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# NM Philharmonic performs for autistic kids

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A group of children, including Ethan Trujillo, right, playing with a saxophone, Jacob Trujillo, second from right in front, and Viggo Parton, third from right in front, get to play with instruments in an "instrument petting zoo" after the New Mexico Philharmonic and Festival Ballet Albuquerque performed "Peter and the Wolf" for a group of about 175 autistic children from seven local schools at Popejoy Hall on Wednesday. (Marla Brose/Albuquerque Journal)

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By Jon Swedien / Journal Staff Writer

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Jesse Montalvo, like other autistic children, can't always sit still and be quiet, said his mother, Jill Montalvo.

This makes it difficult to take the fourth-grade Pajarito Elementary student to public events, even something as simple as a movie, for fear he might make a scene.

"He doesn't always understand he can't jump up and be happy," Montalvo said, explaining that her son sometimes doesn't understand social norms. "A lot of kids on the (autistic) spectrum can't be taken some places because they tend to fidget and they want to voice out."

But none of that was a problem Wednesday when Jesse Montalvo and about 175 autistic students from seven Albuquerque Public Schools elementaries attended a symphony performed by the New Mexico Philharmonic at Popejoy Hall at the University of New Mexico.

A ballet dance troupe, Festival Ballet Albuquerque, acted out scenes from "Peter and the Wolf," as the orchestra performed the famous Russian composition.

During the concert the children were allowed to stand up and make noise. They were chaperoned by teachers, parents and volunteers.

The concert was the brainchild of Anthony Trujillo, owner of Holman's USA, a high-tech company headquartered in Albuquerque.

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Trujillo led the efforts to fund and organize the symphony, along with the New Mexico Philharmonic and APS. Trujillo sits on the philharmonic's board of directors.

"This is all inspired by my 10-year-old daughter, Sophia," who is autistic, Trujillo said.

He said he too has felt like he couldn't bring Sophia to events where there would be an expectation for her to sit still and quietly for a long period of time.

He said he hopes the symphony – in addition to giving a unique opportunity to autistic children – will raise awareness about autism. Trujillo has also started a charity – Holman's Technology for Autism Foundation.

Anne Tafoya, APS executive director of special education, said she has talked with Trujillo about making the autism symphony an annual event and expanding it to include middle- and high school students.

After the concert, Jill Montalvo said the symphony was a wonderful event for her son.

Jesse Montalvo agreed. "It's great," he said.



Dancers from Festival Ballet Albuquerque, including Kendra Williams, right, dressed as a duck, chat with children, including Josiah Jones, front left, who attended a symphony and ballet performance of "Peter and the Wolf" to a group of autistic schoolchildren at Popejoy Hall on Wednesday. (Marla Brose/Albuquerque Journal)

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