

the world ensemble

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE WORLDWIDE EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

Venezuela's El Sistema Program in Prisons

By Nathaniel Schram, Founder and Executive Director of *Musicambia*; Violist of the *Attacca Quartet*

It wasn't until I traveled through the prisons of Venezuela in 2014, to observe El Sistema's work with prisoners, that I really understood the power of music. In Los Teques, a city outside of Caracas, I saw a child watch proudly as her incarcerated mother practiced the viola. In Barinas Prison, I saw men and women celebrating the infectious energy of joropo, Venezuela's traditional folk music. In Tocuyito, I heard a pregnant woman sing a heartfelt lullaby to her unborn child. El Sistema's work in incarcerated communities represents one of the most powerful environments for music I have ever seen.

The Venezuelan initiative began with Lenin Mora, a musician and lawyer who grew up within El Sistema and was a horn player in the Simon Bolívar Orchestra of Venezuela. Lenin realized that Sistema principles could also work for adults – particularly in prison populations, who are desperately in need of an artistic outlet, a means for personal reflection, and a path toward community.

Since the first prison program was inaugurated, in 2007, the Orquestas Penitenciarias de El Sistema (OPS) has spread to eight prisons throughout Venezuela and served nearly 9,000 incarcerated people. The prison núcleos vary in the genres and styles of the music played, but all have one underlying commonality: music fundamentally changes how the participants interact with each other, their communities and their families. The programs are open to all; a majority of those who participate have had no musical experience before entering prison. The only requirements are that attendees cannot be under the influence of drugs or alcohol and must remain non-violent at all times.

The Institución Nacional de Orientación Femenina, or INOF, is a low-security women's prison. When I attended the full symphony orchestra rehearsal, I saw a seamless collaboration between beginner musicians, veterans, and faculty members – a small (or not so small) miracle. Within months of playing their instruments, these women were playing music that would be a challenge for any youth orchestra. They were focused. And they were smiling. After the rehearsal, one of the women said to me, "Even though we are in here, the music makes us forget where we are. We can forget about the world outside and just be free."

At the Internado Judicial de Barinas, a penitentiary in the inland city of Barinas, the goal of the program is

to create a band for Venezuelan folk music like joropo and merengue. The instruments taught are guitar, violin, and cuatro; there is also a chorus. The extremely proficient professors supplement these instruments with their own: double bass, mandolin and harp. Despite the relatively modest scale of this program, the feel was deeply joyful; the prisoners cheered one another on, and cheered their teachers' virtuosity with equal gusto.

In these programs, as in all Venezuelan Sistema prison programs, families are often invited to attend performances. In this way, prisoners share their musical progress with their friends, families and communities. The result is that pride and self-esteem develop not only in the prisoners but also in their families and communities, and the effects of the work extend to the next generation.

While Venezuela remains at the forefront of this important work, a number of programs around the world are embarking on similar projects for incarcerated communities. The *Irene Taylor Trust* in England, led by Sara Lee, has created a highly successful program based on collaborative composing. *Creative Scotland*, based in Edinburgh, is incorporating multiple arts such as painting, acting, and creative writing, as well as music, in prison programs. *Sistema New Brunswick* in Canada is creating one of the most comprehensive Sistema prison programs in North America.

In the United States, I created *Musicambia*, a program designed to translate the profound efforts in Venezuela to the overwhelming incarceration crisis in the U.S. *Musicambia* is currently working with incarcerated men at the New York State maximum-security prison; the program has strings, brass, voice, keyboard, guitar and bass players. We plan to open a similar program in Allendale, South Carolina, where we will partner with local educational institutions to involve local community musicians and music education students.

In the words of one of our *Musicambia* participants in New York: "Men who have spent most of their lives in prison have very little hope, very little to aspire to. Learning to make music provides a lifeline and reaches us in ways nothing else can. And people who learn to speak in the language of music learn the language of humanity, love and connectedness."

NEWS

ASIA

[Sistema Japan Students Perform in Germany](#)
Students from *Sistema Japan* traveled to Germany in March with an invitation from the Berlin Philharmonic and other German musicians to perform as part of the five-year anniversary of the Great Eastern Earthquake and Tsunami. The group performed Beethoven's 5th Symphony side-by-side... [Continued on page 2 >](#)

EUROPE

[Iranian Youth Orchestra Premiere Performance](#)
The Sistema-inspired *Iranian Youth Orchestra* (IYO) recently gave its first public performance of Western classical and Iranian orchestral music. IYO was born out of the closure of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, after founder Arman Noroozi visited the Sistema Europe Summer Camp... [Continued on page 3 >](#)

LATIN AMERICA

[El Sistema Venezuela Hosts Teachers](#)
El Sistema in Venezuela hosted a group of 28 teachers from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay, for a three-week intensive Leadership Training in January. The program was sponsored by the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and... [Continued on page 3 >](#)

NORTH AMERICA

[YOLA Students Perform at the Super Bowl](#)
The Super Bowl is among the most watched television events in the world, with an audience of 116 million in 2016. This year, 41 young musicians from *YOLA* (Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles, a project of the Los Angeles Philharmonic) performed onstage with Coldplay, Bruno Mars and Beyoncé... [Continued on page 4 >](#)

AFRICA

[El Sistema Sweden visits El Sistema Kenya](#)
In February, eight representatives of *El Sistema Sweden* visited *El Sistema Kenya* (ESK) in Nairobi to assist ESK's new program (its second site) in the Juja slum. The representatives brought donated violins, flutes, trumpets and clarinets, led workshops and masterclasses... [Continued on page 4 >](#)

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All Together, Every Wednesday

By Malin Aghed, Development Manager, *El Sistema Sweden*; board member of *Sistema Europe*

The Gothenburg neighborhood of Hammarkullen, Sweden includes almost a hundred different nationalities and languages, and struggles with high unemployment, gang activity and drugs. In 2009, with the support of the *Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra* and Maestro Dudamel, we launched the first *El Sistema Sweden* program there.

We soon realized that our most crucial issue was gaining the trust of our families and community. So we began to hold informal gatherings for parents and children every Wednesday from 5 to 6 pm.

Attendance was slow at first. But we followed Maestro Abreu's example and didn't give up. Now, the ritual of *Vänstay* has become the social core of *El Sistema Sweden*, practiced at all of our 30+ sites in 20 cities. Families trust that every single week, we will be there to welcome them and provide a safe haven – like a neighborhood tree providing shade for people of many different cultures to come and share music and ideas. “*Vän*” means friend, so it means staying together with friends (and *Vänstay* sounds like the word Wednesday pronounced with a Swedish accent).

When parents join their children at *Vänstay*, we

welcome every individual by name. We have singing and dancing games, usually with children teaching parents. Always, there's food; every fourth Wednesday, the parents bring potluck dinners. We often have visits from orchestra musicians or conservatory students – or, perhaps, the local police or librarian.

As *El Sistema Sweden* has spread, so has the *Vänstay* concept. By keeping the same structure and repertoire across programs, we have built in the possibility of regular visits between sites. In this way we bring distant neighborhoods closer together.

Together – that is the key word. We have seen parents begin, through *El Sistema* and *Vänstay*, to interact with their kids in new ways, and with other families for the first time in years. We have seen parents learn Swedish just by coming regularly to *Vänstay*. We have seen parents of different ethnicities begin to help one another with jobs, health care, and legal problems.

We believe that *El Sistema* is a way to develop the society we want our children to inherit. The beauty and creativity of music is a human right; *Vänstay* is a way of celebrating and sharing that right with others. Music. Passion. Together.

FROM THE PUBLISHER AND EDITOR

There are about 380 *El Sistema*-inspired programs around the world – and Venezuela's *El Sistema* counts as only one. With the latest student count in Venezuela topping 750,000, this field is fast approaching one million students. So we are big. We are broad in our distribution across the world. But we are not well connected.

Our disconnectedness is understandable – the vast majority of programs are young, with leaders so busy they don't have time to invest in network-building communication. And the world is a big place to keep up to date about. However, every single one of us knows that connections to other programs are important, and in the longer run essential: To learn what others are trying and discovering. To get a one-click connection to other programs that are working on something we need to know more about. To build an identity, and eventually a cohesion, that help us grow more visible and powerful together.

That's why we started *The WE* (our nickname for this publication, because it reminds us that we are stronger when connected). In researching our forthcoming book, we found that wherever we traveled, program leaders and teachers asked us about programs in other countries as eagerly as they answered our questions about theirs. We felt like itinerant medieval troubadours bringing news of the world. *The WE* may not have the personal immediacy of news on foot, but it can reach farther, and faster. In this issue alone, we share the barely-known huge success of *El Sistema* in Venezuelan prisons, a unique community-building practice in *El Sistema Sweden*, the voice of a Filipino teenager, over twenty news stories of your colleagues around the world, and over fifty one-click hyperlinks to connect in seconds.

We're building teams of Associate Editors in Africa, Asia/Pacific, Europe, Latin America and North America to foster communications in each region. We hope you'll help us by being in regular touch with them (click on the names in the masthead to get direct access). Please respond when they write you. Even better: get in the habit of reaching out to them. Fire off an email, whenever you can, about the experiments you're trying, about your discoveries, your big events, your new plans. Just by doing so, you'll build network energy in your region – regional networks can have huge impact, as people are finding in Europe, Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere.

And you'll be helping to strengthen the worldwide network. Please make *The WE* part of the way you think and communicate. Help us turn the mindset of “me” in our field into the regular connection of *WE*.

Eric Booth and Tricia Tunstall

NEWS

ASIA

Sistema Japan continued

... with members of the Berlin Philharmonic, including Daniel Stabrawa, under the baton of Stanley Dodds. Another concert was held at St. Thomas Chapel in Leipzig, where J.S. Bach once served as kapellmeister. Website: <http://www.elsistemajapan.org>

The New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage commissioned a [research study](#) of *Sistema Aotearoa* in Auckland. The findings affirm that students in the program advance beyond their peers in academic achievement, social development, and community identity. The report also found positive impact on

families and community, and evidence that the program deepens students' sense of cultural identity. The full report is available at: <http://www.mch.govt.nz/sistema-aotearoa-evaluation-report-dec-2015>

Child's Play India Foundation (CPIF) helps over 60 [disadvantaged children across four locations in India](#) to learn instrumental and choral music. The program welcomes volunteers from all over the world for a 'working holiday'. Most recently, CPIF hosted a music student from Seattle University, who spent time teaching choir and piano. Volunteers and visitors are welcome, however short the visit! Website: www.childsplayindia.org

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Existing networks

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GUEST COLUMN

by Amira Axelle A. Miel, violinist, Orchestra of the Filipino Youth, *Ang Misyon, The Philippines*

In the summer of 2012, a notice of auditions for a youth orchestra popped up on my Facebook feed. I decided to send in an application. Little did I know that the orchestra would become a brilliant, well-respected musical ensemble comprised of talented underprivileged kids from all over the Philippines.

I hold the *Orchestra of the Filipino Youth* very close to my heart. Being part of OFY has meant a lot of "I never knew's" and "I can't believe's." I never knew that music could form unbreakable bonds of friendship. I can't believe that by simply being part of a group and contributing to its harmony and melody, I can be at one with others I have known for only moments, and have peace within myself. I never knew that some pieces can make you feel so emotional that you break down inside, and that other pieces just make you want to dance your heart out while playing.

As one of the pioneering members of the orchestra, I feel an obligation to open others' eyes and minds to the magic of music. I come from the city of Cebu, and Cebuanos are naturally musical; the songs and rhythms of our ancestors run in our blood. However, the OFY is not yet a very familiar name in Cebu. It is my dream to establish a satellite orchestra in Cebu, and my first musicians will be the less fortunate kids. I want to give a better life to the many kids my age who are living in the streets, in front of shops, beside polluted rivers. These children, these teenagers, don't know about hope. They resort to drugs, alcohol, and crime to fill the empty space inside them. I want to help them out of the vortex of vices. I want to ignite the flame of music inside them, so that someday they will be dancing to the tune of their own hearts.

How do I start this seemingly impossible task? I don't have the money, time or space to establish a branch of the OFY and be a full-time teacher and counselor. However, I believe that goodness can come from the tiniest beginnings. Since I have some knowledge of the violin and basic music theory, I can start with the kids in my neighborhood, joining them to play games and tell jokes. I can take out my violin and play for them, and, slowly, I can teach them how to play. Someday they will take up their own violins and learn to tell their stories through the music they make.

OFY isn't about credentials and status. It's about compassion, humility and music as a guiding force. I will not let the kindness stop with me. It will live on in the many children and young people I yearn to help and inspire.

NEWS

EUROPE

Iran continued

... in 2014 and 2015. The IYO team was inspired by SEYO artistic leaders and young musicians, and upon returning to Iran they created a program of 45 students rehearsing in a government building. The IYO mission is to inspire young people to make music and to build interest for orchestral music among the Iranian public. Contact: arman.noroozi@yahoo.com
Website: www.nojavanorchestra.org

Responding to drastic flooding in Bosnia in 2014, Ismar Poric, founder of Superar Bosnia in Srebrenica, produced the video "Love People" to raise money for struggling flood victims (<https://youtu.be/tDt1tc8E34U>). In 2015, Poric created and produced a new music video featuring his students called "We Want to Sing Together" (<https://youtu.be/XJRqhhQZxz0>). Superar Bosnia dedicates itself to messages of love, peace, and friendship, and the script for the video is written from the students' perspective. Website: <https://www.facebook.com/Superar-Bosnia-536719613060309>

The Symphony Orchestra of *Big Noise Raploch*, near Stirling, Scotland, has been invited by the William Walton Foundation to perform at *La Mortella on the Italian island of Ischia*, as part of the Festival of Youth Orchestras. This opportunity for the Orchestra follows their hugely successful 'Big Trip' to Caracas in 2014. The Orchestra will also perform in Rome in July before returning to Scotland to play at the International Society of Music Educators Conference in Glasgow. Website: www.systemascotland.org.uk

In November 2015, *Superar Suisse* successfully set up a new orchestra and choir in Lugano with around 80 children. This new program started shortly after the inauguration the new concert hall, Lugano Arte e Cultura (see below). *Superar Suisse* proudly hosted its first Lugano concert on 1 April in the new hall, the first co-production between students of *Superar Suisse* and students of *Sistema Lombardia* from Italy. Links to the new concert hall and *Superar Suisse*: www.luganomusica.ch/it/485/orchestra-superar



LATIN AMERICA

Venezuela continued

... included teachers, administrators, and program leaders. The group spent two weeks working at the nucleus of Calabozo and San Juan de los Morros in the state of Guarico, and then one week in Caracas receiving training in different aspects of Sistema methodologies. CAF sponsored this training to accelerate development and expertise of Sistema programs in the seven countries. Website: <http://www.caf.com/en>

Arpegio Perú's *Orquesta de Barro* made a second trip to Germany and Switzerland in March, where students performed a concert at the great Berliner Philharmonie, alongside the Droste-Hülshoff Symphony Orchestra. In Switzerland, the Orquesta worked to establish a long-term collaboration with MusicEnsemble, an El Sistema-inspired program based at the Geneva Conservatory of Music. The visit included teacher-training workshops and concerts in Geneva, Bern and Zurich. Contact: Lady Solano (lady@arpegioperu.org) Website: <http://arpegioperu.org/orquesta-de-barro>

A new program called *Orquesta Plástica* is in development in Bahia, Brazil, as part of *NEOJIBA*. The first phase focused on the development of a construction technique for violins made out of PVC tubes. The project is now training individuals in the construction of various instruments made of PVC and other plastic materials. Various professionals are involved, including Swiss violin-maker André-Marc Huwyler and Brazilian plastic artist and instrument maker Fernando Sardo. Website: www.neojiba.org

The Fundación Nacional *Batuta* established a long-term partnership with the British Council in February. Their first project will be two workshops with the British Council's World Voice program (<http://music.britishcouncil.org/projects/world-voice>), whose objective is to foster musical and cultural exchange through song. The workshops will bring together *Batuta* teachers and students to learn about the World Voice method. Contact: Silvia Sánchez Gamboa, silviasanchez@fundacionbatuta.org

The École de Musique Sainte Trinité in Haiti reports that two of its students participated in a four-week luthier training program, which inspired the school to set up a workshop for aspiring luthiers. Sainte Trinité is also working on a new audio-visual room dedicated to online training for teachers and advanced students. Contact: Bernadette Stela Williams, Executive Manager: wbstella20@yahoo.fr

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NEWS

NORTH AMERICA

YOLA continued

... for the Super Bowl halftime show. Gustavo Dudamel conducted the students. Watch the flashy 13-minute performance at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/jokmsq2>. You can read Tricia Tunstall's essay on the YOLA students' social learning behind the scenes of that not-quite-orchestral performance here: <http://tinyurl.com/jk4hl22>

A new regional network has been formed in the Canadian province of Ontario, made up of Sistema Toronto, OrKidstra in Ottawa, and Sistema Aeolian. The network hopes to advance the work of all ten programs in the province. Key goals for the new organization are to build greater visibility and identity in the eyes of the government and other funders who support provincial projects. Website: <http://www.elsistema.ca>

A new 17-minute film titled "I am an OrchKid" introduces the work of OrchKids, a Sistema-inspired program in Baltimore, Maryland (a project of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra). The film (by James Bartolomeo) evokes the feel inside a U.S. program. You can watch it here: <http://tinyurl.com/hj5tzgd>

Josiah Quincy Orchestra Program (JQOP) in Boston, Massachusetts is seeking international video pen pals for its six ensembles. In April JQOP will make short introductory videos of students performing and discussing their interests, school life, and music experiences. JQOP hopes to partner with El Sistema-inspired programs worldwide to exchange such videos and build stronger relationships between student-musicians everywhere. If you are interested in being a part of this project, contact Graciela Briceno, grasesblumen@gmail.com. Website: www.jqop.org

AFRICA

El Sistema Kenya continued

... for the children, and taught teachers how to use Sibelius notation software to teach music theory and composition, and to record/notate Kenyan folk tunes for classical instruments. Children and teachers greatly enjoyed the visit and hope to have more collaboration with El Sistema Sweden in the future. Website: <http://www.elsistemakenya.org>

Brenda Moras and Bernadette Muthoni of El Sistema Kenya work with beginning violin students in Juja, Kenya. Photo: Mimmi Ericsson

Let it Shine is a new El Sistema program founded by Maria Mercedes Del Valle in an orphanage in Arusha, Tanzania, currently with one teacher for voice and recorder. The program includes violin through a visit from a Global Leader representative from Youth Orchestra of the Americas. Website: <http://tinyurl.com/hde6t9t>

Ghetto Classics in Nairobi, Kenya played for the Pope's arrival in Nairobi this past November. The students performed an African version of Bach/Gounod's *Ave Maria*, *The Prayer of St Francis*, and a traditional Kenyan song called "Daima." Ghetto Classics also has joined Carnegie Hall's Link Up program, as the first partner in Africa. Students in four Nairobi slum schools will follow a music curriculum adapted from the Carnegie Hall curriculum that includes singing, the recorder, and other musical challenges. The program culminates in a live local concert created by Carnegie Hall and performed in Nairobi by the National Youth Orchestra of Kenya. To find out more about Link Up: <http://www.carnegiehall.org/Education/Link-Up>

Three big changes are underway for the Music Enlightenment Project (MEP) in Johannesburg, South Africa. MEP serves over 800 students from five schools and is currently entering the completion phase of its first home base location, with rehearsal and office space. One of the MEP ensembles will be touring in Ghana later this year, and a fundraising concert has been scheduled for April/May to support these young musicians. Contact: Adeyemi Oladiran, Director, adeyemi.mep@gmail.com.



RESOURCES

Sistema Global announces the release of a 2016 update to their 2013 Literature Review of El Sistema and Sistema-Inspired Programmes. The report is the first and only broad foundation survey of the global Sistema field, and includes new research surveys that address critical questions in the field. Available free at: <http://sistemaglobal.org/literature-review>

The new book *El Sistema: Music for Social Change* contains a variety of essays and is edited by Christine Witkowski, the founding Director of YOLA at HOLA for five years. The book includes program portraits from around the world, teaching and learning practices, and solutions to a range of challenges. Hardcover copies available at http://www.musicroom.com/se/id_no/01123363/details.html, and Kindle and e-reader versions available at Amazon.

To celebrate the 41st birthday of El Sistema in Venezuela, Fundamusal has compiled a film of clips from speeches and presentations by José Antonio Abreu, beginning with his talk in 1975 to the original "pioneers" of El Sistema. In Spanish: Ayer 12.02.16 nuestra Institución "El Sistema" cumplió 41 años de vida. <https://youtu.be/9GvgyLTLpA>

Here is a link to a seven-minute film of a violin being made. Recommended for all string players and interested others. <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=841927949255039>

The Third International Teaching Artist Conference (ITAC3) brings artist educators together from around the world for three days, just after the ISME (International Society of Music Education) conference in Glasgow. ITAC3 is in Edinburgh, Scotland, August 3-5, with the theme of "Next, Best and Radical Practices." The focus is not exclusively on Sistema or music, but on all the arts and many ways of educating through the arts. itac3.com

The Teaching Artist Development Lab at Lincoln Center Education welcomes artists of all disciplines, at beginning, intermediate and advanced levels for its 8-10 day intensives in July. It serves artist educators from around the world; discount housing at Lincoln Center available for a limited time. LincolnCenterEducation.org/TA_Development

*"El Sistema programs aren't expensive. Keeping people miserable year after year in programs that don't change poverty is what's expensive."
– Richard Holloway, Chairman, Sistema Scotland*