

## RECONNECTING WITH MUSIC AT THE CENTER FOR AUTISM

Oftentimes, families who have a son or daughter on the autism spectrum avoid attending live performances because they worry about how their child will react to an unfamiliar sensory experience. A traditional performance space can be large and intimidating, and the typical presentation may not provide the level of detail and multi-sensorial elements that would help the child thrive. Pacific Symphony is helping to minimize this hesitation by partnering with The Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders to bring live musical performances to these families in a way that works best for them—in a comfortable, sensory-friendly environment where children are free to laugh, dance, play and learn, with music that the whole family can enjoy.

Janavi, an outgoing 8th grader, had never been to a live concert before. A new student at the Center for Autism, Janavi was looking to make friends with girls her age when she met Mairene, a shy, sweet 7th grader from Irvine. The girls bonded quickly, and Mairene invited Janavi to their first outing: an interactive string quintet concert called “A Night with Pacific Symphony,” hosted by the Center for Autism. Though the experience was new for Janavi, for Mairene it was a second chance to experience live classical music.

Her mother Mary explains, “When she was younger, we tried it... I thought she would like it because they did a preview of the show at her school, but we just stayed in the bathroom the whole time.” After that, they stopped attending performances even though Mary and her husband are avid classical music listeners themselves. This time, the Symphony’s concert seemed different, so they decided to give it another chance.

When the two families arrived on the night of the concert, the Center for Autism’s classroom had been transformed into an intimate performance space, where curious spectators would be able to see the musicians and their instruments up close and follow along with images projected on the wall. The girls and their families sat together, nervous and excited about what was to come.

As the concert began, they started to relax, comfortable in the familiar setting. Caught up in the moment, Mairene jumped up to dance in the roomy space that was provided for everyone to play and respond to the music in their own way. Janavi stood up and sang along, excited to hear the musicians play two of her favorite songs, “Let It Go,” as well as the “Can-Can.” After the performance, the girls enjoyed playing violins, violas and cellos, as well as interacting with the musicians.

The families left with smiles on their faces and a new enthusiasm for music. “Western classical music is sort of alien for me and my husband,” recalls Janavi’s mother, Jyoti, “so it’s been a very smooth introduction, very non-intimidating. We wouldn’t have taken Janavi to a classical concert because we didn’t know anything about it.”

This specialized environment gave them the positive experience they needed to feel confident coming to a Symphony performance at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. Since that first concert at the Center, the girls, who are now best friends, have attended Family Musical Mornings and Classical performances, sitting together and enjoying the full orchestra and new venue.



Janavi learns how to hold a violin from Pacific Symphony musician Pamela Jacobson.

However, no one has been more ecstatic than their families. For Jyoti and her husband, Family Musical Mornings were an exploration into the unfamiliar world of classical music. “We never knew about Family Musical Mornings until then,” reflected Jyoti, “so it was nice to know that we could go. I would have thought that it was too formal, or that we’d be disruptive, but it was really a very nice way to open up that world to us.”

Mary adds, “We were trying to get Mairene introduced to attending the concerts, but it was difficult. I think because the concert at the Center for Autism was so intimate, so personal, she got more out of it. It was a good transition to try Segerstrom Concert Hall, because now we thought ‘okay, we can do this.’”

“It really helped me a lot!” expresses Mairene. “I really loved it.”

The success of these one-of-a-kind concerts has been widely apparent, as 88 percent of participants report having confidence that they can now attend a Pacific Symphony concert with their child, and 100 percent would like to attend another similar Symphony event.

The Center for Autism gives help and hope to children and families challenged by autism, ADHD and other neurodevelopmental disorders. Not only do they provide early identification and intervention, but they also provide excellence in clinical care and a wide range of educational resources and research to increase the understanding of these disorders, and hope to one day eliminate them altogether.

“A Night with Pacific Symphony” at The Center for Autism is one of Pacific Symphony’s Heartstrings Music and Wellness initiatives, which aims to help partners fulfill their missions by making classical music accessible to those who may not be able to attend traditional venues.

For more information on our great partner, visit their table in the lobby on Dec. 4 or visit [www.thecenter4autism.org](http://www.thecenter4autism.org).

**This program is made possible by the generous support of the Thompson Family Foundation.**



Mairene test drives the violin after the Symphony’s concert.



THE CENTER FOR AUTISM  
& NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS