



Teaching El Sistema Teaching

By Judy Hill Bose, Director of Teacher Education, Longy School of Music

As Sistema-inspired programs spread across the US, and the wave of enthusiasm for the nascent movement gains momentum, the question looms large: how does El Sistema guide us in enacting a teaching practice that is unique, meaningful and successful? What's particularly Sistema-like about it?

Last month in Boston, 30 educators from U.S. El Sistema programs gathered to learn from each other and to ask these questions in community. The professional development seminar "Enacting a Teaching Practice through El Sistema" was a collaborative event held by the Longy School of Music, the Conservatory Lab Charter School and the Abreu Fellows Program at the New England Conservatory.

Featured educator Lorrie Heagy (Alaska's "Teacher of the Year"; first cohort of Abreu Fellows) shared her expertise in early childhood music teaching and helped us explore what kinds of skills/concepts/ideas – both musical and social – can be introduced for our earliest learners to carry them through to the intensive ensemble work of a Sistema program. Participants played alongside Conservatory Lab School students, jammed in a bucket band – and brought their questions and insights to the table in discussions around how we shape educational practice in our US nucleos.

What did we learn? What can we share?

While teaching in a Sistema program may be resonant with darn good teaching practice anywhere, there seems always to be a larger, longer-term goal in mind. Imagine that you see (as we did) a fantastic teacher meeting the eyes of every five-year-old as they sing complicated songs, helping them learn to move together as an ensemble, to use simple rhythm instruments respectfully, to learn finger and arm movements that secretly do the important work of building muscles and correct positioning for hands that will later hold small violins and bows – and imagine that all these students are well aware that students in the next higher grade are playing instruments in an orchestra, and that it will be their turn soon.

It's a uniquely Sistema-like model, and it seems to need educators who are inventing things at every turn, who are taking established practices and tweaking/turning/developing. It seems to require a teaching practice that is grounded, flexible, patient... and certain that it IS possible for every child to flourish musically and personally. This kind of teaching practice feels new, and teachers need every opportunity to share great successes and great flops with each other generously.

FROM THE EDITOR

In May 2010, at the end of the first national U.S. symposium on El Sistema, at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, our Venezuelan colleague Rodrigo Guerrero had some parting words of wisdom for attendees. "My friends," said Rodrigo, "before you leave, look around you. Look to your right. Look to your left. Because these are the people who are going to help you. They are your strongest allies.

"Networking is incredibly important," he told us. "You cannot work alone."

Almost two years have passed since then – two years that have seen the emergence of more U.S. "núcleos" than any of us, even at that moment of euphoria, would have thought possible. And it's truer than ever that "you cannot work alone." The people who can help your program toward true long-term success are, in fact, the people who are doing the same work you're doing, inspired by the same ideals. Only by weaving a robust fabric of connection between our many nucleos can we ensure that they all thrive.

It's our hope that *The Ensemble* can contribute to that fabric of connection...and an El Sistema in the U.S. that is not just a profusion of núcleos, but a movement.

Tricia Tunstall

Subscription Information

Please distribute this newsletter widely to build awareness of the national movement.

1. Please print out copies and give them to students, families, supporters, anyone...
2. Please post issues on your website.
3. Soon we will have a web address where issues will be archived.

"From the minute a child is taught to play an instrument, he's no longer poor. He is a child in progress...who will become a citizen." – José Antonio Abreu

News Notes

El Sistema@Rainey launched in September 2011 at the Rainey Institute in Cleveland, Ohio with 30 children, ages 7-11. Rainey Institute is a 107 year old community education site that grew from the Settlement House movement. Founded and directed by 2011 Abreu Fellow Isabel Trautwein, who is a full time violinist with The Cleveland Orchestra, the program provides violin instruction, choir and educational support to children grades 1-4. Key supporters are individuals, United Way, Cleveland Foundation and GUND Foundation. The Cleveland Orchestra and Conn-Selmer, Inc., are the official providers of Sherl&Roth violins to El Sistema@Rainey. The young musicians graduated from their cardboard Stradivaris on Oct. 13th, 2011 and will be performing at Severance Hall, onstage with The Cleveland Orchestra, 3 times this season. (Contact: isabel.trautwein@gmail.com)

Austin Soundwaves launched on October 17, 2011 in Austin, Texas, under the leadership of Patrick Slevin, also a 2011 Abreu Fellow. Sponsored by the non-profit organization "Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts" and actively supported by the University of Texas at Austin, the program offers free classes in strings, percussion, composition/theory and creative instrument-building to over 40 students at a charter middle school. The program also includes mentoring and increased arts attendance support for the Hispanic community. Website: <http://hispanicallianceaustin.org>. Facebook: Austin Soundwaves. Twitter: ATX_Soundwaves. (Contact: p.slevin@hispanicallianceaustin.org)

Community Engagement Through Music Education—a workshop to be held by Baltimore Symphony Orchestra on November 11th-12th, 2011. Aimed at encouraging the formation and development of new "nucleos" throughout the U.S., the hands-on workshop will feature onsite visits to several sites of the BSO's El Sistema-based program "OrchKids,"



With Isabel Trautwein, Chloe uses her dowel-stick training bow during week 3 of El Sistema@Rainey in Cleveland.

now in its fourth year, and an address by Maestra Marin Alsop. CEME uses OrchKids as a teaching tool to inform, inspire, instruct, and most importantly, encourage orchestras, local government agencies, public and private school systems and community organizations to consider and implement El Sistema based music programs such as OrchKids in locations throughout the world. (Contact: cgoodman@bsomusic.org)

The inaugural Take a Stand Symposium (Jan 30-Feb 1, 2012) builds on the 2010 YOLA Symposium, which drew over 200 participants from 6 countries and 27 states, and will use inspiring speakers, interactive workshops, and global networking opportunities, to provide compelling tools to turn inspiration into action. The Symposium will address key issues in the field, investigate El Sistema-related teaching and learning practices and philosophy, and offer opportunities for conversations among sites in geographic regions. Highlights include workshops with special guests from Venezuela and a rehearsal with YOLA and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. Registration and additional information will be available on November 8th at: <http://www.laphil.com/education/yola-symposium/index-2012.cfm>

Dear Colleagues in the Movement...

By Eric Booth

Over recent pre-dawn tea, I mused, for the thousandth time, about ways to tap and expand the energy and potential of our movement.

We all know we need more connection to gain strength and visibility, yet few of us have the time to stay on top of what's happening across the country. The idea of a simple national newsletter hit me. It could provide a greater sense of being a part of burgeoning national endeavor.

I decided to just do it. I'm lucky to be an advisor to many programs, to work as a public advocate, and I owned and ran a newsletter company for seven years—so it made sense. Since I don't have the time for this new project by myself, I asked Tricia Tunstall if she might be willing to be the Editor. She literally wrote the book on El Sistema in the U.S. and Venezuela, the forthcoming first major-publisher book—*Changing Lives: Gustavo Dudamel, El Sistema and the Transformative Power of Music*. (WW Norton, January 2012). She is a passionate independent advocate, observer, and follower of the growing movement. She was the perfect person to take it on, and with a heart as big as most who commit to this work, she agreed to be the Editor of The Ensemble.

And we rely on you to distribute the newsletter widely, through email and on the web, and by printing and distributing copies for students, families, funders and community, to let them know they are part of something huge and growing.

Subscription Information

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**"My mantra has always been, 'There is no better time to help children than right now.'"
- Rey Ramirez, co-founder/director of "Soundscapes," Newport News, VA**