

## The Philadelphia Symposium

by Elaine Sandoval, current Sistema Fellow

As 2012 closes, it's exciting to reflect on how many times El Sistema was in the conference spotlight this year. The worldwide Sistema conversation, evolving as it moved through Los Angeles (February), Scotland and London (June), Thessaloniki, Greece (July), New Brunswick (August), and Berkeley (November), arrived in early December at the Social Action Through Music Symposium in Philadelphia, before moving on to New York. Thanks to Stanford Thompson's hospitality and hours of work by the Play On, Philly! (POP) staff, the symposium brought together Sistema practitioners from the U.S. and the international scene to discuss promising practices in leadership and teaching.

Participants chose between two "tracks," focusing on teaching or on leadership. The teaching track, designed and led by Eric Booth and facilitated by Joe Hamm (Soundscapes), Rebecca Harris (POP), Kathleen Krull (POP), and Eric Rasmussen (ORCHkids), took on the ambitious mission of identifying areas of agreement about promising practices for achieving our youth development goals through teaching and environment-building in El Sistema-inspired programs.

Some discussions resulted in straightforward agreements about promising practices. For example, one discussion about enriching the performance experience identified a number of practices, such as inviting others into rehearsals, using Skype and similar technologies for some kinds of rehearsal, arranging side-by-sides with other nucleos, and encouraging performance in homes. Another memorable outcome was a series of reflective questions designed to help teachers choose repertoire; questions to be asked about each potential piece of music include: What skills are being developed? Can it connect students of varying abilities? Does it allow connections to other ensembles within the community? Does it build community? Is it emotionally moving to the performers and the audience? Is it a masterful example of a particular music culture or tradition? Is it resonant with the identity of the program?

Other discussions were more open-ended, raising themes the group identified as important for continuing investigation. One conversation about translating Sistema from Venezuelan society to the U.S. identified several aspects of U.S. culture that present particular challenges (and opportunities) for



Four El Sistema leaders from Venezuela address the Symposium; from left: Eduardo Méndez (Executive Director, FundaMusical), Rodrigo Guerrero (Deputy Director, Institutional Development and International Affairs, Fundamusical, and translator), Valdemar Rodríguez (Deputy Director of Fundamusical, Director of Simon Bolívar Conservatory) and Ángel Lineras (Manager of Special Education Projects, Fundamusical). Panelists were joined by (not pictured) Victor Rojas (General Manager of Simon Bolívar Symphony Orchestra) and were facilitated by Mark Churchill. Photo: Albert Yee.

Sistema practices: the culture of competition; cultural and musical diversity; and the existing discourse and established ecosystem of music education.

A particularly significant discussion involved race, culture, class, and power in Sistema programs. Recognizing the important cultural differences between most Sistema practitioners and their students, participants realized the need for building cultural awareness and understanding among staff, and for preparing students to succeed in the different cultures that orchestral expertise will bring them into. Several courageous teachers shared personal experiences and challenges in their own programs, fostering a safe space for honest discussion and wide agreement that similar conversations must happen in all sites in order to support our students well.

The symposium ended with a panel of El Sistema Venezuela executives, and it was reassuring and inspiring to find that even now, decades since the work began, Sistema's homeland still prizes inquiry and creativity over systematic and pragmatic structures.

Based on the proceedings in Philadelphia, the Sistema Fellows are compiling a document about "promising practices" for achieving El Sistema-inspired goals in the U.S.. We hope this inquiry will continue locally, as we seek to improve teaching practices based on the needs of our particular students and communities. In our interactions with teachers, partners, parents, and even students, let's make the spirit of conference inquiry a habit we practice locally and every day.

## FROM THE EDITOR

The Simon Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela decamped for home last week, after a packed three-week U.S. tour that deserved all the adjectives the L.A. Philharmonic has used about the conductor the two orchestras share: Radiante! Electrico! Pasion!

For me, the most memorable aspect of the tour was that nearly everywhere the orchestra touched down, there were spontaneous eruptions of conferences, panel discussions and symposia – in general, people gathering to create learning experiences around the concert events. It's a remarkable development: professional symphony orchestras do not, as a rule, cause outbreaks of music education during their tours. But the SBSOV represents a kind of North Star for the burgeoning El Sistema movement in the U.S., and their presence inspires us to come together to learn from them, and from each other.

This is precisely as it should be, because within El Sistema itself, performance and education are inseparable aspects of the overarching social mission. Orchestra members think of themselves as teachers – "maestri" – as much as performers, and these two aspects of their artistry are fused into a single identity. In Scotland and in London last summer, in Berkeley and Philadelphia and New York last month, orchestra members spent their nights as performers dazzling audiences in sold-out halls, and their days as maestri, coaching and mentoring the children of Sistema-inspired programs.

The ease and fluency with which musicians in El Sistema move between performance, teaching, and learning is very far from our experience, and challenges our tendency to cultivate these as separate categories. But I think we are learning, thanks to the generous spirit of the touring Bolivarians, to take advantage of the potent synergies between performance and education. During a Carnegie Hall-sponsored seminario in New York, I watched a young Venezuelan conductor galvanize third-graders learning the Ode to Joy (he worked with them all day, before he performed that night), and there was no mistaking the energy in the room: it was Radiante! Electrico! Pasion!

Tricia Tunstall

"When you create bonds with other programs, you have the opportunity to share so many dreams!" – José Antonio Abreu

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE U.S. EL SISTEMA MOVEMENT

## News Notes

Launched in September 2012 by Program Director Calida Jones, **Bravo Waterbury!** (in Waterbury, CT) is an education program of the Waterbury Symphony Orchestra. Bravo currently serves 34 students in grades K-2 at Children's Community School in Waterbury. The program meets after school 4 days a week for 3 hours a day, focusing on building ensemble and teamwork skills, music appreciation, academics, citizenship, and community



*First grader Morandah Montaque solos at Bravo Waterbury's first Winter Concert, Dec. 2012*

outreach. Core classes include musicianship (which happens during the school day, 2 days a week), instrumental exploratory, bucket band, and choir. Bravo has a number of partnerships, including with Bridge to Success, a birth-to-21-years youth development program in Waterbury. To engage the community, Bravo often holds parent informances, which are mini-concerts of skills the students have mastered in a few weeks. Immediately following, they hold parent information meetings to discuss various upcoming activities, and to encourage Bravo parents to share and engage with one another. Contact Calida Jones: [bravowaterbury@gmail.com](mailto:bravowaterbury@gmail.com)

The **Sistema Fellows Program** (at New England Conservatory) is a professional training program designed for postgraduate musicians and music educators who are passionate about creating careers that connect music, youth, and social change. Past participants have gone on to guide the development of El Sistema-inspired programs across the U.S. and beyond, and to become leaders in the field. Application deadline is February 8, 2013. To apply, visit <http://necmusic.edu/sistema-fellowship>

The University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) has established a **new certificate program in Music Entrepreneurship** with an emphasis on OrchKids and the establishment of OrchKids programs, in collaboration with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Students in the certificate program will participate in a two-semester internship with OrchKids, as well as attend courses in Management Leadership, Establishing Music Organizations, and El

Sistema Methodology. Please check the UMBC website for more information: [www.umbc.edu/music/programs/entrepreneurship.php](http://www.umbc.edu/music/programs/entrepreneurship.php). The application process has begun; contact Director Kristin Jurkscheit: [kristjur@aol.com](mailto:kristjur@aol.com)

## Resources

The Daddario Foundation supports educational programs that offer sustained opportunities for active participation in music making, particularly for those that might not otherwise have the opportunity. They have awarded grants to U.S.El Sistema inspired sites in the past. Next deadline is 1/31/13. <http://www.daddariofoundation.org/FoundationGrantGuidelines.Page?ActiveID=3104>

Based on his presentations at recent education convenings in Berkeley, Philadelphia, and NYC around the Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra U.S. tour, Eric Booth has completed a **new essay about priorities in teaching practices** of El Sistema inspired programs. Available at: <http://www.laphil.com/education/yola/resource-library> listed under "Eric Booth's Eyes on the Right Prize." Response has been strong, so The Ensemble will follow up on one of the essay's ideas – an **El Sistema movement book club**. Read Daniel Pink's book *Drive*, and we will host an online discussion in February about the teaching implications of its research on intrinsic motivation. Details on this first national book club in the next issue – read the essay and start reading *Drive* now.

Diane Cline ([dianecline@gmail.com](mailto:dianecline@gmail.com)), Founder and Director of El Sistema Somerville, has released her M.A. thesis (The University of Cincinnati) entitled **Community Music Education Partnerships for Social Change: Six Unique Adaptations of El Sistema in the United States of America**. The thesis (studying programs in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Fort Worth, Los Angeles, and New York) is available at: <http://www.sistemasomerville.org/ClineSistema.pdf>

Cal Performances' Director Matías Tarnopolsky interviewed Gustavo Dudamel and José Antonio Abreu at the Berkeley Forum on Music Education during a Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra residency. Video recorded 11/28/12: <http://calperformances.org/performances/2012-13/special-events/simon-bolivar-symphony-orchestra-of-venezuela-conference.php>

## Leadership Learning in Philly

by Katie Wyatt, Executive Director, KidZNotes

Looking around the room on the first day of the "Social Action Through Music" Symposium in Philadelphia last month, I was amazed to find I knew hardly anyone there! My co-facilitators on the symposium's leadership track -- Stanford Thompson (Play on, Philly!), Rey Ramirez (Soundscapes), Dan Trahey (OrchKids), Beth Babcock (Boston Women's Crittenton's Union), Calida Jones (Bravo! Waterbury), Anna Pietrasko (Miami Music Project) -- were colleagues I've known well for several years; so it was a thrill to find our meeting room filled with a hundred people I'd never met, a few representing programs I'd never heard of -- a sign of just how quickly our movement is exploding.

Our two days of discussion were filled with lively ideas and questions. Among the issues we discussed were bucket band (necessary or not?), paper orchestra (essential or superfluous?), and the place of recorder lessons and choral groups in Sistema-inspired programs. In keeping with our focus on best practices in leadership, we questioned assumptions that have already begun to feel like received wisdom, like the "Rolls Royce" of program planning: a \$300,000 budget for an orchestra of 100 kids.

The more experienced among us began to reflect on the "why" (and not just the "how") of starting programs, and to admit what we would have done differently if given the chance. (I think that in my own program, we tried too many things in our first year. We started the kids on a Kindermusik curriculum, on Suzuki violin, and choir. With so many things going on, it was hard to tell what was really working.)

I was struck by how honest and complex the questions were, and by how much everyone in the room was willing to share. While some of the best practices we shared might have been seen, in more conventional kinds of work, as proprietary and even as profit opportunities, the open-door spirit of El Sistema won out.

I remember experiencing this openness as an Abreu (now Sistema) Fellow peering into nucleos across Venezuela, where every door was open and people were eager to hear our opinions. No embarrassment, no misplaced pride -- although loads of well-placed pride in how much they had learned from each other through their lineage of teachers and web of orchestras. If we can maintain the ebullient Sistema spirit of sharing and contribution that originally inspired us, we will all benefit from the healthy "competition" whose essence is striving together.

## Subscription Information

To ADD or DELETE names in the free subscription list for The Ensemble, send an email to:

[TheEnsembleNL@gmail.com](mailto:TheEnsembleNL@gmail.com)

**"The more we communicate, the better we'll sound. So, make a call, ask a question, share a thought or successful technique." - Joe Hamm, Teaching Artist and Program Coordinator, Soundscapes, Newport News, VA**