

Answers to questions about Song to Symphony:

Song to Symphony is an extensive in-school music and literacy program created by Sherman Chamber Ensemble Artistic Director Eliot Bailen. Below are answers to some frequently asked questions about Song to Symphony.

Briefly, what is Song to Symphony?

The Song to Symphony program motivates children to write, create and perform their own original musicals where they feel ownership and pride and are deeply hooked into music through a unforgettable musical experience.

More specifically, Song to Symphony is a large-scale musical production that involves a large segment of the school population in the creation of a musical/theatrical production. The emphasis is on taking songs written collaboratively in the classroom and showing how classroom work can be broadened into a memorable symphonic experience. The songs the children write and perform are accompanied by a professional symphony orchestra with orchestrations written by Eliot Bailen. In the full-scale version, the songs are set in the context of a related dramatic script and sometimes accompanied by additional material created and/or performed by older students (essays, poems, etc.).

What is the origin of Song to Symphony?

Mr. Bailen created the first Song to Symphony in 1999, while working with the Stamford (CT) Symphony. Since then, he has completed commissions for nearly 20 more full-scale productions with schools and orchestras in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey.

The inaugural Sherman Song to Symphony took place in 2002, in conjunction with the town's bicentennial celebration, and was a highpoint of the year for the entire community. Mr. Bailen has done smaller song-writing residencies at the Sherman School each year since then. School officials were so taken with the first production, they have asked that Mr. Bailen do the full-scale version every 4-5 years, so each child in the K-8 school has the opportunity to participate during their school career. In 2006, supported in part by a special grant from the state of Connecticut, "An Immigrant's Story" was developed and produced at the Sherman School. 2010 marked the most recent full-scale STS production.

What inspired Mr. Bailen to create Song to Symphony? What is his background in music education and music for children?

Mr. Bailen credits his love for children and for songwriting and the incredible journey that each project provides. He has a strong belief in the power of the song.

Mr. Bailen holds a DMA in music performance from Yale University and is regarded as one of the finest classical cellists in the tri-state region, Mr. Bailen is also nationally recognized as a writer and producer of children's music. With his partner, Karen Balliett, Mr. Bailen was a winner of the 1990 Parent's Choice Gold Medal and winner of numerous ASCAP Popular Awards. Their duo, "Karen and Tommy," has been a featured guest artist on Nickelodeon's "Eureeka's Castle" airing from 1993 through 1997. Their work is also featured on Scholastic Production's music video "Song City U.S.A." and on BMG Records series for children, "Early Ears." "Dinosaur Rap" was voted the #1 song of the year in 1987 on the Peabody Award winning radio show "Kid's America." In 1999, Mr. Bailen was a winner in the John Lennon Songwriting Contest. He has been on the string faculty of Columbia University and the roster of Young Audiences New York.

Locally, Mr. Bailen, often accompanied by colleagues from the Sherman Chamber Ensemble, has presented master classes and assembly programs at the Kent Center School and the Dutchess

Day School in Millbrook, NY and children's concerts based on classical repertoire at the Sherman and Kent libraries. In 2009 and 2010 he conducted songwriting residencies with the 8th grade classes at Pawling (NY) middle school, based on curricular material such as Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Since 2009, he has offered a summer songwriting and musical theater summer camp in collaboration with the Pawling Central School District. Mr. Bailen provided songwriting classes as part of the After School Arts Program (ASAP) summer arts camp curriculum in 2009 and in conjunction with the Sherman historical Society's Kids @ Cobbler Shop summer camp starting in 2011.

What are the goals of a Song to Symphony project?

The goal of STS is always to help achieve educational objectives in music, literacy and other subjects, focus the entire school population around a positive event, contribute to student self-esteem and bring the entire community together in celebration of youth artistic endeavor. Each project is organized around a theme developed with the school faculty and administrators, based on the curriculum or a community concern. And, of course, STS provides participating school communities with an unforgettable musical and dramatic experience.

How does Mr. Bailen work with the teachers?

Song to Symphony requires very close cooperation with all the school and the teachers. Songwriting sessions typically take place in homeroom classes, and language arts faculty are often involved with developing the dramatic portion of the production. A close relationship with music faculty is key, as is the whole-hearted support of the administration.

How does the classroom process work? How are the children engaged on an ongoing basis?

The classroom work is a creative brainstorming process. Once the script is complete, the children will read it and each class will write a song based on a certain critical point in the script. Mr. Bailen tries to make sure that all the lyrics of the songs come from the children, although he reserves the right to edit and make suggestions. Ideas from the kids are put up on the board and from these the songs are fashioned. He often asks the children for musical ideas, either style or actual efforts to create melody to the lyrics. For the music, Mr. Bailen fills in the rest. When there are orchestrations involved he often puts a little more time into the songs at home so that they will be streamlined for the orchestra. The songwriting process is the most demanding for the kids - it's hard work - and keeping them engaged during this creative process is always one of the more challenging parts of the whole project. But the idea is for the children to understand the enormous pay-off for their efforts when in the end they proudly sing their songs with a full orchestra for a large audience.

Each song takes 3 or 4 sessions to finish. When the songs are finished, Mr. Bailen makes a recording of all the songs on CD. If possible a CD is distributed to every child so that they can learn the songs. They also work with music teachers in school to learn the songs.

Language arts teachers or community members typically work on developing the script for the dramatic part of the production. Usually older students will be invited to audition for speaking roles in the production, and additional interested students will be tapped to work on technical aspects of the production (stage management, scenery, sound, etc.).

What is the "Symphony" part of Song to Symphony?

Once the songs have been created by the children in the classroom, Mr. Bailen spends several weeks arranging them for a full symphony orchestra (typically 24-26 pieces). He assembles a group of professional musicians, many of them regular performers with the Sherman Chamber Ensemble, who travel to the school and spend the day of the performance rehearsing with the

children. It is an extraordinary thing to see this group of highly trained and experienced professionals providing “backup” for the performances of local children – who have, indeed, created the music the musicians are playing. This element is what makes Song to Symphony so unusual and so memorable.

What are the key challenges in doing a Song to Symphony?

The first hurdle is, of course, financial - it's an expensive production! The second is organizational: many different people to coordinate. Mr. Bailen tries to stay as organized as possible - a lot of emails. He can use all the help he can get, because the more people helping out, the higher the production values we can shoot for. This is important.

What does Song to Symphony cost, and how is it funded?

Song to Symphony is an ambitious project financially, with costs ranging from \$15,000-\$20,000. This includes musician fees, preparation of scores and scripts, sound system and other technical costs, promotion and printing, and sometimes T-shirts for all participants and videotaping of the production (to be available for purchase on DVD),

It is recommended that any school interested in producing Song to Symphony put together a fundraising plan well in advance. The STS model is a natural for applications for educational or arts grants or for sponsorship by a local corporation or other entity. Many professionals and businesses may provide in-kind goods and services. Parent-teacher organizations or booster clubs can help by underwriting part of the cost or organizing community fundraising efforts. Song to Symphony is also an ideal project for an appeal to the community at large to support this unique and unforgettable experience for a town's children.

Expenses may be re-couped by selling tickets for the final performance, CDs or DVDs of the performance, T-shirts or other related gear. In addition, local businesses and supporters may purchase program ads to defray printing and other costs. Often a school district will absorb directly many associated costs, such as transportation.

The Sherman Chamber Ensemble supports Song to Symphony by providing assistance with grant applications and publicity and in some instances may be able to secure funding to help subsidize an individual STS project.

How do children benefit from Song to Symphony?

The children experience an incredible sense of pride and ownership in the product since they have been involved on a creative level from the very beginning to the end. The project often gives an opportunity to children who might otherwise not be reached. The project provides a context for children who need just this kind of experience to learn that there is a place for them to shine.

What are the broader rewards of doing a Song to Symphony project?

For the community, it is an opportunity to come together around a common creative goal and to see their young people take pride in the complete process of creating and performing a large-scale presentation. For the school, it is the ability to add exciting new dimensions to the curriculum and to classroom teaching – traveling from the blank page in the classroom to a large stage with a full orchestra and hundreds of proud kids.

What can teachers/parents do to get their kids excited about classical music?

The goal of this project is not to promote classical music as such, but to promote music. According to Mr. Bailen, “I don't personally distinguish so much between different types of music - for me there is well-written music, or poorly written music. I try to show the children what well-

written music is and put it into an orchestral context - not necessarily classical, but most of the instruments are from the classical orchestra. Only a small number of children will gravitate naturally to classical music, but to give all the children a wonderful musical experience will bring them all closer to developing their own way of appreciating music.”