

Orchestrating Beyond the First Movement: Perspectives on Program Expansion

by Julie Davis, Sistema Fellow 2012

As our young musicians took their end-of-the-year concert bows this spring, some program directors were thinking about the possibility of many more students joining the celebration next year. Several directors shared with me their insights about scaling up and expanding beyond the initial program design.

New York City's four-year-old Harmony Program, with sites in Brooklyn, Harlem, and northern Manhattan, plans further expansion next year. Says Executive Director Anne Fitzgibbons, "It's important to have a very strong foundation before you begin building new sites."

One key to a strong foundation is streamlining the administrative operations that oversee multiple sites. Anne notes that Harmony Program's efficient systems for payroll, student attendance, program assessment, and teacher training will allow Harmony to grow while maintaining its quality. Another key? "Know your program's priorities," says Anne, "and be true to them." New York City, like other communities touched by El Sistema, is hungry for more.

As Dan Trahey, artistic director of OrchKids, says about the city of Baltimore, "Everybody wants it." Sometimes, host sites want it so much that they are eager to pay for the program. Such opportunities for multiple sites are tempting, but Anne warns "not to let the tail wag the dog" and rush the process of expansion.

Juneau Alaska Music Matters anticipates opening its second site this fall, in response to community demand. "It is important to balance opportunity with quality," affirms JAMM director Lorrie Heagy. JAMM's second site will succeed, she says, because she has had time to instill a common teaching language among her staff. A teaching artist who has worked side-by-side with Lorrie for a year will supervise the new site.

Atlanta Music Project founder Dantes Rameau advises us that another key to a strong foundation for expansion is strong partnering with organizations that can inform and support El Sistema programming. To Dantes, "Expansion is people partnering. We can't work in isolation." This year AMP will open its



Harmony Program (NYC) students perform at program sites in Manhattan and Brooklyn; HP will expand to the Bronx in 2012-2103

Photos: Andre Beckles and Yuan Yuan Kong

third, choral-based site with Sistema Fellow Aisha Bowden. Aisha notes that AMP's partnership with the City of Atlanta's Office of Cultural Affairs has opened the doors to numerous collaborations with local nonprofits and corporations.

With El Sistema's relentless spirit of striving to create access to quality music education for all, it is easy to think that a program's success lies in the increase of the number of students served. Yet Patrick Slevin, program director of Austin Soundwaves, defines success differently. "In Venezuela, the numbers wouldn't mean as much without things like the Simon Bolivar's Proms performance. That excellence is why so many people know about Venezuela."

In contrast to nucleos that are expanding through multiple sites, Austin Soundwaves, currently in its second year and serving 65 students at East Austin College Prep, is internalizing growth. Patrick focuses his expansion efforts vertically to build a "pipeline," so that by 2016 the charter school-based nucleo will serve pre-K through 12th graders. To Patrick, this is "a Sistema" – a single location where all students, teachers, families, and community partners are connected. "We're gradually building the program around our people. We base our program around the people we have, and the people we can safely say will be here long-term."

FROM THE EDITOR

Mind the Gap

"I officially declare this nucleo open!" said Jude Kelly last week. By "this nucleo" she meant the Southbank Centre in London, a vast complex of performance spaces on the bank of the Thames River. Kelly, Southbank's director, was celebrating the weeklong residency of the Simon Bolivar Orchestra of Venezuela by recreating the Centre as an international El Sistema festival.

In a way, it did have the feel of a nucleo. The Bolivar musicians led sectionals with the children of "In Harmony," England's El Sistema-inspired program. There were concerts every night. The Centre was bursting with Sistema-related people from all over the world – Scotland, Sweden, Ireland, the USA, Japan, and elsewhere. The feeling of connectedness around a common vision was intense and palpable.

The Southbank "nucleo" lasted just a few days. But I was impressed by the kinds of continuous connectedness many Sistema-inspired programs have achieved. I heard about the practice, in Sistema Gothenberg, of bringing children from different sites to play together every Wednesday. I heard that in New Zealand, all Sistema teachers meet together once a week. And when Maestro Abreu met with members of the emerging entity Sistema Europe, he stressed the importance of staying actively connected with one another.

It's not easy for Sistema-inspired programs in the U.S. to achieve this kind of connectedness. We're so geographically dispersed, and so necessarily focused on the daily challenges of running programs, that it's easy to become isolated.

But the clear evidence is that every time programs come together, in "seminarios" and other less formal ways, the result is a combustible energy for both teachers and students that lasts well beyond the event. As Dan Trahey of Orchkids puts it, "Just get in a car and visit the nearest Sistema program." Or – just pick up the phone. Being mindful about transcending our geographical gaps can re-energize and invigorate us as we go about the challenging and joyful business of changing lives through music.

Tricia Tunstall

"They dignify their existence by assuming, from their earliest years, the glorious condition of artists." – Jose Antonio Abreu, about the children of El Sistema

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE U.S. EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

News Notes

Founded in 2009 in St. Louis, **Orchestrating Diversity** began as the Urban Youth Orchestra, with a dedication to the principle of providing highest expectations for a population too long thought destined for failure. In addition to performing standard orchestral repertoire, the youth orchestra has performed premieres of new music and collaborated with the free-jazz great Hamiet Blewett, and soon will work with Black Artist Group composer Zimbabwe Enkenya. The volunteer staff delivers year-round weekly rehearsals, lessons, classes in music history, theory and ear training. After this summer's Intensive, the orchestra will perform Rossini's Italian in Algiers overture, Brahms 1st Symphony, and Beethoven Emperor's Concerto. In addition, OD is launching a beginners program for children ages 4-9. Contact: Mark Sarich at lnac.mark@gmail.com

In the April issue of The Ensemble, Karen Zorn described the **Masters of Arts in Teaching** program, offered by Longy-Bard as a part of its Take a Stand initiative, and informed by the Longy School's history in progressive music education and Bard's history of social-development-focused teacher training. Online applications are now open for this intensive yearlong program, housed at the LA Philharmonic's YOLA at HOLA. The focus is on El Sistema teaching, including daily work with students. Application available at www.bard.slideroom.com. Deadline: September 21, 2012 (for January, 2013 matriculation). Questions: Elsjie Kibler-Vermaas at elsje.kiblervermaas@longy.edu

The University of Maryland Baltimore County, in partnership with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and OrchKids, has just announced the launch of a one year Post-Baccalaureate **Certificate Program in Music Entrepreneurship**, with a special focus on El Sistema methodology, and on establishing and managing El Sistema inspired programs. Applications due by July 15, for a start in late August. Information and application process available <http://www.umbc.edu/music/programs/entrepreneurship.php#objectives>

Two recent seminarios. In early May, the **largest U.S. seminario** to date was hosted by Play On, Philly!, bringing together 300 students from eight El Sistema-inspired U.S. programs. Two days of rehearsals and sectionals led by teaching artists and staff from each program culminated in a joint orchestra performance

of "What a Wonderful World," Medley of Traditional Spiritual Songs, and Sibelius' "Finlandia." Participating programs included El Sistema Lehigh Valley (Allentown, PA), Harmony Program (NYC), KidZNotes (Durham, NC), OrchKids and Tuned In (Baltimore, MD), Play On, Philly! and Tune Up Philly (Philadelphia, PA), and Soundscapes (Newport News, VA). The **first Ohio seminario** brought together students from My Cincinnati and students of El Sistema@Rainey in Cleveland to rehearse and perform together for two days. Both programs are completing their first year – one year ago the students hadn't heard of Beethoven, but at the seminario they played the Ninth Symphony confidently next to new friends from out of town.

Two international news items On June 24, the first meeting of **Sistema Europe** was held at the Southbank Centre in London in conjunction with their international summit. Leaders from 11 countries were represented, eight additional countries are active, another six readying to launch – currently some 8500 students are in Sistema Europe programs. Maestro Abreu and Eduardo Mendez spent time with them, and they laid the first foundation stone for a growing network that seeks to develop good communication and resource exchanges with the U.S. movement.

Sistema Japan announces the launch of its first site. The Soma Children's Orchestra Project (SCO) in the city of Soma, province of Fukushima, one of the disaster areas in March 2011, serves children who have suffered traumatic stress. The program starts with string ensemble lessons for 27 students ages 8 to 13. The leaders of Sistema Japan thank many in the U.S. El Sistema movement, and in July a team of five from the U.S. will help publicize Sistema Japan and teach at the Soma site. Contact: Yutaka Kikugawa, Executive Director of Friends of El Sistema Japan at info@elsistemajapan.org

Resources

The **Boston Youth Arts Evaluation Project** recently won an award for excellence, and also published their findings in a downloadable workbook and handbook. For over three years, four well-established youth arts organizations researched and developed a framework and tools to measure three main outcome areas common to youth arts programs: artistic expression (I Create), identity (I Am), and community (We Connect). Their generously shared tools may be very useful to us: http://www.byaep.com/1/BYAEP_Handbook_Workbook.html

Inside a Seminario

By Zebadiah Coombs, second-year violist with Play On Philly, eighth grade student

The El Sistema in America Experience

This [seminario] was a great experience that I will never forget. All of the students were able to have a day of fun and music and no one had to worry about anything. Yes, it was hot, and yes, we didn't always know what to do or where to go next; however, everything always worked out in the end, and that's what counts. My most special memory about it would have to be how music, something I love with all of my heart, brought me so close to people who I barely even knew. For someone with barely any friends, that really means a lot.



Photo: Steven Krull

Just being with all of those kids was an honorable experience, but actually working with them was so much more. It was actually sort of like a blessing. We were able to go from those who were divided by where we live to those united in music. On the surface, there were some things wrong. I'll admit that much, but nothing/no one is perfect. You have to look below the surface to truly see what you have in front of you, and what I saw was amazing. I had a lot of fun, and no matter what else happened ... we went, we prepared, and we conquered every obstacle in our way as we will continue to do!

Like I said before, the experience really was a blessing. There is no other way to explain it. I value it because musicians have to learn from each other. We each come to the same goal in different ways. If we want to continue to break the limitations that people have put on us, we have to cherish and help each other. We have one common goal and we must reach that goal as one body.

We are one. That is why other programs should do this. We have to come together to give everyone music.

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"They played until their wee hearts burst." – Richard Holloway, founder of Sistema Scotland, about the children's side-by-side concert with the Simon Bolivar Orchestra