

Cultivating Future Leaders and Sites

By Dan Trahey, CoFounder and Artistic Director, OrchKids, The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

The vibrant atmosphere of collaboration and knowledge-sharing is a key component of El Sistema. Venezuelans are eager to open their musical home to thousands of visitors; the L.A. Philharmonic sponsors convenings of the eager and interested. In this spirit, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra offers yearly training sessions through the Community Engagement through Music Education (CEME) series. The BSO's third annual installment in this series, in November 2011, brought together a number of organizations interested in creating El Sistema within their organizations and in their communities.

Sessions focused on the essentials: everything from solidifying mission and goals to the nuts and bolts of site selection, fundraising, staffing, partnership, pedagogy, repertoire selection, assessment, and community development. Most important, participants explored how to take the first step towards creating a program.

Baltimore Symphony conductor Marin Alsop inspired the gathering with her observations about how OrchKids is changing the ethos of the BSO. The image of Meyerhoff Hall, the orchestra, and classical music itself is changing, she said, from highly elitist to much more inclusive and community-minded. She spoke about how to truly engage a community new to the idea that making the pursuit of music part of their daily lives can have extraordinary benefits.

This year's CEME was the strongest yet, and I was struck by the remarkable maturation of individual and organizational thought regarding El Sistema since the first event just two years ago. In general, attendees' knowledge about the Sistema is much broader and deeper than it was at the beginning, and there is a stronger conviction about using music as a vehicle for



CEME participants Charles Murrell and Matthew Thompson (Morgan State University) and Gary Padmore (Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra) inspire OrchKids students by performing with them.

social change. People are no longer asking "Why?" but simply "How?"

There's much more diversity than there used to be in the types of organizations attending. The national network is already heterogeneous, including symphony and youth orchestras sponsors, schools, foundations, social service centers, and independents. The attendees at our workshop epitomized this diversity—a promising sign for the future of the movement. And the participants keep getting younger and younger.

Our CEME culminated in a community performance that included kids and workshop attendees alike. Approximately 150 of our OrchKids students from Lockerman-Bundy Elementary School played in a number of ensembles, including Orchestra, Choir, Creative Composition Ensemble, Bucket Band, and sectional groups. We had an enthusiastic audience of over 400 people. Participants rolled up their sleeves and dove into the concert experience, setting up the concert hall, making music with the young musicians, serving meals, and fully engaging in the community experience that is OrchKids.

FROM THE EDITOR

Do your students know your mission statement?

It's a question I wouldn't have thought to ask until last week, when I heard a student at Community Theater Works, in Providence, RI, articulate confidently – and unprompted -- his commitment to aligning his personal actions with his program's mission. He spoke at the conference "Music and Civil Society," co-sponsored by CMW, a remarkable, El Sistema-resonant organization structured around the permanent residency of a string quartet in an urban neighborhood of Providence.

The CMW students, along with students from he visiting El Sistema-based Philadelphia program "Play On Philly," showed us, through their words and music, some of the connections between music and civil society with more eloquence than we had achieved in our academic talks the day before.

"Our mission," the CMW student told us, "is to create a cohesive urban community through music education and performance that transforms lives." His ease with these ideas reminded me of the fluency with which Venezuelan children speak about their orchestras as crucibles for citizenship as well as art. In a Venezuelan nucleo, every single person – students, teachers, even janitors – knows exactly what the mission is, and this orients choices and behaviors on a daily basis.

Are we in the U.S. being too timid about using our mission statements as a powerful force for alignment and energy? If all students, even the youngest, understand the commitment to bringing social change into musical learning, they can absorb and embody that commitment in everything they do.

Our students feel our mission, even without words. To give them words for it is to empower them even further to be musical agents of change in their own lives and their communities.

Tricia Tunstall

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Please distribute this newsletter widely to build awareness of the national movement.

1. Please print out copies and give them to students, families, supporters, anyone...
2. Please post issues on your website.
3. Soon we will have a web address where issues will be archived.

"The only reality we had at the start was a small group of very good teachers. This is the true seed of a program." – José Antonio Abreu

News Notes

Kids 4 Harmony launched on October 27, 2011 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. State Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli, Mayor James Ruberto, and Pittsfield School Superintendent Jake Eberwein all spoke at the launch, lending their support for this new initiative. An intensive after-school classical music program (five days a week), Kids 4 Harmony has the advantage of being sponsored by Berkshire Children and Families, a social service agency with nearly 125 years experience helping families build strong futures. Under the direction of 2011 Abreu Fellow Marie Montilla, Kids 4 Harmony offers instrumental music instruction to 70 first to third graders at Conte and Morningside Elementary Schools. Facebook: Kids 4 Harmony. Twitter: @Kids4Harmony mmontilla@bcfcm.org

MYCincinnati launched in October, led by Laura Jekel, a 2011 Abreu Fellow. She is working with Price Hill Will, a non-profit Community Development Corporation committed to the revitalization of Cincinnati's Price Hill neighborhood. The program meets from 4pm to 6pm every day at the Roberts Academy (a public school) and is open to anyone living in Price Hill. MYCincinnati's mission is to use classical music as a tool for youth development and community engagement by providing urban children with access to free, intense, high-quality musical instruction. Currently, there are 15 children in the program learning violin, viola, and cello. Laura@pricehillwill.org

"Seminario" opportunity. On Feb. 2, 2012, three southern California sites (Santa Barbara, San Diego, Pasadena) will bring together over a hundred students, teachers, and parents in LA for a day of focused learning and performing. All attendees of the Take A Stand Symposium are urged to stay an extra day in LA and participate actively (a number of roles are being offered) with El Sistema teachers from across the country. More information available in mid-December.

Resources:

Helpful blog. Jonathan Govias (conductor and Abreu Fellow 2010) writes an occasional blog that addresses a variety of El Sistema related issues—from the practical to the inspirational. His writing is engaging, and his perspectives are provocative and informed. <http://jonathangovias.com>



Marie Montilla (left) with Mayor Ruberto and community leader Rev. Louise Williamson at the launch, reminding us of the importance of strong local stakeholder networks.

Online assessment site. The excellent arts education organization CAPE (Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education) has created and posted an excellent resource for assessing student learning. El Sistema educators search for good background information, usable tools, and advice on ways to apply them to illuminate the learning in El Sistema programs. CAPE's new site is the best new resource to help us find effective ways to improve our programs and share their effectiveness through assessment practices. <http://www.capeweb.org/what-we-do/chicago-programs/arts-assessment-toolbox>

El Sistema program tool site online. Many have already used the variety of resources that the Los Angeles Philharmonic's YOLA program (Youth Orchestra Los Angeles) has generously placed online for benefit of all sites. Perhaps most popular has been the Paper Orchestra Cookbook and Video—giving all the basics to launch such a project. There are sample teaching artist job descriptions, parent handbooks, partnership agreements, teaching schedules, some research and foundation documents, and more. <http://www.laphil.com/yola/yola-resource.cfm>

Grants for music commissions. Meet The Composer/MetLife Creative Connections grants offer modest support (under \$3,500) for commissions of new music and composers' active involvement with communities in connection with them—making commissions by El Sistema-inspired organizations particularly interesting. Next grant deadline (they recur quarterly) is Jan. 7, 2012. <http://www.meetthecomposer.org/creativeconnections>

Fellows in National Action.

By Erik Holmgren, Program Director, Abreu Fellows

The Abreu Fellows Program at New England Conservatory has two primary goals: to educate ten people each year to make significant and sustainable contributions to the growth of the El Sistema movement in the United States, and to create knowledge and information useful to those who are deeply engaged in the work.

In September of this year, the third-year Abreu Fellows, with the support of the LA Philharmonic, the Longy School of Music, and the network of El Sistema-inspired U.S. nucleos, began the process of contacting every program in the U. S. with the goal of learning about the successes and needs of each. The project results will include the first estimates of the number of children being served by El Sistema in the U.S., a new, enhanced Nucleo Network List, and an identification of the challenges programs face nationwide in the hope that, collectively, we may develop strategies and materials to help address them. The findings will be reported in Los Angeles at the "Take a Stand" Symposium in January 2012, and a report will be made available to every nucleo in the United States immediately thereafter.

Immediately after initiating this effort to understand and listen to the field, the Fellows departed Boston in late October on internships throughout the U.S. and the world. This year the Fellows worked with 15 programs in the U.S., one in Scotland, and four in Costa Rica. Additionally, several Fellows opened conversations with the broader arts learning community through meetings with the NEA, the National Association for Music Education (formerly MENC), the League of American Orchestras, Arts Education Partnership, the National Guild, and the Organization of American States. Stay tuned for stories, data, and resources from the field in the coming months.

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"I asked Venezuelan colleagues what to look for in my teachers, and they said 'the spark, the passion, and you'll know it right away.'" - Anne Fitzgibbon, Founder/Director of The Harmony Program, New York