

# the world ensemble

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE WORLDWIDE EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

## What's in it for Professional Orchestras?

By Lucy Rash, Education Manager, *Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (Australia)*

Plush velvet seats, dimmed lighting, and the overture-concerto-symphony trifecta: it's the perfect setting in which to enjoy classical music. Or is it? For an ever-growing number of orchestras around the world, this image of the main stage 'art for art's sake' concert hall is fast losing its monopoly over company strategy.

At Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO), we are in the process of implementing a new strategic plan. I'm extremely proud of the process, and here's why: the dreaming and doing traditionally undertaken by the Education and Community Engagement team is undergoing a significant shift away from the periphery and towards the core of our work as a company.

The MSO's Sistema-inspired community music program, *The Pizzicato Effect*, represents an evolved and considered response to Melbourne's multicultural community. Located within the City of Hume, a council area home to migrant and linguistically diverse populations, our program could not exist without a company willingness to adapt. More than a third of our students speak two or more languages at home. Consequently, the MSO – having long operated in the domain of western orchestral tradition – now regularly prints communications in Arabic, Turkish, and English, and our program staff work onsite with students from over 14 different language groups. Our community has acted as a catalyst for MSO's reassessment of 'what we do' each day as an orchestra.

Our challenges are not unique. For many orchestras, the key to long-term strength and sustainability now lies in maintaining meaningful partnerships with community. "Before we even called it [the program] *YOLA*, we were looking for community partnerships," says Leni Boorstin, Director of Community and Government Affairs at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association (LAPA). "We always thought of it as a partnerships program." The word 'partnership' is trending in educational circles. But what do successful partnerships look like? "For us," Ms. Boorstin says, "this has meant shared management, shared responsibility, and shared financing of the program." Naturally, this model ensures that the program and its partners are actively including community interests and needs. "The future tax payer will no longer accept to pay for orchestras if they aren't relevant to more people than just the small percentage that chooses to come to our concerts," says Petra Kloovik, Education Manager at *Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra* in Sweden.

With average audience ages continually on the rise, Sistema-inspired programs are also affording orchestras

the opportunity to draw in younger audiences. For Ros Giffney of *Sistema Aotearoa (SA)*, the program represents "a close and positive partnership with the *Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra (APO)* that provides young people with unique, inspirational opportunities." In 2016, SA alone engaged with over 1,000 students. Importantly, programs like this are now encouraging a culture of mutual exchange whereby orchestras gain the interest of new young lovers of classical music while investing in the skills and wellbeing of this audience. As Peter Garden, Executive Director of Performance and Learning at *Royal Liverpool Philharmonic/In Harmony Liverpool*, suggests, "an extensive and outstanding Learning program that genuinely engages your local community across age groups is part of what a 21st-century orchestra should be."

Nonetheless, the establishment of such programs is not without its complexities. Changing education policy, the often unpredictable status of philanthropic support, and the reduction of budgets affecting community partners' ability to sustain meaningful partnership are challenges at the forefront of many programs' daily operations. Sometimes progress can be slow. For Ms. Kloovik, the Sistema programs of Gothenburg haven't yet inspired the rate of progress for instrumental skill development that its orchestral community had hoped for. "There are a lot of explanations for this," she says, "[but] the best way to address these worries was reminding the orchestral community of the important starting point [of reaching out to new audiences]."

Sometimes all it takes to identify that starting point is the simple yet powerful will of a champion for the cause. For Camilla Sarner of *El Sistema Sweden*, her first meeting with Gustavo Dudamel was life-changing for this very reason, as was the support of her senior colleagues. "He [Dudamel] was so enthusiastic and took the initiative to suggest we start a project together. [Artistic Director of Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra] Helena Wessman was very resolute and clear that it was both a very good idea and in the exact direction that the orchestra wanted to move."

A new truth is emerging: in order to thrive, orchestras must now plan to be as relevant, meaningful and accessible as possible to a wider variety of audiences than ever before. For the students, teaching artists, and administrators of Sistema-inspired programs worldwide, identifying the right model for this kind of engagement is, quite literally, child's play.

[For a fuller, detailed version of this article, [click here.](#)]

## NEWS

### AFRICA

#### [Xiquitsi Project Documentary, Mozambique](#)

The *January 2017 issue of the World Ensemble* featured an article by Kika Materula, the founder of *Xiquitsi Project* in Mozambique. You can now view a 19-minute documentary film that brings this program to life: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6x2f-dcA\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6x2f-dcA_g)  
*Continued on page 2 >*

### ASIA

#### [Introducing Sounds of Palestine](#)

*Sounds of Palestine* was founded in 2012 in two refugee camps in Bethlehem. Today, more than 160 kindergarten children receive weekly music workshops throughout refugee camps of isolated villages. Once children enter first grade... *Continued on page 3 >*

### EUROPE

#### [The Dream Orchestra Helps Children Refugees](#)

In April 2016 Ron Davis Alvarez started the *Dream Orchestra* with a handful of young boys from a home for refugees south of Gothenburg, Sweden. Six months later, the orchestra consisted of 30 children, mostly unaccompanied, from Afghanistan, Syria, Albania and Somalia. These students... *Continued on page 3 >*

### LATIN AMERICA

#### [Meaningful Performances in Mexico](#)

2016 was a busy year for the *National System of Musical Development (SNFM)* in Mexico. SNFM continued to develop its musical projects, serving more than 10,000 children across the country. Highlights from 2016 included *Harmony Concerts for Gender Equality in Morelos*... *Continued on page 4 >*

### NORTH AMERICA

#### [MYCincinnati Ambassador Ensemble](#)

The *MYCincinnati Ambassador Ensemble* (a performance group of the Sistema-inspired program in Cincinnati, Ohio) joined musician and artist Napoleon Maddox in late February to create the world premiere of *Twice The First Time*... *Continued on page 4 >*

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## Music Learning Strengthened by Social Context

By Chloë Kline, Education Director/Resident Musician, *Community MusicWorks*, Providence RI

Over the past five months, Community MusicWorks has been engaged in an experiment we're calling the "We Shall Overcome" Project. The experiment, which involves deep exploration of [this famous protest song](#) with all of our student musicians, was born out of CMW's ongoing interest in how social justice issues can deepen our young musicians' engagement in their own musical and social development.

The We Shall Overcome Project, which was planned at Carnegie Hall in September as part of a PlayUSA grant, is based on a hypothesis that when students uncover personal rationales for playing music (such as self-expression and being part of a legacy of musicians protesting oppression), they will have a different understanding of their role as musicians and citizens, become more intrinsically motivated to develop their musicianship, and work to strengthen both their musicianship and their civic engagement.

During this project, all of our student ensembles learned an arrangement of We Shall Overcome (with parts designed for varying skill levels) and explored the history and meaning of the song. All of our ensembles have also written their own verses based on things that they would like to overcome – in their schools, their neighborhoods, or the world at large. The first full performance of the project took place in

January, at CMW's annual Performance Party.

The next round took place on March 24, with special guest Emanuel Ax, as part of a community concert in a local gym. After reflecting with students and teachers about the January performance, we wove in some new elements for March, including harder parts for the more advanced students and parts of songs written by members of our songwriting class. We also featured verses written by members of the community: under the guidance of master teaching artist and composer Tom Cabaniss, CMW teachers led community sings leading up to March 24, inviting various community groups to come together to sing the song, learn about CMW's project, and write their own verses.

The We Shall Overcome Project is helping us explore our hypothesis that musical proficiency and community participation skills are mutually reinforcing. It's also allowing us to deepen our ties within our community. In a January reflection, one young musician noted that this project "made me feel connected and loved." We hope that, through this project, we can all work together to more deeply explore music's role in supporting social change – and in the process, feel the connections and love between members of our community.

## FROM THE EDITOR

In our ongoing quest to report on the growth of the Sistema-inspired movement across the world – perhaps history's biggest global movement at the intersection of art and social change – it sometimes happens that a *World Ensemble* issue gives only modest attention to our "mother country," Venezuela. This is just as Maestro Abreu and his colleagues would want it; they have always been remarkably non-possessive about El Sistema as a set of principles and ideals meant for worldwide use in many diverse ways.

In this column, however, we want to take a moment to acknowledge and honor El Sistema Venezuela, which turned 42 in February. The political and economic crisis gripping the country is a matter of deep sorrow and concern for us all; we know that our comrades in Sistema Venezuela are persevering in their work against herculean odds. As if that weren't enough, the Sistema, its leaders and its top orchestras are coming in for increasing criticism from various sources – inevitable, probably, for any movement that grows to such prominence and acclaim amid political hyperpartisanship.

In this context, I'm heartened by an essay I read recently by Paul Desenne, a Venezuelan composer who has long served El Sistema by writing compositions and arrangements for Sistema ensembles. [The essay](#), in the October issue of *Zea/NYC*, is a meditation on the extraordinary nature of El Sistema Venezuela's accomplishments. Mr. Desenne writes:

"It is amazing to see the formidable trajectory of the organization after 42 years of constant growth... The political funambulism, the huge engagement required in South America to maintain such an institution progressing across tumbling regimes and governments, keeping the flame alive until it will hopefully reach the highest world standards and, beyond that goal, until it manages to transform the way a good part of the world sees, plays, listens to, and uses music for education, is deeply misunderstood. It cannot be judged properly from a distance. Inside, it's political tightrope on a podium, dodging the looming destruction of an institution that has served hundreds of thousands of kids on a daily basis."

Mr. Desenne's essay reminds us of the almost miraculous synergy within El Sistema: playing and singing symphonic music is transformative for young people of Latin America and many other cultures, *and* the musical aliveness and energy of young people in other cultures is transformative for the world of symphonic music – precipitating, in his words, a "global symphonic warming."

Happy 42nd birthday, El Sistema Venezuela.

*Tricia Tunstall*

## NEWS

### AFRICA

[Continued from page 1 >](#)

The 15th "residential" of the Kenya National Youth Orchestra (KNYO) focused on the training of its next crop of conductors. In February, KNYO showcased at the ONGEA! Music Summit (<http://ongea.biz>). KNYO is also forming a partnership with [El Sistema Kenya](#) in which young KNYO leaders will apprentice as teachers in El Sistema Kenya schools, creating curricula, gaining experience in teaching, and giving back to their communities. For more information, visit [www.artofmusic.co.ke/national-youth-orchestra-of-kenya](http://www.artofmusic.co.ke/national-youth-orchestra-of-kenya)

The Art of Music Foundation in Nairobi, Kenya has recently seen growth and musical improvement in a number of its programmes. First, Ghetto Classics' Sunday community sessions have grown and recently formed Senior and Junior Orchestras. Through the Link Up program led by Carnegie Hall, Ghetto Classics has expanded to three new schools in Nairobi and four in Mombasa. This brings the total number of students under the Link Up program to over 800. At the end of 2017, students will come together to perform "The Orchestra Moves" in Nairobi and Mombasa with the Kenya National Youth Orchestra.

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## GUEST COLUMN

*By Vanessa Rodrigues, Teaching Artist, Rocinha Music School, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

It was already 2:25 PM and my 2 o'clock students still hadn't shown up to their violin class – unusual, since they live close by and are usually on time. Then I got a message on WhatsApp from João: "Professora, I'm sorry I couldn't come to class today, but they're shooting in the street here and I can't leave my house."

The Rocinha Music School is on the 17th floor of a municipal building across the freeway from and overlooking the Rocinha favela of Rio de Janeiro. The students are 7-20 years old, the vast majority from Rocinha. Ever since the UPP, a state policing project to pacify the favelas before Rio's mega events in 2014 and 2016, was installed in Rocinha, my students have often told me they actually felt safer when the gang was in charge; at least everybody knew the rules and nobody dared break them. Now there are regular flare-ups between the police and drug dealers, with thousands of innocent residents fleeing the crossfire.

I have almost never come face-to-face with drug gangs. But one evening a few years ago, we brought our chamber orchestra to play in a small community centre in a fairly turbulent part of Rocinha. The entrance is a small unmarked door in a narrow, steep alleyway staircase. We were standing in the stairway when a young man in military fatigues with an assault rifle pushed his way past us on his way down the stairs to make his drug deal. I didn't feel immediate urgency, as it was obvious that we belonged there and were no threat to him. But if a UPP officer had appeared on the scene at that moment, there would have been nowhere for us to seek shelter from flying bullets.

Still, I can't agree with people who say things would be better if the favelas just went back to being gang-controlled. Sure, things might seem more orderly, but gang law is brutal and uncompromising. Two of my young students told me that they witnessed an alleged rapist being beaten to death by gang members, right before their eyes. And when the gangs were stronger, a young girl who caught the eye of a gang member would have no choice but to be his girlfriend; if she or her family objected, they would all be shot.

The vast majority of our students are here because their parents want to keep them occupied and away from gangs and crime. We have classes in recorder, guitar, choir, and orchestral instruments; our repertoire is a mix of Brazilian, folkloric, classical and popular music. Many students fall in love with music. As for the kids who start to miss their lessons, we try hard to keep after them. Fortunately, Rocinha has many NGOs and offers a wide variety of activities, from ballet to surfing to football; we just hope the kids who leave us have found another fulfilling activity that suits them, rather than imagine the worst.

## NEWS

### AFRICA

*Continued from page 2 >*

For over eight years, the Music Enlightenment Project (MEP) has provided extra-curricular music education to children from Braamfontein in the inner city of Johannesburg, South Africa. Working with children from more than five schools, MEP now has a home office and physical identity, thanks to the donation of a venue by Billion Group (a property company). For their Open Day on 28th January, MEP invited parents, children and others to see their offerings and sign up for classes. MEP started teaching activities within their new space in February, while continuing to build and make improvements. MEP's goal is to use this space to create a community centre where children and adults can develop and express their creative abilities in a safe environment. For further inquiries, contact: [www.musicenlightenmentproject.co.za](http://www.musicenlightenmentproject.co.za).

### ASIA

*Sounds of Palestine continued from page 1*

... they are invited to join the after-school program, with the opportunity to participate in orchestra, choir, dabke dance, and/or instrumental group lessons. Sounds of Palestine also offers children healthy home-cooked meals, homework support, and recreational activities after school. Music teachers are assisted by social pedagogical workers who have received music leadership training from Musicians without Borders. These social pedagogical workers also work with the families of the children and offer long-term support. In 2016, Sounds of Palestine's students participated in eight different performances with orchestra, choir and dabke. To learn more, visit [www.soundsopalestine.org](http://www.soundsopalestine.org).

Recognizing the need for collegial support and the sharing of resources, [Sistema Aotearoa](#), [Sistema Whangarei](#), [Sistema Waikato](#), and [Sistema Hutt Valley](#) created a memorandum of understanding resulting in [the formation of Sistema New Zealand](#). Their first gathering gave students the opportunity to meet new Sistema friends from around the country, and program leaders and teachers a chance to meet and share experiences. A total of 102 students travelled to participate in workshops, including learning a newly composed waiata (song) by Rob Ruha, an esteemed composer in Māoridom and Māori performing arts. The day ended with a presentation on the Auckland Town Hall stage attended by government officials during which the children played as one orchestra.

The Philippines is a melting pot of Malay, Spanish, and American culture, and a cycle of ironies contained

in its 7,100 islands. On February 18, the [Orchestra of the Filipino Youth/Ang Misyon](#) (under Sistema for the Filipino Youth) conquered an audience of pop-inclined millennials with Beethoven's 5th Symphony, works by Brahms and Dvořák, Marquez's Danzon No. 2, and Edwin Lumanug's Philippine Airs Medley, at the resort-style campus of Lyceum of The Philippines University Cavite, south of Manila. In front of a crowd of three thousand high school and college students, faculty, and the community, the OFY proved that classical music delivered by a dedicated group of teenage musicians in their denim pants and Philippine sports jackets can rock an entire campus.

### EUROPE

*The Dream Orchestra continued from page 1*

...gather three times each week for orchestra rehearsals and music instruction. Many of the students say that the music provides life support in their situation of long and insecure waiting, or when missing family and friends. The Dream Orchestra held a public concert on 25 February. For more information: [www.elsistema.se](http://www.elsistema.se) Contact: Malin Clausson [malin.c@elsistema.se](mailto:malin.c@elsistema.se) or Ron Davis Alvarez [ron@elsistema.se](mailto:ron@elsistema.se)

A new five-minute film from the six sites of [In Harmony England](#) shares its approaches and argues for the value of starting young and integrating the work in schools. You can watch this video and its wealth of resources here: <https://vimeo.com/181926178/b0b19bcd01>

For the fourth time, the international music youth camp "Side by Side by El Sistema" will take place 14-20 June 2017 in Gothenburg. During a few intense summer days, young musicians gather from all around the world to play in an orchestra or sing in a choir, culminating in a concert with musicians from the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. Among the conductors leading the orchestras and choirs on nine different levels will be Santtu-Matias Rouvali (chief conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony), Ron Davis Alvarez and Gustavo Dudamel. Registration is now open at <http://www.sidebysidegoteborg.com>

The fourth Summer Residency of [Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra](#) (supported by the Hilti Foundation) will welcome 190 young musicians from 19 countries from July to August, hosted in Athens by El Sistema Greece ([elsistemagreece.com](http://elsistemagreece.com)). Previous residencies were held in Vienna/Salzburg (2013), Istanbul (2014) and Milan (2015). There will be a combined orchestra, as well as an advanced group and intermediary group. Musical co-directors will include Etienne Abelin, Bruno Campo,

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### EUROPE

*Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra, continued from page 3*  
Ron Davis Alvarez, Felix Briceño, and Samuel Matus. In addition, SEYO'17 teachers will participate in workshops, coach sectionals, and learn from each other. The Final Concert will be part of the Hellenic Festival at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus in one of the world's most impressive open-air stone theatres, built between 160AD - 174AD.

### LATIN AMERICA

*Musical Development in Mexico, continued from page 1*  
... and Jalisco, a welcome concert for Pope Francis during his visit to Mexico, a productive meeting in Nicaragua with the member countries of the Ibero-American Youth Orchestra Program, and the 15th anniversary tour of the Mexican Children's Symphony Orchestra (OSIM). For more information: <https://tinyurl.com/h82a4th>

Esperanza Azteca, Mexico's other El Sistema-inspired program, has continued growing over the past year, with new orchestras such as OSEA Malinalco, OSEA Tlaquepaque, OSEA Plácido Domingo, and the Audi Orchestra of Mexico. Esperanza Azteca is a social-musical project for young people of limited resources between 5 and 17 years old. Since 2009, they have created over 86 symphony orchestras and choirs in Mexico, the U.S., and Central America. The project serves more than 16,000 children with 1,300 teachers. For more information: <http://esperanzaazteca.mx>

The Orquesta de Barro, Arpeggio Peru's all-star team, performed Gustav Mahler's 4th Symphony in the Trujillo Municipal Theatre in February. It was the first time a Mahler symphony had been played in the city. The concert was the result of six weeks of daily rehearsals with Thomas Mittelberger, professor of conducting at the Hamburg Conservatory, and Jaap Zeijl, solo violist with the NDR Symphony Orchestra in Hamburg. They also taught master classes to Arpeggio students and teachers. The soloist was Leevke Hambach, a singer from Leipzig. Website: [www.facebook.com/arpeggioperu](http://www.facebook.com/arpeggioperu)

El Sistema in Venezuela, or FundaMusical Bolívar, is celebrating its 42nd anniversary with exciting [news about its former students](#). Tomás Medina, first trumpet with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra, made

his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic in a series of concerts in February and March. The first time Tomás entered the Berliner Philharmonie was in 2000, while on tour with the Venezuelan National Children's Orchestra. The El Sistema alum returned to play as a guest with the legendary orchestra. Another member of the Simón Bolívar Orchestra, flutist Ana Paola Rincones, won Best Classical Album of the Year from the Pepsi Music Awards for her album, "Elegante Guajira." <http://www.anapaolarincones.com/discografia.html>

### NORTH AMERICA

*MYCincinnati Performance, continued from page 1*  
... Through the lens of hip-hop, experimental storytelling, poetry, and chamber music, the piece explored the story of Mr. Maddox's great grand-aunts, Millie-Christine, conjoined twins born into slavery in the pre-Civil War South. The performance was raw, ecstatic, poetic, fluid, and challenging. For more information, see [December 2016 issue of The Ensemble](#).

[The National Take a Stand Festival](#) (July 15-22, in Los Angeles) will select students from programs all over the U.S. to join in an intensive week of playing together, culminating in a concert conducted by Gustavo Dudamel at Disney Hall. The festival will also include a Symposium, open to participants from around the world. Website: <http://laphil.com/education/take-stand/take-stand-symposium-2017>.

[Carnegie Hall will convene NYO2](#), a national orchestra of 14-17 year old students from underserved communities, in late June/early July for intensive rehearsals, classes, and performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra. A number of students from El Sistema-inspired programs have been accepted into NYO2, a testament to the high musical achievement their programs are attaining. Website: [www.carnegiehall.org/nyo2](http://www.carnegiehall.org/nyo2)

PlayUSA ([www.carnegiehall.org/PlayUSA](http://www.carnegiehall.org/PlayUSA)) is a program of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, which seeks to support action research to advance practice in programs dedicated to underserved youth. Five U.S. Sistema-inspired programs have been selected for PlayUSA over its two years (one is the "We Shall Overcome Project" featured on page 2 of this issue). For more, see the [January 2017 issue of The Ensemble](#).

## RESOURCES

Alix Didier Sarrouy, a sociologist from Sorbonne University, recently wrote an important PhD thesis: "Actors in music education: comparative ethnography between three núcleos inspired by the El Sistema program in Venezuela, Brazil and Portugal." It focuses on [the beauty and complexity of human relations in núcleos](#), and shows how surrounding social ecosystems have a massive impact – and how, sometimes, even very challenging ecosystems can create positive attachments. For a copy in French or Portuguese, please contact: [alixsarrouy@gmail.com](mailto:alixsarrouy@gmail.com). Plans are in process for English and Spanish versions.

[#ImagineNation: the Value of Cultural Learning](#), recently published by the Cultural Learning Alliance in the U.K., reveals the [impact of learning through arts and culture on vital measures of success](#) including educational attainment, employability, health, and social engagement. The report provides helpful advocacy that distills a wide gathering of studies and programs, and brims with statements of support from highly respected individuals. Website: [www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk](http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk)

A small but interesting research study from Germany finds that [school-based music training seems to be beneficial in preventing an increase in aggressive behavior](#). In the study, students of natural sciences (in a parallel study group) did increase in aggression, while music students felt the same level of stress but didn't become more aggressive. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959475216300676>

[Two blogs](#) by Eric Booth/Tricia Tunstall have been circulating recently. One considers the beginnings of El Sistema *theater* programs (<http://howlround.com/the-biggest-arts-education-phenomenon-in-the-world-but-not-in-theatre-yet>) and the other speaks to El Sistema teachers with advice from the authors' experiences studying programs around the world. <http://ericbooth.net/to-teachers-in-el-sistema-inspired-programs>.

*"One reason the future cannot be predicted is that it can be influenced."  
– Adam Kahane, complex social change strategist*