

Sensory-friendly orchestral concerts for the whole family starting Oct. 24

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SDSU and San Diego Symphony design year-long concert series for children with developmental and learning differences



Families gather to attend the San Diego Symphony Orchestra's Symphony Kids Series (Photo: San Diego Symphony)

Over the past three years, San Diego State University Center for Autism has collaborated with the San Diego Symphony to host a year-long series of inclusive, child-friendly concerts at Jacobs Music Center. The new concert season starts with a spotlight on the string instrument family on Saturday, Oct. 24.

The San Diego Symphony Orchestra's [Symphony Kids Series](#) was co-designed by **Inna Fishman**, director of [SDSU Center for Autism](#) and associate research professor of psychology at SDSU.

The performances are tailored to families with children 5 years old and younger, offering an engaging and approachable introduction to the world of music for all children, including those with sensory and learning differences. The experience starts with hands-on instrument

exploration, with San Diego Youth Symphony's ChIMES program, and craft activities before families head into the concert hall for 30 minutes of live music played by members of the San Diego Symphony Orchestra.

The performances, hosted by **Nathalia Palis**, LA-based educator, songwriter and music therapist, include interactive sing-alongs, musical games and dances, and children can choose to sit, stand or visit a nearby quiet room or reading station for breaks throughout the concerts. Kits made by [KultureCity](#) containing support items such as sound-reducing headphones and fidget toys are also available upon request during the performances.



SDSU Center for Autism members trained in behavioral therapy serve as “concert buddies” at each event, offering professional support for families as they enjoy the show.

“Families with young children with autism often feel unwelcome in public spaces and continue to face stigma from strangers who misunderstand neurodivergent behaviors. Sensory triggers such as bright lights, sudden noises and busy environments can be overwhelming and overstimulating for their children,” said Fishman. “Therefore, it was very important to create a safe and fun space so these families feel part of the community and can expose their kids to the world-class music hall and musicians.”

SDSU Center for Autism offers clinical and educational services for children with developmental disabilities and their families, in addition to conducting research and training on autism spectrum and related disorders. Each year since the Symphony Kids Series

started, the Center has received tickets through the San Diego Symphony's [Music Connects](#) program, which enables the families it supports to attend the shows .

“One of the most valuable things about this partnership has been the opportunity to learn from Dr. Fishman and her team at the SDSU Center for Autism,” said **Laura Reynolds**, VP of Impact and Innovation at the San Diego Symphony. “Their expertise has shaped everything from how we prepare families for their visit to how we invite children to participate during the concert. Whether a child wants to sit quietly and listen, move and dance with the music, or take a break in a quieter space, we want them to feel that there's a place for them here. It's a wonderful example of what can happen when arts organizations and community partners bring their knowledge together to create something neither could accomplish alone.”



The San Diego Symphony Kids Series is sponsored by the Dr. Seuss Foundation and U.S. Bank, and each concert costs \$24 per person to attend. The 2026-27 concert series continues into winter and spring with three more shows featuring brass, percussion and wind instruments.