

HighLife

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First *notes*

Very Young Composers program features compositions by local kids performed by professional musicians

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imagine you're 12 years old and composing music for the first time.
Then imagine you're doing it with members of the New York Philharmonic, some of the world's most accomplished musicians from the world's finest symphony orchestra.

Then imagine they're not playing your music the way you imagined and you, a 12 year old, have to stop them and tell them, "You're doing it wrong."

And imagine how good it feels when those musicians smile, offer encouragement and your music floats across the room.

That's what it's like to be part of Very Young Composers, a program sponsored by The Youth Foundation, the New York Philharmonic and the Playground Ensemble. Conrad Kehn is with The Playground Ensemble in Denver and in his years with Very Young Composers he has helped kids create more than 100 original compositions.

"We want to try to capture their childhood creativity," Kehn said. "It also helps them organize ideas from front to back. Kids need to know that they have a voice and their ideas are important. They also learn to organize their ideas and present them in public. That's very empowering."



ABOVE: This might be Heidi Brosius' first time at a Very Young Composers workshop, but she is no stranger to the piano. She has been playing for four years.



LEFT: Ignacio Velasco is a participant in this summer's Very Young Composers program. The program combines the original compositions of young local children with the talent of professional musicians.

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if you go...

What: Very Young Composers concerts.

Where: Avon Public Library and Vail Public Library.

When: 1 p.m. today in Avon, 1 p.m. Friday in Vail.

Cost: Free.

More information: Visit The Youth Foundation's website at www.vvf.org.

MUSICAL ROOTS

Jon Deak started it all when he was the principal bassist with the New York Philharmonic. He actually launched the program in 1995 when he was in Denver as a composer in residence with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra. He took it back to New York with him, then brought it to the valley in 2006 when he returned with the New York Philharmonic.

"It helps them develop independence and leadership," Deak said.

The Very Young Composers really are very young. The program begins in third grade.

The pieces tended to be short, like the composers. The kids say starting is harder than finishing, and their music is whatever they say it is.

The program includes 20 kids this year, and you'll hear 16 compositions, all relatively short. Some kids have been in the program for four or five years, and those pieces will be a little more complex, Kehn said.

Kids don't need any musical background, Kehn said. They create their own musical piece from start to finish, during a week-long workshop.

"They can sing it, hum it, play it on their smart phone. ... It doesn't matter," Kehn said.

With the help of teaching artists, students learn some music theory and how to compose for different instruments. Then, they write their own story and set the story to music in a

step-by-step process.

They get some help from Elizabeth Sadilek-Labenski, a Vail Valley resident playing flute; Jason Rodon, a percussionist from Breckenridge; Peter Kenote, who plays viola with the New York Philharmonic; and Thomas Smith, who plays trumpet with the New York Philharmonic.

Deak and Kehn will conduct.

Besides Vail, Denver and New York, the program is in China, Japan, Korea, Venezuela, Finland and the United Kingdom.

"These young composers' works contain a detectable local accent, distinct from their counterparts in New York and around the world, and it is a pleasure to help them develop their compositional voices," Deak said. "When children are free to imagine, when their creativity is taken seriously, you find that they have the potential to create real works of art."