



BEYOND TRADITION:

MUSIC WE SEE OURSELVES IN

Islander Middle School Orchestra
Mercer Island School District
NAfME NW Conference, Spokane, WA

February 15, 2025

2:00 PM

“The Mercer Island School District is proud to prioritize and support the arts as an integral part of a well-rounded education, with Islander Middle School serving as a shining example of the transformative power of the performing arts. Our district recognizes that the arts foster creativity, collaboration, and cultural awareness, offering students a vital platform for self-expression and connection. At Islander Middle School, the orchestra program exemplifies this commitment, not only by achieving excellence in performance but also by embracing diversity in its musical repertoire. By spotlighting artists who have been historically marginalized, the IMS Orchestra ensures that students can see themselves reflected in the music they play and experience a deeper connection to the stories and cultures behind the compositions.

“The selection of the IMS Orchestra to perform at the NAFME Conference is a testament to the outstanding quality of our program and the dedication of our students and educators. This prestigious honor underscores the value our community places on the performing arts and highlights our commitment to creating inclusive spaces where all voices are celebrated. Through their work, the IMS Orchestra inspires pride and demonstrates the powerful role of the arts in shaping empathetic, culturally literate students prepared to make meaningful contributions to our community and to the world beyond Mercer Island.”

- MaryJo Budzius, IMS Principal

“Under the skilled direction of Sarah Hart, the Islander Middle School Strings Ensemble has achieved remarkable recognition as one of only two middle school orchestras selected to perform at the prestigious 2025 National Association for Music Education’s All-NW Conference. Representing the Northwest region—spanning six states—this honor highlights the extraordinary talent and dedication of these young musicians.

“Their performance is more than an achievement; it’s an opportunity to advocate for what middle school orchestra students can achieve with exceptional teaching and support. Before a packed audience of accomplished music educators, the ensemble will showcase innovation in pedagogy, explore new musical styles, and highlight compositions and arrangements that inspire the next generation of musicians. This performance reflects not only their exemplary musicianship but also the vibrant culture of music education in the Mercer Island School District.

“This milestone would not be possible without the unwavering commitment of our music educators, from kindergarten through high school, whose passion and dedication inspire students every day. It also reflects the steadfast support of parents and our community, who understand the transformative power of the arts. This recognition by NAFME is a testament to what we can accomplish when educators, families, and community members rally around a shared vision, working together to cultivate creativity, excellence, and joy in our students’ lives.”

-Fred Rundle, MISD Superintendent

The following program aims to center historically marginalized voices and to highlight the cultures, traditions, and identities of the students and families of the Mercer Island Orchestra Program.

“This is precisely the time when artists go to work. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal.” – Toni Morrison

High Strung 🌟 Adrian Gordon

Yijia Huang, violin solo; James Kern, cello solo; Zain Burklin, drum kit

Acharanga 🌟 Reena Esmail

Raahi Dalal, tabla

Chinese Folk Song Suite, II: The Flowing Stream 🌟 arr. Chen Yi

Emerald Zhang, guzheng

La Muerte de Neftolio 🌟 Augusto Lozano, arr. Angelo Linguine

Zain Burklin, snare; Delaney Kinsella, guacharaca; Tala Ali, hand drum; Emily Arevalo Tamayo, Vivienne Lee, Calvin Piispanen, Sam Esmaili, maracas

Good Luck, Babe 🌟 Chappell Roan, arr. Emily Westman

Noah Tan, Elisabeth Yu, Calvin Piispanen, Charlotte McMichael, Karthik Subramaniam, Rachel Hoole, Shiyun Ding, improvised soloists; Zain Burklin, drum kit

“Music is a powerful tool for activism and social change.” – Jon Batiste



Sarah Hart (she/her/Ms.), NBCT, began playing the violin at the age of ten in her public school's fifth-grade orchestra program. She was the concertmaster of the Oklahoma All-State orchestra in her senior year of high school, and upon graduation, attended the University of North Texas to pursue a degree in Music Education. Hart then taught orchestra in the Bryan/College Station, Texas Independent School Districts. After several years as an educator, Hart returned to school at Texas A&M University to earn a master's degree in English with emphases in non-canonical women's writing and linguistics. She graduated summa cum laude, and then continued her career in the Houston Independent School District teaching English. Following this, she worked as a stay-at-home parent (the hardest job there is), and later in communication and fundraising/development for Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, a 501(c)3, to provide Meals on Wheels, facilitate interfaith relations, and coordinate refugee resettlement. After relocating to the Pacific Northwest in 2016, Hart became the orchestra director at Islander Middle School in Mercer Island in 2018. Since then, she has also worked as conductor with the Seattle Youth Symphony's Summer Music Program, served as a strings coach with Cascades Youth Symphony and the Bellevue, Edmonds, and Northshore School Districts, and maintained an active private studio. A thought leader on diversity, equity, and inclusion, she has published articles on these topics in the *Voice of Washington Music Educators* and has presented on student-led collaboration in chamber ensembles at WMEA's annual conference in 2024. Hart was a quarterfinalist for the 2025 Grammy Music Educator Award, and serves frequently as an adjudicator and clinician in various regions around Washington State. She will present as part of a panel at the national ASTA conference this spring on *Coalition Building: Gathering Women's/Non-Binary Stories for Equity in Orchestra Workplaces*. In her spare time, Hart enjoys travel, reading, cooking, and hanging out with friends and her family of seven (that's five kids!) plus two musically collaborative Bernese Mountain Dogs: Bowie (as in David) and Iggy (as in Pop).

Bryan Kolk is a music educator, conductor, and bassist from Michigan. He received a Bachelors of Music Education and Masters in Double Bass performance from the University of Michigan. He studied conducting at the Pierre Monteux School, the Sherborne Summer School in England, and the University of Michigan Wind Conducting Symposium. He has directed school orchestra programs in both Michigan and Washington and is currently the Orchestra Director at Mercer Island High School and Co-Director at Islander Middle School. For the past five years he has worked for the Seattle Youth Symphony Orchestra (SYSO) as director of the Debut Symphony Orchestra. He also conducts for the West Seattle Community Orchestras (WSCO), an organization that brings students and adults together to make music in a full orchestra setting. Bryan has previously served as Assistant Conductor of the Dearborn Youth Symphony, Everett Youth Symphony, and Bainbridge Island Youth Symphony. He has taught in several school districts in the Seattle area including Seattle Public Schools, Lake Washington School District, and Shoreline School District. During the summers, he conducts the Masterworks Orchestra at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Michigan and has been a part of the administration of SYSO's Marrowstone Summer Music Festival since 2011. In his free time, he loves to go hiking in the Cascades with his partner and their energetic dogs Pepper and Tabitha.



"I awna pay a biowin!" Caitlin Olive's first sentence was the start of a lifelong obsession with orchestra. Caitlin studied the Suzuki Method under Mihoko Hirata, Dr. Suzuki's first ambassador to North America, for 16 years. She then attended DePauw University, studying violin performance and improvisation, before earning a BA from the University of Washington in 2012.

In 2020, Caitlin and her husband, Locke Bell, founded Olive Tree Music, a nonprofit designed to bridge the gap between public school music programs and the music education every student deserves. Olive Tree Music hosts Beginning Orchestra and Rock Orchestra Camps on Mercer Island each summer. Scholarships are available for camp tuition, instrument rentals, and supplies.

Currently, Caitlin serves as Orchestra Assistant for the 5th-8th grade orchestra program at Islander Middle School on Mercer Island, WA. She is also Interim Assistant Conductor of the Rainbow City Orchestra in Seattle, WA, which highlights and celebrates marginalized artists and identities while sharing their performances with artists that represent, uplift, and excite LGBTQIA+ communities.

When Caitlin is not teaching or conducting, she is playing her NS 5-string violin. On a typical Friday night, you'll find her rocking out with one of her bands: Merchant Mariner, OLIZAR, or Casting Shadows. Merchant Mariner's sophomore album *We Are Why We Can't Have Nice Things* is set for release in 2025. Caitlin's hit single, "Paper Bag," is available on all streaming platforms and on Olive Tree Records. On those rare sunny Saturdays with no commitments, Caitlin loves to cuddle Napoleon the Orange (tabby), free jam with her niece, Jackie, on drums, and watch *90 Day Fiancé*.

www.olivetreemusic.org | www.caitlinolive.com | www.olivetreerecords.com



The Mercer Island Orchestra Program in Mercer Island, WA, serves 325 students in grades 5-12. Instruction begins via twice-weekly heterogeneous, before-school lessons for both beginning and advanced (those with prior experience on string instruments) fifth-grade students. In sixth grade and beyond, students attend orchestra daily. Our program maintains two full-time teachers, Sarah Hart and Bryan Kolk, and one full-time orchestra assistant at the middle school, Caitlin Olive, who is largely supported through generous community donations. The Mercer Island Orchestra Program endeavors to forward the tradition of orchestral musicianship through a collaborative lens of feminism, anti-racism, inclusivity, and equity. Learn more at <https://www.miorchestra.org>.

We would like to thank the following members of our community for their support to make this performance possible:

Dr. Fred Rundle, Superintendent
Mercer Island School District School Board
MaryJo Budzius & Aaron Miller, IMS Co-Principals
Becky Mullvian & Katie Gallagher, IMS Assistant Principals
Weston Lucas, Learning Services Coordinator/Fine Arts Director
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The MISD Band Staff, Percussion Support
Vicki White-Miltun, Mentor Extraordinaire
Nathan Rødahl, Supporting Clinician
Jerilynn Harris & Emily Wickman, Supporting Artists-in-Residence
Karl Olson, Latin Percussion Educator
Ravi Albright & Sampada Bhalerao, Hindustani Percussion Educators
Xuemei Jiang, Guzheng Educator
Sean Curran & The MISD Tech/AV Department
The Mercer Island Orchestra Boosters
The Mercer Island Schools Foundation
The Mercer Island Fine Arts Advisory Council
The Islander Middle School PTSA
The MISD Transportation Department
The MISD Communications Department
Robin Walker, Locke Bell, & RJ Stidham, recording/remixing support
Families, friends, & chaperones of the Mercer Island Orchestra Program

Learn more about our composers & arrangers:

Adrian Gordon website - <https://www.leapyearmusiconline.com/>

Reena Esmail website - <https://www.reenaesmail.com/>

Emily Westman music - emilywestmanmusic@gmail.com; IG: @westmanarts

To expand your lens:

Decolonizing the Music Room - <https://www.decolonizingthemusicroom.org/>

Institute for Composer Diversity Database - <https://www.composerdiversity.com/>

Thanks to our donors and sponsors for supporting orchestra
in Mercer Island School District!



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Hammond Ashley Violins
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Julie Hsieh & David Figatner
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Gouri Mishra

Mr. Viraj Mody
Mr. & Mrs. Jeannie Pae

Mohit & Ojaswani Suley
Jackie & Dave Tan

Chamber 500+

Madhuri & Karthik Anbalagan
Ruby & Syed Azeem
Zach & Michelle Bernson
Chloe Eunyong Choe
Melissa & Neer Danielli
Kate Delimitros
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