

## Take A Stand 2018

by Ana de Souza, Teaching Artist, *Miami Music Project* (and MMP alumna)

I had the privilege last month of attending the L.A. Phil's 2018 *Take a Stand Festival*, Symposium, and Teaching Intensive. The Festival brought together students aged 12-18 from programs directly inspired by El Sistema or similarly dedicated to social change and youth development through instrumental music education. About 140 students, from 36 programs in 19 states plus Puerto Rico, participated in this ten-day festival, which began at Soka University in Orange County and finished in Los Angeles with performances in Walt Disney Concert Hall. The students were grouped into two ensembles: the Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Maestros Gustavo Dudamel and Michael Morgan, and the Junior String Ensemble, conducted by Maestros Jeffrey Grogan and Soo Han.

The Symposium was a two-day event, July 13-14, focused on bringing together leaders and teachers dedicated to social impact and youth development. For the first time, there was also a three-day Teaching Intensive running parallel to the symposium, with activities and conversations aimed specifically for practicing music teachers and teaching artists. There were 150 attendees at the symposium, of whom 80 were also involved in the Teaching Intensive.

The theme of this year's symposium was "student voice." Sessions and speeches were focused on how to empower and cultivate student ownership in El Sistema-inspired programs; the title of one keynote speech, by Justin Laing, was "Will the Liberatory Orchestral Music Program Please Stand Up?" Appropriately, many of the presenters were students. YOLA rising senior Liliana Morales gave a keynote speech, as did rising Harvard freshman and *Mariachi Mestizo* alumna Xóchitl Morales. Xóchitl – a published poet, music teacher, and mariachi musician – talked about how music has been key to her becoming the person she is today; as a Hispanic woman, I found her message especially inspiring.

Students were also co-presenters in many of the sessions. *MYCincinnati* students, along with program director Eddy Kwon, shared with us their extensive specialized programming for teens, geared to increasing student leadership and power within the

program. In another session, students of *OrchKids* from Baltimore played for us and talked about the process of collaborative composition, in which students use a group process to create their own compositions.

In fact, the entire Teaching Intensive was anchored in a student-centric process that had begun before we arrived. During a Festival rehearsal day, a number of students were asked for their perspectives on what makes their programs so important to them. They came up with six program "impact" statements, which were relayed to us and drove many of our discussions and conversations about how to improve our practice. The statements varied from highly general, such as

"Music can change and save me," to more specific, for example, "Music can help me achieve my dreams."

Thus the Teacher Intensive was no ordinary professional development session, in which people seek answers to specific challenges at their programs. Instead, we were asked to analyze the student quotes and create ways forward, to help support their aspirations. For example, my group's solution to the quote "Music can help me achieve my dreams" was to create student-led chamber groups so they

can learn how to work as a team, lead, and strive for excellence – which are appropriate qualities to help realize a dream of any kind. On our last day, we all met with a panel of students, presented our conclusions to them, and asked for their feedback.

For me, this was perhaps the most valuable part of the Take A Stand Symposium: we learned how to problem-solve with little or no background information; discuss and debate our solutions; and, most importantly, be patient and trust the process. As teachers, we often forget that the process of building toward an outcome, in a way that authentically prioritizes student voice and student empowerment, is more important than the outcome itself.

It was wonderful to have so much interaction with the students participating in the Festival orchestras; it felt great to see their happiness bursting out of them. When I asked Diego Dominguez, from the Miami Music Project, about his thoughts on the Festival, he said: "The experience was outstanding, from the way they treated us almost like a professional orchestra, to getting to meet new people who enjoy and appreciate music just as much as I do. TAS was 10 out of 10!"



*Colburn staff member and Mariachi Mestizo alumna Jazmin Morales speaking at the Symposium.* Photo: Paul Cressey

## FROM THE EDITOR

We're ten years old!

2008 saw the beginning of most of our oldest programs, including *OrchKids* in Baltimore, the Harmony Program in New York City, and *Orchestrating Diversity* in St. Louis. *YOLA* began in 2007... but its first rehearsal with Gustavo Dudamel was in 2008. So I think we're safe to consider this year the tenth anniversary of our emergence as a national movement.

In the Sistema spirit of continual inquiry, I'd like to celebrate this anniversary by focusing on questions. Movements, like people, are most vividly defined by the questions they ask. So: what were the main questions we were asking, ten years ago? And what are the main questions we are asking now?

According to my notes and my memory, the main question people were asking ten years ago, hands down, was: How does El Sistema work in Venezuela? Usually followed quickly by: How can we make it work like that here?

And then, in short order: How do we find funding? Where do we find instruments? And where, oh where, is the pedagogy handbook? We were immersed in the "how-to" of beginning.

Fast-forward ten years...and our collective inquiry has undergone a sea change. As our lead article notes, the overarching question at the recent Take A Stand conference was: How do we support student voice and empower students to become leaders? This question seems to be top of mind everywhere; at the January *El Sistema USA Symposium*, there were sessions on student-led learning and collaborative composition. Instead of focusing only on how we teach our kids, we're now asking how we can let them lead.

There are other new and urgent questions now, involving how to address structural racism...how to appropriately transfigure our repertoire...how to attain long-term sustainability...and how to form coalitions in our field, for collective impact.

The inquiry seems more mature now—more responsible, more self-interrogating, more ambitious. In the words of *Bravo Waterbury's* Calida Jones, we are "getting comfortable with being uncomfortable." We are beginning to grow up.

*Tricia Tunstall*

"The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity." – Dorothy Parker

## News Notes

Thirteen U.S. El Sistema-inspired programs have been accepted (after a competitive application process) into [El Sistema USA's PRESTO grant program](#), which provides group learning, mentorship, and funding to programs in their first five years. Funded with one million dollars over three years from the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation, the inaugural cohort includes: Accent Pontiac (Bloomfield Hills, MI), Buffalo String Works (Buffalo, NY), Trenton Music Makers (Trenton, NJ), Charlotte Symphony Orchestra (Charlotte, NC), ComMUSICation (St. Paul, MN), Empire State Youth Orchestra (Schenectady, NY), Harmony Project KC (Kansas City, MO), Harmony Project Tulsa (Tulsa, OK), Make Music NOLA (New Orleans, LA), Project Music (Stamford, CT), Riverside Arts Academy (Riverside, CA), Salty Cricket Composers Collective (Salt Lake City, UT), and WHIN Music Community Charter School (New York, NY), which is a Sistema-centric whole school model.

At the [BRAVO Portland Youth Orchestras summer camp](#) in June, their faculty welcomed 10 teaching artists from around the U.S. and Venezuela to work with Dan Trahey on a [Collective Composition](#) project. Entitled "Break the Cage," the composition refers to families being separated and locked up at the U.S. southern border, and it includes group composition, experimentation, and improvisation over musical grooves by musicians at different levels. The premiere performance was at the world headquarters of Weiden + Kennedy advertising agency. Take a look: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUI3jVU\\_B1A&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUI3jVU_B1A&feature=youtu.be)

In July, the Premier of New Brunswick hosted a [national conference of First Ministers](#) (all provincial Premiers) and invited [Sistema New Brunswick's](#) Moncton Youth Orchestra to perform for them – an honor for the program and a thrill for the students. Also for SNB, Founder/CEO Ken MacLeod has just had his TEDx Talk posted, about the founding of SNB and the power of Sistema work. A useful advocacy tool for any program. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2P4eZ5HBZs&feature=youtu.be>

## Resources

[Youth Service America's Lead Agency Program](#) activates youth volunteers on September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance, MLK Day of Service weekend, and Global Youth Service Day, providing grants of up to \$6,000 to nonprofit organizations who bring together coalitions of youth development and community-based organizations. Through their partner coalitions, Lead Agency grantees must engage a minimum of 1,000 youth for each of the three days of service, especially middle and high school-aged youth, and those from underserved communities. Applications reviewed through August 10, 2018. <https://youthserviceamerica.submittable.com/submit/115970/2018-2019-lead-agency-application>

Sistema programs connected to schools may want to apply for [Target Field Trip Grants](#) that provide modest funding (up to \$700) for many different kinds of K-12 field trips. Online applications are accepted between August 1 and September 30, 2018. To find out more: <https://corporate.target.com/corporate-responsibility/community/philanthropy/field-trip-grants>

[Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) for Out-of-School \(OST\) Time Settings](#) is a brief research report commissioned by The Wallace Foundation and written by the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This research summary is one part of a Wallace series entitled [Navigating Social and Emotional Learning from the Inside Out](#). The report recognizes it is rare to find SEL learning as a priority of OST programs the way it is for Sistema programs, and provides a useful overview for such programs. Find out more at: <https://tinyurl.com/y97map9y>

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## A Social Skills Curriculum

*by Christie Gray, Executive Director,  
Sistema Toronto*

Sistema Toronto is in its second year of a three-year project dedicated to building a detailed and integrated curriculum focused on musical and social learning outcomes for its 250 students, aged 6-12. The music curricula components include music and moment, strings, choir, and percussion. We are also creating an integrated social curriculum, developed by a team of our teachers and rooted in experiential learning pedagogy, that is intended to be woven into teaching and learning outcomes for all music classes.

The first iteration of our social curriculum was rolled out in 2017-18 and is based on the overarching principals of empathy, effort and attitude. Each of 35 weeks of programming focused on a different social skill or 'word of the week.' Teachers were provided with lesson plans, videos, and inspiration that helped them weave the word of the week into their classes. Students and teachers talked about the concept, what it means, and what it looks like in practice.

For example, during one week we focused on the social skill of "forgiveness." We asked students to think about how forgiveness is an essential part of Constructive Criticism and Teamwork, which we had talked about earlier in the year. Junior students listened to a Mozart aria about friendship and betrayal. Afterwards, they shared their own experiences and talked about how forgiving someone is an important part of relationships.

During another week, the focus was on Constructive Criticism; students and teachers talked about how to offer suggestions and strategies for improvements while making sure to offer specific compliments as well. Students put their skills into action that week; they spent an hour introducing our youngest students to a stringed instrument for the first time.

The second iteration of the Social Curriculum will be implemented in September. Students will spend more time on each social skill and will delve deeper into applying each concept in music, at school, and at home. Also, in Year One we found that our words of the week were often too unrelated from week to week, so in our second iteration we are planning monthly themes that tie more concepts together.

## **ACTION FOR THE MONTH:** [Join the Yale Declaration on Equity in Music for City Students](#)

*As part of a significant initiative to partner with the New Haven School District, the Yale School of Music has launched a [Declaration on Equity in Music for City Students](#). They request other programs to sign onto the Declaration and the initiative to invigorate national discussions and local solutions. We urge all Sistema programs to distribute the declaration in their communities and to [share the story](#) of your local music ecosystem. For more, go [here](#).*