

Imagining and Realizing the Possible Future

By Marshall Marcus, CEO European Union Youth Orchestra, Chair Sistema Europe

It was recently announced that Venezuela's National Electricity Corporation (Corpoelec) will form a new youth orchestra in Caracas under the aegis of El Sistema, with the aim of eventually enrolling up to a thousand children. Stop for a moment and think about that announcement: it's nothing short of a revolution in institutional and model development for El Sistema.

Not long ago came the news of Maestro Abreu's plan to extend El Sistema's work into schools throughout Venezuela. Another big, very big, idea. Meanwhile, in Barquisimeto, the proposal for one of the world's greatest architects, Frank Gehry, to build an opera house complements the announcement last year of Milan's La Scala opera house partnership with El Sistema.

Here are three examples – plucked almost at random from El Sistema's ever burgeoning and seemingly unstoppable structural and institutional growth – of radical new models to advance the spread of successful Sistema work in Venezuela. After almost 40 years, the unremitting daring pace of structural expansion there remains mind-bogglingly ambitious, and whilst such changes take their place alongside highly valued pedagogical and musical developments too numerous to list in an article of this humble length, they are no less integral to the success of El Sistema. Actually perhaps more integral; a point we can often miss.

Now I could go on at length about the ingenuity of Maestro Abreu's development model and its critical importance for the growth of El Sistema. But instead of preaching to the converted, here's my question for today: what are we doing in the rest of the El Sistema world that can even begin to compare with the virtuosic depth of long-term strategic planning and development of El Sistema in Venezuela?

Answers, I suspect, could be proffered on an extremely small postcard.

The fact is that we are all so justifiably impressed by the methodology and pedagogy of El Sistema, that, in my opinion, we have arguably neglected the radical nature of the model development side. Don't get me wrong: there are some great programs and wonderful teaching approaches out there, and there are also impressive institutional initiatives, such as Take a Stand and the Salzburg Festival's recent mass Sistema play-in that brought almost 1500 young Venezuelans to perform in one of the world's most important music festivals.

But how many of these initiatives are being planned with, say, ten- to forty-year perspectives, in order to

provide new engines for institutional development in tomorrow's world at national or regional levels? What does the next President of the U.S. (or the one after that) know about the social problem-solving capacity of El Sistema? Who has engaged with the George Soros's, the Bill Gates's or the Thomas Piketty's of this world? In England last year, for example, when Sistema England made a presentation to an invited audience with members of the In Harmony Scheme, the question from the floor from the U.K. government's Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, was: "This is all wonderful; have you been in contact with the Ministry of Justice?"

So we have here a philosophy, a methodology, a pedagogy, actually a complete aetiology of positive social change in a proven program of community cultural activity. (Apologies, proven is a big word that remains arguably short of our current grasp). But is it only Maestro Abreu whom we should be relying on to argue the case in front of the World Bank, Davos, G20 and the people at TED?

I believe that in order to begin to be successful at a level where there is significant institutional leverage on big international stages, we need to be more imaginative and bold in our institutional thinking. And somewhat more outward-facing. The laboratory phase of hundreds of varied Sistema organizations worldwide has been great - and continues to be - but it's essentially a laboratory of pedagogy. What we now need to lay alongside it is a laboratory of institutional and model development that takes our Sistema organisations into daring new partnerships and as yet unimagined alignments.

A couple of examples from Europe: Big Noise in Scotland is hosting an international teachers' conference in October 2014. How great an opportunity is that for major international tech companies or inter-governmental organisations to eavesdrop on this gathering? Or consider the next Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra camp, happening in Istanbul in August. Why not invite major international corporations to come see how young Europeans from a dozen countries are learning to communicate effectively across major language, social and cultural barriers? Fact: somewhere near you is a company like Corpoelec Venezuela; not a sponsor, but a game changer. Fact: unlocking that change is just a matter of imagination.

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FROM THE EDITOR

In this month's lead article, Marshall Marcus writes compellingly about imagination and its uses. It seems to me that often, we in the Sistema-inspired movement are abundantly imaginative about how to teach children what eighth notes are, how to find metaphors for proper bow hold, how to include shy children and redirect disruptive ones. We are sometimes less imaginative about how we seek support, which is really a question of how and where we see ourselves within our social environments.

Marshall is writing about the very biggest of big-picture thinking. I think the spirit of creative self-invention is equally useful at the other end of the spectrum, where programs are small and just evolving. I've been privileged recently to work with one such imaginative experiment in New Jersey, where five small programs that developed independently have decided to create an alliance.

No one knows exactly what this alliance could or should look like. We do know that in a state characterized by fierce extremes of wealth and poverty, our students struggle with the same acute problems. By coming together, the programs can share precious resources, create a profusion of peer learning opportunities among teachers, and command public attention. And more: they bring their supporters into alliance. The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, the New Jersey Youth Orchestra, the Wharton Community Music School, the school district of Orange, the municipal dignitaries of Union City, and the Geraldine Dodge Foundation – suddenly all are partners in this common endeavor.

Our first common project culminates this month, with a joint concert by the students of all five programs. The performance will feature Dave Rimelis's spirited mash-up of the Ode To Joy and Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds" (I have to think that both Bob and Ludwig would have approved).

Of course, many U.S. programs have created such seminars, to joyful and often truly transformative effect. What's distinctive about this one is that the five programs are not only collaborating on a common concert; they are committed to building a new entity of affiliation. It's not developmental thinking on the grand Venezuelan scale. But it's a step in that direction. Viva Sistema New Jersey!

Tricia Tunstall

**"The genius of El Sistema is the orchestra, where you can't be great until you are great together."
– José Antonio Abreu**

News Notes

El Sistema Pittsburgh launched its first pilot program at the The DoorWay in Avalon, six miles northwest of Pittsburgh, with 20 students; they plan to double the number in the fall. The DoorWay is a counseling center where families and young people in troubling circumstances go for help. The partnership began in 2013 and now focuses mainly on string instruments. Founder Ronald Siso, a conductor and music arranger who studied within Venezuela's El Sistema in Maracai and maintains strong ties there, envisions sharing material from Venezuelan programs with the wider movement. Contact: <http://elsistemapittsburgh.org> or rsiso@elsistemapittsburgh.org

The **Longy-WolfBrown Evaluation project** launched by the Buck Family Foundation (announced in the Feb. 2014 issue) has received an additional \$100,000 in funding from The Mellon Foundation, and has announced its study sites. The new funding adds: three more Core Sites; investigation of how Sistema-inspired programs affect professional orchestras; and support for training Longy graduate students as El Sistema Research Fellows. The **nine Core Sites** for research are: Incredible Children's Art Network (iCAN) (Santa Barbara, CA); Kalamazoo Kids in Tune (Kalamazoo, MI); KidZNotes (Raleigh, NC); New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (NJSO) Champs (Newark, NJ); OrchKids (Baltimore, MD); The People's Music School Youth Orchestras (Chicago, IL); Play On Philly (Philadelphia, PA); Reno Philharmonic Celebrate Strings (Reno, NV); San Diego Youth Symphony (SDYS) Community Opus Project (San Diego, CA). There are also 17 Collaborating Sites and three Companion sites. For inquiries: Ann.Welch@longy.edu

The **fifth cohort of Sistema Fellows** at New England Conservatory has just graduated. As a contribution to the field, they produced a report that pulls together their year of learning and serves as a foundation document for the field: **An Inquiry into Creating Intentional Social Change through Ensemble-based Music Programs**. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/qae8bpk> As the Fellowship transitions into a new phase of ongoing leadership development instead of training new cohorts, a tribute to the 50 graduated Fellows is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/obn38hs>

OrchKids' Community Engagement Through Music Education Conference, July 16-19, will study their

Creative Concert Production techniques to produce engaging, pedagogically sound concerts in the El Sistema style. Participants join the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids staff, administration, students, parents, and teachers as they prepare for a string of concerts during the world's largest free arts festival, Artscape, in the heart of Baltimore, Maryland. For more information: bsomusic.org/ceme

Resources

A strong **new advocacy film** (27 minutes) has just been produced, featuring insightful theory that supports the work of the whole movement, along with personal stories of the students and teachers of the Verdugo Young Musicians Association (VYMA) at Longfellow Elementary School in Pasadena, CA. *I Am a Fine Musician* is produced by the Roberts Coyote Foundation and intended to be an advocacy tool for all programs. The producers have made it available online: <http://fnmusician.org/watch-film> with DVDs available upon request at: angela@mocamedia.tv

James Taylor wrote "**Shed a Little Light**" to celebrate Martin Luther King, and he has waived the rights for a **Full Arrangement Package** for Sistema-inspired sites (to include all levels of students in our programs). The arrangement package by Adam Johnston is now available to use for free for all Sistema-inspired programs, in hopes that our whole movement will honor MLK by performing it around the holiday next January; go to Rep + Resource on Sistema Global: <http://sistemaglobal.org/item/shed-a-little-light> Also, a **new Co-Commissioning project** requests a \$50 contribution to support further works for us, by us, in a sustainable way. Please join (and have your name listed on the cover of the arrangement) to support this inexpensive way to build our musical connections and identity: contact kalikolehuamele@gmail.com

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) has released the 2014 Edition of **ArtScan – a 50-state clearinghouse of education policies** that shape arts education instruction and opportunities in public elementary and secondary schools across the U.S. <http://www.aep-arts.org/research-policy/artscan>

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Creating Sustainability

by Dalouge Smith, President & CEO of San Diego Youth Symphony and Conservatory/Community Opus Project

The El Sistema movement outside Venezuela has grown rapidly, with hundreds of programs launched in countries on six continents in less than a decade. However, the excitement of starting a program must quickly transition to long-term thinking to fully meet the needs of the children, families, and communities we serve. In San Diego, we focus on three key factors to ensure that what we've started with our Community Opus Project is sustainable.

Our first commitment is to ensure our students have long-term music-making opportunities. We believe these opportunities must not be dependent upon our organization alone. We work closely with schools to help them build beginning music at the elementary level and expand their middle and high school music programs. Our El Sistema work serves as the inspiration to the schools and a complement to what they already offer.

Secondly, we aim to place El Sistema teachers in all of the students' music-making settings. This contributes to a continuity of experience and philosophy that goes beyond the musical training. We now have Opus faculty in full-time music educator positions at two schools and a roster finishing teaching credentials so they too can be hired into schools. Additionally, our first Opus program manager is a top candidate to become the first district staff member in 25 years to lead visual and performing arts programs at our partner district.

Third, we build sustainability for ourselves and the movement through supporting and guiding the work of new El Sistema efforts in communities beyond the direct reach of our programs. We now advise two additional local school districts as they develop their own El Sistema efforts.

Finally, we want to connect with other El Sistema programs to share what we've learned and achieved with Opus and to understand how others are approaching the challenges of sustainability. It is imperative that El Sistema-inspired programs investigate these questions together if we are to be a true movement. Achieving sustainability in one program will only be of benefit if it helps sustain the field. It is necessary for us all to contribute to this inquiry in order to claim lasting success.

"I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning." – Plato