

2026 MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music and Arts Camp Teacher Bios

Gretchen Paxson Abberger – Artistic Director Emeritus of MNjcc Suzuki Program, Co-Director of MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music Camp, Violin, Viola and Ensembles.



Gretchen Paxson Abberger holds a Bachelor of Liberal Arts from Bennington College, a bachelor's degree in Music Performance from the Manhattan School of Music, and a master's degree in Historical Performance from the Mannes College of Music in New York City, as well a 2-year Long Term Certificate in Suzuki training from the School for Strings in New York City studying with Louise Behrend. Further teacher development has been short-term training courses with the following: Ronda Cole, Daphne Hughes, Allen Lieb, Carol Smith, Ed Sprunger, Carey Beth Hockett, Brian Lewis, Sera Smolen, and Alice Kay Kanack. Gretchen

taught at the Manhattan School of Music prep department, and Louise Behrend's School for Strings in NYC before moving to Toronto in 1994. Since then she has been free-lancing, teaching privately, and as a guest teacher at Suzuki workshops throughout the GTA. She has also taught for the Southwestern Ontario Suzuki Institute, and Camp Sparrow. As a guest teacher at winter workshops, Gretchen has taught all levels for RCM, Hamilton Suzuki Program, Etobicoke Suzuki Music, and in Ottawa for Suzuki Programs of Laura Nerenberg, and Leslie Wade. She teaches all levels at the North York Suzuki School of Music, and was Artistic Director for the Miles Nadal Jcc Suzuki Program from 1999-2024. This coming season Gretchen is looking forward to handing the reins of Artistic Director of the program to Kate Shaner, and taking on a new role as Emeritus Artistic Director, while continuing to teach in the program, and oversee the adult music programming. In 2010 Gretchen founded and directed the MNjcc Suzuki Summer Music and Arts Camp, which she will continue to co-direct alongside Kate Shaner.

In 2002, she founded Thanks to Dr. Suzuki Concert Performances, a charitable organization whose mission is to create community among students and teachers of Toronto area Suzuki schools in a yearly collaborative gala concert. Gretchen approaches Suzuki philosophy from two sides of the Suzuki triangle, as a teacher, and also as a parent of two adult children who learned violin by the Suzuki method studying at the MNjcc Suzuki Program.

Paris Bickersteth - Drumming



Paris drummed for the University of Calgary Jazz ensemble and was the rhythm section leader for two years. In 2021, he was a tenor drummer with the Bluecoats Drum and Bugle Corps and our drum line performed at PASIC 2021. From 2017, Paris spent six years teaching with the Calgary Stampede Showband and the Calgary Stetson Show Band until moving to Toronto to pursue a degree in architecture.

Mariana Bolaños - Pottery



Mariana Bolaños is a Mexican ceramic sculptor based in Toronto. She has exhibited her work in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Focusing on art with a social purpose, she works as a facilitator in community programs around Toronto and the GTA. Mariana studied visual arts in Mexico and obtained a Diploma in Fine Arts from Centennial College when she moved to Canada. She graduated from the Ceramics program at Sheridan College in 2023 and is currently an artist-in-residence at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto.

Jennifer Burford - Violin



Jennifer's students range in age from children as young as 3 years old to adults. She is a member of the violin faculty at the Miles Nadal JCC Suzuki Program and the Royal Conservatory School. Her teaching style readily adapts to the needs of the individual student. She has experienced all sides of the Suzuki Triangle, beginning as a Suzuki student at age 4, continuing to evolve as a Suzuki teacher, and adapting into a new role as a Suzuki parent and practice partner to her oldest of three children. She began her first decade of teaching at the North York Suzuki School where she held the positions of String Coordinator and Director. Jennifer is equally comfortable with older children and teens, having held teaching positions at Claude Watson School for the Arts and Havergal College.

Prior to beginning her teaching career in 2006, she completed a Bachelor's of Music Performance while studying with Mark Skazinetsky at the University of Toronto. She

received her Artist Diploma from the Glenn Gould School and her Master's of Music Performance Degree from University of Toronto under the tutelage of Erika Raum. Jennifer has completed teacher training through the Suzuki Association of America in books 1-8, studying with Elayne Ras, Ed Sprunger, Karen Kimmet, Kathleen Spring, and Allen Lieb. She also has taken the Suzuki Association of the Americas supplemental course "Teaching from the Balance Point" with Ed Kreitman. Jennifer recently was certified as a Teacher Trainer in the Creative Ability Development, a method of developing divergent thinking and musical artistry through improvisation.

Jennifer remains an active performer and freelancer in Toronto. She holds the position of Principal Second Violin with the chamber orchestra Canadian Sinfonietta and has performed with Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, Esprit Orchestra, Toronto Concert Orchestra, Sinfonia Toronto, and Mirvish Productions. She continues to enjoy playing chamber music, after being a recipient of the Felix Galimir Chamber Music award at UofT. In addition to classical music, Jennifer has developed her versatility as a musician by recording and performing with jazz, funk, folk, Klezmer artists, and the Queer Songbook Orchestra.

She is a member of the Suzuki Association of America, the Suzuki Association of Ontario, and the American Federation of Musicians.

Philip Clark - Collaborative Pianist



Philip studied piano and harpsichord at Oberlin College, while majoring in philosophy. In his teens and twenties, he played jazz piano with various ensembles. Since 2002 he has taught philosophy at U of T. Both Phil's children studied at the MNjcc Program, son Sam on violin, and daughter Gwendolyn on cello. He became an accompanist for the Suzuki Program in 2014.

Andrew Dawydchak - Violin, Fiddling

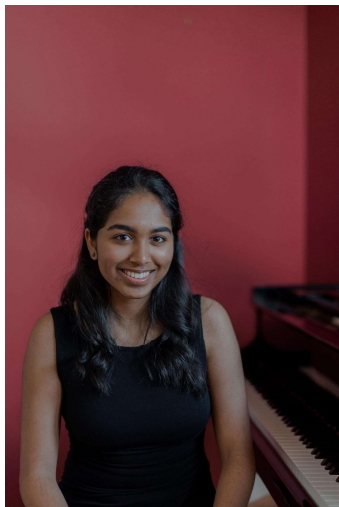


Andrew Dawydchak (David-chak) has demonstrated a passion for performing and commitment for teaching. He has a Bachelor of Music Degree (Violin) from Humber College and has completed Suzuki Teacher Training Units 1-5. Andrew has demonstrated how his classical training as a Suzuki student can intertwine with a passion for folk, pop, Canadian fiddle, Celtic, country and jazz music. Andrew has studied with some of North America's premier players and teachers. He notably credits Margot Jewell and Drew Jurecka on shaping his playing and teaching style.

While initially volunteering to teach the first fiddle class in 2013 to the students at Etobicoke Suzuki Music, the class has since cemented itself as part of ESM's Enrichment Classes and continues on!

Andrew is no stranger to the stage. Winner of many top honour fiddle awards since 2005 including being a Canadian Open Finalist and Jr. Open Champion, Ontario Open, Southwestern Open, Northern Ontario Open, Maritimes and many other categories. Andrew has had the opportunity to share the stage, record and produce with countless musicians spanning across many genres including Grammy and Juno nominated artists. When not performing or teaching Andrew can be found perfecting his golf swing or stopping pucks on the ice. Go Leafs go!

Sanjana Dhanasekaran – Piano, Collaborative Pianist



Sanjana Dhanasekaran began her piano studies at the age of four under the Suzuki method and later transitioned to the R.C.M.T. curriculum, through which she earned her Performer's A.R.C.T. in 2020 as a student of Clayton Scott. She completed an enriching secondary education as a piano major in the Arts Unionville program at Unionville High School, where she had a variety of solo, collaborative, and interdisciplinary performance experiences - most notably a performance of the first movement of Beethoven's Triple Concerto at Flato Markham Theatre.

An adaptable student and player, Sanjana's musical sensitivity has been cultivated through masterclasses and workshops with respected musicians such as Janina Fialkowska, André Laplante, Anton Nel, Michelle Cann, and Serouj Kradjian. Sanjana's playing has won her recognition, most notably the "Coup de Coeur" in her category of the 2021 edition of the Canadian Music Competition, as well as first place scholarship earnings at the University of Ottawa and Ottawa Piano Festival while under the tutelage of David Jalbert in Ottawa and Dr. Su Jeon Higuera in Toronto.

Sanjana currently studies with Dmitri Levkovich in Toronto and will be continuing her studies at Missouri State University with Dr. Hye-Jung Hong this fall.

Evet Kim - Violin



Violinist Bokyoung Evet Kim has performed in recitals, concerts, festivals, and masterclasses across the US, Canada, Japan, Korea, and Europe. She received a Master's degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music on scholarship and a Bachelor's from UBC on full merit scholarship.

Her principal teachers include David Updegraff, Andrew Dawes, Gwen Thompson, Gerald Stanick, Robert Rozek and Hae-yup Yang.

Notable highlights include concertmaster roles with UBC Symphony Orchestra and Yemel ensemble, and soloist performances with the Vancouver Symphony and Metropolitan Orchestra.

Passionate about young musicians, she also teaches strings at the Toronto District School Board. Her structured approach focuses on technique, expression, and recital preparation to help foster confidence and discipline.

Many of her students have claimed top prizes in Canadian violin competitions, benefiting from her method.

Daniela Kolarska – Arts & Crafts



Daniela Kolarska is part of a Montessori team teaching French to students from 2 to 14 years old. She offers them a linguistic hands-on environment where the students can practice and explore their relationships to the language, to other people and to nature. She is also a practicing artist in her own right.

Daniela specialized in teaching language in several countries both at elementary and university levels, and has been studying the conditions of human development and the elements of holistic learning.

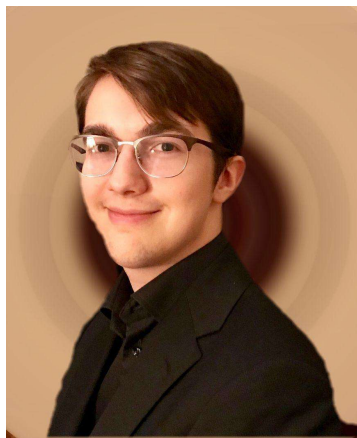
She looks forward to teaching art and crafts this summer at the MNjcc Suzuki camp, exploring together various elements of the living artistic heritage of the Indigenous peoples of our area. As well, by incorporating Indigenous stories, Daniela plans to explore art with our relationships to nature, each other and the land.

Nancy Lokan – Violin, String Orchestra



Nancy Lokan started her violin studies in Ottawa, studying with Walter Prystawski, former concertmaster of the National Arts Centre Orchestra. She started playing professionally in solo and chamber music as a teenager. After her degree in music at the University of Toronto she joined the Canadian Forces String Ensemble based in Ottawa. After moving back to Toronto Nancy began exploring the Suzuki method of teaching while raising her three children. All three of her children have grown up in the Suzuki world at the MNjcc and beyond, and have embraced music. Currently one of her grandsons participates in the MNjcc Suzuki Program. Nancy teaches privately, as well as group and ensemble classes for the MNjcc Suzuki Program.

Ryan Lokan - Ensembles Assistant



Ryan Lokan began studying with Gretchen Paxson Abberger and attending the MNJCC Suzuki violin program from the age of 5. After attending Etobicoke School of the Arts' strings program, Ryan studied in Sir Wilfred Laurier University's music program under Julie Baumgartel. Ryan has also studied under Burton Kaplan in New York. Musical Theatre has been an important part of his musical career, beginning with plays at the Toronto Youth Theatre. Ryan then studied classical voice under Helga Tucker of the Royal Conservatory. Ryan has spent the past few summers teaching ukulele, singing, and violin at the National Music Camp of Canada. Ryan has also been playing with the Kitchener Waterloo Chamber Orchestra this season. He completed ECC and Suzuki Violin Unit 1 training in 2022-23.

Rob MacDonald - Guitar



Sincere performances of bold and engaging repertoire have established guitarist Rob MacDonald as one of Canada's most exciting performers of new music. As both a soloist and chamber musician his persistent quest for fresh repertoire regularly leads to the creation of new works and the presentation of rarely heard pieces. He has performed with Soundstreams, Madawaska String Quartet, Canadian Opera

Company, Amadeus Choir, Continuum, Talisker Players, Contact Contemporary Music, Tapestry New Opera and Toca Loca. Alongside Tracy Anne Smith, he is co-founder of ChromaDuo, an ensemble actively commissioning, premiering, and performing new repertoire internationally. Their debut recording, Hidden Waters, has been called 'nothing short of inspirational' (Simon Powis, Classical Guitar Review) and 'modern guitar music at its most powerful, extending the form and substance of the guitar to give the listener an almost orchestral experience' (Kirk Albrecht, Minor 7th). He teaches at The University of Toronto, The North York Suzuki School and The MNjcc Suzuki Program.

Rebecca Morton - Cello



Cellist Rebecca Morton began her studies at the age of six at the Hamilton Suzuki School and went on to study at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto with David Hetherington where she was awarded the Gold Medal for achieving the highest string mark in Canada. Continuing at the Eastman School of Music, she was the recipient of a six year scholarship and graduated with highest distinction receiving Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees under Paul Katz and Steven Doane. Since graduating, she has won numerous scholarships and awards including semi-finalist in the 2003 Eckhardt-Gramatte String Competition.

Currently living and freelancing in Toronto, Rebecca has taught extensively in the Toronto area as well as at McMaster University.

Lenny Ranallo - Guitar



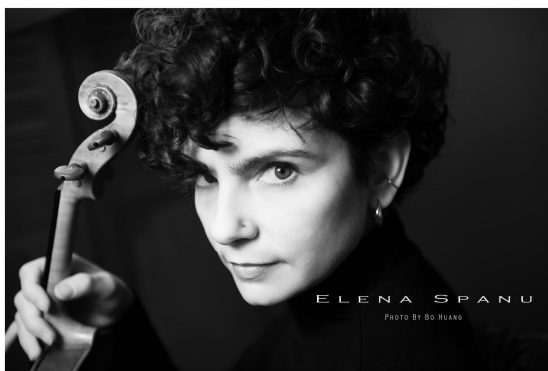
Drawing inspiration from Bach to Coltrane and beyond, American Guitarist Leonard Ranallo seeks to blur the line between composer, performer, and improviser. Equally comfortable in the concert hall or a local club, Ranallo brings a unique vitality to every performance. His fluency in both classical and electric guitar has resulted in performances across the United States and Europe.

As a performer, he's been featured at festivals in Italy, Scotland, and the US, and has won prizes in the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra's Young Musicians Competition, the Philadelphia Classical Guitar Society Competition, and the James Stroud Competition. In 2012, Ranallo made his professional orchestral debut as a concerto soloist performing with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Ranallo is a committed educator, having taught privately for over ten years. He was previously on faculty at the Peabody Preparatory and Swarthmore College, and is a certified Suzuki guitar instructor. He has given workshops and classes at Peabody Conservatory, Oberlin Conservatory, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in performance, composition, and improvisation.

Ranallo completed his Master's Degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland studying under Professor Allan Neave and Matthew McAllister, and his Bachelor of Music at Oberlin Conservatory under Stephen Aron.

Elena Spanu – Violin



Elena Spanu started playing the violin at the tender age of three. She began her studies at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto Ontario after signaling to her mother she wanted 'that' while pointing to the television screen of children playing the violin. She continued to develop her skills at Western University where she received a Bachelor of Musical Arts. It is there that she discovered her interest in Baroque violin performance and moved on to pursue an Artists Diploma in the

subject while at the University of Toronto under the direction of Jeanne Lamon and other members of Tafelmusik.

Elena currently holds the chair of principal second violin with the North York Concert Orchestra and plays regularly with the Niagara Symphony. As a freelancer, she also plays with orchestras and chamber groups in and out of Toronto. Elena has a keen ability to play

sensitively with other musicians. She enjoys using this aspect of her skillset in aid-ing and fulfilling the powerful collective music making of an ensemble.

Elena has always enjoyed listening to the sounds and grooves of folk music, finding it to be uplifting and energizing. The isolation period of the pandemic created a space for her to master her favourite tunes and explore the genres of Old Time and Irish music.

Thanks to the prominence of virtual environments, she has had the opportunity to study under the guidance of exceptional artists and composers such as Patrick Ourceau, Judy Hyman and Rayna Gellert in the pursuit of these new genres. One of Elena's favourite pastimes is attending jams as she enjoys connecting with other musicians, learning new tunes, meeting new people and learning their stories through music. She is often inspired by people of all ages and stages of life who are fiercely dedicated to their craft and love what they do.

Elena is a trained Suzuki violin instructor and Creative Ability Development coach. She directs the Toronto Suzuki Studio and is a faculty member at the North York Suzuki School of Music. She enjoys teaching music to both children and adults and strongly believes that one is never too old or too late to learn an instrument. Her goal as a teacher is to nurture her students to be their own creative guides. Through their instruments they learn the power of discipline, commitment and to trust and share their voices through their expression, creativity and connection to their community.

Yolanda Tapia - Piano, Choir Director, Collaborative Pianist



[Yolanda Tapia](#) is a multifaceted musician, international pianist, educator, vocal coach, and Fulbright Scholar currently based in Toronto. She is actively engaged with institutions like the University of Toronto, El Sistema Toronto, and the Community Music Schools of Toronto. Past roles as a staff pianist and collaborative pianist include the Instituto Superior de Música in Veracruz, and Western University.

As a member of Obsidiana Duo, this year Yolanda has embarked on national tours with Prairie Debut and Debut Atlantic alongside her duo partner, Camila Montefusco.

Mexican-born, Yolanda has performed as a soloist with the Xalapa Symphony Orchestra and CSU Symphony Orchestra, obtaining awards from Mexico's Chamber Music National Competition, the CSU concerto competition, Xalapa Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition, and Kiwanis. She has delivered piano and collaborative piano masterclasses at the University of Veracruz, FIM Loja in Ecuador, Cambrian College, and presented lecture recitals at CollabFest2021, Latin American Chamber Players, Western University, and El Canto Online.

Her commitment to the music community is evident through co-founding collaborativepianist.info and Cybercollab 2021. As an orchestral and chamber musician, she has performed with various ensembles, including a residency with Holland America's Lincoln Center Stage Piano Quartet. Yolanda holds a Bachelor of Music from the University of Veracruz, a Master of Music degree from Colorado State University and a Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Western Ontario. When not performing, she delights in experiencing live music across a spectrum of genres, ranging from heavy metal and punk to rock and jazz.