

AD ASTRA

Kansas City

All About Ad Astra

Our city. Our sound. Our heart.



In just two years, Ad Astra Youth Orchestra Kansas City has grown from 90 students in two orchestras to over 200 in four ensembles, including a 30-member cello ensemble.

In this short time, Ad Astra has already gained a reputation for musical excellence and educational integrity. The program has also established itself as Kansas City's Youth Orchestra and Musical Ambassadors, performing for highly visible community performances such as the KC Chamber of Commerce World Cup Dinner, the Kansas Music Educators Association, and others. Ad Astra has also collaborated with the Kansas City Jazz Orchestra, area professional musicians, and Grammy award-winning artists. In June 2026, Ad Astra Youth Orchestra will make its debut performance in New York's famed Carnegie Hall.

Ad Astra's major tenets include providing area student musicians the opportunity to expand their playing opportunities beyond their school program. Our aim is to help students and teachers enhance their programs by offering students these additional opportunities. All music is selected through a highly vetted process by Ad Astra staff to ensure age/level appropriateness, educational value, and overall enjoyment.

Ad Astra Orchestras

Ad Astra is made up of three orchestras, all based on grade/age and playing level/ability. Each student submits audition materials, and all are heavily vetted to ensure effective and fair placement.

Apollo Orchestra is Ad Astra's most advanced orchestra.

Apollo is designed for students in grades 9-college.

Apollo is conducted by Russ Pieken.

Gemini Orchestra is our ensemble designed primarily for students in grades 7-9 with at least two years of playing experience.

Gemini is conducted by Sheri Cain and Lauren Martens.

Aurora Orchestra is designed for students in grades 5-9 with at least one year of playing experience.

Aurora is conducted by Madeline Smith.

Cellonauts is Ad Astra's cello ensemble. Accepted cellists in Apollo and Gemini Orchestras are eligible to audition for this select group. Accepted members will receive Cellonaut audition information before the start of the season.

Cellonauts is conducted by Matthew Imber.

Ad Astra Requirements

Motivated string students from across the Kansas City area are encouraged to audition. Ad Astra accepts auditions from students in grades 6 through college.

Students must be members of their respective school strings/orchestra program, should one be provided. Ad Astra aims to enhance a student's music education. Ad Astra is not intended as a replacement for the school orchestra/strings program. Members must also be in good standing in their school orchestra program. Of course, this requirement is waived if a student is homeschooled or attends a school that does not offer a strings/orchestra program or attending an area college/university.

Accepted members must adhere to the Ad Astra attendance policy. Members are also required to be prepared for each and every rehearsal.

Tuition

Ad Astra strives to keep tuition as low as possible and as attainable as possible for all members and families. However, we also strive to offer a superior product and experience for our student members.

Tuition rates for 2026-2027 are \$750.00 per student. This equates to approximately just \$25 per weekly rehearsal. Accepted students and families are offered fair payment plans and options. Families may also apply for financial assistance to help offset tuition costs. Accepted students will also receive instructions for the financial assistance application.

Rehearsals and Performances

Rehearsals take place at Church of the Resurrection at 135th and Roe Boulevard in Leawood, KS.

Rehearsals begin during the first week of September and last until late April/early May. We do take breaks during the month of December and for Spring Break.

Rehearsals in 2026-2027 will be held on Monday evenings.

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| Aurora Orchestra | 7:00 – 8:00 pm |
| Gemini Orchestra | 6:30 – 8:00 pm |
| Apollo Orchestra | 6:00 – 8:00 pm |
| Cellonauts | 8:10 – 8:45 pm |

Ad Astra normally presents 2-3 formal concerts per season.

Community performances are also scheduled each year.

Performances take place in venues such as Yardley Hall, Helzberg Hall, area high schools, and other community locations.

Accepted members will receive a full rehearsal/performance calendar in May