Steven Banks

Come As You Are brings over 700 new audience members to the concert hall

Come As You Are builds on a successful first year of community performances, free concert tickets and partnerships designed to broaden and diversify classical music audiences.

Photo Credit: Rob Davidson

Saxophonist Steven Banks is expanding his **Come As You Are (CAYA)** initiative to more orchestras and regions for the 2026/27 season, building on the initiative's successful first year of connecting communities currently underrepresented in the concert hall with world class, live classical music.

Launched in September 2025, CAYA is founded on the belief that classical music is for everyone, and that its ability to enrich our lives should be available regardless of cultural background or socioeconomic status. Through the initiative, Banks gives free community performance talks for audiences and underrepresented communities that provide context for the music they will hear in the concert hall. Working closely with participating presenters and drawing on their knowledge of the communities they serve, CAYA works to provide free and discounted tickets to main-stage concerts.

By creating opportunities for people to experience and connect with live music, CAYA aims to foster a genuine sense of ownership and belonging, helping to create audiences that better reflect the world in which we live.

Building on a successful first season

During the 2025/26 season, CAYA worked with **six international orchestras and 25 community partner organizations**, including community centers, arts centers, Black-led organizations, Black Greek-letter organizations, Title I schools and El Sistema programs. Partners included: St Louis Symphony Orchestra, Quad City Symphony Orchestra, Rhode Island Philharmonic, Schubert Club and BBC Symphony Orchestra London.

Photo credit: Phillip Hamer

500+

people attended CAYA community performances

700+

main-stage concert tickets distributed free of charge

Audience and partner response

"Thank you for coming to [college], you're playing really left an impression and I greatly appreciated your explanation of the BBC Symphony Orchestra performance as I feel it will let us enjoy the performance more."

“The crowds Friday and Saturday were the most diverse I’ve seen…The engagement with the community was authentic. And there is a desire for more.”

‘There is a clear desire to center more opportunities like CAYA as part of our inclusive audience development strategy—particularly experiences that pair performance with dialogue, lower barriers to access, and intentionally engage communities who have not always felt welcomed in classical spaces. Management sees this model as a meaningful way to extend artistic programming beyond the concert hall and strengthen long-term community trust and engagement.’

"Thank you for giving such a powerful insight into your world of composition and classical saxophone performance, I feel inspired to look more into classical music because of it"

CAYA expands in 2026/27

The 2026/27 season brings CAYA to more orchestras and regions. **This season's focus will be on intergenerational and wider communities**, bringing together and unifying different people across the community. The first orchestras have been announced, and will include:

Melbourne Symphony	**Los Angeles Philharmonic**
The Cleveland Orchestra	**Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra**
Toronto Symphony Orchestra	**Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin**

More to be announced...

The initiative reflects a growing desire among participating orchestras to explore new approaches to audience development- particularly experiences that combine performance with dialogue, reduce barriers to access and intentionally engage communities that have not always felt welcomed in classical spaces.

> *'I am so happy that the Come As You Are initiative has brought hundreds of new audience members to the concert hall. Beyond that, each CAYA concert is incredibly rewarding for me. I feel more connected to my audiences and so enjoy being able to share what I love about music with them. The simple act of gathering together to share this music and what inspires it gives both the performer and audience an opportunity to feel seen and considered in a way that deepens the mainstage concert experience.'* ***Steven Banks***

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