

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

## Summer Play in Sistema Programs

By Elaine Sandoval, 2012-13 Sistema Fellow

While Venezuela's top youth orchestras were taking the Salzburg Festival by storm this past summer, what was happening in North America? With a break from school-year parameters, the summer presents exciting freedom which many programs use to shake up their activities and pursue new endeavors.

As the guest column by Mark Gandolfi illustrates, many programs use the summer to try new musical collaborations. The

**Conservatory Lab Charter School** had an intensive summer leading up to an exciting performance with Gandolfi and the **Boston Landmarks Orchestra**.

The students at **Play On, Philly!** (POP) collaborated with Conservatory Lab via Skype – chamber groups from both programs traded performances and dialogue via webcam with the

long-term hope of meeting in person. **MYCincinnati** took advantage of **Cincinnati Opera's** summer season, bringing students to a dress rehearsal, learning opera arrangements, and then performing an opening for the opera outside its hall. **Yakima Music en Acción** (YAMA) toured and performed at the Manhasset Stand Company factory as well as opening for a community band. Boston was also the site of a two-week intensive summer seminar at **The Longy School** which enabled the musical collaboration of over thirty students from five El Sistema-inspired programs.

Many programs also saw the summer as an opportunity for deep pedagogical experimentation. Both POP and YAMA emphasized peer teaching; they coached students on teaching techniques and worked mentoring activities into their programming. **Sister Cities Girlchoir** used the summer to train their high school students, hiring them as counselors-in-training and giving them sole responsibility for leading nonmusical teamwork activities (including a spa day!). **Corona Youth Music Project**, besides an intensive seminar, used the summer to focus on private lessons. In Santa Barbara, the **Incredible Children's Art Network** (iCAN) focused their summer activities entirely on a curriculum of improvisation, while in Chicago,

the **People's Music School Youth Orchestra** used the summer to pilot a chamber music curriculum.

Behind-the-scenes, the summer is also useful administratively for El Sistema-inspired programs. **El Sistema Lehigh Valley** (ESLV) brings prospective teaching artists to watch them work with the summer program prior to hiring. The People's Music School sees the summer as an "administrative oasis" for resting, reflecting, and planning – a chance to evaluate their work and plan changes for the upcoming year. Similarly, iCAN uses afternoons for teaching artists to work on pedagogy together.

Finally, the summer serves as a great opportunity to pilot. We can welcome **Crescendo Detroit** as the newest El Sistema-inspired program in the US (starting November 4th); they did a six-week pilot of their program during the summer, bringing in thirty students for six hours a day of music, dance, life skills, reading, and vocabulary, and performing

for parents once a week. The summer is also useful in piloting new program innovations – as you may have read in last year's Ensemble newsletter, ESLV used summer 2012 to pilot El Sistema-inspired activities for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Summer can also play a role in recruitment and bringing in new students – at iCAN, summer activities are mandatory for all incoming first-year students.

As can be expected, challenges arise in the way of competing summer activities, facilities without air conditioning, and transportation issues without the usual school buses. However, many of the aforementioned programs actually found summer activities to be even easier than school-year programming. Morning summer programs appreciated students' "freshness" as compared to getting students after a long day of school. Parents also pleasantly surprised some programs by taking on the challenge of transporting the children, and supporting field trips and performances. When fully taken advantage of, summers are invaluable for giving students new opportunities and allowing the experimentation and reflection to take school-year programs in new directions.



*Conservatory Lab Charter School "Composition Group" students work with composer Michael Gandolfi at his studio. Photo: Toni Jackson*

## FROM THE EDITOR

When I traveled to Japan in July 2012, I reported back to Ensemble readers my fascination at learning the intention of educators in Soma, Fukushima to use El Sistema in the service of healing children traumatized by the 2011 tsunami. Back in Japan last month, I was able to see the Sistema program that has evolved since then.

Distinctive it is. The program meets only once a week, on weekends. About 150 children aged 5 to 17 convene for a full day of choral and instrumental music-making. Their instructors are local teachers, assisted by a cohort of college-student volunteers who make the three-hour trip to Soma from Tokyo every week. Conductor Yohei Asaoka makes the same trip every other Saturday, to work with both the children and their teachers.

Interestingly, the volunteers, while all good musicians, are majoring in other subjects or working in business, and have been attracted first and foremost (and usually through Facebook!) by the social engagement aspect of the work. Yutaka Kikugawa, the program's founder and leader, is also not a professional musician; his background is in UNESCO work in Japan and Africa.

In some ways, then, the profile of the Soma program is unlike that of any núcleo I've known. But my experience of the program made clear its strong alignment with Sistema values and ideals. Watching the orchestra perform, I was struck by its dramatically inclusive nature: older children who could already play Vivaldi and Mozart; tiny children only a few weeks into the program, playing downbeats on open strings; even some older adults who are retired teachers. Hearing the stream of lively, loving encouragement from the teachers and the Venezuelan jacket-clad student volunteers, I caught the clear inflection of "relentless positivity." And the conductor, smiling and dancing, drew the children into physical expression of the music.

Maestro Asaoka told me later that the program's pedagogy is guided by the ideal of peer learning. "I tell them, 'teach as I taught you, pass it on,'" he said. "And I always put more skilled kids with less skilled."

Most deeply "Sistema" of all, of course, were the children who lost homes, friends, and family members two years ago – their faces now lit with focus and their heads dipping with every accent. El Sistema Japan is testimony to the extraordinary adaptability of the Sistema: even when methods are modified in widely varying ways, if the vision is authentically resonant, the result is El Sistema.

*Tricia Tunstall*

**"You have no idea how capable you are. You are braver than you know. Stronger than you think. And more intelligent than you imagine." – José Antonio Abreu**

## News Notes

**Crescendo Detroit** launched in October with an after-school program that builds on their ambitious summer program. Housed in a church in the Dexter-Davison neighborhood, students ages 5-13 build a foundation in instrumental music, adding dance and vocal music, along with literacy-focused homework assistance, life skills instruction and nutrition. By taking a 360-degree view of the child, the “five-fold approach” addresses barriers to success that many underprivileged children face. Once children learn the basics of music and dance, they can specialize in instrumental music, choir or dance. The primary goal of the program is significant improvement in academic results and citizenship development – “building character through music.” Contact Co-Founder and CEO Damien Crutcher: [dkcrutcher@progressionarts.org](mailto:dkcrutcher@progressionarts.org)



*Crescendo Detroit dance class, inspired by Alvin Ailey* Photo: Jim Liska

**Sistema Global** and The Institute of Education, University of London are pleased to announce the upcoming (November 18th) release of *El Sistema and Sistema-Inspired Programmes: A Literature Review of Research, Evaluation, and Critical Debates*. Sistema Global gathered an international team of music education researchers, led by Dr. Andrea Creech, with colleagues from Canada, Mexico, and the U.S., that reviewed the many academic journal articles, evaluation reports, dissertations and policy documents that have been produced about Sistema programmes worldwide. This is the first international study of what is “out there,” and it provides a solid foundation for all future research. For more information, and to download the report’s Executive Summary or full report, go to [www.sistemaglobal.org/LitReview](http://www.sistemaglobal.org/LitReview)

The mission of the **Sistema Fellows program at New England Conservatory** has been to fulfill José Antonio Abreu’s 2009 TED Prize wish to “create a professional training program for 50 postgraduate musicians who are passionate about creating careers for themselves that connect music, youth, and social change.” Completing that commitment this year, with Fellows making profound contributions to the U.S. and global movement, NEC is launching a “next

step” plan to develop the movement by investing in the expertise and skills of the alumni Fellows. Based on field analysis, survey input, and support from Fundamusical in Venezuela, NEC will provide advanced professional development for the 50 Fellows, facilitate learning through field work, provide networking and collaboration, and develop online resources.

## Resources

Three **important media bits**:

- ◆ Read about new research on the ways **learning to play an instrument relates to increased academic achievement** (including the Harmony Project in L.A.): <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/10/using-music-to-close-the-academic-gap/280362>
- ◆ An article articulates the **connection between music study and career success** in fields other than music: [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/13/opinion/sunday/is-music-the-key-to-success.html?\\_0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/13/opinion/sunday/is-music-the-key-to-success.html?_0)
- ◆ Aaron Dworkin of Sphinx gives a stirring speech about **racial exclusion in the orchestral field**: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOSigzQFAGU&feature=youtu.be>

The annual Burk Donor Survey analyzes **changes in philanthropic donor attitudes and practices**. The 2013 report was just released: [http://cygresearch.com/files/free/Exec-Summary\\_2013-Burk-Donor-Survey\\_Report\\_US.pdf](http://cygresearch.com/files/free/Exec-Summary_2013-Burk-Donor-Survey_Report_US.pdf)

Here is a handy **info-graphic on the psychology of music** – from how it moves in the brain to its impact on education. This visual presentation might be a useful advocacy tool with families and communities. <http://dailyinfographic.com/the-psychology-of-music-infographic>

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## Conjuring Composition

*By Michael Gandolfi, composer and educator*

In the summer of 2013, I led a composition project for students of the **Conservatory Lab Charter School** of Brighton, Massachusetts. With the guidance of CLCS instructor Rebecca Levi, I designed and taught a series of classes during which six volunteer students, grades 3-5, studied details of composition (pitch, rhythm, phrase structure, form, etc.) and applied their learning to weekly composition exercises. The classes were lively and interactive; the students composed and played works in a variety of genres and forms, including blues, rondo form, and program music. I also brought the students on a field trip to my home studio and introduced them to my composition work-station, where they composed melodic fragments.

Back in the classroom, we found ourselves formulating the program for a work based on two Tarot cards: the High Priestess and the Magician. We devoted several sessions to the development of this story, with all the students contributing improvised musical leitmotifs and participating together in the development of the musical episodes. We used the rondo and variation form, with the rondo theme expressing the virtues of the High Priestess, and the variations depicting the succession of magic tricks.

When this basic framework was complete, I spent the following two weeks composing the work, which we called “The Queen and the Conjuror,” with the Queen being the High Priestess and the Conjuror being the Magician.

This work was written for the **Boston Landmarks Orchestra** and the CLCS Dudamel Orchestra, which included the six students in the project. It was performed in public several times: once in the spring, at a school assembly in Dorchester, Massachusetts, involving several creative contributions by members of several local schools; and again in the summer at Boston’s Hatch Shell, the principal venue of the Boston Landmarks Orchestra.

It was exciting to watch these students learn the myriad steps involved in creating a musical work – and, in addition, to see them communicate what they had learned about the creative process to the other members of their orchestra. Thanks to this summer program, these students have begun to think of themselves as composers.

**“I believe the issue of inclusion in our orchestras and in the arts constitutes a moral crisis within a form of expression that is vital to our culture as a thriving society.” – Aaron Dworkin, Founder/President, The Sphinx Organization**