



THE PROMISE OF MUSIC

THE FIRST WORLD CONGRESS
ON THE SOCIAL IMPACT *of* MUSIC

EVENT SCHEDULE

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2025

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	TICKETS
10:00-12:00 PM	Monday Film Screening: Sing Sing	Divine G (Colman Domingo), imprisoned at Sing Sing for a crime he didn't commit, finds purpose by acting in a theatre group with other incarcerated men. When a wary outsider joins the group, the men decide to stage their first original comedy. It's a stirring true story of resilience, humanity, and the transformative power of art, starring an unforgettable ensemble cast of formerly incarcerated actors. "Sing Sing" garnered 3 Academy Award nominations and earned 97% positive reviews on Rotten Tomatoes.	TICKETS
2:00-3:15 PM	Jamie Bernstein on the Power of Music and Media	Join this special appearance by author, narrator, director and filmmaker Jamie Bernstein. Her 2018 memoir, <i>Famous Father Girl</i> is about growing up with legendary composer-conductor Leonard Bernstein, subject of the Academy Award nominated 2023 film, <i>Maestro</i>. She has written and narrated concerts about Mozart, Aaron Copland and Stravinsky, as well as "The Bernstein Beat," a family concert about her father. Jamie will discuss her father's artistry and career and ground-breaking use of mass media for music education and appreciation. Presenter: Jamie Bernstein	TICKETS
3:30-4:30 PM	Music and the Arts – Saving Society Billions Through Enhanced Wellness	Frontier Economics is one of the world's largest economics research firms with a staff of over 500. In 2024, Frontier Economics completed a major study for the UK government examining the impacts of arts, culture and heritage on the health and well-being of British people. Using a broad spectrum of evidence and new economic modelling, took the bold step of determining the economic impact of arts engagement on the population, based on health and well-being and savings in healthcare costs, increased productivity, etc.). The results were startling. Not only did the evidence show that engagement with the arts enhanced people's wellness, it also saved government money – a lot of money. Frontier Economics did not consider the benefits from tourism, hospitality, employment, etc., (as real as those are), but focused specifically on wellness. The Frontier Economics research found a value in healthcare and other public expenditure savings of as much as \$15 billion CAD annually. Consider how much greater the impact would be with an even more robust public investment. Presenter Matthew Bell, Director of Frontier Economics presents the findings of the report, and its implications both for public policy, and for the health, wellness and life satisfaction of people everywhere. Presenter: Matthew Bell	TICKETS
4:45-5:45 PM	Positive Fatalism: Music-Making in the Harsh Realities of Kinshasa	Drawing on nearly two decades of field research in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Dr. Pairon will introduce the concept of 'positive fatalism' relating how the art of music-making may empower people to live with dignity amidst the unimaginable challenges, dangers, structural injustice, and hardships of daily life. Presenter: Dr. Lukas Pairon	TICKETS
7:00 PM - 12:00 AM	Concert Series: The Glenn Gould Foundation Presents: The Promise of Music	Join us for a night of music and magic as we kick off a week of fantastic events for The Promise of Music at the Aga Khan Museum! The Promise of Music: The First World Congress on the Social Impact of Music opens with a joyous celebration featuring amazing artists from all over the world. Come experience the Afghan National Institute of Music, the Firdaus	TICKETS

Celebration

Orchestra from Dubai, The Recycled Orchestra of Cateura, Memphis-based dancer Lil Buck, and many, many more. Meet the performers, explore the galleries, and visit the bubble sound and light installation at the museum.

With Viggo Mortensen, emcee, and a keynote by General Romeo Dallaire, the evening will be jam-packed with incredible performances and inspiration.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2025

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	TICKETS
9:00-10:30 AM	Music Education – Transforming Children’s Lives	Across the planet, social initiatives rooted in the teaching of music have shown the powerful impact that this form of creative expression, collective engagement and personal development can have on the lives and futures of children and youth. The programs presented in this panel hail from diverse cultural and social environments, and address different needs and challenges among the students they serve. Despite these differences, our speakers will draw upon their lived experience, and that of their students, to identify the common threads that make their work successful, impactful and life-changing, with lessons that can benefit children and communities everywhere. Presenters: Dr. Lee Willingham, Elizabeth Njoroge, Adam Greig, Kenn Mainville, Ron David Alvarez,	TICKETS
10:30-11:50 AM	Music and Social Prescribing – Holistic Health and Wellness	In an era of constrained resources and an over-taxed health care system, we can and must find better and more cost-effective ways to enhance health and wellness across the population by addressing the social determinants of health: the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Health is affected by numerous social factors that arise long before the need for physicians and hospitals becomes acute: loneliness, nutrition, emotional and home support, education, one’s physical environment, availability of cultural and social engagement, to name a few. Addressing these needs in a way that can save health care dollars, relieve stresses on the medical system and produce better health outcomes is the essence of the movement called Social Prescribing. Social prescribing holistically unites clinical and social care by referring patients to local, non-clinical services that are chosen according to the client’s interests, goals, and gifts. Our panelists draw upon a wealth of real-world experience to discuss the powerful role that learning music and access to musical culture can play as a social prescribing aid to the wellness of our children. Presenters: Annie Saumier, Dr. Sue Bennett, Tina Fedeski, Dr. Arla Good	TICKETS
10:00-12:00 PM	Tuesday Film Screening: The Soloist	Inspired by the book, <i>The Soloist: A Lost Dream, an Unlikely Friendship, and The Redemptive Power of Music</i>, this 2009 film tells the true story of Nathaniel Ayers, a Juilliard-trained former musical prodigy whose schizophrenia has landed him on the streets of Los Angeles. The Soloist stars Jamie Foxx as Nathaniel Ayers and Robert Downey Jr. as Steve Lopez, a journalist who befriends Ayers after hearing him play on Skid Row. As Lopez learns more about Ayers and a once promising career derailed by mental illness, he determines to help undo the tragedy of a talent so remarkable relegated to the streets As Lopez embarks on a quixotic quest to help Ayers pull his life together and launch a career in music, he gradually comes to realize that it is not Ayers whose life is being transformed, but his own.	TICKETS
12:45-1:45 PM	Music in Exile: the Struggle to Preserve Culture	Dr. Ahmad Sarmast is the visionary Founder and Director of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM), established in Kabul after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. ANIM was created as a modern, inclusive conservatory, welcoming children in need, and open to girls, who had long been banned from access to education. ANIM sought to rescue and revive Afghanistan’s rich, musical heritage which was nearly eradicated under Taliban rule.	TICKETS

		Sarmast’s mission came at great personal risk. Despite death threats and a targeted suicide bombing that left him with grave injuries, Sarmast persisted and ANIM flourished, until the sudden return of the Taliban in 2021. He refused to be deterred. After several months in hiding, and in an extraordinary act of defiance and hope, the students and teachers escaped and re-established the school in Portugal – reborn as a “conservatory in exile.” Dr. Sarmast vividly recounts and speaks with raw emotion about the harrowing experience, the ache of separation from home and the enduring strength his students and faculty find in music. Through it all, he continues to champion music as not only an art form, but a basic human right. Presenters: Dr. Ahmad Sarmast	
2:00-3:15 PM	Music Education – Preserving Culture, Preventing Erasure	Music is a connecting thread that runs through cultures, extending from the very origins of identity to today’s contemporary expressions. The central role of music makes it an essential part of who people are and how they understand themselves, from cultural celebrations and sacred observances, the telling of folk stories and foundational myths, sustaining family memories, and the voicing of hopes and concerns of the present-day. Yet, with the passage of time and changes in society or the uprooting of families and populations through traumatic events of displacement, war and natural disaster, people can become separated from themselves and their roots, becoming strangers in strange lands, or even alienated from their culture while still living in their homelands. Hear our panelists discuss the vital part music and music education plays in preserving and recovering cultural traditions, in regaining a sense of rootedness, and even finding a fresh sense of identity and kinship as they reconcile themselves to their new homes. Presenters: Dr. Richard Marsella, Dr. Sommer Forrester, Ron Davis Alvarez, Dr. Ahmad Sarmast	TICKETS
3:30-5:00 PM	Glenn Gould’s Variations and the Human Qualities that Foster Remarkable Human Creativity	Joshua Cohen is a professor of philosophy, and has taught at MIT, Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley, before joining the faculty of Apple University, established by Steve Jobs in 2008. Jobs’ goal was to infuse Apple’s employees with a more holistic and creative vision of the company’s mission and values. As part of his three-part series, “Best Things,” Prof. Cohen developed this presentation about Glenn Gould and his re-imagining in 1981 of his groundbreaking 1955 hit recording of Bach’s Goldberg Variations. Created for Apple, and rarely seen outside of Apple University, Dr. Cohen presents revelatory insights not only about a landmark recording, but about the richness of ideas that went into its creation. Through this presentation, illustrated with numerous video clips and penetrating analysis, Prof. Cohen reveals Gould’s insights about the rich inner workings of a musical masterpiece, but also his ideas about the ethical dimensions of technology, and their implications for society and the future of humanity. For those whose lives are touched daily by technology (all of us!), and for whom music is essential, this talk will be a provocative, stimulating and attitude-changing experience. Presenters: Brian Levine, Joshua Cohen	TICKETS
7:30 - 8:30 PM	Concert Series: The Recycled Orchestra – From Landfill to Legends	It’s an evening of pure joy, and a story that has caught the world’s imagination. The Recycled Orchestra features gifted young musicians performing timeless music on instruments made entirely of recycled trash. Formed in the impoverished Paraguayan town of Cateura in 2007, the Recycled Orchestra is the fruit of a program designed to provide young people orchestral training, and the rich life skills that come with it, all fueled by the joy of music. Dubbed “the Landfill Harmonic,” the ensemble’s instruments are amazing re-inventions, created using materials salvaged from their town’s one industry, an enormous landfill. Cellos are fashioned from oil drums, saxophones made from drainpipes, drumheads from old X-films. The Recycled Orchestra is transformation incarnate, both	TICKETS

		turning garbage into an orchestra and lives of hopelessness into ones of inspiration and purpose. The ensemble has toured the world, even performing with Metallica and Stevie Wonder, and the subject of a new musical debuting next year, Basura, by Gloria Estefan.	
8:00 - 9:00 PM	Concert Series: Afghanistan National Institute of Music: The Inextinguishable Flame	Soon after the Taliban’s initial withdrawal in 2001, Dr. Ahmad Sarmast founded the Afghanistan National Institute of Music (ANIM) in Kabul, and against all odds, a global phenomenon was born. Tirelessly working to reverse years of Taliban efforts to eradicate a glorious centuries-old musical culture, Sarmast and his unrelenting teachers created a school offering lessons to disadvantaged children including orphans and girls. Not even a suicide bomber during a student concert, in which Sarmast was seriously wounded, or the Taliban’s decree banning music entirely and forbidding expression by women, could silence ANIM, now continuing its mission from exile in Portugal. Their world tours have included sold out shows at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall.	TICKETS
8:00 - 9:00 PM	Concert Series: Firdaus Orchestra: Symphonic Traditions From the East and West	Experience the trailblazing Firdaus Orchestra, an all-female ensemble whose name means “paradise” in Arabic and whose spirit embodies empowerment and unity. Comprised of exceptional musicians from nearly 30 countries, Firdaus share their talents while inspiring young women to unlock their potential, express themselves freely and pursue careers in music without limits. Founded for Expo 2020 Dubai by Her Excellency, Reem Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates, the Firdaus Orchestra has grown into a powerful symbol of cultural exchange and gender inclusion. Performing as a 50-member ensemble that blends Western symphonic traditions with traditional Arabic instruments and musical heritage, they offer an exceptional repertoire that spans continents and centuries. It is the vanguard of a UAE-wide music education initiative. Mentored by music legend A.R. Rahman, the orchestra includes gifted musicians from the Arab region, and from such far-away places as India, Mexico and Russia and Japan.	TICKETS

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2025

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
9:00-10:00 AM	Music, Trauma and the Developing Brain	What are the unique qualities of music that make it such a powerful force in the early development of children, whether lullabies at bedtime, singing nursery rhymes, jumping in time to skipping songs, or the endlessly repeated playback of tunes heard on-line? How does music contribute to a young child's bonding, emotional development, cognitive maturation, socialization, mood regulation and development of peer relationships? Hear our panellists discuss not only how the formative impacts of an active engagement with music listening and learning advances the young child's development, but also the implications for lifelong resiliency, wellness and success. Presenters: Dr. Ellen Waterman, Dr. Wendy Stewart, Margaret (Mags) O'Sullivan	TICKETS
9:00-10:30 AM	El Sistema at 50 - The Movement that Started it All	In 1975, Venezuelan economist and musician Dr. José Antonio Abreu had the idea of expanding the reach of music education to make it available more widely to the young people of his country. Beginning with 11 students meeting initially in the only available space, an underground parking lot, Abreu worked relentlessly to expand the program, which quickly evolved into the movement popularly nicknamed "El Sistema" (the System). In Abreu's vision, learning music was a form of social action to nurture better citizens for whom there should be no barriers to access, regardless of a child's economic circumstances, challenges, or special needs and abilities. Using the orchestra as a model society ("whose only purpose is to be in harmony with itself"), El Sistema grew to include teaching centres ("nucleos") in economically challenged neighbourhoods with persistent problems of crime, gangs and drug use, in juvenile correctional facilities, as well as programs run by Indigenous communities, others serving youth with special needs and disabilities, and programs teaching the art of instrument making and repair. With its toddler-to young adult program, emphasis on group learning, play and teamwork, today more than 2,000,000 Venezuelans have experienced El Sistema, which has produced 400 nucleos and given rise to more than 170 orchestras, and in addition to symphonic ensembles, has choral, jazz and has spurred a renaissance in Venezuelan folk-traditional music. Today, El Sistema inspired programs have spread to more than 60 countries worldwide, including Canada. While the musical results produced by these programs are impressive and inspiring, the central purpose of El Sistema is "Social Action Through Music." Join us for a discussion of this revolutionary movement, moderated by Eric Booth and Tricia Tunstall, publishers of the worldwide newsletter of El Sistema, "The Ensemble" and a panel of leaders from international El Sistema programs. "Music has to be recognized as an . . . agent of social development in the highest sense, because it transmits the highest values – solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion. And it has the ability to unite an entire community and to express sublime feelings." – José Antonio Abreu Presenters: Eric Booth, Tricia Tunstall, Nick Skinner, Vicky Williams, Tina Fedeski, Ron Davis Alvarez	TICKETS
10:00-12:00 PM	Wednesday Film Screening: The Landfill Harmonic	This award-winning 2015 documentary tells the story of the Recycled Orchestra of Cateura, one of the world's most remarkable and inspiring musical ensembles. In a deeply impoverished town of 2,500 on the edge of a massive landfill near the Paraguayan capital, Asunción, children have been learning to play violins, cellos, horns, and drums, all "recycled" from garbage retrieved from the dump. Under the leadership of visionary teacher and founder, Favio Chavez, and with the help of local craftsman, Nicolás "Cola" Gómez, the Recycled Orchestra was born.	TICKETS

		In a town where 1,500 tons of waste are dumped every day, children grow up with a bleak vision shaped by the rubbish that surrounds them. Or, they did until the Recycled Orchestra came into their lives. It's a music education program where each instrument is as unique as the child that learns to play it, and a new spirit of pride, accomplishment and possibilities is born every day.	
10:45-12:00 PM	Dr. Gabor Maté in Conversation: Trauma, Childhood and Musical Pathways to Healing	A captivating, and deeply insightful conversation, recorded exclusively for The Promise of Music, exploring the profound connections between trauma, childhood development and emotional healing and music. Dr. Maté is joined in conversation by Brian Levine of The Glenn Gould Foundation. Presenter: Dr. Gabor Maté	TICKETS
11:00-12:00 PM	Strategic Granting in Music Education: MusiCounts Insights & Process	MusiCounts is Canada's music education charity, having directed over \$18 million in instruments and resources to thousands of underserved schools and community music programs across Canada. Join MusiCounts as they offer a focused overview of their granting model as well as data-driven insights on the state of music education in Canada. These insights not only inform key trends in music education across the country, but also offer a foundation to inform broader educational and cultural policy conversations as they pertain to the state of music education. Presenter: Nick Godsoe	TICKETS
1:00-2:15 PM	SIMM Panel: Essential Skills for Musicians Facilitating Social and Community Music Projects	This session focuses on the specific skills, training and personal qualities required of musicians who facilitate participatory music projects. Presenters: Dr. Lukas Pairon, Dr. Irina Kirchberg, Eric Booth, Tricia Tunstall, Pierre Vachon, Sebastian Ruth	TICKETS
1:00-2:00 PM	Rooted in Movement: Art, Equity, and Community	In this powerful keynote, internationally acclaimed dancer, choreographer, and arts advocate Lil Buck shares how Memphis Jookin' – a street dance style born in the neighbourhoods of his home town – became both his personal path to possibility and a platform for youth empowerment. With its signature glide, bounce and elaborate footwork, Jookin' launched Lil Buck from local streets to global stages. Reflecting on his own journey and the work of the Lil Buck Foundation, he explores how culturally rooted art forms can foster resilience, unlock talent, and expand opportunities for young people, especially in underserved communities. A Wall Street Journal Innovator of the Year and subject of Netflix's MOVE and the documentary Lil Buck: Real Swan, he invites us to reimagine the role of community-based art in shaping brighter, bolder futures. Presenters: Lil Buck	TICKETS
2:15-3:30 PM	Roundtable: Building Bridges to a Better Future	When young people grow up facing adversity, whether through economic deprivation, violence, displacement, or multigenerational trauma, feelings of hopelessness, disengagement, and hostility can become internalized responses to their outward circumstances. Through self-destructive or even criminal behaviour, too often, young lives can be wasted or tragically cut short. Against such overwhelming, soul-destroying odds, how can something as ephemeral as music make a difference? And yet, as our speakers have witnessed firsthand, music can inspire and catalyze an astonishing metamorphosis. It begins by showing young people that they are not alone. It affirms their potential to learn, to create and to achieve. And it nourishes an environment for personal growth, self-discovery and contributing to something greater than themselves. The external realities of these young people may not immediately change, but through music, many develop inner	TICKETS

		strength, a sense of community, and spiritual and intellectual resources that help them rise above their circumstances and empower them to find a better way forward. Presenters: Dr. Richard Marsella, Elizabeth Njoroge, Steve Happi, Davis Moussinghi, Micah Hendler, Ndondo Mulli, Ron David Alvarez	
2:30-3:30 PM	Changing the Tune: Rethinking School Music Programs to Meet Student Interests and Needs	When young people grow up facing adversity, whether through economic deprivation, violence, displacement, or multigenerational trauma, feelings of hopelessness, disengagement, and hostility can become internalized responses to their outward circumstances. Through self-destructive or even criminal behaviour, too often, young lives can be wasted or tragically cut short. Against such overwhelming, soul-destroying odds, how can something as ephemeral as music make a difference? And yet, as our speakers have witnessed firsthand, music can inspire and catalyze an astonishing metamorphosis. It begins by showing young people that they are not alone. It affirms their potential to learn, to create and to achieve. And it nourishes an environment for personal growth, self-discovery and contributing to something greater than themselves. The external realities of these young people may not immediately change, but through music, many develop inner strength, a sense of community, and spiritual and intellectual resources that help them rise above their circumstances and empower them to find a better way forward. Presenters: Nick Godsoe, Sherryl Sewepagaham, Zeda Ali, Darren Hamilton	TICKETS
3:00 - 4:00 PM	Concert Series: Firdaus Orchestra: Symphonic Traditions from the East and West	Experience the trailblazing Firdaus Orchestra, an all-female ensemble whose name means “paradise” in Arabic and whose spirit embodies empowerment and unity. Comprised of exceptional musicians from nearly 30 countries, Firdaus share their talents while inspiring young women to unlock their potential, express themselves freely and pursue careers in music without limits. Founded for Expo 2020 Dubai by Her Excellency, Reem Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates, the Firdaus Orchestra has grown into a powerful symbol of cultural exchange and gender inclusion. Performing as a 50-member ensemble that blends Western symphonic traditions with traditional Arabic instruments and musical heritage, they offer an exceptional repertoire that spans continents and centuries. It is the vanguard of a UAE-wide music education initiative. Mentored by music legend A.R. Rahman, the orchestra includes gifted musicians from the Arab region, and from such far-away places as India, Mexico and Russia and Japan.	TICKETS
3:45-5:00 PM	The Value and Power of Music Therapy	Music therapy harnesses the power of music in a therapeutic relationship guided by a trained professional to address a wide range of conditions in order to improve wellness and quality of life. Dating back to the early 20th century – and gaining formal recognition in U.S. universities by the 1940s – music therapy is now a well-established and respected discipline. When applied to children, music has been shown to support language acquisition and rehabilitation, motor skills development, emotional expression, social engagement, cognitive development and recovery from trauma. Music therapy is used extensively in paediatric, rehabilitation, mental health, medical and chronic care settings. Based in Calgary, Jennifer Buchanan is one of Canada’s most respected and successful music therapists. Based on her vast experience, and compassionate use of music as a healing tool, Jennifer will explain why, at this time of unprecedented increase in mental health challenges amongst children and youth, music is a powerful tool for promoting wellness. Jennifer will be joined in this session by members of Music for Every Child, a unique youth-led, registered charitable	TICKETS

		organization run by students ages 8 – 23. Music For Every Child initiates and funds music therapy programming for children with special needs in inner city schools. Through the universal language of music, Music for Every Child helps students develop important skills including socio-emotional, communication, and behavioural regulation. Music for Every Child is currently an official Educational Partner of the Toronto District School Board, collaborating with educators and professionals across Toronto, Mississauga, Ottawa, and Oakville. Presenters: Sandrine Zuyderhoff, Jennifer Buchanan, Samantha Fung	
3:45-5:00 PM	New Advances in Applied Music Neuroscience - from Mechanisms to Interventions	In recent decades, research into the effects of music on the brain, cognition, and neurological development – from early childhood through end of life – has surged. The massive body of work has evolved alongside science’s growing understanding of neuroplasticity (the brain’s remarkable ability to continuously reorganize itself by forming new neural connections in response to stimuli, experience and activity). While huge gains in understanding have been made, vast frontiers remain unexplored in uncovering exactly how listening to, learning and making music change the brain. Already, we are gaining insights into the uses of sound, rhythm and musical structures for therapies to treat diverse conditions including stroke recovery, autism, Parkinson’s disease, epilepsy, traumatic brain injury, dementia, multiple sclerosis and mood disorders. This expanding field raises compelling questions for parents, educators, and clinicians about the role of music in early development, and how it may build the neurological foundations for lifelong health, cognitive resilience and emotional well-being. It also points to the potential of music-based targeted interventions that can be applied throughout life in response to specific health challenges. Presenters: Dr. Marco Battaglia, Dr. Gottfried Schlaug, Dr. Michael Thaut	TICKETS
7:30 - 9:00 PM	Concert Series: Sistema New Brunswick Children’s Orchestra & Sistema Toronto: Dan Brown’s Wild Symphony	With narration by Viggo Mortensen From bestselling Author Dan Brown (The Da Vinci Code) comes a magical, immersive concert experience that brings his whimsical children’s book Wild Symphony to life through vibrant visuals, celebrity narration, and an unforgettable live performance. The show will feature the 145 amazing musicians of the Sistema New Brunswick Children’s Orchestra and Sistema Toronto for a one-of-a-kind event with two remarkable Canadian ensembles with inspiring stories of their own. Wild Symphony is more than just a concert. It is a sonic journey through a magical animal kingdom, complete with dazzling projections, interactive moments, and Dan Brown’s spirited score. Whether you’re a child discovering orchestral music for the first time or a lifelong music lover, this performance promises wonder, laughter, and inspiration for audiences of all ages.	TICKETS
8:00 - 9:00 PM	Concert Series: The Sinfonia por el Peru Youth Choir, with VOCA Chorus of Toronto	Created by the world-renowned Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Flórez, Sinfonia por el Perú (“Symphony for Peru) is committed to catalyzing social transformation through group music teaching. Modeled after Venezuela’s El Sistema, the program provides musical training for young people as a means of building life skills, artistic ability and the values of good citizenship in 17 teaching centres across 10 regions of Peru. Sinfonía por el Perú has achieved remarkable results, touring Europe to great acclaim in 2024. The Sinfonía por el Perú Youth Choir has quickly risen to international prominence, making their Canadian debut after their first place win in the 2024 Summa Cum Laude Competition in Vienna. Their sparkling ensemble, vibrant Latin rhythms and harmonic mastery will captivate Toronto audiences.	TICKETS
8:00 - 9:00 PM	Concert Series: Lara Somos Vocal Ensemble: Music	With this special Canadian premiere performance by the world-renowned Lara Somos Ensemble, we pay tribute to the 50th anniversary of El Sistema, the revolutionary music education program that has changed the lives of children and youth across the planet.	TICKETS

**Beyond Barriers
(Venezuela)**

This extraordinary vocal-instrumental ensemble was trained in El Sistema's Special Education Program, which empowers young musicians with a wide range of hearing, visual and cognitive differences. The super-virtuosity of Lara Somos's close harmony vocalists and multi-instrumentalists breaks barriers with every note, proving that that music knows no limits.

Having performed on global stages with such luminaries as the Sir Simon Rattle, Andrea Bocelli, Juan Diego Flórez, Plácido Domingo and Itzhak Perlman, Lara Somos now brings their boundary-defying artistry to Canada for the very first time.

Don't miss this rare and moving opportunity to witness the transformative power of music through a performance that radiates joy, unity and excellence.

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
9:00-10:30 AM	Music in Prisons and Detention Centres	How can music programs in prisons and detention centres contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates into society? In places of incarceration where human dignity and sense of self is repressed, creative expression offers a fragile yet vital form of agency. Drawing on years of collaborative research within the SIMM research network and the lived experience of the founders of a ground-breaking prison program, we will show the value of music both as a tool for rehabilitation, but also as a form of identity-building, quiet resistance, and constructing positive relationships. Rather than romanticizing the role of music, we critically examine the limits and risks of musical practice in prison settings, how power, vulnerability, and institutional control affect prison music programs, and the ethical responsibilities of practitioners in working musically with the incarcerated. This session will include a presentation by Anne-Katherine Dionne (University of Toronto), alongside reflections by a panel of experienced practitioners and researchers in this field. We hope to provoke dialogue around the complexity of music’ impact in places of confinement. The presenters will play a recorded message from Alanis Obomsawin. Presenters: Dr. Lukas Pairon, Anne-Katherine Dionne, Dr. Bina John, Steve Happi	TICKETS
10:00-12:00 PM	Thursday Film Screening: Music of the Heart	Music of the Heart, starring Meryl Streep, is director Wes Craven’s 1999 film that tells the true story of Roberta Guaspari’s efforts that changed the lives of generations of Harlem schoolchildren through music. A single mother with little more than talent and the determination to make a difference, Guaspari has to overcome the skepticism of everyone who doesn’t think she should be teaching violin to students in a tough inner-city neighbourhood. With single-minded determination, bolstered by a deep love of music, Guaspari discovers a new calling. Through teaching music, she can enrich the lives of her students with beauty, joy, and the self-esteem that comes with a sense of accomplishment. However, even after a decade of recognition, success stories, and acclaim, Guaspari and her students face an even greater challenge: New York City budget cuts. With the hope of saving the imperiled program, they stage a “miracle concert” at Carnegie Hall. This extraordinary story demonstrates the Promise of Music in changing lives and will inspire anyone who has ever feared that their dreams are out of reach.	TICKETS
10:45-12:00 PM	Lessons Learned – The Sweet Sounds of Success from Winning Music Programs	What does it take to build a transformative community music program, one that changes kids’ lives, opens new horizons for them, and contributes to healthier, more engaged communities? Each of our panelists has put in endless hours, faced innumerable challenges, made and corrected mistakes, and helped build a program that can serve as a role model for those who want to bring learning music to the young people in their own community. Our panelists will share insights gained from years of organizing, fundraising, working with parents, teachers, administrators and public officials. Their examples show how to get started, build strategic alliances, create and adapt plans, persuade the skeptical, cope with challenged and challenging students, and nurture their organizations from “startup novelties” viewed with skepticism, to cherished, indispensable pillars of their communities, garnering enthusiasm, support and pride. Presenters: Eric Booth, Tricia Tunstall, Kenn MacLeod, Nick Skinner, Vicky Williams, Diego Becerra, Dr. Shawn Earle, Tina Fedeski	TICKETS
12:45-1:45 PM	Music and AI:	Will AI increase our musical enjoyment or dull our emotional response? Will it enhance our sonic creativity or lead	TICKETS

	Threat or Blessing	us to become quick-but-facile “composers”? Tod Machover – who has been at the cutting edge of music and technology for over 40 years, and who leads the visionary MIT Media Lab – will provide context for today’s AI music explosion, explain current approaches and where they might lead in music learning and creating, play relevant examples from recent AI-infused compositions by himself and others, and present an adventurous path forward that blends human and machine in mutually beneficial ways. Presenter: Tod Machover	
2:00-3:15 PM	SIMM Panel: Social and Community Music Projects and their Possible 'Impacts'	If community music projects are to have genuine value, we need to challenge outmoded and romanticized narratives, many of which are rooted in paternalistic assumptions from the past. Presenter Dr. Roger Mantie will pose provocative questions about how we understand the social impact of music and what underlying assumptions shape our interpretations of concepts like agency, transformation, and responsibility. Posing these difficult questions can lead to more realistic, evidence-based and beneficial initiatives that respond to community needs in a wide range of social, economic and cultural contexts. A more grounded approach frees music educators from well-intentioned but often utopian notions that portray music as a panacea, something that “saves” or “redeems” so-called “endangered souls.” This session invites us to strive for initiatives founded on a more nuanced, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded understanding of what music can (and cannot) do in the face of social inequality, oppression, displacement and human suffering. Presenters: Dr. Lukas Pairon, Dr. Roger Mantie, Dr. Imogen Flower, Dr. Lee Willingham, Dr. Richard Marsella	TICKETS
3:30-5:00 PM	Starting a Music Program in Your Community - Tips for Start-Ups	Starting a music program from the ground up can be a powerful way to foster community, engage youth and create a lasting cultural, educational and social impact. This roundtable brings together leaders and program founders from across North America to share their experiences launching music initiatives. Join this session for practical advice on everything from securing funding and building partnerships to creating lasting long-term engagement. Whether you’re an educator, community advocate or artist, this session will bring the tools necessary to launch a music program in your own community. Learn from their successes, their setbacks and their growth – but most of all, learn that it is possible for you, your children and your community! Presenters: Eric Booth, Tricia Tunstall, Dr. Erin Parkes, Andrea Unrau, Dr. Richard Marsella, Chelsey Hiebert	TICKETS
8:00 - 10:00 PM	The Sunshine Orchestra featuring A.R. Rahman	The only thing better than an evening with the dazzling Sunshine Orchestra is an evening with the Orchestra and its visionary founder: legendary composer and Academy Award winner A.R. Rahman, live on stage. The Sunshine Orchestra is comprised of exceptionally gifted young musicians from under-resourced communities who receive world-class training at A.R. Rahman’s K.M. Music Conservatory in Chennai, India. Under his mentorship, they have transformed into a powerhouse ensemble, performing with passion and purpose. They receive free musical training that endows them with confidence, life skills and a strong sense of teamwork. They explore both Indian and Western traditions with a mission as inspiring as their sound: use music as a force for good. Since its founding in 2008, the Orchestra has performed around the world, including a special concert at the United Nations, earning acclaim for their moving story. Now, for the first time in Toronto they will take the stage alongside A.R. Rahman, one of the great music masters of our time, whose list of credits includes scores for 145 films including the music for Slumdog Millionaire.	TICKETS
8:00 - 9:00 PM	Jerusalem Youth Chorus: Hope Rises	The Jerusalem Youth Chorus (JYC) is an Israeli-Palestinian music and dialogue project raising the voices of young leaders from East and West Jerusalem to the global stages of America’s Got Talent, TED, and beyond.	TICKETS

Through the co-creation of music and the sharing of stories, JYC empowers young singers from East and West Jerusalem to speak and sing their truths as they become leaders in their communities and inspire singers and listeners around the world.

Even in times of war, JYC continues to meet, and its singers' commitment to each other, and the power of their voices raised in harmony, has only grown.

The Jerusalem Youth Chorus is far more than a music ensemble. It is the voice of hope.

The JYC is building a youth movement of Palestinians and Israelis raising their voices for peace, justice, inclusion and equality. Singing together creates a container in which its possible to have hard conversations that transform the way we see themselves, one another, and the world around them.

The singers of JYC weave their stories into powerful performances that inspire vision and action for a shared future.

TIME	SESSION TITLE	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTERS
9:00-10:00 AM	Music is Medicine – A Scientist’s Perspective and a Personal Journey	Join us for this illuminating address by Dr. Shimi Kang MD, award-winning psychiatrist, bestselling author of The Dolphin Parent, acclaimed speaker; recognized expert on mental health, positive parenting, family dynamics, innovation, and resilience. An inspiring exploration of music’s profound scientifically validated power for healing, connection, and thriving, drawing on Dr. Kang’s clinical practice, research and real-life experience as a mother. Presenter: Dr. Shimi Kang	TICKETS
9:30-11:15 AM	SIMM Panel: Decolonial and Justice-Oriented Social and Community Music Practices	How do community-based music-making programs engage in a meaningful way with diverse cultures and their representatives, authentically reflecting Indigenous values and perspectives, and those of other formerly colonized nations? With sensitive planning and design, and inviting the leadership of Indigenous community leaders, Elders, song-keepers and others, community-based participatory music projects can become a gateway through which to challenge dominant cultural frameworks and centre local knowledge and traditions, energize community agency and promote individual empowerment. Who leads these initiatives? Whose music is being made? Who decides? What forms of teaching are most powerful and authentically rooted? How can those “from outside,” with potentially useful skills offer their help and resources in a respectful, supportive way that listens, responds and does not impose? And how can such projects challenge and resist colonial dynamics, and connect with the rediscovery and strengthening of traditional stories, dignity, spirituality, and solidarity? Presenters: Sherryl Sewepagaham, Dr. Lukas Pairon, Dr. Deanna Yerechuk, Kathy Armstrong, Karen Cyrus, Nicole Schutz	TICKETS
10:00-12:00 PM	Friday Film Screening: Mr. Holland’s Opus	Richard Dreyfuss shines in this inspiring 1995 hit drama about Glenn Holland, a gifted musician aspiring to compose a great symphony, who takes a job teaching high school music and in spite of himself, discovers his true vocation – changing the lives of students through music. Part It’s a Wonderful Life and part Goodbye Mr. Chips, Mister Holland’s Opus is all about the gift that passes from teacher to student by instilling a love of music. Performing alongside Olympia Dukakis and William H. Macy, Dreyfuss garnered Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations for his performance. When scoring the film, composer Michael Kamen was inspired to create the “Mr. Holland’s Opus Foundation,” which keeps school music programs alive through the donation of musical instruments.	TICKETS
10:15-11:45 AM	Bringing Awareness to Careers in Music	Music students are often steered towards careers in performance, teaching, or academia - paths that reflect the structure of most post-secondary programs. But Canada’s music industry is much broader, powered by professionals working in artist management, music publishing, record labels, nonprofit leadership, community service and much more. These roles are not only vital to the music industry, they are varied and rich with opportunity and creative fulfillment. Yet, they are systematically overlooked in most music education contexts despite offering powerful and fulfilling ways to apply the skills gained through music education. Join some of Canada’s leading music industry professionals as they shine a light on the full spectrum of careers available in music. Presenters: Nick Godsoe, Matt Maw, Keziah Myers	TICKETS
11:30-12:30 PM	The Musical Brain	The study of neuroplasticity – the brain’s ability to change in response to stimuli, activity, experiences, and training	TICKETS

	and Impacts of Learning Music – A Universe Between Our Ears	– is one of the most exciting and promising areas of research in medical science. The infinite complexity of the brain, with its hundred trillion neural connections, remains a vast and largely uncharted landscape. We are still in the early stages of understanding how the brain works, how it develops from infancy through to old age, and how what we do and learn can change it. But one fact is now clear – from cradle to grave, we can and do change our own brains. And in early childhood, when development is especially critical, the experiences and opportunities provided by parents, teachers, and caregivers can decisively shape the path of a child's life. The effects of music on the brain have proven to be an especially rich field of study, yielding startling new insights on the vital role that this essential human art can play in preparing children and even infants for fuller, more resilient futures. And this is just the beginning. Join our panelists as they explore the latest insights into the remarkable interplay between music and the brain, and discover how this powerful art form can support the development and well-being of your brain, and your children's brains. Presenters: Dr. Marco Battaglia, Dr. Laurel Trainor	
1:00-2:00 PM	Why Music Matters for Youth Mental Health	An illuminating keynote double-header exploring music's scientifically validated power to heal, connect, and thrive. This session brings together two extraordinary voices offering complementary perspectives on music's transformative effect on young lives. Dr. Battaglia draws from clinical psychiatry and evidence-based research, while Dr. Stewart approaches the world from pediatric neurology, exploring the role of music in activating synapses and dopamine responses and supporting brain development. Rooted in science, but elevated by deep compassion and rich personal experiences working with young patients, both speakers offer a powerful and hopeful vision of what music can do. With live music! Presenters: Dr. Ellen Waterman, Dr. Marco Battaglia, Dr. Wendy Stewart	TICKETS
2:15-3:30 PM	The Musical Brain and Impacts of Music Learning - Part Two – The Cerebral Symphony Orchestra	We live in a world deeply focused on competition and competitiveness. Policy-makers want to have the most skilled workforce possible to enhance productivity. Parents seek to equip their kids with “marketable skills,” that will enable them to compete in a rapidly evolving technological environment. These pressures converge in public policy, leading to an education system that emphasizes STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). But what are we missing? At the foundation of all learning and all human achievement lies the human brain, and its infinitely complex and varied functions. Does our singular focus on a specific range of academic subjects fully prepare children's brains to achieve their maximum potential, even in those specific areas of future professional activity that we're training them for? Or is something else needed? Dr. Peter Gouzouasis will review his groundbreaking research showing the startling effect studying music has on students' achievements in subjects entirely outside the arts. His study of more than 110,000 students in British Columbia showed profound differences in the academic success of students who had studied music and those who had not. His work compellingly suggests not only deep neural interconnections between disciplines, but also that studying a musical instrument can play a role in supercharging the capacity of young people to excel across a broad range of academic areas. Presenters: Dr. Laurel Trainor, Dr. Peter Gouzouasis	TICKETS
2:45-3:45 PM	Inclusive Music Education: Building	This panel brings together leading educators, researchers and practitioners who are reimagining music education to serve students with exceptionalities. Through diverse approaches, from adaptive instruments to inclusive	TICKETS

	Transformative Music Programs for Students with Exceptionalities	ensemble programs, panelists will share how their programs foster access, autonomy and engagement for students with exceptionalities. This session will explore how music can support communication, emotional expression, and social connection for students across a range of abilities. Designed for educators, administrators, parents and advocates, this discussion will offer practical strategies for developing inclusive music programs and highlight the profound impact these programs have for students, educators, and the broader field of music education. Presenters: Dr. Ellen Waterman, Dr. Erin Parkes, Daniel Coronado, Dr. Adam Bell, Rory McLeod, Michael Carter	
3:45-4:45 PM	Policy, Action and Activism	Over the past three decades, People for Education has grown from a small, grassroots initiative into one of Canada's most respected and influential voices in public education policy. In this keynote, Executive Director Annie Kidder will reflect on the organization's evolution and its impact on shaping equitable, evidence-based education. Through research, policy development, and public engagement, People for Education has influenced provincial and national conversations about the essential role of the arts and music in a well-rounded curriculum. Annie Kidder's keynote will offer a practical look at how long-term advocacy can influence public policy and create lasting systemic change. Attendees will gain concrete strategies for protecting and expanding access to music education and learn how to build broader support through effective policy engagement. Presenters: Annie Kidder, Roberta Guaspari	TICKETS
4:00-5:00 PM	Bringing Music Alive in Schools: Transforming the Lives of Children and Youth Through Music Education	Music programs are a powerful force in the lives of young people, whether it's through building self-confidence, fostering belonging, or helping students navigate the overwhelming challenges of today. And yet, access to meaningful music education remains deeply unequal among children and may become increasingly inaccessible in the future. This roundtable brings together panelists from across Canada, the U.S., the U.K., and Ireland who are reimagining what music programs can look like. Together, the panelists will share insights into how their music programs are bringing about social change and the impacts they have witnessed in the lives and well-being of their students. For educators, administrators, parents and policymakers alike, this session offers a window into what's possible when we commit to making high-quality music education accessible to every child - a right, not a luxury or privilege. Presenters: Emma Cunliffe, Jeannie Hunter, Melanie Doane, Andrea Unrau, Margaret 'Mags' O'Sullivan	TICKETS
5:00-5:15 PM	Final Forum Address	Ken MacLeod has been a leader in the not-for-profit sector for most of his career - as a volunteer, board member, senior manager, donor and consultant. Ken is the former President & CEO of the internationally acclaimed New Brunswick Youth Orchestra, Inc. and led, over more than twenty years, the development of what is today known as one of the most accomplished youth orchestra programs in Canada. Ken is founder of NBYO's Sistema New Brunswick program, recognized in 2015 with the Prime Minister's Award for Social Innovation. Launched in 2009, Sistema NB offers opportunity and hope to children and youth. Sistema NB is expanding annually and operates eleven Sistema NB centers in New Brunswick, serving more than 1,200 children daily. In a recent book, Nuts, Bolts and a Few Loose Screws, by Gair Maxwell, Ken was profiled as the 'Virtuoso of Vision' for his work with the NBYO and Sistema NB. Presenters: Ken MacLeod	TICKETS
5:15-6:00 PM	"Super-producer"	The term "super-producer" gets thrown around a lot, but in Bob Ezrin's case, it's well earned. The Toronto-born	TICKETS

	Bob Ezrin: A Challenge and a Plea	musical mastermind has been behind the board for many of rock’s most legendary albums, among them Alice Cooper’s Billion Dollar Babies, KISS’ Destroyer, and Pink Floyd’s The Wall. But Ezrin isn’t just about making hits, he’s also been a vocal champion of music education in Canada, working tirelessly with MusiCounts, to keep the beat alive in schools facing ongoing governmental arts funding cuts. Presenters: Bob Ezrin	
7:30 - 10:15 PM	Concert Series: AR Rahman: Up Close and Personal	A.R. Rahman is a living legend – a musical innovator whose impact spans continents and generations. Known for his extraordinary ability to fuse traditional Indian music with contemporary sounds, he’s earned iconic nicknames like the “Mozart of Madras” and “Isai Puyal” (“Music Storm.”) A two-time Academy Award winner, and six-time winner of the Indian National Award for Best Music Composer, A.R. is beloved by over a billion fans worldwide. His work ranges from epic film scores and orchestral works, to collaborations with the likes of Mick Jagger, Coldplay, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Hans Zimmer. He has scored 145 films from indie gems to Bollywood blockbusters including the Oscar-winning soundtrack for Slumdog Millionaire. The soul of A.R.’s music is rooted in deep spiritual values, and his art is a force for harmony around the world. This is a rare and intimate opportunity to experience this music master in concert, joined by his brilliant band.	TICKETS