

Prodigy® Cultural Arts, Florida Orchestra partnership
Gets 50% funding boost to expand free violin lessons



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- **More Hillsborough County program sites will open in summer of 2020**
- **Florida Orchestra develops new Prodigy® ensemble with youth orchestra**
- **Young violinists to perform at Annual Showcase on Feb. 26**

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ST. PETERSBURG, FL – The Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners has approved a 50 percent funding increase to support more free violin lessons provided through a partnership between The Florida Orchestra and University Area CDC's Prodigy® Cultural Arts Program. The continuing partnership offers the lessons and other musical experiences to children who might not have the opportunity any other way.

Thanks to the new \$150,000 grant -- up from \$100,000 last year -- the partnership will provide more sites to reach more students starting in the summer of 2020. Current sites include Roy Haynes Community Center, Thonotosassa Recreation Center, Gardenville Recreation Center and Tampa Metropolitan Youth Orchestra. Last season, more than 100 students took violin classes through the program.

University Area CDC and Hillsborough County jointly provide funding for the program, including instrument rental and other class supplies. The grant also allows the orchestra to hire violin instructors and a coordinator dedicated to the partnership.

The program has been such a success that TFO has partnered with Tampa Metropolitan Youth Orchestra (TMYO) to offer Prelude Strings, a beginning string ensemble for Prodigy® students who want to continue playing and potentially advance to a larger TMYO ensemble. The Prodigy® ensemble meets on the same night as all other TMYO orchestras so that students have a positive role model and goal. Participation in the ensemble is free, and Prodigy® students receive regular private lessons and an instrument at no charge.

The students will perform at the Annual Prodigy® Showcase on Wednesday, Feb. 26, at the Friday Morning Musicale in Tampa from 6 to 7 p.m. The recital will feature violinists from Thonotosassa, Roy Haynes and Gardenville community centers. It is free and open to the public. ****For media access, please arrange with [Kelly Smith](mailto:ksmith@floridaorchestra.org) or [Leslie Farrell](mailto:lesliebethfarrell@hotmail.com) in advance.****

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The Prodigy® program also has inspired generous support from the community. “Music can change children’s lives, especially if they are able to play an instrument. Supporting Prodigy® means supporting children and this gives my life meaning,” said Jeanne Coleman, a sponsor and a TFO board member.

The recital showcase is part of the strong, consistent structure set up for Prodigy® classes. Each session is six weeks, with classes meeting 3 hours per week. All classes take one field trip per session and must perform a finale showcase, which shows what students have learned.

The partnership began small in the summer of 2018, when the orchestra taught group violin classes twice a week to kids at one site, Roy Haynes Recreation Center in Tampa – a first for TFO and Prodigy®. The orchestra also performed chamber concerts, hosted Prodigy® students and families at a TFO Masterworks concert at the Straz Center and offered the Instrument Petting Zoo, giving students the opportunity to try instruments for free. The number of program sites has since expanded as lessons are offered after school.

Prodigy®, a research proven diversion and prevention program, uses an innovative approach to empower, educate and enable eligible youth, providing a doorway to a better world. Kids ages five to 18 experience performing and visual arts, taught as a tool for self-expression, to learn communication, exploration, problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Now celebrating its 20th year, Prodigy® is transforming young lives and reaches across 10 counties.

The Prodigy® activities are a key component of TFO’s mission to help build a strong Tampa Bay community through the power of music, guided by Music Director Michael Francis. The orchestra performs free hospital, park and school concerts, and works with schools and youth orchestras through side-by-side concerts and more. In Pinellas County, this is the third year of TFO’s Teaching Artist program, which has helped build and guide strings programs in schools. Last season, TFO served more than 90,000 people through community and education programs – most for free.

The Prodigy® activities are in addition to the orchestra’s season of 130 concerts, performed by 67 full-time professional musicians as the premier – and largest – orchestra in Florida. TFO performs series of classical, popular, and morning coffee concerts in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater.

For more on how The Florida Orchestra builds community through music, please see its community report for the 2018/19 season [here](#).

For more information about the Prodigy® Cultural Arts Program, please visit www.uacdc.org/prodigy.

[About The Florida Orchestra](#)

The Florida Orchestra is recognized as Tampa Bay’s leading performing arts institution, the largest professional symphony orchestra in Florida, and one of the most vibrant and innovative orchestras in America. Its 52nd season runs through May. Under the leadership of Music Director Michael Francis, it performs more than 130 concerts a season, with series of classical, popular, and morning coffee concerts in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater, as well as free Pops in the Park. Dedicated to bringing music to all people, connecting to the community is a priority, with pre-concert talks, family and youth concerts and other educational activities. Kids and teens get in free to Masterworks concerts with Classical Kids tickets. FloridaOrchestra.org and 727.892.3337 or 1.800.662.7286.

[About University Area CDC \(Community Development Corporation\)](#)

Serving the community for more than 20 years, University Area CDC provides support for thousands of Tampa residents through holistic programming, adult education and resource assistance. Its primary mission is the redevelopment and sustainability of at-risk neighborhoods in the Uptown/University area, surrounding University of South Florida’s Tampa campus. More information about University Area CDC, a 501(c)(3) public/private partnership, is available by calling 813.558.5212 and by visiting www.uacdc.org.