

## Arranging for Student Success

By Christopher Schroeder, Resident Teaching Artist, Conservatory Lab Charter School

As much as we would love to hand out parts for Shostakovich's 9th Symphony to our bright-eyed 2nd-grade orchestra, it goes without saying that this would not be the best use of rehearsal time. Customizing arrangements for children's ensembles provides a bridge for students to gain the technical and musical skills they need in order to comprehend, perform, and find joy in orchestral music-making. Even with much music already available for beginner and intermediate ensembles, Sistema program directors are faced with a number of challenges in choosing repertoire, including limited rehearsal time, "quirky" ensemble instrumentation, and the inclusion of musicians of varied abilities. As a result, many teaching staff members have been creating arrangements aimed at providing every child the opportunity to participate.

"It's a matter of need. With our younger ensembles, we don't always have all the necessary parts covered. It could be as simple as giving the oboe part to a flute player; however, it's possible to orchestrate music in a much more artistic way, with creative and thoughtful arranging," says Bruce Keisling, Conductor of YOLA.

At *OrchKids* in Baltimore, Eli Wirth says that he arranges for the groups he conducts, because he "has a better understanding of their abilities and of how to appropriately challenge them." Stanford Thompson, CEO of *Play on, Philly!*, agrees that in prioritizing and identifying need, "we don't look through a music catalogue; we look to the needs of our students."

Although there is a large selection of repertoire available for beginner string orchestra, one challenge that most programs share is finding music for full orchestra. At the *Conservatory Lab Charter School El Sistema* (CLCS) of Brighton, MA, wind players starting in 3rd grade, and trumpet players in particular, do not have the physical ability to play above a written "G" in the staff. As a result, I have created over 25 arrangements (many derived from choral works) that start in concert "F," to help them gradually build their range, sound, and musicianship. Joseph Hart, of *Play on, Philly!*, affirms

this idea, saying, "Vocal music translates quite well for our instrumentation." Albert Oppenheimer, at Chicago's *YOURS Project*, arranges music at three or more levels of difficulty. He feels that "arrangements give educators the tools to make each concert an experience of struggle, achievement, and success for each student."

Arrangements also provide a unique voice to each program, accentuating not only the students' strengths, but also the strengths and musical influences of the teaching staff. Santa Barbara *iCAN Music Program*

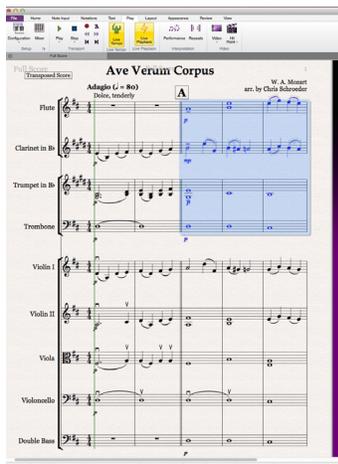
Director Adam Johnston finds that "enlisting feedback on collaborative arrangements allows educators to be flexible and improvisatory in their teaching, and helps to build a stronger culture among the staff."

Creating arrangements for programs is essential to the success of each student – providing an opportunity to be challenged, empowered, and eager to continue their growth as passionate individuals and musicians. Good arrangements offer this experience for even the youngest ensembles; they provide a bridge to music that fuels our collective passion and love for this art form.

*Sibelius* and *Finale* are the two leading music notation software programs. *Sibelius 7's Academic*

version goes for \$295, while *Finale 2014* will set you back \$350. Both have a similar learning curve and produce similar results. Another option is *Noteflight*, an online notation software that allows users to create and share up to ten scores by registering for a free subscription, with an upgrade option of \$49.00 per year.

"Just do it!," says Albert Oppenheimer. "Study up on basic orchestration concepts, like range and technical ability, and listen to what your students can do. If you are concerned about a certain passage, have them try it out." Once you have an understanding of the basics, Joseph Hart suggests, "set up your "hotkeys" – setting up the numbers on the keyboard to correspond with a rhythmic value will save you so much time." Finally, says Eli Wirth, "Don't worry about changing Mozart; write what is appropriate for your students."



For more about his work, go to [christopher-schroeder.com](http://christopher-schroeder.com); to watch a performance with CLCS students, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=de8n3WMr4aA>

## FROM THE EDITOR

Arrangers should be compensated when their arrangements are used, right?

Right, in the context we have been accustomed to as musicians – a context where musicians are perennially underpaid or unpaid, and it's often assumed that this is fine, since we love what we do and would probably be doing it anyway.

But the world of El Sistema presents a different set of priorities. Valuing the work of musicians is crucial, of course, but equally important is creating a larger interdependent network of programs that support, encourage and aid one another. When staff members at Sistema-inspired programs create arrangements of works in the public domain, therefore, it's wonderful when these works can be shared among all El Sistema-inspired programs.

Arrangers are vital to our work. All good youth ensemble programs need musical arrangements that require rigorous practice and also yield abundant rewards of beauty and excitement. The Sistema's need for imaginative arranging is even greater, given our dedication to creating opportunities for children of widely differing skill levels to perform together. I think every Sistema-inspired program should include arranging skills in at least one of its job descriptions – that of the conductor, if there is one, or of one or more teaching artists. This ensures that the work of arranging will be compensated.

Still, the need for arrangements is too great for each individual program to address separately. That's why it's crucial to create a collective trove of arrangements freely available to all. Several initiatives in this direction are already well underway, most significantly the [Rep & Resource Project](#).

As our Venezuelan friends and mentors have shown us, sharing arrangements does more than contribute to the flourishing of each nucleo. It also leads to a common core of repertoire, so that children in different programs can easily play together. North American programs that have been involved in seminarios have shown us the deep delight children experience when they find they can play fluently with children they've never met before.

As for the resourceful artists who arrange music for Sistema programs – their work has two-fold value: they are writing for their specific programs, but they are also writing for the entire international Sistema community. Fees for use are fine; nourishing an international movement is better.

*Tricia Tunstall*

"My piano teacher, Doralisa de Medina, made an arrangement of the Jupiter Symphony for seven pianos. Playing it was a great happiness for us." – José Antonio Abreu

## News Notes

The Chicago Metamorphosis Orchestra Project (ChiMOP, [www.chimop.org](http://www.chimop.org)) provides free music education programs to Chicago public school students with limited access to the arts. Its first initiative (summer 2013) was an advanced summer youth orchestra program that filled instructional gaps and provided advanced students with lessons, chamber music, and orchestra throughout the summer, with six concert performances. In September, ChiMOP began a before, during, and after school orchestra program in partnership with Chicago's Mary Lyon Elementary School. A hundred 3rd-8th graders participate in the before and after school symphony orchestra program, including choir, bucket band, wind and string sectionals, and instrumental group lessons. This spring, 350 1st and 2nd graders will begin orchestra prep study during the school day, leading to the creation of a paper orchestra as gateway to the symphony orchestra that starts in 3rd grade. Most symphony orchestra and orchestra prep classes are co-taught by ChiMOP teaching artists and Mary Lyon music teachers. Thomas Madeja, Artistic Director: [thomas@chimop.org](mailto:thomas@chimop.org)

Keep an eye out for this: Facebook just completed a successful two-month trial of allowing not-for-profit organizations to [add a "Donate Now" button to their Facebook page](#), enabling instant contributions. Launch date has not been announced but is expected to appear without fanfare soon.

## Resources

Joe Hamm, the Program Manager and a Teaching Artist at Soundscapes in Newport News, VA, has completed a ten-minute film: "[Beyond the Music: Soundscapes, El Sistema and the Proven Power of Music](#)." Made on Joe's own initiative, it tells the story of Soundscapes but also makes a strong advocacy case that can be useful to many programs as an introduction to El Sistema-inspired work. Available at [http://youtu.be/8\\_3PtSuKjzk](http://youtu.be/8_3PtSuKjzk)

[Preparing Students for the Next America: The Benefits of an Arts Education](#), the latest Research Bulletin from the Arts Education Partnership, offers a snapshot of how the arts support school achievement, build 21st century workforce skills, and enrich the lives of young people and communities. It draws on

the research in AEP's [ArtsEdSearch.org](http://www.aep-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Preparing-Students-for-the-Next-America-FINAL.pdf), the nation's first and foremost clearinghouse of research on the impact of arts education on students and their school communities. <http://www.aep-arts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Preparing-Students-for-the-Next-America-FINAL.pdf>

There is a new [National Center for Arts Research at Southern Methodist University](#), and it analyzes data on the U.S. arts in unconventional ways. For example, its [Inaugural Report](#) finds that an average U.S. arts/cultural organization actively engages (using an inclusive definition of participation) with only 10% of its local population. Yes, 90% of U.S. citizens have nothing to do with most arts/culture organizations. Can El Sistema-inspired work exceed that average? <http://mcs.smu.edu/artsresearch>

[GetEdFunding](#) is a free grant-finding resource, dedicated to helping educators and institutions identify the funding they need. GetEdFunding presents more than 1,000 grants and opportunities culled from federal, state, regional and community sources and is available to schools, educators, higher education institutions, and nonprofit organizations that work with them. <http://www.getedfunding.com>

Non-profit organization fundraising expert Judy Belk offers [empowering advice about fundraising](#) in her recent blog: <http://www.philanthropyjournal.org/news/top-stories/corporate-giving-bounces-back-six-things-nonprofits-need-know>

The Scottish Household Survey finds that [culture equals health](#). Those who participate in culture or go to cultural places or events are more likely to report good health and life satisfaction than those who do not – even when other factors such as age, economic status, income, area deprivation, education qualification, disability or long-standing illness and smoking are accounted for. Those who participated in a creative or cultural activity in the previous year were 38% more likely to report good health, compared to those who did not. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/08/9956>

## Subscription Information

To ADD or DELETE names in the free subscription list for The Ensemble, send an email to:

[TheEnsembleNL@gmail.com](mailto:TheEnsembleNL@gmail.com)

Back issues of The Ensemble are always available at: [http://www.changingliveselsistema.com/?page\\_id=7](http://www.changingliveselsistema.com/?page_id=7)

## Layering "Finlandia"

By [Bruce Kiesling, YOLA \(Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles\) Conductor](#)

For El Sistema programs in North America, it can feel like a very long way from the massive Venezuelan youth orchestras that have inspired us to the reality of our basic challenge: how to provide our students with orchestral music they can actually play. If we plan for our concerts to involve anything close to Venezuelan numbers of musicians, our performing ensembles are going to include students of widely varying technical abilities. One of our most important tasks is providing repertoire that can challenge and inspire such groups while assuring a meaningful artistic experiences for our audiences.

At our YOLA program at the LA Phil, we have addressed the repertoire question by creating arrangements of works for ensembles of different levels and different instrumentations. For example, every student across our YOLA program (over 500 students) has learned a version of Sibelius's famous tone poem, "Finlandia." We began with an arrangement for advanced middle school-age full orchestra. I created a somewhat more advanced version for high school orchestra that filled in many of the details featured in the original version of the work. To include our students of less experience, I created two additional arrangements, one for elementary-level full orchestra and another for middle school wind ensemble.

Each arrangement holds true to the form of the middle school arrangement we started with, so everyone can perform together – or, alternately, any two of the arrangements can be combined. In addition, and importantly, each arrangement works as a stand-alone piece, so that students in each ensemble can get a sense of the whole musical work in a way that motivates and rewards dedication to getting it right. Finally, our musicianship and choir teachers created simplified parts for choirs and Orff percussion, so that our youngest musicians could take part in learning the piece as well.

Although not even our beloved Disney Hall can accommodate 500 performers, we were able to create several performances of 150-250 participants, with various combinations of student musicians all performing "their" versions of "Finlandia." It was fun and rewarding for our musicians, fun for our teaching artists, and thrilling for our audience.

**"Your vocation, your life work, is where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need."  
– Frederick Buechner, U.S. theologian**