



SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

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SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY LAUNCHES SECOND GENERATION OF AWARD WINNING MUSIC EDUCATION WEB SITE SFSKIDS.ORG

New Design and Content Developed in Partnership with UC Irvine Institute for Software Research

SAN FRANCISCO, February 20, 2014 – The [San Francisco Symphony](http://www.sfsymphony.org) (SFS) continues its mission of providing broad access to music and music education with the release of a new version of its free online music education resource, SFSKids.org. The new SFSKids incorporates user-friendly educational game-play techniques to bring orchestral music to today's digitally-savvy children, and launches a new generation of music instruction tools for parents and teachers. The new SFSKids was developed in creative partnership with **University of California, Irvine's Institute for Software Research**.

The new SFSKids presents an updated online experience entirely different from the original SFSKids. The original website, which has now had more than 5 million site visits in more than 20 countries, has been re-imagined and rebuilt to be more appealing to today's computer users, while continuing to ensure maximum access through its design for desktops and laptops. The second generation SFSKids incorporates new approaches to music learning, new and significantly expanded content areas, and a completely new graphic identity. Some examples of brand-new features and content throughout SFSKids include: a fun and playful series of educational modules presented as immersive environments and using animal avatars as guides; the ability to explore various linkages between composers,

instruments, and music compositions; biographical background about selected composers; a greatly expanded library of music available for listening, with more than double the number of excerpts and a rotational system to provide increased variety; the use of some game-based techniques to motivate repeated listening and engagement; gesture controlled simulation scenarios using the mouse and keyboard to provide “hands-on” experiences of playing instrument and conducting music; interactive online tutorials to learn about music basics; the opportunity for users to compose and notate their own original music; and much more.

SFSKids remains a key component of the SF Symphony’s commitment to music education. “Technology is a fantastic tool to acquaint young people with orchestral music,” says Brent Assink, Executive Director of the San Francisco Symphony. “It is our hope that SFSKids will help a new generation of young students engage with music in a fun and meaningful way.”

Walt Scacchi, a senior research scientist at UC Irvine’s [Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences](#) and [UC Irvine’s Institute for Software Research](#), said “Our collaboration with the San Francisco Symphony resulted from their creative insight to embrace an online music learning game environment as a contemporary way to bring classical music to young people. Game-based learning environments and simulation scenarios engage students, families, and teachers in ways that build and strengthen learning.”

THE SF SYMPHONY / UC IRVINE PARTNERSHIP

The development of SFSKids by the SF Symphony and UC Irvine’s Institute for Software Research is part of a partnership that has enabled the San Francisco Symphony to build on its work as a new-media pioneer in the performing arts. The Institute for Software Research is the only Organized Research Unit in the University of California system with a focus on Software Research. The Institute’s work advances software and information technology through research partnerships that form the intersection between cutting edge software research and real world practice. The Bren School’s commitment to education technology includes a program that mentors middle school students in an app-writing competition.

SFSKIDS.ORG IS ABOUT ACCESS

The new SFSKids is specifically designed for use on desktops and laptops in order to ensure maximum access in homes and classrooms. Since most public classrooms around the world still use older model devices, SFSKids is designed with modest technical requirements in mind, using Adobe® Flash with the intention of providing the most widespread accessibility possible. A future phase of development will enable SFSKids to be used on smartphones and tablets. SF Symphony Director of Education and Youth Orchestra Ron Gallman explains “Our first priority was for SFSKids to be accessible to as many children, families and teachers as possible worldwide. Tablets and smartphones are certainly increasing in global usage, and we look forward to adding users of handheld devices in the future.”

SFSKIDS.ORG SUPPORTS NATIONAL ACADEMIC STANDARDS IN MUSIC EDUCATION

SFSKids is designed in alignment with nationally prescribed music education curriculum standards, and supports learning goals in regional and local music education curricula. The site presents music education concepts through an online environment that motivates users to interact with music and perform cognitive tasks. Users are able to explore various components of music-making, such as orchestral instruments, composers of orchestral music, the basics of conducting and composing, and much more. Multiple scientific studies have demonstrated the benefits of music as an essential part of the educational process. Through SFSKids, the San Francisco Symphony provides an accessible resource for children, families, and teachers to learn about and build familiarity with orchestral music.

SIX LEARNING MODULES

SFSKids presents music education concepts and fosters engagement with orchestral music through six interactive and game-based learning modules: *Discover*, *Listen*, *Play*, *Perform*, *Conduct*, and *Compose*.

1. Discover

Users explore relationships between music, composers, and the instruments of the orchestra across 300 years of music history. Knowledge “Bubbles” pop open to reveal fun facts and provide connections to more information and more music. Timelines help to situate composers and musical compositions chronologically. Designed to stimulate deepening levels of inquiry, the module invites users to explore further and further on a voyage of discovery.



2. Listen

Users gain increased familiarity with orchestral music by listening to a wide selection of audio excerpts performed by the San Francisco Symphony. Each sample includes a short written description designed to provide contextual information, such as the mood or function of the music, or directing the user to listen for specific events or gestures occurring in the music. The site incorporates more than 170 music excerpts, some of which remain on the site permanently while others will rotate every six months to provide more variety. At any given time, 124 different clips of orchestral music will be available for users to explore.



3. Play

Users engage in two game-play scenarios based on a selection of music from the site's playlist. In *Star Catcher*, users guide an avatar to follow a line of stars that outlines musical phrases and rhythms. In *Mood Journey*, users select

emotions or moods they perceive in the music, which are tied to visual environments. Both game-based platforms are designed to foster ongoing engagement with different pieces of music. Users can share their personal *Mood Journey* visuals by pasting a unique, generated URL onto their computer's clipboard, which can then be e-mailed to friends and family.



4. Perform

Users are able to simulate performing on 13 different musical instruments representing the four instrument families—strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The instruments are: violin, cello, flute, clarinet, trumpet, tuba, timpani, piano, xylophone, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, and maracas. Users can hear the instruments' sounds by clicking notes on a scale, and can approximate playing the instrument through gesture control of the mouse and keyboard keys. For example, to “play” the cello, the user’s left hand on the keyboard can choose different notes (like a cellist’s left hand selecting notes on the fingerboard), while the mouse in the right hand controls the bow motion (just like a real cellist).



5. Conduct

Inspired by [Michael Tilson Thomas' conducting tutorials](#) on the SF Symphony's Keeping Score.org website, the Conduct module introduces basic conducting patterns as well as some basic gestures pertaining to musical expression. With the right hand, users learn to create different beat patterns by moving the mouse. Left hand gestures on the keyboard control gradations in volume (dynamics). Once the basics have been presented by following an onscreen avatar, budding conductors can strike out on their own to conduct a dozen different musical selections performed by the San Francisco

Symphony. As conductor, the user is able to adjust both tempo and volume to his or her liking. A feature of the site is that tempo adjustments will not distort the sound or pitch of the audio sample.



6. Compose

This module teaches some basic elements of musical notation via music editing software, which then allows the user to compose a short work, play it back, and share it digitally. Users are guided through information about note values, pitches, rests, time signatures, tempo designations, dynamics, and more. While some young composers may wish to jump in and begin composing from scratch, others will want to use pre-selected “starter music” which they can then complete as they wish. Users can share their creations digitally with friends and family, encouraging social media interaction based around each user’s own unique musical ideas.



SFSKIDS CLASSIC REMAINS AVAILABLE

The original SFSKids.org launched in March 2002 as one of the first music websites for children. The site presented opportunities for learning about music through interactivity, animation, and the creative exploration of music-making, and quickly became the pre-eminent free online music education resource to learn about and engage with orchestral music. Since its debut, SFSKids.org has garnered many awards and commendations, including a “Best Music Site” award in the 2002 Web Award Competition, coverage by *Time* magazine, the *Wall Street Journal*, and Radio Disney, and a demonstration by Martha Stewart on national television. SFSKids.org has now reached more than five million users and

still averages 1,500-2,000 visits per day from around the world. The original version of the site will remain available online as a resource for teachers and classrooms that still use it, alongside the new, updated version.

ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY'S COMMITMENT TO MUSIC EDUCATION

Music education has been a part of the SFS' mission since its founding in 1911. The Orchestra's second performance in 1911 was a concert for children, and its commitment to lifelong learning continues today with a variety of programs designed for all age groups, including: *Adventures in Music*, the longest running and most comprehensive music education program of its kind among American Orchestras in public schools reaching every child in grades 1-5 in the San Francisco Unified School District; *Music for Families*, concerts for parents and children; the internationally-renowned [San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra](#), the *Instrument Training and Support* program for middle and high school music students, and *Community of Music Makers* workshops for adult amateur singers and instrumentalists. Michael Tilson Thomas and the SFS launched their *Keeping Score* PBS television series and multimedia project in 2006, to make classical music more accessible to people of all ages and musical backgrounds. The project, an unprecedented undertaking among orchestras, is anchored by eight composer documentaries, hosted by Tilson Thomas, and eight live concert films, now available on DVD and Blu-ray, and includes www.keepingsscore.org, an innovative website to explore and learn about music; a national radio series; and an education program for K-12 schools to further teaching through the arts by integrating classical music into core subjects. To date, more than six million people have seen the *Keeping Score* television series, and the radio series has been broadcast on more than 400 stations nationally. Praising the SFS's education programs, the *Wall Street Journal* states, "The San Francisco Symphony serves as the industry standard," and *The New York Times* refers to the SFS as "a music education powerhouse."

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