

# Juneau String Ensembles

Student & Family Handbook

2025-2026

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Juneau String Ensembles (JSE)

The Juneau String Ensembles is a non-profit organization in Juneau, Alaska, focusing on the development of young string musicians through ensembles..

Our Artistic Director, Guohua Xia, established the first youth chamber music quartet in the mid-1990s in Juneau. Comprising just a handful of young players, the “Fireweed String Quartet” played its first community concert in 1997 and traveled to Haines to perform. By the year 2000, the interest blossomed into a full string ensemble. In 2002, a younger group of aspiring musicians came together in the second ensemble. During the fall of 2004, an entry level ensemble was established due to the successes of the other ensembles and the growing community interest in string playing by younger musicians.

This year, Ursa Major and Aurora Strings are rehearsing, performing, and providing opportunities for music education and growth for young Juneau musicians.

## Mission

The mission of JSE is to enrich the musical experience of Juneau’s youth through education, travel, and performance by developing and promoting music ensembles. JSE strives to:

- Provide students with an opportunity for musical enjoyment by nurturing a heightened awareness of the value of music in their lives and the community;
- Encourage personal development by improving individual performance and ensemble skills while working with a peer group that has attained a similar level of expertise and talent;
- Promote discipline and a sense of commitment;
- Offer professional music guidance to the members through workshops;
- Share accomplishments within the community with performances at a variety of venues;
- Serve as goodwill ambassadors beyond our community at state, national, and international levels; and,
- Collaborate with other ensembles both in and out of Juneau.

# Organization and Structure

**Membership** Young students in Juneau String Ensembles are led by Artistic Director, Guo Hua Xia. Membership can be recommended by any local string teacher, but final approval and placements are made by the JSE Artistic Director. Auditions are held in August each year, and as needed at other times. Advancement of students into ensembles is made by the recommendation and approval of the JSE Artistic Director, as well as seating arrangements within sections. Members in JSE are musicians who are participating in an ensemble.

**Board of Directors** The JSE is governed by a Board of Directors that oversee and administer JSE business pursuant to the Alaska State Statutes 10.20, the JSE Articles of Incorporation and JSE Bylaws. Positions on the Board include President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and additional members as needed. The Board shall be comprised of a diverse membership to include parents and community members.

**JSE Ensembles and Quartets** JSE may provide several ensemble opportunities for young string musicians for a variety of skill levels:

- Aurora Strings is an advanced-level ensemble comprised of mostly high school-aged musicians and led by the Artistic Director.
- Ursa Major is an intermediate-level ensemble comprised of young string musicians led by the Artistic Director.

Mr Xia will place students in ensembles based on consultation with the student's private string teacher, the student's performance, attendance and behavior in previous years, and short, informal auditions.

During a student's first year performing with Aurora Strings, they are also expected to continue to rehearse and perform with Ursa Major. This provides our intermediate students with the challenge of the advanced ensemble alongside gaining leadership skills while participating in our intermediate ensemble. Extenuating circumstances may provide exceptions to this policy and will be reviewed by the board on a case-by-case basis. Students playing in both large ensembles will only pay the Aurora Strings tuition fee.

JSE regularly gets invited to perform at community events that cannot accommodate all members of Ursa Major or Aurora Strings. On these occasions, Xia will invite a sub-group of musicians to participate, chosen at his discretion. These performances often require additional rehearsals but will not involve additional fees. Not all JSE musicians will be given these opportunities every year.

Mr. Xia may also provide support for smaller chamber groups, such as quartets, upon request, for a fee paid directly to him, and as his availability allows. These groups are not part of JSE, but may perform as part of Chamber Music Night at Xia's invitation. Tuition for coaching these groups should be paid directly to Mr Xia, and if they perform for a fee, this fee should be paid directly to Mr Xia or the musicians involved and not to JSE. (Families involved should work with JDHS and ASAA to confirm that receiving payment for performances does not affect All-State Orchestra eligibility.)

## **Rehearsal, Performance and Attendance Policies**

**Communication** Throughout the school year, details regarding rehearsals and performances will be communicated via BAND, as well as verbally by the Artistic Director during rehearsals. Urgent information will also be posted on BAND.. Please ensure that at least one parent/guardian is in the ensemble's BAND group and has notifications turned on. A second parent/guardian and the musician themselves are also welcome to join the BAND group. Communications for each group will be distributed by a lead parent or JSE board member. The lead parent for your group serves as an intermediary between the Artistic Director and your student.

Ursa Major Lead Parent: Jason Amundson (907) 209-5200

Aurora Strings Lead Parent: Melissa Davis (907) 942-5413

If you need assistance contacting the lead parent, please email [JuneauStringEnsembles@gmail.com](mailto:JuneauStringEnsembles@gmail.com).

Occasionally, information may be sent via text message. This is especially likely if Xia sets up an additional rehearsal for a small group of musicians. In this instance, students themselves may be included in a text group only if their parent/guardian is also in the group. Minors should not text or email JSE staff or board members without a parent/guardian cc'd on the email or text.

**Rehearsals** Aurora Strings and Ursa Major rehearse regularly during the school year, and

extra rehearsals will be scheduled prior to performances to support student preparation. The groups rehearse on a weekly basis during the school year, and the rehearsal calendar is set annually.

Small chamber groups, such as quartets, will schedule rehearsal times and locations independently. The Artistic Director will provide support as needed on a case-by-case basis.

Transportation to and from rehearsal and performance locations is the responsibility of the parent. Musicians should arrive at rehearsals at least 10 minutes prior to starting time for warm-ups and tuning. Parents (drivers) are responsible for providing adult supervision for early arrivers. Musicians must be picked up promptly at the completion of rehearsal.

Members are expected to come to rehearsals prepared and with their music and instruments in order. Please bring a pencil. Musicians should plan to spend time outside of rehearsals practicing the music in order to be prepared for rehearsals and performances.

**Performances** Transportation to and from performance locations is the responsibility of the musician and their family (or ride-share support family). Musicians are expected to arrive at performance locations 60 minutes before concert time or as otherwise directed. If a musician misses rehearsals, dress rehearsals, or arrives late to rehearsals and performances, their participation in performances will be at the discretion of the Artistic Director.

**Musician performance dress code** For formal concerts, Aurora Strings wear all black attire, (including shoes and socks/hose). See detailed dress code attached to this document. Ursa Major wears white tops and black bottoms (including black shoes and socks/hose). Dress code may vary depending on performance venue, and will be included in communications from the artistic director and lead parent. For more informal community events, JSE t-shirts will be worn with black bottom half. These t-shirts will be available for new members at a subsidized cost of \$10. Please do not substitute a JSE hoodie or other merch for the official JSE t-shirt. Assistance with dress code is available. Please contact the lead parent for your group for additional information.

**Attendance** Success of each ensemble group is dependent on regular rehearsal attendance by participating musicians as well as consistent practice of assigned music at home. When you join JSE and are accepted into an ensemble you are making a commitment to your fellow musicians to work together and create quality music together. Please make rehearsal attendance a priority.

In case of planned or unplanned absences, the musician's parent/guardian should contact Mr Xia as soon as possible to notify him of the absence. Mr Xia: 907 209 1962.

**Private Lessons** JSE highly recommends all our musicians also take private lessons. There is an expectation in our group that students will have support to work on the orchestra music outside of JSE rehearsals. JSE provides ensemble coaching, but musicians will not progress with important techniques such as shifting and vibrato without regular individual lessons. Please let us know if you need help finding or paying for a private instructor.

**School Orchestra** JSE ensembles are an addition to, and not a replacement for school orchestra class. JSE recommends that all musicians participate in their school orchestra when available.

## Tuition and Fees

Tuition and fees are established and outlined on the annual registration forms for each group. Students playing in both large ensembles will only pay the Aurora Strings tuition fee.

Membership in each ensemble is for the year, with a 25% reduction for additional siblings. Tuition for musicians can be paid in full at the beginning of the season, or paid in two installments at the beginning of each semester, typically August and January. JSE accepts both check and credit card payments. The musician's family will pay all fees when making online payments. Credits and refunds are not offered for missed rehearsals or performances. Juneau String Ensembles is not able to offer a tuition refund if a musician decides to drop out or discontinue ensemble, other than in exceptional circumstances (determined at the Board's discretion).

Tuition fees are due by the 4th rehearsal of the semester. There is no prorated option for students who join later in the semester or cannot attend all rehearsals. Xia may invite guest musicians to attend a limited number of rehearsals starting later in a semester at his discretion. Musicians who are Xia's invited guests pay a personally negotiated tuition fee directly to Mr Xia and are not members of JSE. After one semester, a guest musician must formally join a JSE ensemble to continue attending JSE rehearsals.

JSE alumni may be invited by Mr Xia to continue participating in JSE. These musicians are guests at our rehearsals and performances and not required to pay tuition. JSE does not recruit college students. College-age musicians who move to Juneau are encouraged to contact the Juneau Symphony for information about opportunities for lessons and ensemble playing. All JSE alumni are invited to return annually for the Aurora Strings Christmas Eve performance. Please contact Mr Xia for details.

Small chamber groups, such as quartets, can request support from the Artistic Director for a fee paid directly to Mr Xia. In preparation for the JSE Chamber Music night, or other events needing small groups of musicians, Mr Xia may form select small groups at his discretion that practice outside of regular rehearsals at no additional charge.

*\*\*JSE welcomes all young string musicians, and no one is turned away due to inability to pay\*\**

Please visit the online registration form for Juneau Strings Ensembles to learn more about our partial tuition waiver options.

## **Student Expectations**

During rehearsals, performances and other JSE events, we expect musicians to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Attend as many rehearsals as possible;
- Arrive 10 minutes before each rehearsal starts for tuning and warm up;
- Bring your instrument, music and a pencil to every rehearsal;
- Cell phones on silent and put away, and distractions minimized during rehearsals, breaks, and performances;
- Follow the director's instructions and refrain from talking during rehearsals and performances;
- Be ready to play when directed, stop playing as soon as the conductor stops, and do not play your instrument while Mr Xia is talking or other sections are rehearsing.
- Practice ensemble music outside of rehearsal;
- Utilize respectful, considerate behavior and language towards fellow musicians, parents, and directors at all times in addition to treating instruments and equipment with respect;
- Respect our rehearsal and performance spaces. Do not touch anything that doesn't belong to JSE without permission.

Disruptive or disrespectful behavior will be addressed as follows:

1. Musicians will be given a verbal warning.
2. Musician will be given a second verbal warning, and the parent/guardian will be notified. The musician may be dismissed from the rehearsal or performance, as well as the

parent notification.

3. Musician's parent may be required to attend all rehearsals with the musician.
4. Lastly at the discretion of the music director, failure to adhere to student expectations may result in removal from the ensemble with no refund of fees.

**Prohibited Behavior** The following major violations will not be tolerated by JSE. Musicians may be put on probation, suspended, or dismissed from rehearsals and performances. Disciplinary actions will be taken immediately for any musician who:

- Illegally possesses or uses drugs, alcohol and/or tobacco at any JSE function or who is convicted of such action occurring anywhere;
- Possesses a firearm or weapon at any JSE function;
- Uses profane language or obscene gestures; or,
- Repeatedly behaves in a manner that does not comply with the Student Expectations during rehearsals and/or performances.

JSE may terminate membership without refund for any member who demonstrates any of the above behaviors, at the discretion of the Artistic Director.

## Fundraising

JSE may elect to conduct fundraising performances to support opportunities such as travel for its members or bringing other ensemble groups to Juneau for collaboration. At all routine performances, JSE will collect donations, or sell tickets at prices set by the board, to support operating and performance expenses.

Musicians are expected to participate in fundraising events during the year.

## Parent Volunteers

As a non-profit, JSE is run by a group of volunteers who assist with everything from set up and take down for performances, serving as lead parents that facilitate communication within the ensembles, and serving as board members. If you have a talent or interest in assisting with various tasks, please email [JuneauStringEnsembles@gmail.com](mailto:JuneauStringEnsembles@gmail.com) to express your interest!

One parent volunteer must be present at every rehearsal alongside Mr Xia. The parent will be responsible for monitoring student arrival and departure, bringing and serving a basic snack (box of granola bars etc), helping with set-up and clean-up, and supporting Mr. Xia in any other tasks requested. **Each family is asked to sign up as the rehearsal volunteer once per semester.** Families are welcome to quietly observe any rehearsals.

## Travel

JSE strives to provide touring opportunities outside of Juneau to its members every few years as interest and opportunity allow. Not all groups may travel during a calendar year. The ensemble group, or members, invited to travel during a given year will be made at the determination of the Artistic Director.

In order to travel, students traveling with JSE must meet the following qualifications:

- Behavior and attitude – Students must demonstrate appropriate behavior and attitude at rehearsals and performances; students must be committed to being a positive representative of JSE and the community of Juneau.
- Responsibility – Students must show responsibility by attending and being on time for rehearsals, performances, and fundraising opportunities and/or taking initiative for communicating with directors and other JSE members.

**Travel Money/Expenses for Members** Although there may be instances where some or all of a JSE member's travel expenses will be covered by JSE fundraising efforts, families are primarily responsible for the final cost of travel for a JSE member.

## Aurora Strings Concert Dress Code

*The JSE board developed this dress code to present a professional and cohesive look on stage at formal concerts.*

- All black - not gray, blue, “washed out.” Shoes and socks should be all black including soles and any lacing.
- Formal.
- Shoulders, elbows and midriff must be covered.
- All skirts/dresses should fall below the knee.
- Black, continuous from shoulders to floor including fully back shoes (no sandals or colored lacing).
- These requirements should be maintained when seated in playing position and when standing and bowing.

*Examples:*

- Black button-down long sleeve dress shirt with collar, black slacks, black socks, black dress shoes.
- Black dress with shoulders covered, hem falls below the knee even when seated, black pantyhose and black shoes.
- Black nice shirt with shoulders covered, black dress pants with black socks and black shoes
- Black nice shirt with shoulders covered, black skirt, hem falls below the knee even when seated, with black pantyhose and black shoes.



## Ursa Major Concert Dress Code

*The JSE board developed this dress code to present a professional and cohesive look on stage at formal concerts.*

- White top and black bottoms - not gray, blue, “washed out.” Shoes and socks should be all black including soles and any lacing.
- Formal.
- Shoulders, elbows and midriff must be covered.
- All skirts/dresses should fall below the knee.
- These requirements should be maintained when seated in playing position and when standing and bowing.

*Examples:*

- White button-down long-sleeve dress shirt with collar, black slacks, black socks, black dress shoes.
- White nice shirt with shoulders covered, black dress pants with black socks and black shoes
- White nice shirt with shoulders covered, black skirt, hem falls below the knee even when seated, with black pantyhose and black shoes.

