

Report on the InterSchool Orchestras of New York's Exceptional 2014/2015 Season



The 2014/2015 season provided exceptional experiences for the students of the InterSchool Orchestras of New York from beginning to end. For the fourth year in a row, we beat all previous enrollment records with the participation of 361 students. Our comprehensive youth orchestra program included the ISO Symphony's tour to Scotland and the grand finale concert at Carnegie Hall for all eight ensembles. We awarded financial aid to every student needing it to take part in the tour and the regular season, \$240,920 in total.

Touring Scotland: "Nothing Short of Spectacular"

That was the description of the performance tour to Scotland by student blogger Aidan Landauer. It was indeed a spectacular and unique experience for our students. In planning the first international tour in ten years, we wanted to provide opportunities for students to get to know and work with students from other countries, which led us to apply to the Aberdeen International Youth Festival.

Our students stayed in dormitories at the university along with participants from 17 other countries, who all socialized at late night dance parties. More significantly, the ISO Symphony shared a concert with the Amersfoort Youth Orchestra from The Netherlands in the Aberdeen Music Hall - one of the legendary performance halls in Europe. After each orchestra played independently, they joined together to give stirring performances of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Russian Easter Overture*, Bernstein's *Candide Overture*, and selections from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. ISO students brilliantly performed the solos in the Rimsky, and ISO's Jeffrey Grogan led the combined orchestras at break-neck speed in an encore of *Candide*.



We also gave concerts in Braemar in a mountain setting worthy of *Brigadoon* and in nearby Elgin. The ISO Quartet (Orliana Morag, Julia Zhong, Isaac Scheinfeld, and Amory Benjamin) took time out from the regular schedule to give a recital at Aberdeen's Royal Children's Hospital – a moving experience for all involved. Students recorded their reactions to the trip on the blog, ISOinScotland.wordpress.com, where you can still read about the trip and find links to performance videos and news articles.

Performing for Audiences throughout the City



Only a month after returning from the tour, the regular season began in September with retreats for all the ensembles. Sectionals, full rehearsals, and opportunities to get to know fellow musicians combined to kick-start the learning process.

The first opportunity to perform came with the traditional **PhilharMONSTER!** Halloween concert, held in partnership with Symphony Space. This year the Concert Orchestra and ISO Symphony performed (in costume, of course) a dramatic program, which culminated with music from *Star Wars* conducted by Darth Vader (aka Jeffrey Grogan) with a lightsaber. Violist Ian Niederhoffer made his conducting debut with a selection from Grieg's *Peer Gynt Suite*. A few weeks later, the ISO Symphony was the guest artist for the gala of Young Audiences International at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. The supporters of this important arts education organization gave the students a standing ovation.

We presented a **Winter Festival of Ensembles** on December 8 and 9 at Symphony Space, in which all eight large ensembles and the ISO String Quartet performed. The beginner orchestras thrilled listeners with “Let it Go,” from the movie *Frozen*, and the Carnegie Hill Orchestra took us on a “Dark Adventure,” while the Symphony brought drama to the concert with Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture*. The Band’s performance of Vaughn Williams *English Folk Song Suite* let everyone leave humming a tune. ISO Constance Mensch Concerto Competition Winners **Elizabeth Yeoh-Wang** (harp) and **Lena-Marie Stoger** (violin) gave memorable performances with the ISO Symphony, and **Lila Holyoke** (cello) performed her solo with Concert Orchestra.



After the holiday break, all energies were concentrated on the May 3 **Edward and Elaine Altman Concert** at famed **Carnegie Hall**. We decided to make it more interesting for the students (and the audience) by mixing and matching ensembles and musicians. The four beginner orchestras (130 musicians strong) performed as one mass orchestra. The sound check that morning was the only time they all played together, but you never would have known it from the magnificent performance they gave.

Carnegie Hill and Concert Orchestras joined forces for *Tocatina*. Musicians from the Symphony and the Band supplemented the wind section of the Concert Orchestra for its intense performance of the finale from Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, and a number of alumni were reunited with the ISO Symphony for its finale, two movements from the Mussorgsky/Ravel *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Guest soloist Richard Stoltzman made it clear why he is one of the most revered clarinetists of all time, performing two Gershwin selections and totally captivating musicians and audience alike. The concert was a huge success, coming within a few seats of selling out and raising \$207,000, thanks to a ticket selling contest won by the unstoppable Morningside Orchestra.



Magic also happened two weeks earlier when the ISO Symphony came together with the Turtle Bay Orchestra to rehearse their repertory. We plan to provide more opportunities like this next season for the more accomplished students to mentor and inspire the younger ones.

In addition to the concerts described above, ISO ensembles performed 16 additional concerts in public schools, nursing homes, and parks. Altogether, more than 7,000 people heard ISO’s young musicians perform!

Providing Music Lessons

The ensemble program dominates ISO’s activities, but we also provide subsidies through three programs. The Endangered Instrument Program encourages students to learn and progress on the less common instruments, including oboe, bassoon, viola, and contrabass by subsidizing lessons, and in some cases free loan of an instrument. The Janet Wolfe Scholarships provide music lessons for students of African American and Latino heritage, and the Teaching

Internship Program provides free lessons to students at Ella Baker Elementary School. Those lessons are taught by ISO coaches, as well as by interns drawn from the ISO Symphony.

Raising Resources

The second annual Practice-a-thon brought in a record \$27,000 and students clocked a total of 1,001 hours of practice time over the two-week period! The Queens East Orchestra won the competition for most average hours practiced.

As mentioned above, the Carnegie Hall concert raised \$207,000, the third highest income from an event in ISO's 43-year history. Donors celebrated the success of the concert at a reception following the performance.



ISO's first president, David Hume, passed away in February, and in his honor we established the David Hume Fund for the Future, which will help us reach further into underserved communities, provide scholarships and lessons, and exceptional performance opportunities. More than \$37,000 was raised for the Fund.

Generous contributions had never been so important, as ISO's budget grew to more than \$900,000 for the season (up from \$725,000 the prior year), with the tour to Scotland and the Carnegie Hall performance as the most costly activities.

Providing Opportunities

The 2014/2015 season was characteristic of the varied program that the InterSchool Orchestras of New York provides its students. Most importantly, every qualified student was able to participate through generous financial aid. More than half of the students received financial aid or tuition scholarships and 60% of those taking part in the Scotland trip received some remission of fees. Witnessing the accomplishments of the students and their reactions to performing to a packed Carnegie Hall or taking their first trip abroad is immensely rewarding to everyone who works with ISO. All those who generously support ISO share in this success. We couldn't do it without them, and we are very grateful for their support.



InterSchool Orchestras of New York, 2014/2015

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Contributors

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Photos: [Page 1](#): ISO Symphony and Amersfoort Youth Orchestra take their bows in Aberdeen. Students and guide visit Edinburgh Castle. ISO Symphony at PhilharMONSTER. [Page 2](#): Morningside Orchestra performs at Symphony Space. The combined beginner orchestras conducted by Joseph Seifers at Carnegie Hall (this and other Carnegie Hall photos by Adam Hume). Richard Stoltzman rehearses with ISO Symphony. [Page 3](#): Board members Jacob and Ety Bousso and Brenda Kuehne at the post-Carnegie reception. Symphonic Band with Brian Worsdale conducting. Combined beginner orchestras with Matthew Rotjan conducting. Carnegie Hill Orchestra, conductor Steven Rothen, and Thomas Bolster, typist performing "The Typewriter." Concert Orchestra with Lawrence Markiewicz. [Page 4](#): Founder Annabelle Prager and Board President Barbara Tracy.

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