



EDUCATION



sonic spark



OVERVIEW



For 30 years ACO's educational programs have positioned music composition as a gateway to creative thinking, problem solving, and self-expression. Our long-term Sonic Spark programs nurture the imagination through creative rituals and play, cultivating personal, social, and academic growth. Sonic Spark serves students at every stage of creative development, including those who have never played an instrument before, are learning to write music for the first time, or are on track to develop high level careers as performers and composers.





SONIC SPARK by the numbers

- 30+ years of experience in NYC public schools
- Serving 4th-12th grades
- All programs available in-school or after-school
- Programming for special needs students, classes, and schools, including District 75
- All programs embody all strands of the Blueprint for Arts Learning & NYS Arts Standards

ACO offers 3 Sonic Spark programs

Each is designed to magnify the social and academic goals of your school or organization

ACO SONIC SPARK



SONIC SPARK ENSEMBLES

Sonic Spark Ensembles provide students with direct instrumental and voice instruction.

SSE supports students in making musical connections to personal identity and cultural heritage, advances musical literacy and cross-curricular connections, develops improvisation skills as a pathway to technical mastery, and results in student-created original works.

SSE is extremely successful in providing transferable skills that enhance classroom learning.



SONIC SPARK ENSEMBLES

Program Structure

- 4th grade through 12th grade
- In-school or after-school
- Skills-based sequential learning
- Customizable to each school's needs
- Ongoing programs are preferred but short term residencies are also possible

SSE is available to schools with or without active music programs.

Schools with ongoing music programs will see a strong surge in skills and enthusiasm as we use improvisation and creativity to inspire motivation and technical advancement.

For schools without an ongoing music program, SSE often begins as a bucket drumming and/or hand drumming ensemble with a strong focus on identity and heritage.





SONIC SPARK LAB

Sonic Spark Lab is a hands-on, arts-integrated program that teaches students to engage with their creativity, using curiosity to grow their imagination and to build an idea from a spark to an artistic realization.

Sonic Spark Lab uses music composition as a platform to unlock students' creativity, enabling and supporting them in the creation of original musical works rooted in their personal identity, lived experiences, and community history.

Program curricula is developed in collaboration with classroom teachers.

Program Structure

- Sonic Spark Lab is for **middle** or **high school** students.
- Programs run for 12 weeks to the full year
- 2 single class periods or 1 extended class period per week is ideal
- Full-year partnerships can result in student projects designed for community-wide participation and impact





SONIC SPARK LAB

Creativity is ranked among the most in-demand skills for job preparedness

- Sonic Spark Lab uses music performance, improvisation, and composition as a vehicle for developing **creative thinking** and **complex problem-solving**
- Students develop tools for approaching academic and professional life with a **flexible, adaptable, creative mindset**
- **Self-esteem** and **confidence** are nurtured through creative collaboration, rooted in a recognition of each student's unique talents, mindfulness, personal agency/empowerment, and collective decision-making

COMPOSE YOURSELF

Compose Yourself provides advanced in-school and out-of-school composition classes to high school age musicians interested in exploring music composition on a deeper level.

Compose Yourself is perfect for high schools with existing music programs, instrumental or vocal.

- **Student-produced and performed readings** are a point of pride for the entire school community
- **Students create using any musical language** or style (musical theater, jazz, rock, hip hop, experimental, folk, world music, classical and beyond)
- Side-by-side readings with professional musicians from ACO
- Participating students have access to ACO dress rehearsals and featured composers.



COMPOSE YOURSELF

Student Achievements

- 11 CY students have won a total of 21 national young composer competitions
- 16 have been finalists or honorable mentions in national young composer competitions
- 2 have had works featured on NY Philharmonic Family Concerts
- All of our graduates have been accepted to their first-choice college

Compose Yourself is the first step in ACO's pipeline for rising talent!





Our Partners

- Achievement First Bushwick Middle School, Brooklyn
- Ft. Hamilton High School, Bay Ridge, Brooklyn
- IS229 Roland Patterson Middle School, Bronx
- Frank Sinatra High School of the Arts, Queens
- Talent Unlimited High School, Manhattan
- Brooklyn High School for the Arts, Brooklyn
- Computer School, Manhattan
- Brotherhood Sister Sol, Harlem
- Youth Orchestra of St. Luke's, Manhattan
- Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Brooklyn
- Harlem School of the Arts, Manhattan
- The Apollo Theater, Harlem



ACO believes in partnership - we work closely with all of our partners to assure the deepest impact and closest possible alignment with the goals and missions of both our communities.

ACO provides:

- Trained, experienced Teaching Artists who are active professional performers and composers
- Program oversight and administrative support, including coordination of personalized planning and program evaluation
- Field trip and guest artist opportunities

Our Partners provide:

- Students!
- A consistent, enthusiastic classroom teacher to be present & participate alongside the students
- Necessary instruments or supplies - these expenses are usually small, and ACO can often arrange for donations or discounts
- Evaluation information and student data, such as comparative attendance, academic and social performance statistic

CASE STUDY #1

IS 229 - Roland Patterson Middle School

Morris Heights, Bronx

Sonic Spark Ensembles AND Sonic Spark Lab

Summary: ACO Teaching Artists inspire high achievement and a strong incentive for attendance, among a historically transient student community, with a large population of recent arrivals.

From the Principal, Vernon Johnson:

*"I cannot be happy enough for all that this organization has done. This organization supported us in person and remotely when many others did not. The open communication with Mr. James specifically makes working with ACO feel like true partners in this service. I am thankful for the artistry my scholars are exposed to along with the professionalism of all the teaching artists... **Our scholars love the program.** I highly recommend [ACO], and I am excited to continue this great partnership for many years to come.*

Outcomes:

- In less than a year these middle school students coalesced into a high achieving ensemble, creating their own songs based on the musical traditions of their individual communities, and performing, self-directed, for their peers and special events
- Sonic Spark programs have become a powerful tool for enrollment and parent support
- The success of Sonic Spark Ensembles at IS 229 has led to the addition of Sonic Spark Lab for the current year



IS229 ACO Sonic Spark Ensembles 2018, Photo by Kevin James





Wadleigh Secondary represents at Little Kids Rock Songwriting Exhibition, 2021

From the Music Teacher, Roslyn White:

American Composers Orchestra has engaging teaching artists who the students easily relate to and connect with. The music students work with ACO deepens their understanding of themselves, promotes creative expression, and encourages productive collaboration. It has been such a positive experience partnering with ACO over the past two years. They find ways to supplement the work teachers are already doing in class in an interactive and easily digestible format which encourages students to take chances and have fun making music.

CASE STUDY #2

Wadleigh Secondary School

Harlem, Manhattan

Sonic Spark Lab

Summary: ACO Teaching Artists met 2x per week with a middle school band class and a 9th grade band class via zoom during the pandemic year. Students learned to use Digital Audio Workstations and to relate their creative efforts to these new instruments - which they learned completely via Zoom.

The students spent the first part of the year learning a wide range of approaches and processes for sound exploration, which culminated in each student creating an original piece to serve as their very own entrance music. They spent the second part of the year connecting their art to their community, using letters written by classmates to local and national politicians as source material for collaborative works. Many of the resulting works were featured in the Wadleigh year-end showcase and 7 student works won awards in the Little Kids Rock Songwriting Exhibition.

Outcomes:

- Students found deeper connections to their instruments, and their community than would have been possible otherwise
- Notably higher attendance on Sonic Spark Lab days
- Students gained a sense of accomplishment and purpose within their school community

CASE STUDY #3

Talent Unlimited High School

Manhattan

Compose Yourself

Summary: Music students from TU meet after school for classes with ACO Education Director, Kevin James, 10 weeks each semester. For many of the students, their final project is their first composition. The students learn healthy and open attitudes toward creativity and are guided through the process of planning and scoring, including the basics of all the instruments and professional approaches to notation.

As they near completion of their projects, they plan rehearsals, recruit musicians among their peers and produce a workshop and showcase of their new works for an audience of family members and their own school community.

Students who want to pursue composition advance to enrollment in ACO's more ambitious, tuition-based Compose Yourself program. Many of those students continue to benefit from their Compose Yourself affiliation long after leaving High School.

TU graduate and Compose Yourself PRO member Che Buford is the current Presidential Scholar at Boston Conservatory. Che has won several high profile composition competitions in the last year alone.



Compose Yourself students attend a professional reading with renowned composer, John Corigliano

Outcomes:

- For creative students and those with a need to express themselves, Compose Yourself is where they find their tribe
- Enhanced listening and leadership skills among Compose Yourself students raises level and expectations in all the ensembles where they are active
- Student-produced workshop and concert provides an outlet for composers and performers alike to showcase initiative and artistry, building pride in the community and confidence among all individuals who take part





WHAT PARENTS ARE SAYING: Testimonials

*"Since her first semester, [the] class has been [her] musical haven...
I also value how this is a musical community...
And as an added bonus, her classmates unfailingly inspire her."*

"I noticed him taking big leaps in his ability to contribute to a group."

*"Self confidence. It was a big social/ emotional leap for them to show up as
their full selves in the group. I saw them improve in their ability to speak up
and share their opinions, and also to give helpful feedback to the other
members of the group."*

"A sense of autonomy. I think she's more self confident"

"Thank you for making the Sonic Spark composition class a reality for [our son]. It was a highlight of his 5th grade year. He learned so much and has gained confidence; we see him participating in discussions and sharing his opinions more freely. We really appreciated the scholarship both semesters!"

*"I am extremely appreciative for all of the time, work, and dedication that the SPARK Team has given to my children.
It has made a wonderful difference and a lasting impact on their Creativity, Confidence, Learning."*

PROGRAMMING COSTS



ACO is a fully contracted vendor with the City of New York and the NYC Department of Education.

ACO's pricing and programs are customized to the needs of each partner. We are often able to either offer subsidies, or to work with our partners to raise necessary funds through grants or other local funding options.

Our shortest Sonic Spark Lab or Compose Yourself residencies can be priced as low as \$3,000-\$5,000. However most of our partners opt for full year programming with an average cost between \$12,000-\$25,000.

ACO receives public funds through the National Endowment for the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature.





Let's Talk

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