

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE U.S. EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

Woldwide Sistema

By Glenn Thomas, Founder of *Sistema Global*, an online discussion forum, and a supporter of the *Opus* project of San Diego Youth Symphony

In 1872, Phileas Fogg won a bet and a jackpot by circling the globe in 35,572 words. Author Jules Verne's famous character, pressed by a deadline, bypassed entire continents in his rush. Pressed by a word limit, I'll do something similar: since comprehensiveness is impossible, I'll offer six snapshots that will give a feel, I hope, for the breadth and energy of what has inarguably become "Sistema Global."

But first, a bird's-eye view. Programs inspired by El Sistema are now on six continents and in at least 45 countries. There's an El Sistema program of some kind in almost every country of South and Central America. North America is following quickly, with 70-plus programs in the U.S. and Canada and at least three in the Caribbean. The newly formed umbrella organization Sistema Europe includes programs in over a dozen programs, with more in planning stages. Korea has a number of nucleos; Japan's first nucleo, in Fukushima, will officially launch this week. African Sistema-based programs include those in South Africa, Uganda, Ghana, and Kenya. New Zealand and Australia are already two years into their programs, and in the Philippines, a program is about to begin.

Let's begin our "zoom-ins" near Paris, in the suburban ghettos called *banlieues*. "L'Orchestre des Jeunes," or "DEMOS," began in 2010 under President Sarkozy and is Sistema-based in many ways. In partnership with the Orchestre de Paris, the Cité de la Musique, and the Orchestre Symphonique Divertimento, DEMOS involves 450 children ages 7 to 12 in four hours of instrumental ensemble each week. The children perform annual concerts at the venerable Salle Pleyel. Heading north, we find Amsterdam's Leerorkest, or "Learning Orchestra," founded by Marco de Souza in 2005. With support from the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, 130 teachers and volunteers work with 2000 instrumental and choral students in 18 locations. In 2010, the first graduates gave a final concert attended by Princess Máxima of the Netherlands.

Our Far East stop will be El Sistema Korea, which includes both a Ministry of Culture-funded network of 19 nucleos, called "Orchestra of Dreams," and a Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra initiative called "Orchestra



Baby passport of author Thomas, born in Venezuela, beginning a life of global perspective, now a resident of San Diego

of Our Town," with 6 nucleos. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Venezuelan Sistema when the Caracas Youth Orchestra toured South Korea in 2011.

Let's jump "down under" to Sistema Australia, founded by former IT expert Chris Nicholls. Chris was inspired a few years ago by seeing how his son was transformed by studying music, so he left his career to begin the program. With support from academic, cultural, and government sources, Sistema Australia has launched a nucleo in the Laverton area of Melbourne -- now called "Crashendo!" (Chris's son is now a fine cellist, and Chris took up the viola himself.)

¡Vamonos a Mexico! Mexico's relationship with El Sistema is long and deep; many great Mexican musicians have worked with the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra. Mexico's Sistema Nacional di Fomento Musical serves 45,000 children around the country. SNFM includes 180 orchestras, 800 choirs, and 160 bands across the country. Another 6,000 children are served by a Sistema-like program recently formed by Television Azteca; the flagship orchestra of this program is the "Aztec Orchestra of Hope." A privately funded Sistema program in Monterrey, the "Ciudad de los Ninos," serves an additional 1,000 children.

Our last stop is the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia. The Marchand Youth Orchestra operates in a dangerous neighborhood, involving 60 children who spend 12 hours a week learning to play stringed instruments. Launched in 2009, the program is funded in part by the OAS Program for Social Inclusion.

I end my abridged world tour with the astonishing thought that there are perhaps a million children engaged in El Sistema-inspired programs worldwide... one child at a time, one note at a time.

FROM THE EDITOR

I am just home from Japan, where El Sistema was officially launched last week. The news from Japan adds a surprising, unprecedented dimension to the potential of El Sistema.

We are used to thinking of the Sistema as a transformative tool in the context of poor and at-risk children with little or no access to music learning. What could it possibly offer to Japan, a country with little poverty and a deep, renowned tradition of school music education?

Among a cadre of quietly visionary Japanese educators and reformers, the answer to this question has been catalyzed by the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011. Among the communities most catastrophically affected was the coastal city of Soma, in the province of Fukushima. There were 458 lives lost, and over 5500 injuries. Livelihoods were devastated: rice paddies were soaked with salt water, and fishing boats stand rusting in the harbor, since radiation released by a damaged nuclear power plant means that people will no longer buy seafood from Soma. Acres of stone foundations are all that is left of whole neighborhoods.

For Soma's Board of Education, the disaster's worst toll is its traumatic effect on children. "There is a dire necessity here," said board member Kenichi Murata at a Tokyo symposium last week. "We need to instill in our children the power to live."

The region's school music ensembles regularly place high in national competitions. But Murata and his colleagues believe that El Sistema can help heal Soma's children by instilling intrinsic motivation, rather than dutiful compliance, as the reason to play music together. "El Sistema brings peer learning, the pleasure of children learning from one another," says Yutaka Kikugawa, founder of the organization Friends of El Sistema Japan. "It brings teamwork, the satisfaction of creating something beautiful together. And it brings joy."

Musical joy as healing agent for traumatized children: this is a powerful new conception of El Sistema's vision. As the Sistema spreads around the world, people will continue to reimagine the ways it can heal children and communities.

Tricia Tunstall

"Always trust the young." – José Antonio Abreu

News Notes

The Youth Foundation in Vail, Colorado launched First Notes in Avon Elementary three years ago for 2nd, 3rd and 4th graders, and now serves 150 students (92% Mexican) every day after school. The school had been listed as low-performing, but in these 3 years a variety of measures have shown improvement – including a rise from 40% to 80% performing

at grade level in reading and math, and a 90% rise in measures of self-esteem. The two-week Music Camp intensifies study in sectional study (violin, cello, clarinet, oboe, flute, trumpet, trombone and percussion), computer music games, art projects, and sports. On July 12th, students welcomed families to the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater for a Vail Music Festival free family concert.

The community music partnership **El Sistema Somerville** launches its pilot program in September 2012 at the East Somerville Community School, Somerville, MA, providing daily after-school ensemble instruction on string instruments to 40 third and fourth grade students.

The cornerstone of the program is a multi-level mentorship that connects high school students, pre-professional college students, and adult professional musicians with students. These one-on-one and small group interactions are expected to increase the quality of musical achievement and character development within the program while engaging the public in a worthy volunteer initiative.

El Sistema Somerville is a publically funded social program of the City of Somerville and the Somerville Public Schools. The program also has community partnerships with Tufts University, The Berklee School of Music, and the Conservatory Lab Charter School, among others. For more information, please visit www.sistemasomerville.org or email Diane Cline, Director, diane@sistemasomerville.org.

Musical Chairs. Erik Holmgren, who served as the Director of The Sistema Fellows Program at New England Conservatory will move to The Longy



During summer camp, a young Vail musician accelerates his music literacy by playing a computer game. Photo: Dani Bedoni

School of Music of Bard College as Director of Teacher Education and Educational Initiatives. Erik will help guide the Take a Stand initiative, which focuses on advancing the work of El Sistema in the U.S. in partnership with Bard College and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He will oversee the Longy-Bard Master of Arts in Teaching program which launches next

January in LA (see The Ensemble April 2012). The new Director of The Sistema Fellows Program at NEC will be Heath Marlow, former Managing Director (and co-founder) of Community MusicWorks, an award winning in-depth program in Providence RI. He knows the Sistema Fellowship well, having worked with the program for several years.

Documentary films have been a primary means of expanding El Sistema worldwide. *Tocar y Luchar* has sparked the commitment of many, and the new *Sistema Revolution* tells the story of launch of Sistema New Brunswick in Canada. (Available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/absolutelycanadian/upcoming-episodes/2012/05/26/sistema-revolution>). The first U.S. feature documentary, *El Sistema USA*, is in process and has just launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds. Filming began on the first day of the Sistema Fellowship in 2009, and has followed the launch and remarkable growth of Play On, Philly, intending to be a catalyst to launch new sites across the U.S. Director Elizabeth Kling and Producer Jamie Bernstein are still filming, and have already caught a true sense of the U.S. movement. Join the Kickstarter campaign at: Phillymusicdoc.com

Resources

Americans for the Arts has just published **The Arts Education Field Guide**, which is a helpful, straightforward way to see the arts education ecosystem. It may help El Sistema sites find the new connections and prompt ideas for new partnerships to support growth. Available for free at: http://www.americansforthearts.org/networks/arts_education/002.asp

The Benefits of Logic

By Jonathan Govias, Sistema Fellow 2010, conductor, consultant

One of the most exciting elements of the movement for social action through music is that we're all in relatively uncharted territory, tantalized by the example and promise of Venezuela but left deliberately – and appropriately – alone to map our own course. This journey requires a compass that allows us to focus strategically on our chosen destination, aligning our actions with social goals. A well-constructed Logic Model is that essential guide.

A Logic Model is a way of charting the thought process behind a program. Its function is to identify what we want to achieve, what we have to work with, and what specific actions are required to bridge the two. Objectives should be unapologetically lofty: we start from our greatest ambition and work backwards to identify the steps towards that goal. An intervention-based program with the long-term objective of eliminating youth crime would first reduce participant exposure to high-risk activities. This requires a safe and secure environment.

The next step in building a logic model is to define the starting point, usually through a resource inventory: the listing of all available human, financial, or physical assets. The last step is to determine what actions are both possible and essential given available resources and chosen objectives. For an intervention-based program, a safe venue with appropriate supervision is non-negotiable. What is negotiable, the Logic Model reveals, is music: more sports or more school would accomplish the same. In answering the critical question "Why music?" we have to look beyond the scheduling framework and consider multiple objectives in the cognitive, emotional and social realms. In his presentation in Ottawa in April, Richard Hallam of the English national Sistema program posed the question "Dare we aim high enough?" If your Logic Model doesn't make absolutely clear the fundamental nature of music to your work, then dream bigger. For an archetypal model and more guidance, go to <http://www.jonathangovias.com>

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"If we save our children, the children will save us." – Kenichi Murata, Principal Instructor, Division of School Education, Soma City Education Board, Soma, Japan