

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

## The Role of the Guest Artist

by Seth Truby, Executive Director, *BRAVO Youth Orchestras, Portland, OR*

Several dozen children file into the room and take their places on the floor or in chairs. After a little coaxing from their teachers, they settle down and turn their attention to the front of the room where they see a new face. This stranger, seated and holding an instrument twice the size of a guitar, begins to play 400-year-old music so quietly the children lean forward to hear. After finishing a short selection, the visiting musician answers the question from the audience, "How old were you when you started playing music?" "I was 8, the same age as some of you, but I didn't start on the theorbo!"

Guest Artists play a vibrant role at many El Sistema-inspired programs. They introduce unusual or exotic instruments; they lead students on a journey through a rich array of musical genres; they illustrate the ethnic and cultural diversity in our wider community of music makers; they share stories of travelling across continents

and oceans to perform; and they make themselves relatable, telling stories of how they were drawn to music as children, or frustrations with practicing, or switching instruments and music styles as they struggled to find their own artistic voices.

At BRAVO Youth Orchestras in Portland, OR, we welcome about 35 Guest Artists per year, a little more than one per program week. They have been professionals and amateurs, classical, fiddle and jazz musicians, Mexican, Danish, and Venezuelan, bagpipers, conductors and opera singers. From world-class violin soloist Joshua Bell to the winner of the local youth concerto competition, each Guest Artist invites our students to imagine for themselves paths into very different musical futures.

At *Yakima Music en Acción*, a particularly inspiring Guest Artist was cellist Joshua Roman, who performed concerto excerpts, worked intensively with the cello section, and stayed until the YAMA students ran out of questions. At *Miami Music Project*, violinist Isabella Trautwein of the Cleveland Orchestra has visited regularly as a Guest Artist to work with both beginning and advanced students.



Guest Artist Joshua Bell plays with Aislin at BRAVO Rosa Parks. Photo by Rich Kolbell

Guest Artist visits often lead to surprising opportunities. When students at *Kidznotes* in Durham, NC joined *Black Violin* onstage at their ticketed concert, they ended up being featured in a music video, and the two groups will join forces again at the Carolina Theater this spring. Esteemed film and TV conductor Harry Rabinowitz, BRAVO's oldest Guest Artist at 99, brought the score he composed for "Reilly, Ace of Spies" during his visit and led a guided listening session; two years later, the BRAVO students were

honored to perform this same piece at the maestro's memorial service.

At Baltimore's *OrchKids*, where Guest Artists have included Roger Waters, Renée Fleming and Yo Yo Ma, key elements of these visits include high intensity rehearsals, playing in the neighborhood and in larger civic venues, and fusing musical styles. Artistic Director Dan Trahey says, "We

are not just trying to stimulate the students; we want to have an impact on the Guest Artists' feeling about the social relevance of music making."

Last summer, students at *MYCincinnati* had the opportunity to work with internationally-renowned hip-hop artist Napoleon Maddox. A month of dialogue, creative imagining and rehearsal led to a collaborative concert that combined new arrangements of Maddox's songs and original student poetry. Director Eddy Kwon says the joint project was "an extraordinary opportunity to meld music of diverse traditions with active engagement in social, historical and political issues."

In every field of human endeavor, we seek out heroes and role models. In El Sistema-inspired programs, our heroes are often holding musical instruments. Guest Artists inspire our young students in a way that complements the daily work of Teaching Artists. They show that rigorous music study can open doors of opportunity including college scholarships, international travel, or a successful career as a performing artist. They also demonstrate the many vibrant roles music can play in the life of an individual or in the vitality of a community.

### FROM THE PUBLISHER & EDITOR

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." – Aristotle

Psychologists suggest that it takes 45 days to break an old habit and establish a new one. This takes a great deal of determination but brings a world of positive change, since habits determine so much of who we are, no matter what we say we believe. We certainly know this in music learning: the habits learners establish become the foundation for their next accomplishments.

Which brings us to the "Action for the Month." (See page 2 of every issue of *The Ensemble*.) We are trying to give our movement a broader reach of visibility and impact by establishing a new habit that everyone in the movement adopts together.

We all have firmly-established habits of working hard in our own communities to change life possibilities for students and families. This work requires huge attention and care, and it is generally going well. However, we are not growing strong as a national movement, perhaps because of our habits of exclusively local focus. Movements require collective action to become visible, to gain national supporters, and to grow into their larger potential.

That's why we've initiated the Action for the Month: to help us form a new habit. We know you are crazy busy – we are too. That's why our Actions are designed to take only a few minutes. Let's break the habit of not bothering.

The payoff is even more than an acceleration of our movement's impact; it is "walking our talk" for our students and families. By engaging in every Action, we model the kind of personal and interpersonal responsibility we wish our students to learn.

The two of us are old enough to have come of age in a time of large-scale national movements – for civil rights, for women's equality, against the Vietnam War. While there was a great deal of vigorous local action, these movements were only able to make permanent change because we undertook common actions with others around the country (even without the help of the Internet!)

Our whole movement needs to join in collective actions. For just a few minutes a month. Every month. Every one of us. To grow powerful.

If you have ideas for Actions you think might be effective, please [let us know](#). We would love to hear from you.

*Eric Booth & Tricia Tunstall*

"Courage is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with one another, with community, a work, a future." – David Whyte, poet

## News Notes

Applications are now open for the 2017 National Take a Stand Festival in Los Angeles, July 15-22. The free 7-day national youth orchestra camp brings together orchestral musicians aged 12-18 from El Sistema-inspired and aligned programs across the country, and will culminate with a final performance led by the LA Phil's Artistic and Music Director Gustavo Dudamel at Walt Disney Concert Hall. We urge program directors, teachers, and staff to please pass this message along to students so they may apply directly. Online applications close Feb. 22; notification of acceptance will be made by March 22. All necessary information available at: <http://laphil.com/education/yola/national-take-stand-festival-2017>

The Sphinx Performance Academy (SPA) is a free 2-week intensive chamber music and solo performance program designed for aspiring black and Latino string players, ages 12-17. It includes rigorous private lessons and coachings in addition to daily monitored practice sessions, masterclasses, and performances. In Chicago June 30 to July 14, 2017; in Cleveland July 23 to August 6, 2017. Application deadline is April 12, 2017 (no fee). Apply: <http://bit.ly/2hmr5eO>. For questions about the SPA, email [SPA@SphinxMusic.org](mailto:SPA@SphinxMusic.org)

The University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau, Alaska, offers four \$10,000 scholarships for string students interested in pursuing a Secondary Education Master of Arts in Teaching degree with a K-12 music certificate program. In one year, students earn their MAT and conduct their teaching internships at the Sistema-inspired Juneau Alaska Music Matters (JAMM) program and at music classrooms around Juneau, as well as perform in the Juneau Symphony. All of the application and scholarship materials can be found online: <http://www.juneaumusicmatters.com/mat-program.html>

In this tenth anniversary year of Ottawa's Orkidstra, Co-Founder, Executive and Artistic Director Tina Fedeski has been honored with Canada's Meritorious Service Medal, an honor created by Queen Elizabeth II to recognize remarkable achievement.

## Resources

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, Community MusicWorks (CMW) recently released three reports that reflect on their impact.

✓ *We Are Each Other's Magnitude and Bond* is an evaluation of CMW's Fellowship Program and Institutes for Musicianship and Public Service – two long-term projects to expand CMW's impact. Led by Dennie Palmer Wolf, the evaluation documents their impact in diversifying the classical music field, sharing CMW's model, and developing a next generation of entrepreneurial, community-invested musicians. <http://tinyurl.com/zapsty8>

✓ Funded by Art Place America, *Sharing Tables with Strangers: Strengthening Neighborhoods Through Community-centric Concerts* examines the impact of the CMW's long-term presence on its host neighborhoods. The report by Chloe Kline and Dennie Palmer Wolf looks closely at a recent Community MusicWorks concert series in a neighborhood taqueria, and its influence on community members' perceptions of their neighborhoods, relationships with their neighbors, and engagement with their community. <http://tinyurl.com/zapsty8>

✓ *The World You Want to Live In: New Paradigms for the Arts* is an essay by Lucy Caplan that analyzes broad themes from Art + Social Action: New Paradigms and Practices, a February 2016 day-long symposium hosted by CMW and the Brown University Arts Initiative, which explored themes pertinent to an evolving field of arts and activism. <http://communitymusicworks.org/resources>

Also worth noting from CMW: In our January issue, we wrote about CMW's "We Shall Overcome" project as part of Carnegie Hall's PlayUSA. You can find out more about this innovative action research project, and how it aspires to accelerate musical development through engagement in social and historical context, at: <http://communitymusicworks.org/the-we-shall-overcome-project>

### Subscription Information

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## 21st Century Skills

By Diogo Pereira, Program Director, Harmony Project Phoenix

Ever since the publication of President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities "Reinvesting in Arts Education" (2011), the U.S. education community has been increasingly interested in 21st-century skills such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication ("the 4 Cs"). As an advocate for music in schools, I firmly believe that the collective and intense practice of music creates the context to cultivate these competences. But how can we be intentional about fostering 21st-century skills, and design activities that translate concepts into action?

Here are some key activities in the Harmony Project Phoenix's program design that we hope contribute to developing 21st-century skills.

*Communication.* Students take on the challenge of public speaking. Every piece in our concerts is introduced by a different student. The oral presentation must be written, revised and rehearsed before being presented on stage.

*Collaboration.* We allocate a daily 15-minute reflection time, facilitated by teaching artists and encompassing a variety of non-musical activities like setting goals collectively and individually, assigning jobs, and creating classroom rules.

*Critical Thinking.* Our scholarship offering is dependent upon students and families participating in community services. Students design their own community services (i.e. performing in children's hospitals, care centers, etc.). This helps to promote civic literacy and to develop students' understanding of interconnections between their ensembles and their community's needs.

*Creativity.* One could argue that creativity is embedded in every music act. We use composition classes as a framework to develop it further. Students generate ideas, select and refine them, create a personally meaningful product, and perform/evaluate. Some of our students enroll in the online music education platform "Young Composers & Improvisors Workshop" ([www.yciw.net](http://www.yciw.net)).

The development of 21st-century skills is important for our students' development as people, not just as employees. As Michelle Obama has said, "The intersection of commerce and creativity is about more than economic stimulus, but it's also about who we are as people."

### **ACTION FOR THE MONTH:** Urge the new Obama Foundation to support El Sistema-inspired programs

Barack and Michelle Obama are launching The Obama Foundation, and they seek suggestions for the kind of projects they should undertake. Please post this month (at <https://www.obama.org/your-voice>) with your reasons why the Foundation should support the national El Sistema movement (not just your program). Let's submit a wave of aligned posts to grab their attention and support. Full instructions (and a heads-up about what you will find on the site) at: <http://theensemblenewsletters.com/action-for-the-month>