

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE U.S. & CANADIAN EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

Arranging to Play Bernstein's "Somewhere"

By Jamie Bernstein, writer and narrator

How I wish that my father, Leonard Bernstein, had lived long enough to witness El Sistema. If he had, he would surely have been its most fervent champion. He'd have loved the way this multinational movement combines two of his strongest lifelong commitments: sharing the joy of music with young people, and striving to make the world a more just and peaceful place.

Love of teaching, love of learning, a fervor for striving together to make and share beauty, social transformation through the warm embrace of music – through these elements, El Sistema manages to combine virtually everything Leonard Bernstein worked for into one glorious, global initiative.

There was a time, in the 1950's-70's, when every kid in the U.S. knew who Leonard Bernstein was: that friendly guy on TV who conducted the New York Philharmonic and talked about the music in a way that was informal, informative, and fascinating.

Millions of children – and their parents – were turned on to classical music as a result of his [Young People's Concerts](#). Today, kids are far less likely to know who Leonard Bernstein is. They might have heard of his Broadway show *West Side Story*, which became an Oscar-winning film...but they probably don't know that he wrote symphonies, ballets, operas, and more; conducted the great orchestras of the world and made historic recordings with them; plus he did all that groundbreaking teaching on TV; plus he spoke out fearlessly whenever he saw injustice and oppression, even if it got him into trouble. (His FBI file was 800 pages long.) Leonard Bernstein's impassioned multiplicity is a great model for El Sistema's fired-up young players. I wish they knew more about him.

Leonard Bernstein would have turned 100 this coming August 25th. All this year, around the world, cultural institutions of every kind will be celebrating the centennial of this multi-dimensional 20th-century dynamo. So I wondered: how could El Sistema participate in "Bernstein at 100"?

In my decade-long involvement with El Sistema, I have delighted in how Sistema teachers create special "tiered" arrangements of musical compositions for their multi-aptitude ensembles. These arrangements allow the entire group to experience the thrill of jointly rehearsing and performing beloved orchestral works. I

found myself imagining the music of Bernstein being arranged in such a manner. But I didn't want to burden Sistema programs with additional costs.

So I plotted, I begged, I twisted some arms... and here it is! The Leonard Bernstein Office, together with Hal Leonard LLC, have devised a special "tiered" arrangement of Bernstein's iconic song "Somewhere" from *West Side Story*. These arrangements are being



Leonard Bernstein with attendees after a *Young People's Concert*

offered to Sistema-inspired programs in the U.S., Europe and beyond – at no charge to the participants. Through January 31, [El Sistema USA](#) extends the opportunity (first introduced this fall) to perform "Somewhere." ESUSA will distribute parts to Sistema-inspired programs who sign up: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/38NDVQJ>

The tiered "Somewhere" arrangements feature two levels of aptitude, in versions for orchestral ensemble as well as for strings alone and winds/brass alone. In addition, all the arrangements are compatible with a specially prepared choral arrangement. Choruses are enthusiastically invited to participate – in any configuration, including just piano accompaniment.

My father's soaring melody, together with Stephen Sondheim's inspirational lyrics, expresses our universal yearning for a more peaceful and compassionate future, at a time when so many people worldwide are experiencing displacement and deprivation. "Somewhere" is the perfect anthem for our troubled times, providing a much-needed message of hope for young people everywhere. I hope that when various Sistema-inspired programs gather for their signature "seminarios," the assembled groups can all play "Somewhere" together. My vision is for young people worldwide to have the opportunity to learn about Bernstein and celebrate his centennial.

What better 100th birthday present could there be for Leonard Bernstein than to introduce him, through his music, to a new generation of eager young players? I'm sure my father would have loved nothing more than to give the children of the world his own melody, with which to express our collective wish for a safer, more harmonious planet.

FROM THE EDITOR

"Good job!"

As teachers – especially as teachers with a central goal of helping students develop self-esteem – how many times a day do we say that to kids? In my private teaching practice, I too say it often. When a child works hard, plays well, and looks expectantly at me, it's almost reflexive.

But "Good Job!" is the name of Chapter 4 in the new book *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives*, by Peter Johnston – and it's an example of what NOT to say. It's got me thinking.

Praise, says Johnston, can often be counterproductive for children's healthy development. It fixes a child's attention on whether her product is "good" or "bad," which implies defining her as a success or a failure. "Praise distracts [kids] from simply doing what they are doing," he writes, "and turns their attention towards pleasing us."

In my own teaching this week, I experimented with finding alternatives to praise. I came up with "I like the way you...(created a crescendo in that phrase, etc)." But I quickly realized that this didn't solve the problem; it was still about what I liked. According to Johnston, "saying 'I'm proud of you' has the same effect as saying 'I'm disappointed in you.'" The message of both statements is that what's important is *your* judgment of the child.

Johnston emphasizes the importance of positive feedback, but he redefines "positive" as process-oriented observations instead of person-oriented praise. A helpful response, he says, might be to ask, "How did you do that?" In answering the question, the child will experience herself as a person who acts and makes choices that have positive consequences – she will internalize what Johnston calls "an agentive narrative." He suggests "causal process statements" as another element of positive feedback: "You created a crescendo in that phrase, and that gave the music a sense of excitement." The child learns that he has made choices that have powerful effects.

This is why Johnston's message, which resonates with that of Carol Dweck and other current thought leaders, is so important for teachers in Sistema-inspired programs. "Good job!" is easy. But "How did you do that?" is what will help our kids become self-confident artists.

Tricia Tunstall

"In difficult times you should always carry something beautiful in your mind."
– Blaise Pascal

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News Notes

Students are invited to [apply for the 2018 National Take a Stand Festival \(NTASF\)](#). Building on the inaugural festival in 2017, NTASF in July 2018 is a free youth orchestra training program that brings musicians from El Sistema-inspired programs across the U.S. to Los Angeles, to form two ensembles: a Symphony Orchestra of 100 of the most advanced musicians ages 12-18, and a Junior String Ensemble for younger musicians (open to 36 string players ages 12-15). Accepted students will learn from a world-class artist faculty and rehearse and perform at Walt Disney Concert Hall in L.A. Travel, lodging, food, and programming will be provided free of charge. Program directors, teachers, and staff are encouraged to pass this message along to students so they may apply directly. More information about the program, eligibility, and audition requirements (scales/excerpts) can be found at: www.laphil.org/ntasf The application deadline is February 8, and notification of acceptance is by March 15.



NTASF 2017 players in rehearsal with Gustavo Dudamel. Photo: Larry Ho

The top ticket-selling film in early December was [Disney's new animated film *Coco*](#). The singing voice of lead character Miguel is [Tony Gonzales](#), who was in the first paper violin class in YOLA at HOLA (Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles at Heart of Los Angeles). Tony grew up in the program, and he still plays viola in the YOLA orchestra. Tony's former choir teacher at HOLA, Emma Joleen, and the whole faculty and staff of YOLA at HOLA, are proud of Tony's big break.

Resources

[Alternate Roots](#) supports social and economic justice programs led by activist artists in 14 Southern states. Their [Partners in Action](#) grant program funds social justice partnerships in grassroots communities;

they provide support and resources for partnerships that are culturally rooted, clear in their objectives and creative in their approaches. The application deadline is January 29; you can find out more at: <https://alternateroots.org/partners-in-action>

[U.S. Department of Arts and Culture](#) is not a government agency but a collective of artists and activists who undertake national grassroots programs that celebrate artistry, community, heritage and collective imagination. Might it make sense for you to invite your students into some projects, as a part of leadership development? Find out about [The People's State of the Union](#) in January, where groups are invited to create a story/music circle in which they express and share their sense of the community and the nation. (Learn more at <https://usdac.us/psotu>.) Also explore the USDAC guide to ethical artistic response to local environmental or social crises, called *Art Became The Oxygen*. <https://usdac.us/artisticresponse>

[The National Guild for Community Arts Education](#) offers a four-part webinar series, chaired by [Dennie Palmer Wolf](#), that focuses on

[rethinking fundamental ways of doing business to achieve the potential of creative youth development](#) – considering program design, staffing, and particularly evaluation, to create more active and ongoing roles for young people as critical thinkers, designers, and decision makers. Free to Guild members, the series is available to non-members for \$35 per webinar or \$120 for the whole series. To find out more, go to: www.creativeyouthdevelopment.org or https://www.tfaforms.com/437637?fa_9=7013600000W7W1

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In Response to Disaster

by Anna Pietraszko, Executive Director, Miami Music Project

Hurricane Irma will go down as one of the most intense hurricanes in history. Causing widespread devastation and flooding, this 650-mile-wide storm left millions without power, cost nearly \$100 billion in damage, and destroyed one out of every four homes in the Florida Keys. The panic before the storm was clear, but it was its humbling aftermath that inspired me to think about different ways to help those most affected.

I decided we should do what we know best – harness music's power to improve lives. For two weeks, we scheduled free performances (better known as "Sound Hugs") by our teaching artists at homeless shelters, daycare centers, assisted-living facilities, and similar venues. By partnering with other community-driven organizations such as the local youth center, we doubled our impact and witnessed the wonderful power of music. Children who may have not had power at home were dancing and singing along with our teaching artists. Adults who may have lost their homes or had little access to a warm meal sat in peace while listening to the soothing sounds of a violin.

Additionally, our office opened its doors and welcomed students and families to cool off during the very hot days that followed the storm. Playing board games and sharing meals gave us the chance to connect with our students, hear their storm stories, and comfort them. Our entire team also made time to assist in cleaning up local schools so classes could resume more easily. It was exciting to receive supply donations from as far away as Oregon. Thanks to social media, word spread, and we helped distribute these supplies in a collective effort to the Florida Keys.

During these two weeks, we saw that even in hardship, it's still about music and it's still about community; the two are inseparable. Community-driven organizations like ours have a special obligation to support our children and families when the going gets tough. Understanding that we are all vulnerable can be terrifying, but also allows kindness, human connection, and love to emerge. This is how the most genuine communities are built, and how children grow to be remarkable young people.

ACTION FOR THE MONTH: Email [Mary Anne Carter](mailto:MaryAnneCarter@neahome.com), Senior Deputy Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) *When Mary Anne Carter was placed inside the NEA by the Trump Administration, many people were nervous that she brought a mandate to undermine it; however, she has proven to be a strong and effective advocate, alongside Chairman Jane Chu. Please follow the instructions [here](#) to write an email of thanks; your note also makes her aware of the El Sistema-inspired movement in the U.S. Our collective voice can make a difference. carterm@arts.gov*