spectacular” performance.**

Cellist Noor Salameh summed up her once-in-a-lifetime concert experience:

“Excitement and concentration echoed through the halls as we awaited curtain call. Repeating a concert for multiple nights is a rare treat for our youth orchestra, and being able to witness the progression of our performances after this past week has been such a joy. I am especially grateful tonight as I play my final MYSO concert after a decade in the program. And I am simply in awe of my fellow youth orchestra musicians.”



# Community Partnership Programs' 20th Anniversary

In 2023–24 we celebrated the 20th anniversary of Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra's Community Partnership Programs. These programs offer music education in a variety of musical genres, from strings to band instruments, jazz, steel pans, and even bucket-drumming. They seek to include students from the City of Milwaukee, students of color, and students who otherwise lack access to music education because of financial and other barriers. The ensemble training format goes beyond teaching music. It fosters development of skills like teamwork, leadership, empathy, and resilience—all essential for future success.

Photos by Nick Havlik, Michelle Hoffman, Melissa Klein, Emily Lukasek, Mark Frohna Photography, Ron Oshima, Ramlow-Stein, Joshua Tebo



MYSO Jazz Studies was founded by Cliff Gribble in 2004.



MYSO's Community Concert Series, which began in 2005, offers 25 free concerts each year to 6,000 area school children, engaging them in performances by their peers. These concerts include an educational component, teaching young audiences about the instruments and music they're hearing.



MYSO and Latino Arts Strings launched a partnership in 2006.



MYSO Scholars, a beginning string program for elementary school children in a predominantly Latinx public school in Waukesha, was founded in 2009.



MYSO's Bucket Drumming program, at the Boys and Girls Clubs, began in 2015.



The Milwaukee Youth Arts Center was renovated in 2021, allowing thousands more young people to experience the arts.



MYSO expanded its Progressions program in 2022.

2003-04    2004    2005    2005    2005    2006    2007    2009    2012    2015    2021    2022    2022

MYSO launched its inaugural Community Partnership program, Progressions, in 2003-04, providing beginning string instrument instruction to Milwaukee third and fourth-graders.



MYSO moved into the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center in January 2005.

MYSO offered a fourth regional String Orchestra rehearsal option, String Orchestra Central, at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, beginning in 2005.



Calypso, MYSO's first steel pan experience, was created in 2007, and due to its popularity, the Soca steel band formed in 2013.



Prelude Orchestra was started in 2012 to create a bridge between MYSO's Progressions and String Orchestra programs.

Begun in 2022, MYSO's newest program, the Prelude Wind Ensemble, provides beginning instruction in woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments to fifth- and sixth-grade Milwaukee children.



# Financials

## 2023-24

(\$000s)

### Revenue

Contributed	\$ 3,264
Earned*	1,353
Restricted Investments**	939
UPAF	404
Other	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 5,961</b>

### Expenses

Programs	\$ 3,038
Administration	164
Fundraising	279
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 3,481</b>

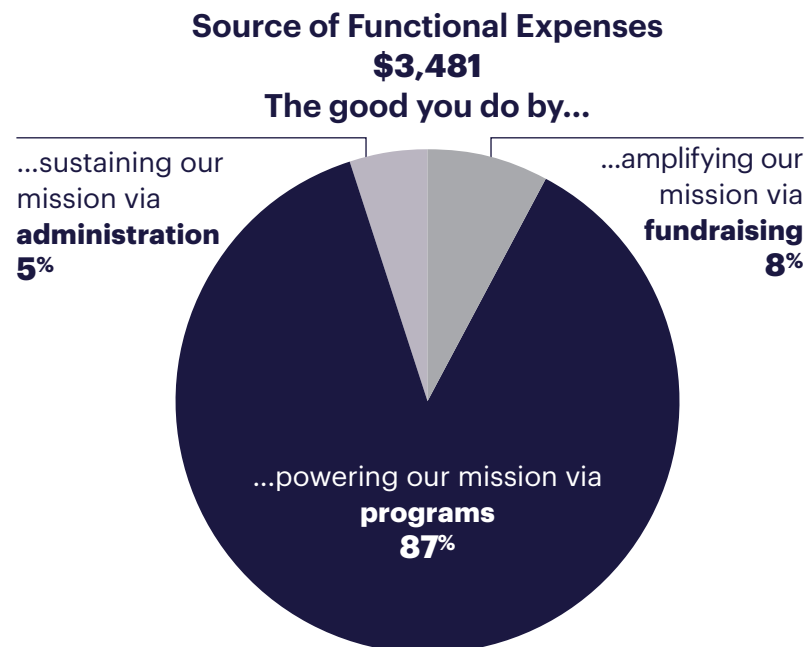
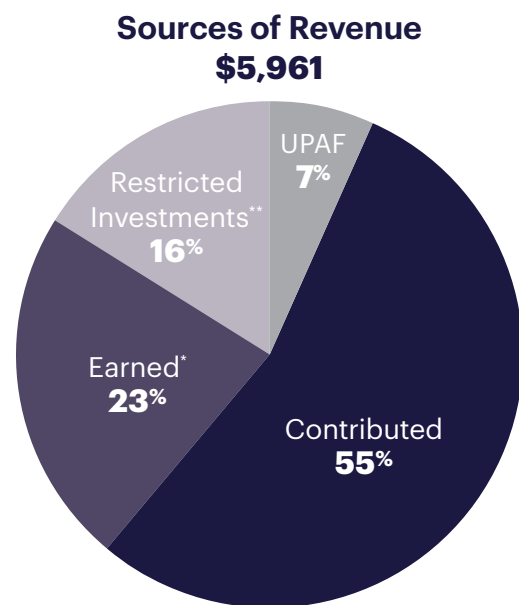
### Net Assets

Total Revenue less Expenses	\$ 2,481
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	8,979
<b>Net Assets, End of Year</b>	<b>\$ 11,460</b>

\*Includes unrestricted investment income of \$38k

\*\*Board and Donor-restricted investment earnings restricted for strategic investments, financial assistance and scholarships.

Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation. Our financial statements are audited annually by Wegner CPAs, LLP.



# About MYSO | Board of Directors

Since 1956, the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) has been nurturing, challenging, and inspiring young minds through music, profoundly changing lives and our community for the better. MYSO has grown from one orchestra and 30 students to become one of the largest and most respected youth orchestras in the country. Each year, MYSO serves nearly 1,000 young musicians, ages 8-18, who come from more than 200 schools, 90 zip codes, and as many as 14 counties throughout southeastern Wisconsin. We reach an audience of 25,000 through 150 public performances.

Our programs include more than 40 ensemble and enrichment training options, ranging from symphonies, string orchestras, jazz and steel bands to music theory, composition, international tours, and more, providing high quality experiences for students of varying skills and experience.

The importance of MYSO as a catalyst for youth development and community change has not gone unnoticed. In the 2015-16 season, MYSO received the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, the country's highest honor for after-school youth arts and humanities programs, presented by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

MYSO is a proud founding member of the United Performing Arts Fund and is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

For more information about MYSO and its many programs, please visit [myso.org](http://myso.org).

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# Thank You

Donations to MYSO are the crucial funding source that allow us to nurture, challenge, and inspire young minds, profoundly changing lives and our community for the better. We are tremendously grateful for these important gifts.

This list recognizes gifts of \$250 or more that were received in the 2023–24 year (from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024). We encourage you to contact Emma Kunz, Philanthropy Operations Manager, with questions or corrections—or to learn how to make a much-appreciated gift to MYSO.

## ENERGICO

**Energetic, strong**  
**\$400,000+**  
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Furniture and Appliance Mart  
Glaze  
Green Bay Packers Give Back  
Melissa Le  
Haggerty Museum of Art  
Howard G Mullett Ice Center  
Jewish Museum Milwaukee  
Joyce Kaiser  
Kendra Scott  
Koss Corporation  
Lake Geneva Ziplines and Ad-  
ventures  
Melissa Le  
Michael Becker  
Milwaukee Art Museum  
Milwaukee Brewers  
Milwaukee Public Museum  
Milwaukee World Festival Inc  
Mister Car Wash  
Next Act Theatre  
North Point Lighthouse  
Friends, Inc  
Qdoba Mexican Eats  
Racine Zoological Society  
Renaissance Theaterworks  
Roger and Sally Ruggeri  
Schlitz Audubon Nature Center  
Shirley Klausner  
The Bartolotta Restaurants  
The Cheesecake Factory  
Tom Edelstein  
Dale & Barbara Pforr  
Jon & Sue Phillips  
Jan Pirozzolo-Mellowes  
Marguerite Pycha  
Bunny Raasch-Hooten  
Vani Ray

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Donald Beane

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Cheryle Schleeeter

**Kara Berquist**  
Allen and Kristin Ibsen

**Kayla Brennan**  
Judi Strout

**Ernest Brusubardis III**  
Emily Schuhmacher

**Ben Celikay**  
Recep and Amy Celikay

**Julian Cortright**  
Kenneth Long

**Sarah Downes**  
Garry and Molly Vandekieft

**Elliot Ecoff**  
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Richard and Ann Petersen  
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Raymond Wilson  
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David and Diane Knox

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Jon and Sue Phillips Family Fund

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Charles and Louise Quigley

**Fran Richman**  
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Cynthia Edling

**Our Two Daughters Who  
Enjoyed Being in MYSO**  
Thomas and Sandra Gold

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Nicola and Consiglia**

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*Printing donated by BVK*

Page 8-9 photos by Iryna Levit, Erica Mendoza-Waldoch,  
Kathy Morency, Ron Oshima, Roost Photography, Amy Van Sistine