

Social Inclusion

By Keane Southard, *Composer Intern, Bennington College*

As a Fulbright scholar, I spent last year in Brazil studying several of the El Sistema-inspired programs there. I wanted to understand the Sistema movement in Brazil and to find out what other programs, particularly in the United States, my home country, might learn from their experiences. One of the most pertinent issues I discovered was that El Sistema's principle of "social inclusion" can be approached in different ways.

Some programs aim to achieve social inclusion by focusing on populations that have traditionally been excluded from classical music education. The [Orchestrando a Vida](#) (Orchestrating Life) program has taken this approach in the interior city of Campos dos Goytacazes. Begun in 1995, it is the oldest El Sistema-inspired program in Brazil, and has developed into a beautiful program with a high-quality youth orchestra. Some other Brazilian programs using this interpretation of "social inclusion" are [Brazil Strings](#) and [Ação Social pela Música in Rio de Janeiro](#), and [PRIMA](#) (Programa de Inclusão Através da Música e das Artes) in Paraíba. These programs operate in favelas (slums) and serve children of impoverished and marginalized communities.

The second way that "social inclusion" can be interpreted is as a mission to bring together youths of different economic and racial backgrounds to make music together. At NEOJIBA (Núcleos Estaduais de Orquestras Juvenis e Infantis da Bahia) in Salvador, Bahia, the development strategy results in this kind of social inclusion. Concert pianist Ricardo Castro, who founded the program, decided to begin by raising musical standards and expectations for Bahian youth. "There had only been one previous attempt at creating a youth orchestra here," he explained, "and the quality was very poor. This reinforced the stereotype that 'poor children can't play well.'" Ricardo held auditions for local young musicians, disregarding economic background, and formed a youth orchestra. NEOJIBA's first four years focused on developing this orchestra to a high musical level; very quickly, NEOJIBA became the best place in the state to get a music education, for children of any race or economic background.

It's interesting to note that this is the strategy Maestro Abreu initially used in Venezuela back in 1975. One of its advantages is that focusing on musical quality first can drive demand for more núcleos later. Only after NEOJIBA's youth orchestra had performed



Ricardo Castro with NEOJIBA musicians.
Photo: Keane Southard

around the city, toured Europe, and gained a reputation for excellence, did the program begin to open núcleos in poor communities around Bahia. Thus demand was generated from the ground up; many communities now want their own youth orchestras, and children practice hard in order to audition for the top orchestra someday.

Both El Sistema Venezuela and NEOJIBA filled a void in cultures that had almost no orchestras or high-quality classical music institutions; but would this strategy work in places with established music education institutions? Ricardo thinks so. He believes that if young children are brought together before they learn their racial and economic differences, they will transcend those differences and become friends through music.

Alex Klein, a Brazilian oboist who founded PRIMA after many years in the Chicago Symphony, sees it differently. Alex and Ricardo are good friends, but Alex is an advocate of social inclusion through focusing on traditionally excluded populations. "I think the El Sistema idea," he told me, "is to get to those who do not belong and give them a reason to belong, give them the strength to play well, so that they create a community amongst themselves." Integrating social classes can only be successful, he believes, when the level of performance is equal between them.

Most El Sistema programs in North America approach social inclusion in the first way/Alex Klein's way described above – with a primary goal of reaching marginalized populations. This is an understandable and probably appropriate "first take" on social inclusion. However, there is a possibility that if a two-track system persists down the line, it could perpetuate the ideology of separateness between youth orchestra programs.

Therefore it might be a worthwhile experiment for one of our programs to try out integrating students from different class backgrounds at a very young age and from the very outset, as Ricardo suggests. Our programs will all benefit from considering and creating different ways to foster social inclusion.

FROM THE EDITOR

In this issue we highlight El Sistema's manifold vitality in Brazil and consider two different ways that programs interpret and exemplify the goal of "social inclusion."

Here is a third way to think about social inclusion – in terms of organizations rather than people, joining forces with other music education projects to serve an entire community. Issues of inclusion and exclusion can make the difference between success and failure for organizations as well as for individuals.

For a model of ambitious organizational inclusion, we need look no further than Venezuela's neighbor Colombia, where the Sistema program, [Batuta](#) ("bat-ton"), has from its inception coexisted with a number of music education initiatives. Batuta's leaders decided early on to cast a wide net of partnership.

"What I would emphasize about Batuta, and Colombian music education in general, is that it's all about collaboration and networks," says Juan Felipe Molano, the former director of Batuta's top youth orchestra and now the conductor of YOLA. "There's room for the different approaches of different organizations, to meet various specific needs."

In Medellín, the mostly-federally-funded Batuta coexists with a venerable municipal program, La Red. The programs share the basic goal of socially-oriented music education, but there's an agreement that Batuta's work is especially effective among the city's poorest, most dispossessed populations. And in Cali, there are at least ten organizations bringing ensemble music to underserved children. "Of course they fight sometimes; that's human nature," says Juan Felipe. "But they are always trying to connect – with each other, and with the kids." In Cali, that determination yielded dramatic results in 2009, when, to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the national Air Force, all the organizations in the city produced a joint concert of seven hundred children and young people in an airplane hangar.

In the words of Juan Antonio Cuellar, a former director of Batuta: "No one institution knows the whole truth. We need to keep building coalitions among all the public and private entities that are working for the protection of children through music."

Abreu consistently tells us: "In North America, you already have so much!" Clearly, strength lies in practicing effective *organizational* inclusion.

Tricia Tunstall

"In Venezuela, public spaces have been literally captured by the creative work of youth and children's orchestras and choirs." – José Antonio Abreu

News Notes

El Sistema USA offers a [symposium](#) on January 9 and 10 entitled [Built to Grow, Build to Last: Redefining the Future of Our Movement with Sustainability in Mind](#). Taught by well-established not-for-profit experts from outside the Sistema community and arts education field, participants (maximum 200) will explore issues of organizational stability and long-term sustainability. A pre-symposium day on January 8 will study [Play On, Philly!](#), and a post-symposium day on January 11 will envision implications of the symposium for Sistema programs. Contact: info@elsistemausa.org. To register: <http://goo.gl/EGM9Ad>

A [Canadian Symposium on Instrumental Change](#) will be hosted by The Leading Note Foundation in Ottawa on February 12 & 13, 2015. The first day will focus on what works and lessons learned in Sistema-inspired initiatives in Canada and beyond, and the second day explores program development and teaching artistry through workshops and panels, master classes and performances, working with students in OrKidstra. Keynote speakers include England's Richard Hallam. Discount registration available through December. <http://leadingnotefoundation.org/save-the-date-symposium-on-instrumental-change>

Located in North County San Diego, and after a year of preparation, [Fortissimo](#) opens in January. Starting with 25 third graders, for two hours, three days a week, the program is a partnership



A soon-to-be Fortissimo student studies a catalog of instruments. Photo: PR Club from Cal State Uni-

between [The Kid's College](#) (an existing after-school enrichment program) and the San Marcos Unified School District. Carole Beeson, a retired teacher from this district, is the founder and Program Director. Guidance from Dalouge Smith and the team from the San Diego Youth Symphony/Community Opus Project has been crucial. cbeeson21@gmail.com

In mid-November, the [El Sistema New Jersey Alliance](#) presented a week-long, statewide festival of concerts in public spaces, emphasizing efforts at coordinated visibility and publicity. Each of the five Alliance programs produced a series of concerts in its own community, recognizing and celebrating the others. <http://ow.ly/EgXFc>

[BRAVO Youth Orchestras](#) in Portland, OR, saw Tricia Tunstall's request on Sistema Global for help with [training a teaching artist from an emerging Sistema program in Honduras](#). Now in their second year, BRAVO feels they have built enough foundation to start paying forward the generosity they have received; they are offering to host the Honduran teacher for a week-plus of training. "Having a guest from a Spanish speaking foreign country enriches the culture of the program for students," says Executive Director Seth Truby, "and making a new friend in another country just appeals to all of us."

Resources

While NEC's Sistema Fellows Program is not enrolling new cohorts, the [Sistema Fellowship Resource Center](#) keeps the work growing by re-investing in the Program's alumni. A new site, (<http://necmusic.edu/sistema>) details the Fellows' collective impact, profiles the 50 Fellows, summarizes the Sistema Fellows Program, and provides links and helpful resources such as the Sistema Fellows Program Final Report. The Resource Center offers Fellows a professional development workshop series, innovation grants, and travel assistance, among other services.

Have you ever struggled to make a simple case for the [benefits of music education on brain development](#)? Here is the resource you have needed to add to presentations with parents, school boards, chambers of commerce, etc.: a clear and delightful five-minute film on music and the brain. <http://trendinghot.net/what-playing-a-musical-instrument-does-to-your-brain/>

Did you ever consider [changing the face of your program location with a public art project](#) like a musical mural? If so, NOCD-NY (Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts, a multi-stakeholder group that connects arts and communities) has just published a series of short books (available free) that will help you imagine and organize such a project. <http://nocdny.org/2014/01/18/update-innovative-cultural-uses-of-urban-space>

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Learning In & From Brazil

by Vanessa Rodrigues, Founder, Brazil Strings

Colorful crowds of costumed dancers and singers at Carnaval time; thunderous rhythms of 300 tightly rehearsed drummers; fans singing choruses of pop songs at stadium concerts – we associate all these with the highly musical country of Brazil.

But relatively few young Brazilians have the means to access formal musical training. Furthermore, Brazil does not have a culture of formal study, especially in underprivileged communities. Often, the students in Sistema programs are the first in their families to study anything. Often, simply coming to class is a mammoth struggle, given the regularity of obstacles like gang shootouts and ruined roads. Nevertheless, Brazilians tend to be a relaxed and jovial people.

If you come to volunteer in "Brazil Strings" for a month, what might you learn that could help you in your own program? The highly extroverted energy of Brazilian youth might feel a little overwhelming. To manage this, I find it works well to incorporate physical movement with something familiar: I might have them follow me around the room playing a rhythmic pattern and singing a song they all know.

You'll notice that Brazilian students grasp rhythmic patterns easily, because they have grown up surrounded by complicated syncopated rhythms. You might want to bring home some familiarity with samba percussion techniques and instruments, so you can introduce them as part of your curriculum – not as a separate performing group, but as a tool to help all your students with rhythm and coordination.

You may also notice the ease with which Brazilian kids sing. This is great preparation for playing in ensemble; you might try having your orchestra students sing together the main melodies of their pieces, whether or not that melody occurs in their parts. My students all know the question-answer melodic structures of Mozart's 40th Symphony and Holst's *Jupiter*; the positive effects on their understanding and expression of the pieces is clear.

Working with Brazilians has taught me that creating a relaxed and fun classroom environment is essential – as is the ability to admit and laugh at my mistakes. A slightly more "Brazilian" classroom approach – with a bit more singing, dancing, and spontaneity – may help your students to feel more at ease, and to play together in a more freely expressive ensemble.

To learn more about Brazil Strings, please visit <http://www.brazilstrings.org>

**"It isn't music that develops the social skills of the kids; it is how you teach it."
– Ana Cecelia Restrepo, Director of La Red, Medellin, Colombia**