



Seven Lakes High School Orchestras

January 17, 2023

Dear Future Seven Lakes Orchestra Member,

It seems that this year has flown by very quickly, and it's very hard to believe that you're about to embark upon your high school career! This packet from the Seven Lakes Orchestras has been provided to help you and your parents take an in-depth look at what orchestra program at Seven Lakes is all about.

We have been very blessed at Seven Lakes High School. In our 18th year of existence, the orchestras have earned many accolades and have presented many outstanding performances. Our ensembles have won numerous "Sweepstakes" trophies at various UIL and festival contests. Our orchestras consistently rank in the top 10 orchestras among all high school orchestra programs in Texas. In 2016 and 2020, the Symphony Orchestra was crowned State Champions; they performed in front of over 3000 music educators at TMEA Convention. Our Pit Orchestra have done an outstanding job for our musicals, "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown!", "Once Upon a Mattress," "Guys and Dolls," "The Music Man," "Big Fish," and "Beauty and the Beast." For their hard work, they have been nominated for Best Orchestra at every "Tommy Tune" awards, the high school equivalent of the Oscars. The Pit Orchestra actually won the prestigious "Best Orchestra" Award for both "Once Upon a Mattress" and "Beauty and the Beast!"

Each year, we bring in guest clinicians from all over the world. Jeffrey Grogan (Oklahoma City University), Franz Krager (University of Houston), and Brian Worsdale (French Woods Festival of Fine Arts) rave about our ensembles. Our students have received masterclasses from world-class musicians from the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, the Houston Symphony, and from many colleges and universities all over the United States. Our students have had the opportunity to perform and premiere living composer works by Lowell Liebermann, Kinley Lange, Todd Frazier, Michael Markowski, and John Mackey. One of our biggest concerts was when we performed with European pop superstar, Alex Rybak.

Our talent has proven itself with dozens of Region Orchestra members, Area Orchestra Members, and several All-State Orchestra members over the years. Hundreds of medals are earned at our UIL Solo and Ensemble Contest. We've earned so many consecutive Sweepstakes trophies at both Full Orchestra and String Orchestra UILs! In addition to the field trips to world-renowned artists like the Tokyo String Quartet, the Eroica Trio, Joshua Bell, Itzhak Perlman, 2Cellos, and the Houston Symphony! Students enjoy social events like Posters and Premieres, the O-Mazing Race, and Main Event! Our spring trips have brought us to San Antonio, Bandera, Dallas, Chicago, New Orleans, and Orlando!

Our compassion has come through with flying colors by volunteering throughout the year at the Houston Food Bank. Students have also contributed to "Toys for Tots" and Katy ISD's Santa Cops Program. Outside music, our students have worked hard toward being the best students at Seven Lakes with far-ranging achievements in academia and sports. Nevertheless, students still enjoy performing great repertoire, making new friends, and being part of a hard-working, fun-loving, and musical family!

Please check out the following pages of Frequently Asked Questions. We invite you to be a member of one of the most exciting groups at Seven Lakes. As a flagship of Katy ISD, we want YOU to be a part of making history!

Musically Yours,

Desiree Overree, Director of Orchestras

Sean Carlton, Assistant Director of Orchestras

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Thank you for your interest in the Seven Lakes HS Orchestras! We are a hard-working, motivated group that loves to perform! We've simply had a remarkable career that has catapulted us to the top! Please continue reading for answers to a few *Frequently Asked Questions*.

How large is the orchestra? Currently, the Seven Lakes Orchestras are divided into six classes during the school day. With over 200 students enrolled, we are proud of all of our performing groups! Next year, we will again have six string orchestras and one full orchestra: Camerata, Philharmonia 2, Serenata, Lyrica, Cambiata, Sinfonia and of course, the Symphony. Almost all of our groups compete at UIL Contests and are engaged with numerous concerts and performances. With six periods of orchestra to accommodate your schedule, there is a home for every player in the Seven Lakes Orchestras!



What can I expect as a member of the high school orchestra program? You have come from an outstanding middle school orchestra program with terrific directors and an outstanding musical background. Just expect much of the same commitment to excellence and pursuit of knowledge!

At the high school level, there is a strong emphasis on performance, with units over string orchestra literature, full orchestra literature, and chamber music. Refinement of rudimentary skills is stressed. Additionally, all students study music theory (the math behind the music) in depth and listen

Dear Class of 2027,

Hello, future SLORK students! This is Sadhana Balasubramanian, president of the Seven Lakes Orchestras. I am here to let you know that joining orchestra will be the best decision you will ever make as you will gain memories that last a lifetime, all while improving your character and technique.

As I am sure you have heard, the Seven Lakes Orchestras are famous for their playing. The orchestra has earned many awards, such as the Symphony Orchestra winning the TMEA State Championship in 2020 and ranking second in 2022. The Symphony Orchestra also received second place in the American Prize in Music contest in 2021, a competition that included collegiate-level orchestras as well. So, as you can see, the Seven Lakes Orchestras are incredibly talented. However, these accolades and prizes do not come without lots of hard work. From late Monday night rehearsals to weekly sectionals, every member of the orchestra puts in many hours to ensure the whole group sounds exemplary. While, at times, the long rehearsals may be a bit tiring or challenging to time manage, the dedication and persistence will pay off. Along the way, you will gain an unforgettable community from your section, the orchestra, and even some of the band members.

We also foster a sense of community with the many social events we host. The Student Leadership Team plans and hosts one social event every six weeks and the informal and formal banquet at the end of the year. In the first six weeks, we have our Posters and Premieres social, which features poster painting, competitive games (Lifeboat!), and ending the night with dinner and a movie. Throughout the year, we also go to places like Main Event and Urban Air Trampoline Park. In the spring, we also have our annual spring trip! In the past, we have gone to locations like Disney World. The Seven Lakes Orchestras is also known to give back to its community. In 2022, we raised \$2800 for Santa Cops, and were able to adopt 17 children to buy Christmas gifts for. We also volunteer at the Houston Food Bank yearly. If you're interested in helping plan events like these, be on the lookout for the Freshman Representative position that will open after the school year starts! Being on the team these past few years has taught me so much, and I've made some of my fondest memories with the team. I highly recommend applying!

Coming in as a freshman, I was extremely nervous. I was worried I wouldn't be able to find my classes (Seven Lakes is enormous!) or find a place where I belonged. Instead, when I walked into the orchestra room, I knew I had found my home away from home for the next four years.

Joining the orchestra program will open you to many opportunities and provide you with a community that will always support you, even throughout all the ups and downs of high school. I invite you to join this wonderful organization, partake in all our traditions, and continue the legacy of the Seven Lakes Orchestras! I can't wait to see you hanging around the orchestra room next year!

Sincerely,
Sadhana Balasubramanian (Class of 2023)

to learn about the way music works (music appreciation). This balance between performance and the more academic curriculum of music makes each student a well-rounded musician.

Do students have to audition to be part of the Seven Lakes Orchestras?

Students are assigned to orchestras according to ability, attitude, instrumentation, and director's recommendation. To be placed correctly in orchestra, an audition is necessary to ascertain the appropriate-level ensemble. Auditions each year consist of a performance of an etude or solo and scales. This audition takes place in April-May for the following year. Audition information will be distributed to all interested students in January.

I'm worried about high school credit and my GPA! Tell me more about how Orchestra helps me! Following your freshman year, students enrolled in subsequent years may elect to take orchestra for GPA exempt status. That means that if you are making an 80 or above for orchestra, that grade will not impact your GPA. You must have completed one full year of orchestra to qualify for this status.



Does the No Pass/No Play rule affect my participation in orchestra? Orchestra students must pass ALL classes in order to participate in extra-curricular activities of the orchestra: contests, paid performances, and auditions for Region, Area, and State. Class time instruction and all after-school rehearsals and sectionals are considered "curricular," and students participate in these regardless of academic eligibility. UIL rules have changed since 2021, and all students may participate in UIL Concert and Sight-Reading.



What is Full Orchestra? Our Full Orchestra (our Symphony Orchestra) is a tradition that was established in the very first year of our existence. The top band and string players combine to perform symphonic literature in each semester. We have already had several performances this school year and were blessed to win our 16th "Sweepstakes" trophy at the annual UIL Concert and Sight-reading Contest! In 2016 and 2020, the Symphony ranked #1 in the state! There is no additional class to register for because this orchestra meets on Monday nights from 5:30 to 7:30p.

What is the Musical and how can I participate? The Fine Arts Department puts on a musical every other year. Our first production of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" won us several nominations for the prestigious Tommy Tune Awards (think of it like the Oscars for high school musical), including **Best Orchestra**. Most recently, the department staged "Beauty and the Beast" and was nominated for 11 Tommy Tune Awards, including "Best Orchestra," which they won! The Pit Orchestra is comprised of selected Band and Sinfonia Orchestra members only; but ANY student is encouraged to audition for a role on stage.

Can a student participate in Athletics and Orchestra? ABSOLUTELY! It is a misconception that students who are enrolled in Fine Arts must choose between Athletics and Music. The Athletics and Fine Arts Departments allow our students to participate and compete for both departments. Conflicts sometimes happen, but we work them out. Good communication between students, parents, coaches, and teachers is important in fostering a positive balance between your passions.

What other commitments must I make in order to be a member? After-school sectionals are required of students enrolled in the upper three ensembles. Additionally, Monday night rehearsals (5:30 to 7:30p) each week are mandatory for Symphony and Sinfonia members. Cambiata members may have Tuesday afternoon rehearsals in the fall semester. To prepare for certain (seasonal) concerts during the school year, more MNRs will be hosted that may include ALL of our students. Additionally, to prepare for upcoming concerts, performances, or contests, students may need to attend an additional Dress Rehearsal or Clinic.



Do I bring my cello or bass back and forth to school?

Like your junior high program, students may use a Katy ISD cello or bass for a fee per year. This fee is paid at the beginning of the school year. Violinists and violists will transport their instruments back and forth, but have orchestra lockers to store these in. Seven Lakes does not provide violas or violins for school use.

What expenses are incurred with membership in the Orchestras?

Students, at the beginning of the year, pay an Activity Fee, a Uniform Maintenance Fee, and purchase a garment bag. As part of the performance uniforms, students provide their own tuxedo shirt, black socks and black dress shoes (boys); and black hosiery and black dress shoes (girls). Additionally, students purchase the informal concert uniform, which consists of the orchestra t-shirt. Students

choosing to participate in our social events pay for their admission and food costs. The spring trip at the end of the year is also an additional expense.

Do I have to buy a tuxedo or formal gown for the concerts? No. Katy ISD issues a formal uniform to every enrolled student; however, there is a Maintenance/Dry Cleaning Fee that must be paid. Also, be aware that we have different uniforms according to the different performances that we have. Although most of our performances require the formal uniform, periodically, we will wear our informal uniform (purchased orchestra shirts and jeans) at informal settings.

What contests and competitions are available to me? All students are encouraged to audition for a membership in the Region 23 Orchestras in the Fall term. Additionally, students may choose to keep working toward the highest level of orchestra: TMEA's All-State. Seven Lakes has 8 Orchestra All-Staters this year, and at one point in time, as many as 15! The Spring semester is highlighted by the annual UIL Solo and Ensemble Contest. At the highest level, students may compete at UT-Austin's TSSEC or Katy ISD's KYAC in May. Concerto competitions sponsored by local civic organizations and youth orchestras are highly encouraged. Most of our ensembles also have a state assessment, called UIL Concert and Sight-Reading Assessment.





What are lettermen jackets and how do I earn one?

Working hard and performing well can earn you points toward your letter jacket, a very prestigious honor! It's cool to be seen around school in your letter jacket! *Did you know that the very first Seven Lakes HS letter jackets were earned by Orchestra students?*

What about social events? Do you have them? Our Student Officers select, plan, and coordinate all social aspects of the orchestra. This year, they planned "Posters and Premieres," socials at Urban Air and Main Event, our Informal and Formal Banquets, and more! Periodically, we also host social events in conjunction with rehearsals or performances. Our biggest social event is our Spring trip, which combines the fun of a

mini vacation with a performance at an out-of-town major venue. Our ensembles have performed at the Meyerson Symphony Center and Majestic Theater in Dallas, Chicago's Symphony Hall, Judson Performing Arts Center, and Tulane University.

I was a Student Officer at my middle school and would like to be an officer again. Can I do that? The office of President is restricted to upperclassmen, but anyone can run for the other offices. The office of Freshman Representative is the only office reserved for freshmen. All officer candidates go through an application and interview process.

How can my parents be involved in the Orchestra program? The Seven Lakes Orchestra Parents Association (SLOPA) is always looking for energetic parents that are excited about helping the Director and the student membership of the Seven Lakes Orchestras. We have meetings about once a month and ask for parents to contribute their time in various ways such as chaperoning events, contributing baked goods or snacks for receptions, hosting contests, and helping fundraise for various items. We



hope that your parents will attend all your concerts and performances and will lend a helping hand.

What do you do for Fundraising? In the past, the orchestra sponsors a huge community-wide Mega Car Wash. In the spring semester, our booster club sponsors a violin art raffle called "Music to the Eyes." Profits from the fundraisers go toward our spring trip and other expenditures.

What benefits are enjoyed by being a member of the Orchestra? Wow! The best question of all! Members of the Orchestra reap many benefits. We all understand about improvement as a musician. We all know that focused practice and performing more difficult music is the key to successful music-making, but there are so many more wonderful things about high school orchestra!

Curriculum-wise, we explore music theory, music history, and music appreciation. We investigate the math, science, history, and culture surrounding music.

Orchestra has real-world applications in character traits such as: teamwork, discipline, dedication, commitment, pride, and integrity. We work together to serve the community and through music and volunteerism.

Individual honors such as Region, Area, and State Orchestra membership, medals at UIL Solo and Ensemble, and of course, the Seven Lakes letter jacket, are incentives for being a member of this elite organization!

Colleges and universities are seeking out students that have been enrolled in long-term fine arts such as Band, Choir, Theater, and Orchestra. ***Imagine being dedicated to an organization for not 4, but 7 years!!*** Consider belonging to this team for more than just the fine arts credit: colleges and universities understand and believe in the dedication, commitment, and responsibility it takes for students to learn an instrument (well) takes. They are seeking out students that have excelled in fine arts. ***We not only place students in the top 10 of Seven Lakes HS graduates EVERY year, but almost all our seniors graduate in the top 15%.***



Socially, the orchestra family is a tight-knit group of friends who support each other, laugh while learning, and love making music together. We are an established organization with lots of tenacity and talent. Hard work and passion for our art are the backbone of our organization. It is evident that all our orchestra students love to perform, and that orchestra is a priority in our lives. In essence, we love to play, and it shows!

If you have additional questions about the Seven Lakes Orchestras, please feel free to contact the Director, Desiree Overree, at desireeaoverree@katyisd.org. Visit our website and navigate around to find out more about our group. We'd love to hear from you!

Auditions materials will be available on our website at <http://www.sevenlakesorchestras.org>.