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The Atlanta Symphony is Changing the Face of American Orchestras

The Talent Development Program supports young African-American and Latino students who plan to pursue a professional career in classical music.



Established in 1993 by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO), the Talent Development Program (TDP) was the first of its kind created by a major American orchestra. Each year, the TDP takes 25 students of every orchestra instrument and prepares them for conservatory and/or university-level study. The program, open to 4th-12th graders through an application and audition process, includes instruction, mentoring, performance opportunities, scholarship support, and more.

The program's success – nearly all of its students graduate from high school and continue to college or conservatory – can be attributed to the combination of lessons from master teachers with summer music camp experiences. Most students who start the program remain in it until graduation.

Over the years, From the Top has had several members of the Talent Development Program on the radio show, including Jack Kent Cooke Young Artists Khari Joyner, Sodie Finebone, Angelica Hairston, and Sandra Bailey (Sandra's performing in the upcoming Maryland show).

From the Top alum, **Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist** and harpist Angelica Hairston has established a very close relationship with her TDP teacher, Elizabeth Remy Johnson, who is the principal harpist of the ASO. "She is absolutely amazing – she's changed me 360 degrees...She taught me to use my time for quality and not necessarily quantity."

Scholarship funds help TDP students attend summer music programs to continue their musical growth. For Angelica, the scholarship funds allowed her to attend the Boston University Tanglewood Institute summer program, where she studied with the now-retired Ann Hobson Pilot – the Boston Symphony Orchestra's first African-American harpist. Angelica says, "She is the ultimate African-American role model for me!"

The Talent Development Program also has a strong Arts Leadership element and encourages its students to give back to their communities with music. Through a partnership with the ASO and the Atlanta Music Project, Angelica and other TDP students performed during an after school program for inner city kids. Angelica remembers, "To start these kids out with music and see them looking at [the instruments] with bright eyes, some of them never having seen the instruments before...it's amazing!"

"I know music kept me out of a lot of trouble growing up so hopefully for these kids music can be something to help them set goals and stay focused."

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