

the world ensemble

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE WORLDWIDE EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

Creating an International Network

By Marshall Marcus, President, **Sistema Europe**; Executive Director of the **European Union Youth Orchestra**

[Editor's note: In creating this newsletter, we started network-building efforts around the world. Sistema Europe is the most developed multi-national network in the world, so we put our first issue's focus there.]

I'd like to dwell for a moment on authenticity. It is July 2006. I am having breakfast at the Alba Hotel in Caracas with Maestro Abreu. The discussion is lively, and one aspect of substance that we alight on is Europe. And El Sistema. Maestro Abreu is talking (with his usual prescience) about the idea of Sistema-inspired programmes in Europe that, at this moment in time, do not actually exist. I'm a little bit slow; it takes me a couple of years to catch up. So it is not until the early hours of 2 February 2012, just as the second Take a Stand Symposium has finished in LA, that I realise what I have to do. I sit down in my hotel room, log onto the sistemaeurope.com domain that I had taken out almost on a whim the summer before, and write to as many relevant people as I can think of in Europe with the news that a network for Sistema-inspired programmes is launching in Europe.

Three years later, we have dozens of network member programmes across much of Europe. From the Arctic to the Mediterranean, from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, thousands upon thousands of young people from a huge variety of cultures are part of a network that is still more a big family than a grown-up organisation. And that is how the family of Sistema-inspired programmes in Europe likes it. It's true that last year we became a legal entity with an elected Board and the usual rules and meetings. But whilst our political masters in Brussels have constructed the quite staggering bureaucratic entity known as the 'EU', we prefer to act as a simple servant organisation, protecting – more than anything else – the set of ideals from Venezuela that brought us here in the first place.

In Europe we have the advantage of large numbers of cultures in a small regional space; more than 40 countries packed into a land mass significantly smaller than Russia or Canada. And maybe that's part of the reason for the diversity of Sistema-inspired practice that seems to be our hallmark: Big Noise Scotland's impressive teacher conference; Sistema Italy's notable federal structure; Sistema Sweden's fantastic side-by-side projects; Sistema England's recent innovatory Young Leaders programme; the indescribable marvel that is the Turkish Music for Peace Foundation; Superar's fast-spreading franchise in Austria, Switzerland, the Balkans and beyond; and deeply

committed projects from Portugal to Armenia, from Greenland (sorry to steal that for Europe) to France.

Perhaps the most striking initiative in Europe to date has been the annual summer Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra that brings so much of this kaleidoscopic ingenuity together. This year at Milan's Expo and the famed La Scala opera house, 250 young musicians from 24 countries gathered together with several Venezuelan orchestras, and not only made music in concerts, but also tried out striking new (for El Sistema) music-making ideas: everything from flash mobs to empathy games, music visualisation sessions and workshops on baroque dance. (Read a little more about it on page 3).

Of course we have our challenges, and they are not just financial. It seems impossible to get all the programmes to give us even modest information about themselves; our website is begging for development; and we have had to deal on occasion with internal national squabbles that amounted in one case to a miniature trademark war. And now that we have Sistema Europe, we also have to work out who owns and uses Sistema Europe's apparently increasingly valuable brand.

So in Europe we are (in no particular order) friendly, visionary, chaotic, complex, innovative, unresolved and deeply aspirational. Our approach puts me in mind of some words from Neil Ascherson, writing in the *London Review of Books* the month after Sistema Europe was founded: "My own sense of the Europe we have is that it's like a sponge, a living sponge of squashy texture and uncertain outline, a rich and beautiful collective creature into whose open pores countless visiting organisms swim or stay to breed ... [and not] a clanking metallic superstate". And that is the point, really. When Maestro Abreu offered me his thoughts about El Sistema and Europe, he was simply doing what he does with everyone, saying, in essence, "You know your own culture, you know your own needs: take El Sistema and use it as it can be used according to your understanding of your own place."

That seems to me as good a starting point as any for the first edition of the World Ensemble Newsletter. Me: I am a European, always will be. But whoever and wherever you are, my view is, never neglect the challenge to keep the ideals of your culture at the heart of your work. Let's be Sistema-inspired, but always true to our own vision. Then the work will really be authentic.

NEWS

AFRICA

[Kenya National Youth Orchestra, Nairobi](#)

The 180 players of the National Youth Orchestra of Kenya performed for U.S. President Barack Obama in July 2015 during his visit to Kenya. They recorded their first score for a short TV feature in the same month, and are laying the groundwork for more recordings in East Africa over the next few years. In the meantime, the orchestra continues to ...

[Continued on page 2 >](#)

ASIA

[New Sistema Orchestra in New Zealand](#)

In October, Sistema Aotearoa (Auckland, New Zealand) launched Auckland's newest youth orchestra – Rangatahi Philharmonia O Tara. For the first time, the wind, brass and percussion students combined with the string section to form ...

[Continued on page 3 >](#)

EUROPE

[Young Musicians in England Build an Orchestra](#)

In October 2015, Sistema England's Young Leaders Programme brought together 35 young musicians from In Harmony Lambeth, In Harmony Liverpool, Sistema in Norwich and The Nucleo Project to build ...

[Continued on page 3 >](#)

LATIN AMERICA

[Colombia's New Program](#)

Batuta recently launched a new program, Voces de la Esperanza (Voices of Hope), in Buenaventura, a city on Colombia's Pacific coast. Buenaventura has suffered many years of violence, and Batuta is collaborating with the Unidad de Víctimas, a government project ...

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NORTH AMERICA

[National Sistema Youth Orchestra](#)

The U.S. is known for having many programs (over 117) and for their independence. They sometimes join for local or regional projects, but a first national project was launched in November 2015. Take A Stand (a collaboration of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, The ...

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An Intensive Weekend Program in Japan

By Yutaka Kikugawa, Founder and Director of **El Sistema Japan**

Many Japanese school-age children are occupied with afterschool priorities imposed by their schools and parents; some examples are intensive afterschool club activities and private “cram” schools for supplementary learning. Therefore, the Soma Children’s Orchestra and Chorus (SCOC) in Fukushima prefecture, Japan’s first El Sistema-inspired program, runs mostly on weekends. The program’s core mission is to foster life skills among children whose lives and families were devastated by the 2011 tsunami and nuclear accident, to provide them with a nurturing social world, and to equip them with intrinsic motivation. The program is free of charge for any child living in Soma City.

Every Saturday morning, there is a beginner’s class of 20 children ages 5-10, with two local string teachers. Every Sunday, intermediate and advanced classes, with 70 children ages 8-18, are in operation from 10am till 5pm; these classes are led by the orchestra music director, Yohei Asaoka, who travels from Tokyo to Soma twice a month, as well as by local teachers and volunteer instructors. Our volunteers have wide-ranging backgrounds. Some are locally recruited

semi-retired seniors with musical instrument skills. Others come from quite a distance; these include conservatory students aiming at music careers, college students who are non-music majors, and young office workers who love to play orchestral music as a hobby. In addition, we have a full ensemble comprised of 30-40 players of different skill levels.

Despite the limitations of our practice schedule, SCOC children learn quickly. One reason is that they have regular performance opportunities in Soma and elsewhere; this advances rapid learning here just as it does in Venezuela. Another reason is that our program prioritizes peer teaching and learning; we make it a key feature of our children’s experience and a key element in our evaluation systems. As a result of these factors and the dedication of our teachers, children and parents, after only two years in operation SCOC was able to play Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony side-by-side with the Teresa Carreño Youth Orchestra of Venezuela under the baton of Christian Vasquez in November 2015, when that orchestra visited Soma during its first Asian tour.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The World Ensemble*, the first publication to connect the worldwide network of El Sistema-inspired programs – currently about 380 programs in 63 countries. Led by 700,000 children engaged in El Sistema Venezuela, the world network’s total number of participants is likely to reach one million by the end of 2016.

This publication is a volunteer effort, with editorial teams in five regions. Each team gathers and writes up key news from its region. In creating this first issue, we discovered that there is far more news than there is newsletter space to cover it (and we didn’t want to burden you with a ten-page issue), so we apologize that we have not been able to include everything submitted. We hope you find the contents useful and inspiring; we hope you will follow your interests and make connections with colleagues around the world to strengthen our network.

We expect to send you four-page issues four times a year. If you know of others who would like to receive these free issues, just send a request to: TheWorldEnsemble@gmail.com. If you would like to stop receiving issues, let us know at the same address. If you have news you would like to submit for consideration, send it to your regional representative (and if you don’t know those listed in the masthead for your region, drop us a note).

We have just launched a [website for this newsletter and for *The Ensemble*](#), our newsletter that addresses the U.S. and Canadian movement: TheEnsembleNewsletters.com. All back issues will be available there, and over time there will be extra features added.

What unites us? The global movement shares core values and goals, even as practices and programs differ in our many cultures. This newsletter is built upon those fiercely-held core values, and shares our best ideas and accomplishments, our questions, and our struggles to build a communications network where an invisible belief network already exists.

What separates us? Circumstance. We are all busy finding support and growing our programs, helping students, faculties, families and communities – often, we do not have time to raise our heads and learn about the work of colleagues around the world.

There are two things we know for sure about this young, enthusiastic, historically-unprecedented El Sistema movement:

1) It has the potential to significantly improve the lives of millions of children who struggle with poverty and other social maladies. And 2) We are stronger together than we are when separate.

Eric Booth

NEWS

AFRICA

Kenya continued

... run week-long residential training courses, where students participate in intensive instrumental instruction, leadership activities and sessions on cultural and socio-economic integration in society. The orchestra has been able to appoint the first group of players to full tutor positions this year. For more information: info@artofmusic.co.ke. Website: www.artofmusic.co.ke

Since its start in 2009, the [Music Enlightenment Project](#) has served more than 800 students from five schools in the inner city of Johannesburg, South Africa. Embracing a holistic approach by “developing life skills through music education,” the project is [expanding its facilities through the corporate social initiative](#)

of a local property development company. The new facility will enhance the program’s community presence. Contact info@musicenlightenmentproject.co.za to learn more about its fundraising campaign.

El Sistema Kenya now serves 60 children at its strings program in Kawangware Primary School, Nairobi. Founder Karis Crawford leads the weekly Suzuki instruction and provides training for her team of Kenyan assistant teachers, who also participate in other music programs in Nairobi. The program has recently received many generous instrument donations from the U.S., is [now launching two new program sites, and partners with the Youth Orchestra of the Americas](#), which will be sending one of its Youth Leaders to help with the project in 2016. For more information: karis.j.crawford@gmail.com. Website: <http://www.elsistemakenya.org>

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GUEST COLUMN

by Elizabeth Njoroge, Founder of *Ghetto Classics* in Nairobi, Kenya

When Father John Webootsa asked me in 2008 to start a music programme for 14 young choir students in his parish in the Nairobi ghetto of Korogocho, I asked myself, "How hard could it be?" Over the years, I have found the answer to that question: very hard.

The first challenge was to convince the community and the kids themselves that classical music had a place in their lives. We work in an extremely harsh environment where people struggle to make it through to the next day. And no one had ever heard of Beethoven or Mozart; this is a world where reggae and local rhythms rule. Our first students were given a very hard time by their peers.

Our next big challenge has been finding the resources to keep our programme alive. In our first few years of existence, we borrowed instruments from the conservatoire every other week. The instruments were very beat-up, and there were never enough of them. Because we couldn't keep the instruments on site for safety reasons, the kids' progress in learning was slow and painful. Sometimes, things just ground to a halt.

Our first major turning point as a program was when we got our own instruments, as a result of large donations – wind instruments from the Goethe Institute and stringed instruments from Polish Aid. The second turning point was when some of our students became old enough and able enough to be teachers themselves. They have a deep insight into the younger ones and are therefore able to teach them better than outsiders can. And they are mentors for their younger "brothers and sisters." The young ones can see what they are aiming for, and what they can achieve if they try.

Today, *Ghetto Classics* has grown to 300 children, and the Korogocho community takes great pride in the program. We are asked to play at many local weddings and community events, and recently we created a flash mob in the middle of a dusty road.

When I started, I don't think I realised how I would get involved in the personal lives of the kids. It's inevitable. Now, my biggest joy is to see just how much the programme means to the kids themselves and how they have grown into such wonderful human beings. That is not to say that we don't still struggle with the heart-breaking trials of their lives – struggles with sexual and physical abuse, addiction, poverty. But they are clearly happier, more focussed and determined to succeed than are their peers. Simply put, music makes things better.

NEWS

ASIA

New Zealand continued

... an 80 student-strong orchestra to perform on the Auckland Town Hall stage for a packed audience of family and the Otago community. They were filmed for national television by the "Sunday" TV crew, who had followed the students for the month leading up to the big launch. In November, the flute and percussion students joined flautist Adam Walker, conductor Eckehard Stier and the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra for one of their mainstage concerts, performing the "Pied Piper Fantasy" by John Corigliano. More information: <http://apo.co.nz/sistema-aotearoa>

Ang Misyon, a three-year-old El Sistema program in The Philippines, received a [special visit by two New York Philharmonic Teaching Artists](#) in July. The Teaching Artists spent time with the flagship ensemble and also with nine satellite sites outside of Manila. They went as teachers and resources, but, as many who travel find, the exchange of learning flowed both ways. Read the blog entry of Theodore Wiprud (NY Philharmonic Education Director), "Fast Learners: What Makes *Ang Misyon* So Special?" to find out what made this experience memorable for the visitors from New York. <http://www.nycaieroundtable.org/blog/?p=705>

EUROPE

England continued

... an orchestra and lay the foundations for a *Sistema Youth Company*. "We're aiming for a vibrant ensemble that demonstrates that great music-making and ownership by young people can be entirely compatible," said Fiona Cunningham, CEO of *Sistema England*. The Music Director will be Venezuelan violinist and conductor Félix Briceño, with a teaching team of musicians from *Chineke!* orchestra (including its founder, double bass player Chi-chi Nwanoku MBE), and a delegation from Portugal's *Orquestra Geração*, headed by Artistic Director Juan Carlos Maggiorani, who is originally from Venezuela. Contact is Reynaldo Trombetta: rtrombetta@sistemaengland.org.uk or www.sistemaengland.org.uk

The third [Summer Camp of the Sistema Europe Youth Orchestra](#) brought together 250 participants from 24 countries across Europe and was made possible

by the Hilti Foundation. Teatro alla Scala hosted a SEYO Side-By-Side concert with the Youth Orchestra of Caracas as part of a monumental "Progetto El Sistema" which took the city by storm for over three weeks. The project generously provided 220 SEYO musicians and 30 teachers with over 1200 tickets



SEYO rehearsal with one of the conductors, Bruno Campa.
Photo: © Marco Caselli Nirmal

to performances by their Venezuelan compatriots, including "La Bohème," by invitation of Gustavo Dudamel. A flashmob of *Sistema Europe* musicians surprised 1500 evening visitors at Expo 2015, and the performers were treated to 100 pizzas made with innovative flour at the "Cereal Cluster." The 25-minute documentary "An Equal Symphony," produced by *Classica Sky Channel 138*, follows the ensemble from rehearsals at *Università Bicocca* to the "Gran Finale" at *Teatro degli Arcimboldi* – preview at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNXDdR6goWM> or request access to full film at: summercamp@sistemalombardia.eu Contact is Maria Majno: maria@sistemaeurope.org or www.sistemaeurope.org

On October 17, 2015, an [official protocol was signed between Orquestra Geração/Sistema Portugal and Fundación Musical Simon Bolívar/El Sistema Venezuela](#). This step seals the relationship between the historical founders of El Sistema and one of the first and most extensive *Sistema*-inspired projects in Europe. The agreement includes sharing experiences and doing teacher and program exchanges. On this occasion, the *Sinfónica Juvenil de Caracas*, conducted by Dietrich Paredes (who also led the *Orquestra Juvenil Geração* at Casa da Música in Oporto last February), performed with the students from *Orquestra Juvenil Geração* before their concert at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon. It was a unique experience for the young students to play "side by side" with such accomplished players. Contact: orquestrageracao@gmail.com and <http://www.orquestra.geracao.aml.pt/en/the-project>

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NEWS

LATIN AMERICA

Colombia continued

... that identifies and assists victims of Colombia's armed conflict. *Voces de la Esperanza* will engage more than 200 children and adolescents in general music and singing classes, which will culminate in a group composition. Through music, the students will be able to express their feelings and their hopes for the future and thus build resilience and redefine their communities in a more peaceful Colombia. Contact: Julia Sánchez Romero, Communications Coordinator, juliasanchez@fundacionbatuta.org

Three news bits from Venezuela: 1) During the [Earth and Autism Awareness Month](#), the Simón Bolívar Music Foundation staged concerts at national parks and monuments promoting environmental conservation and the integration of people with autism into society, through the El Sistema Special Education Program.

2) Zulia is the first state in Venezuela to create a [children's orchestra that specializes in performing Latin-Caribbean music](#), including salsa, merengue, and boleros, among other rhythms. The orchestra of 40 young musicians made its debut in July in Maracaibo.

3) [RonTV](#) is the title of a playful creation of the El Sistema Sweden YouTube channel, featuring the participation of Ron Davis Alvarez, the Venezuelan violinist, conductor, and founder of El Sistema Greenland, in Gothenburg's Side by Side international summer camp, which brought together 600 youngsters from throughout Europe. Every week, two new episodes will be uploaded. It provides a feel for Ron's life on the road, bringing his Venezuelan experience to colleagues across many oceans. Don't miss it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2e1vx-oryBc>

Colombia. [La Red, in Medellín, Colombia, is getting ready to celebrate its twentieth anniversary](#) by publishing a book of stories told by members of La Red's community. These stories recount how individuals, families and communities have been transformed through music. This year, La Red is also celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Maestro José Benito Barros, renowned composer from Colombia's Caribbean coast, known for songs like "El Pescador" and "La Piragua," among

others. In January, La Red's Youth Symphony Orchestra will play the closing concert of the 10th Annual Cartagena Music Festival. Contact Nataly Gómez García, Communications Coordinator: comunicacion.redmusica@gmail.com

NORTH AMERICA

U.S. continued

...Longy School, and Bard College) began a national youth festival process. In 2016 there will be two [summer Festival Orchestras](#) at the Aspen Music Center and Bard College, and then the project will culminate in the [first U.S. Sistema Youth Orchestra](#) in the summer of 2017, in Los Angeles, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel. The 2015 biennial Take A Stand national symposium invited over 200 colleagues from around the country to contribute substantively to the planning of the Festival, and included a three-day retreat for 12 of the newly announced international Festival faculty of U.S. and Venezuelan teachers.

Few U.S. programs garner [significant government financial support](#). So it is good news that the [Massachusetts Cultural Council](#) (MCC), a state arts agency, has committed more than one million dollars of support for 18 Sistema-inspired programs in Massachusetts over the next three years. The funds provide direct grants to programs as well as an expansion of the Johnson String Library, which provides stringed instruments to Sistema students across the state. The MCC has also launched a three-year research study of "executive function development" in five Sistema-inspired programs (and a control group), now over halfway completed; they are also piloting a new fellowship for early-career teaching artists that uses the cultural ecosystem of Massachusetts as a campus for learning.

Canada's [Sistema New Brunswick](#) (now with six nucleos and 800 students, including one First Nations community program) has announced a new partnership between Capitol Theatre and Tutta Musica (the professional orchestra of the Sistema NB Teaching Artist faculty) to [produce musical theater](#) together annually, beginning in 2016 with "The Sound of Music," on that work's 50th anniversary.

RESOURCES

Two useful webinars:

1) In May 2015, Sistema Scotland presented the research from a partnership led by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health and including Education Scotland, Glasgow Caledonian University, and Audit Scotland, with data collected over the past two years from the first two Big Noise Centres. Many have called this [the most significant research project in the global movement to date](#). On Nov. 3, 2015, Sistema Scotland invited an international online audience to learn more about the initial findings of how Big Noise programmes impact the lives of children and their communities. The webinar is available for viewing at <http://makeabignoise.org.uk/research/international-webinar>

2) The Sistema-inspired program of the [San Diego Youth Symphony, in California, is called the Community Opus Project](#). Its partnership with the financially struggling nearby city of Chula Vista began in a school system that allocated no funds for arts education. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, "What started as an after-school music program for 65 3rd graders evolved into one of the largest and most rapid restorations of arts education in the nation, with over 70 visual and performing arts teachers hired in the past four months." The success story is told by the key players in a webinar hosted by the National Endowment for the Arts (the highest government cultural agency in the U.S.). Available for viewing at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqF07c3tMhg>

Many readers probably already know about the website [Sistema Global: Friends of El Sistema Worldwide](#). It is a multipurpose home base for the global movement. We encourage colleagues to check out the free resources it offers (and please add resources of your own), including free repertoire for downloading (at <http://sistemaglobal.org/resources>), and discussion area where you can converse with colleagues from around the world, post questions and offer suggestions. Join the Global Community on LinkedIn at this webpage: <http://sistemaglobal>.

"What's unacceptable is to stop fighting for what you want, to abandon it all out of fear, and not to bring your dreams into reality." – José Antonio Abreu, Founder of El Sistema, quoting Pablo Neruda, in a November 2015 tweet