

## Our Wealth of Volunteers

By Elizabeth Moulthrop, Site Coordinator and Teaching Artist, Paterson Music Project, NJ

El Sistema programs across the U.S. and Canada utilize volunteers in myriad ways. On a typical afternoon, volunteers can be found in different programs helping students with homework, passing out snacks, tuning (and repairing!) instruments, adjusting bow holds, and modeling good posture. Volunteers include professional musicians and teachers, parents and family members, and students. They are an active and important constituency and a precious resource for the vitality and growth of El Sistema programs.

Parents are often eager to contribute their time and skills, providing transportation to concerts, organizing events, and, of course, bringing food. Laura Jekel, Program Director of MYCincinnati, says, "Parents are easy to recruit because we see them every day, and most want to find some way to give back." At MYCincinnati, parents have been volunteering with a Healthy Snacks Program. At YOLA, a group of parents learned from master luthier (and volunteer) Tony Rizzo how to repair instruments; those parents are now learners in violin classes alongside student mentors.

Professional musicians and teachers also contribute to El Sistema programs. At OrchKids in Baltimore, MD, a Peabody harp player and her colleagues volunteered a year of free teaching, with harps supplied by OrchKids. At the Harmony Program in NYC, volunteers have included members of the highest-level ensembles in the city, including the New York Philharmonic and the Orchestra of St. Luke's. These musicians provide individualized instruction, master classes and workshops. Program director Anne Fitzgibbon notes, "Most musicians have heard about the impact of El Sistema in Venezuela and would like to see something similar happen in New York."

Local high schools and universities offer rich volunteer resources for El Sistema programs. In addition, some programs partner with existing youth orchestras, utilizing the advanced players as student mentors. At the Paterson Music Project (PMP) in NJ, members of the New Jersey Youth Symphony String Quartet visited the program; they performed a Beethoven quartet, mentored in sectionals, and helped rehearse for an upcoming concert. A few weeks later, students from PMP performed with the youth symphony.



Alex Wang, Yuji Sugimoto, and Johanna Nowik of the NJ Youth Symphony, volunteering at Paterson Music Project. Photo: Derek Mithaug

Many volunteers support the administrative and business needs of El Sistema programs. At Sistema New Brunswick, business luminaries in the province formed a cabinet of volunteers to fundraise and advocate for the program; they raised close to \$2 million. KidZNotes in NC has a partnership with Duke University, where student volunteers include two MBA students who serve as business development volunteers.

In general, there are as many ways to use volunteers as there are programs. As OrchKids site coordinator Rafaela Dreisin explains, "Volunteers help to create a better adult-to-child ratio. It's extremely helpful having people to do bathroom runs with younger students, or extra chaperones on the playground." Lorrie Heagy of JAMM in Alaska says that when she tapped her school's existing infrastructure, volunteers with all kinds of talent and skills came out of the woodwork, looking to contribute.

A good volunteer can be a future staff member. Ken MacLeod of New Brunswick says that his program now employs people who were formerly volunteers. At OrchKids, they plan to hire the volunteer harp teacher.

The major challenge of using volunteers is the need to manage and train them. Some programs, such as OrchKids, build the coordinating, training, and placing volunteers into a staff member's responsibility.

Incorporating volunteers into El Sistema programs expands the El Sistema network and creates greater advocacy for its mission. Katie Wyatt of KidZNotes says, "The volunteer network is part of our nervous system. It's an essential way for us to share with the community the important work we're doing. And it's a great way to get people involved."

## FROM THE EDITOR

Volunteers provide essential mentoring at the Paterson Music Project in NJ, where 30 second-graders are confident performers after just four months of instruction. In addition, PMP has developed a practice that is unusual for Sistema programs in the U.S., and perhaps everywhere: they have made it a priority to help children learn the skills of effective music listening. Their partner in this endeavor is a conductor/educator, George Marriner Maull, who founded The Discovery Orchestra, and whose mission is to "teach listening skills that help people emotionally connect with classical music."

George leads regular listening sessions at PMP. I was there as an observer one day when he brought in the last movement of the Fourth Brandenburg; clearly no one had warned him that second-graders can't understand Bach.

And a good thing, too, because these second-graders were all over it – counting appearances of the theme, yelling "Dah! Dah!" along with the recurring two big chords, guessing correctly the identity of the recorder when it came in. Some even noticed when he tried to fool them by playing a different piece of music (by Bach, no less).

Watching the children relish Bach reminded me how active an endeavor music listening can be. The kids weren't playing their instruments; they weren't dancing around the room or even marching in place. They were simply and totally absorbed in the act of listening: bobbing their heads, tapping their feet, squinting intently as they tried to hear when the theme reemerged. (Okay, some of them *were* playing – air violins and air cellos.) It's exceedingly rare in these kids' listening lives that a piece of instrumental music doesn't function as background to something else, but takes the foreground, commanding complete attention. The kids of PMP now know they are capable of spending an hour just listening, and that this hour can be exhilarating fun.

"When are you coming back, Mr. George?" they always ask. If only our concert halls were filled with audiences like this! El Sistema-inspired programs can take a step in that direction by providing our kids with the opportunity to become ardent listeners, as well as accomplished players and singers.

Tricia Tunstall

"Music has to be recognized as an ... agent of social development in the highest sense, because it transmits the highest values – solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion." – José Antonio Abreu

## News Notes

The new class of ten **Sistema Fellows** at New England Conservatory has been selected and introduced. Meet them at: <http://necmusic.edu/fifth-class-sistema-fellows>

Lauren Silberman's Univ. of Oregon MA degree thesis is a **research paper on the international growth of El Sistema** that contains the most comprehensive listing of global programs to date. Her fine report is available through a Sistema Global link: <http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Globalizing-El-Sistema-Final-Report-4182827.5.251069905>

On May 29, 2013, the **Incredible Children's Art Network (iCAN) Music Program** in Santa Barbara, CA traveled to Pasadena to join the VYMA Music Project for their **third consecutive annual seminario** – a daylong event for 110 students culminating in a joint performance. Wanting to share what they have learned over three years, iCAN and VYMA carefully documented their planning process and the day itself. Lesson plans, notes, and videos provide a virtual **"Seminario in a Box"** offering these materials for anyone who wants to use or explore them. They hope that teachers, administrators, and musicians find it useful and inspiring. <https://sites.google.com/a/icansbc.org/seminario-with-vyama-2013>

**Correction:** Apologies for an error in our June issue. El Sistema at the **Conservatory Lab Charter School** is an in-school program, not an after-school program.

## Resources

New video material for advocacy uses:

– A new 14-minute news segment on CCTV's "Americas Now" reports the success of the Juneau Alaska Music Matters (JAMM) program, featuring founder Lorrie Heagy. It is a strong advocacy piece that may be useful for many programs. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8ymrOcEW44&goback=.gde\\_4182827\\_member\\_249000418](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8ymrOcEW44&goback=.gde_4182827_member_249000418)

– Some may not be aware of the **documentary film in progress**, produced by Jamie Bernstein, telling the story of El Sistema's emergence in the U.S., focusing on the growth of Play On, Philly. A three-minute trailer for the film-in-progress is available at: <http://www.elsistemausafilm.com>

The **Ensemble Book Club** on Sistema Global completed its June discussion of the essay **"The Generous Laboratory."** Thanks to those who shared so many clarifying and useful ideas. An archive of the entire text is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/GenerousLab>

The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) has just published a new research bulletin, **Preparing Students for the Next America: The Benefits of an Arts Education**. It gives a useful snapshot of how the arts support achievement in school, bolster 21st century workforce skills, and enrich the lives of young people and communities. Available for free download at: <http://www.aep-arts.org/publications-store/#id=1&cid=720&wid=401> Also, the AEP has updated and expanded their **research database, ArtsEdSearch**, the most comprehensive and usefully-organized in our field. Make sure you know about it: <http://www.artsedsearch.org>

**Animating Democracy**, an initiative of Americans for the Arts, offers three resources for those involved in the arts and social change: 1) The **Evaluation in Action** webinar series; 2) a series of case studies entitled **Funder Portraits**; and 3) **Special Collections**, which are topic-specific mini-libraries. The webinar series hones in on common challenges that artists, arts organizations, and their community partners face when evaluating programs and initiatives. The latest addition to the Funder Portrait series explores how the Orton Family Foundation integrates artists and the arts into community planning work in small communities. For more information, visit the website [animatingdemocracy.org](http://animatingdemocracy.org) or contact Animating Democracy Program Coordinator Joanna Chin at [jchin@artsusa.org](mailto:jchin@artsusa.org).

The **Online Database for Education Funding** GetEdFunding is a free grant finding resource, offering a collection of more than one thousand grants and opportunities culled from federal, state, regional and community sources. It is available to public and private schools, school districts, and nonprofit organizations that work with them. <http://www.getedfunding.com>

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## Volunteers – to the Max

*by Mallory King, Founder/Executive Director, Arts to Grow, NYC*

How does a small nonprofit organization grow without diverting funds away from the communities it serves? By harnessing the power of pro-bono professionals, a small budget can go a long way. Arts to Grow's engagement of professional volunteer consultants demonstrates the social benefit for both individuals and community organizations alike.

**Arts to Grow** serves 450 students in 16 partner programs, with a professional paid staff consisting only of the Founder/Executive Director, a very part-time program manager, and teaching artists who are all independent contractors. This is possible only because most of the non-programmatic work is done pro bono by professionals who generously donate their skills alongside college interns, recent graduates, and career changers.

What makes our process successful for our volunteers and ATG is that our expectations are realistic and flexible. We begin by creating project descriptions, which we post to free online platforms including **Volunteer Match**, **Idealist.org**, **Internships.com** and our own social media sites. Then we screen our applicants to be sure they have the skills, time, and interest to execute the particular project(s). We also utilize standard networking, turning to current contacts to introduce us to professionals in a specific field.

For example, at our start we knew we needed a professional website but lacked any budget. I began turning to colleagues and old friends for help. One connection led to another, which led to Rubenstein Technology, who agreed to provide their proprietary user-friendly back end and on-going web and email hosting. Rubenstein also connected us with a partner design firm, Designlounge, for pro bono web design. The donated services of these two wonderful companies provided ATG with top branding and communication tools that have served ATG ([artstogrow.org](http://artstogrow.org)) well for seven years.

During the past eight years more than 600 volunteers have donated their skills, offering both volunteers and ATG with growth opportunities. By outlining meaningful projects and spending time to recruit and match the right person to the right project, you can tap into the vast resource of professionals willing to donate their expertise, time and services to a cause for which they are personally passionate. The result: professionals experience satisfaction and engagement with their community, and your organization can achieve growth on a minimal budget.

**"In an era of relentless competition and ever-increasing pressure for young musicians...El Sistema sidesteps the drama of rejection in favor of inclusiveness." – Charles Donelan, reporter for Santa Barbara Independent**