

"I've always wanted to make my work with young people the central focus of my life. When this opportunity came up I knew in my heart that it was the right time to take this step. I truly believe we can do something extraordinary here."

Sameer Patel  
Artistic Director  
San Diego Youth Symphony



## YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL DIRECTOR NYA DELCASTILLO INTERVIEWS SAMEER PATEL

Well, I just want to talk about everything! You're the new artistic director, and everyone needs to know who you are. And me too, because you're my new conductor. You asked what my name was and you pronounced it right. What's the meaning behind your name and your identity with it?

**Sameer:** Well, let me ask you first Nya, what does your name mean?

Nya means "radiant light."

**Sameer:** Radiant light. That's beautiful. My name means "breeze" or "gust of wind." In some traditions of the Middle East it also means "friendly and loyal companion." I believe names are important; they represent our cultural identity and help share an inherent story of who we are or even who we hope to be.

I know you live in San Diego and have a lot of experience here, but why SDYS?

**Sameer:** I've always wanted to make my work with young people the central focus of my life. San Diego has been my home since 2014. I want to see it grow and thrive, and I want to see the young people in my community make a difference here and beyond.



Nya is SDYS' Youth Leadership Council Director and plays violin in the Ovation program.

"My name is Nya Delcastillo and I am a junior at Otay Ranch High School in Chula Vista. I practice the musical art of the violin and I appreciate the possibilities you have when playing this instrument. I also play ukulele and teach ukulele at my school. In 2015, I started with the Opus program and am currently about to join the Ovation program at SDYS. I started playing the violin in Hollywood Music, a local music store near my house. My family, friends, and community are the reason I continue to pursue my passion of playing the violin. My parents had no musical background, yet they have always been amazingly supportive of my musical goals. I like to think of myself as confident and honest, through the music I play, and the way I inspire others, and myself."

## I've heard you're very professional

**Sameer:** I have very high standards and high expectations, but I also have those for myself. We should all share that sense of caring about what we do.

## Yes, I know that I'm going to be pushed and we're going to learn a lot.

**Sameer:** But I would add that I want all my students to know that it comes from a space of love, and that when I work with them I am most interested in progress and transformation. It's not about perfection; I have little interest in that.

## What do you think about El Sistema inspired programs like the Opus Project?

**Sameer:** The Opus Project was a big reason that I was interested in this position. I love that this El Sistema-inspired program has been thriving for many years in our community. I spent two weeks in Venezuela several years ago, and really got to see El Sistema in action, and the thing I love about it is that through music, young people are given a chance to experience beauty and teamwork, and then they're able to carry that experience and expression of their humanity into the world.

## So as the Artistic Director, and also as a musician, what music do you think needs to be heard?



Sameer, his wife Shannon, and their two children live in Bankers Hill.

**Sameer:** I believe we should not only champion the classics - Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky - but we have a responsibility to champion the voices that haven't been heard from enough: living composers, women composers, and especially composers from diverse backgrounds. I believe representation matters, and championing a variety of voices like this is not only good for our art form, but also good for us as musicians and as members of our rich, diverse community.

## Did you grow up playing an instrument?

**Sameer:** I studied piano from the age of nine and I played in the band in high school. I played saxophone because there was no orchestra in my small town in Michigan. And then I sang in choir in college, and I loved that, and I encourage everybody I know to

sing in choir at some point in their life! Piano is the only instrument I keep up with, and yes, I still practice it!

## Are your kids in the ChiMES program?

**Sameer:** My daughter, Veda, just started about six weeks ago. She loves it and she calls it "class." She loves Miss Michelle, Miss Kat, and Mr. Charlie, and my wife and I are big fans as well. The program is amazing.

## There is a quote that I see sometimes and it's that "music heals all wounds." Do you agree with that?

**Sameer:** I think music can bring comfort and joy, even if only momentarily. It has this amazing ability to allow us to feel vulnerable and to feel empathy with others, whether with performers on a stage or with the people sitting next to us in the audience. It provides us with an opportunity to engage with our own humanity, and to engage with the humanity of others. And maybe those moments help us heal. Maybe they also allow us to think beyond ourselves and to listen and see others in a way that can do some good in this world.

## You're very inspiring, as a person. I'm so excited for rehearsals.

**Sameer:** Oh, Thank you, Nya. We're going to have a great time this year.

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