

Cedar City, Utah:

At the Orchestra of Southern Utah, the Friends of Music Guild collaborated to present educational activities for the premiere of *Africa*, by Marshall McDonald and Steven Sharp Nelson. In this photo, Janice Brooks-Nichter shares an African story; the cellist is Nina Hansen. Below, Xun Sun conducts the Orchestra of Southern Utah and the Southern Utah University Opus Choral Ensemble in a performance of *Africa*.



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Southern Utah may be a world away from Africa, but thanks to a new orchestral piece, thousands of area children experienced a small portion of that continent's diverse cultural history. The Orchestra of Southern Utah recently commissioned *Africa*, a 20-minute work by composers Marshall McDonald and Steven Sharp Nelson that fuses distinctively African rhythms and textures with the modern symphony orchestra. It calls for around 80 musicians, including traditional drummers and a choir singing a poem in Swahili.

Africa premiered in February 2008 as part of the orchestra's Children's Jubilee, a Saturday afternoon program for about 500 parents and children; the event also included displays of original Ghanaian art, African mask and gourd painting, and orchestra members donning traditional, brightly colored Kente cloths, which are symbolic of Africa's rich heritage. To augment *Africa*

Ling Yu and her daughter Anna demonstrate string instruments during the children's event at which *Africa* was premiered.



and the Children's Jubilee, Janice Brooks-Nichter, an African-American drummer and storyteller, toured local elementary schools, discussing Africa and its history with more than 3,000 students.

Volunteers from the orchestra's Friends of Music Guild conceived and executed this brief cultural immersion, says Sara Penny, general manager of the Orchestra of Southern Utah. More than introducing kids to classical music, she sees *Africa* as one tool for producing better citizens. "We're all in a global environment now," Penny says. "Using the music is one way we can help open these children up to the world."