

Preparing Students to Graduate Successfully

By Aubree Weiley, Adjunct Faculty, *North Park University Certificate in Music for Social Change*

As our El Sistema movement in the U.S. matures, our students are growing right along with it, which raises the following questions: How are we helping high school students prepare to graduate from our programs? And how are we supporting them once they leave? As I set out to answer these questions, it quickly became clear that we are only beginning to address this issue, though it is of immense importance. And just as Sistema has inspired a diversity of programs, models of graduate success and post-program support are taking many different forms.

Last month, The [Atlanta Music Project \(AMP\)](#) and [Clayton State University](#) announced a joint program that will provide endowed funding for AMP graduates to continue their education with the [Clayton State Music Department](#). This is a monumental step in paving the path to higher education for Sistema graduates. The partnership was the result of thorough and relentless relationship-building initiatives, explained Aisha Bowden, Co-Founder and Director of [AMPify](#) at AMP. "We went to all of the major players in town and spoke with as many people as we could, and we hope that this opportunity is the first of many," she said.

Stanford Thompson, Founder and Artistic Director of [Play on, Philly! \(POP\)](#) in Philadelphia, similarly stressed the value of networking with institutions. Unlike Atlanta, POP highlights a partnership with a different institution of higher education each year, and plans a year-long festival of activities, including guest conductors and teachers, college student internships, performance and rehearsal opportunities, POP student trips to campus, and more. These mutually beneficial partnerships, which have included University of Pennsylvania and Villanova University, offer students positive exposure to academic life and give institutions accessible opportunities for student teaching and community service.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic takes another approach, by offering [Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles \(YOLA\)](#) students the opportunity to prepare for the college application process through applying for the YOLA Citizenship Award. The award application includes essay composition using typical college prompts,

audition preparation, and staff interviews. "What we noticed in the essays and the interviews, as well as in some of our leadership programming at YOLA sites, was that many of our students were not able to articulate their own stories – stories about their families, their communities, and their personal triumphs and struggles; stories that give people outside of our programs a view into how extraordinary our students are," said Gretchen Nielsen, Director of Educational Initiatives for the LA Phil. In response, and together

with its partners, the LA Phil developed communications classes and held practice interview sessions with students as part of a leadership training initiative. This communication preparation has greatly assisted students in the college application process, giving them the tools to be compelling ambassadors.

Even after kids leave our programs, we need to continue supporting them socially and emotionally, stressed Dan Trahey, Artistic Director of BSO

[OrchKids](#). "We need to always keep the door open for them to come back," he said.

Leaving the door open for students to come back, and offering opportunities for alumni to participate in programs, are areas many organizations are actively practicing and exploring. [Revolution of Hope](#) in Roxbury, MA, highlights non-traditional paths of post-secondary school experience by making it possible for graduates, college-bound or otherwise, to remain in the program but advance to the role of paid intern or teacher. Director David France noted that this benefits younger students as well as graduates. "When kids from our communities see their peers working in our programs," he said, "it has a profound impact on their confidence in their future potential."

As our community of Sistema-inspired program alumni grows, our graduates will play an instrumental role in helping us gain insight on how best to support and guide students. Following our alumni, and finding valuable paths for them to both successfully leave and happily return to our programs and communities, are endeavors to be prioritized. It is our students who will lay the foundation for building a circle of opportunity for engagement, excitement, and excellence.



L to R: Assistant Professor of Music at [Clayton State University](#) Dr. Richard Bell, holding the scholarship agreement is Executive Director of Atlanta Music Project Dantes Rameau, Director of Development of Clayton State University Thomas Giffin. Photo: Anthony Alston, Jr.

FROM THE EDITOR

On a corridor wall of the corporate building in Pasig City where the Philippine El Sistema center is located, there is a large plaque with a portrait of Eugenio Lopez, who was a prominent 20th-century industrialist and founder of one of the largest conglomerates in the Philippines, the Lopez Group of Companies. The plaque is engraved with this quote from Eugenio: "A commercial firm which can hardly make both ends meet, but which gives service and real satisfaction to the community, is in my estimation more successful than a multi-million dollar corporation which reaps huge profits and then keeps them to itself, completely neglecting the community which sustains its life."

Can you imagine a U.S. corporation signing onto this remarkably progressive credo? As noted in our News section this month, the concept of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is evolving among U.S. businesses. But it's far from being a clear vision.

In contrast, generations of Lopez leaders have been absolutely clear about their community obligations and social mission. The current generation supports an array of social causes including truancy reduction, educational reform, child welfare, and environmentalism, and sustains a robust commitment to the Sistema program, [Ang Misyon](#).

I had the opportunity last month to experience Ang Misyon firsthand, on an observation-cum-advocacy trip with Jamie Bernstein. Founded by Federico "Piki" Lopez (grandson of Eugenio) and pianist Jovianney Emmanuel Cruz, it's grown quickly to include hundreds of children in eleven satellites across the country; we heard children playing symphonic and band music in a provincial ghetto, a squatters' colony, and a convent orphanage (we didn't make it to the newest site, on Talim Island in Laguna de Bay, which takes two hours to reach by motorboat...if the weather is good). There is a "Prep Club" training orchestra and a national Sistema orchestra that plays with the verve and ambition of a Venezuelan youth orchestra.

"You can feel the strength of this idea," Piki Lopez told me. "It touches the heart. Our impoverished communities need this kind of transformation."

It's a social commitment of a whole different order from burnishing a corporate image or building a brand -- which are our business leaders' accustomed ways of imagining community connection. We need to help them imagine bigger, and to feel "the strength of this idea."

Tricia Tunstall

"Children who participate in orchestras develop a much more humane perception of their role within society. They have a completely different set of values." – José Antonio Abreu

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE U.S. & CANADIAN EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

News Notes

May is becoming seminario month. There was an **East Coast** seminario (hosted by El Sistema Lehigh Valley in Allentown, PA); one in the **Boston area**, of 14 programs and 400 students; one in the **Midwest** (North Limestone Music Works in Lexington KY, Shift: Englewood in Chicago, Q the Music in Dayton, and Avondale Youth Orchestra in Cincinnati, hosted by MYCincinnati); and a seven-program **joint concert in NYC** (Corona Youth Music Project, Harmony Program, Opportunity Music Project, Union City Music Project, UpBeat NYC, Washington Heights and Inwood Music Project, Youth Orchestra of St. Luke's).

Also, one past and one future seminario: in late March, the **Montreal École FACE Orchestra** and both **Viva!Sistema Montreal** sites (Point St Charles and Kahnawake) performed with the chamber orchestra from the University of North Carolina Charlotte, led by Sistema Fellow Jonathan Govias. In early June, four Boston-area Sistema Fellows will bring their programs to perform at **NEC's Jordan Hall**: Bridge Boston Charter School (Julie Davis), Josiah Quincy Orchestra Program (Graciela Briceno), Margarita Múniz Academy (Avi Mehta), and Revolution of Hope (David France).

Evaluating Sistema Scotland – Initial Findings Report Summary may be the most significant research report on Sistema work anywhere. Led by the Glasgow Center for Population Health, with input from Audit Scotland and a cost-benefit analysis from Glasgow Caledonian University, the data strongly endorse the program's methodology and show a wide range of benefits to students in the short and medium terms. The report predicts longer-term potential to significantly enhance participants' lives, prospects, health and wellbeing. The cost-benefit analysis identifies the payback point at around six years, when investment costs will begin to be out-measured by social benefits. In the longer term, the report finds a net value to society of some 29 million pounds in 15 years, just for the Govanhill program site. This research is not only affirming and inspiring; it also invites close study for its methodology and

partnering. Study available at: <http://tinyurl.com/lr3tsbn>. In tandem with the report, an evaluation film made entirely by Sistema students from Raploch has been released. <http://tinyurl.com/lk6b9vc>

Resources

Crescendo: The Power of Music, the award-winning feature-length documentary about El Sistema in the U.S., directed by Jamie Bernstein, is now available for very reasonably priced screenings. Contact sales agent Andrew Herwitz: andrew.hervitz@filmsalescorp.com. The most successful screenings

are those that include brief live performances by local Sistema program musicians. Here is a new trailer for the film: <https://vimeo.com/128550187> Film website: <http://www.crescendofilm.com>



Mohamed Camara, trombone player in the Harmony Program, featured in Crescendo.
Photo: Claudia Raschke-Robinson

Corporate support for Sistema programs in the U.S. is modest in scope, but some identify CSR

(Corporate Social Responsibility) as a significant target for growth and sustainability. The new report *Corporate Social Responsibility and the Arts* from Animating Democracy (a project of Americans for the Arts) summarizes trends and key insights about the evolution of business philanthropy. The report cites increasing self-interest in business funding, and also many contrary examples and rationales for altruistic funding. <http://tinyurl.com/ka4pmr2>

Imagine what's possible. In a two-week period, student choruses from Superar (a Sistema program in six European countries) performed at the **opening of the Eurovision Contest** on television (audience of 200 million); and students from Superar Bosnia performed at the **official welcome of The Pope** to Bosnia, singing and playing a song written and recorded to raise money for flood victims: [Love People](#).

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The U.S. Research Project

by *Dennie Palmer Wolf, Principal at WolfBrown*

In the Fall of 2014, researchers from WolfBrown, Longy School of Music of Bard College and nine El Sistema-inspired sites launched a national research study on the impact of participating in Sistema music programs. While a number of the participating sites have long collected data and reported outcomes, three features distinguish this collaborative study. First, all nine sites joined together to develop, pilot, and refine a shared set of measures that address musical, socio-emotional, and academic outcomes. Second, each site is looking at the same measures in a control or comparison group of students, allowing researchers to draw much firmer conclusions about the specific impacts of orchestral experiences. Third, the study will be longitudinal, so that we can better understand what impacts emerge as young people mature.

At each site, children complete two booklets in which they report on their behaviors and self-perceptions in their music program and their school day. The measures in these booklets track children's program history and socio-emotional development (self-efficacy, perseverance, growth mindset, achievement motivation, peer relations, and sense of belonging). In addition, sites are collecting concurrent information about children's in-school achievement and musical progress. Data collection will occur during the 2015-16 school year.

Individual programs are also piloting site-specific measures designed to capture the results of special features of their programs. These include observational measures of pro-social interactions that occur during and around rehearsals and concerts, multiple forms of family engagement, and character traits such as leadership and mindfulness.

Getting to this point has been very hard work, but already it's clear that the initiative is highly worthwhile. It is a major achievement for nine diverse sites, varying in size, age, and program design, to take on a common set of "yardsticks" for looking at their students' growth – especially when we consider that this work is in addition to the hundreds of decisions and actions that comprise a single week's work. It is hard to imagine collaboration more in the spirit of Sistema-inspired work. <http://tinyurl.com/oocbccv>.

"The bottom line here is very clear: Arts education isn't something we add on after we've achieved other priorities. It's actually critical for achieving those priorities in the first place." – Michelle Obama