

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

## The Archipelago Project

by Armand Hall, Director of Education, Archipelago Project & Executive/Artistic Director, ROCmusic Collaborative; Daniel Trahey, Executive Director, Archipelago Project & Artistic Director, OrchKids

The Archipelago Project's objective is to empower student creativity and ownership by supplying musical knowledge, performance opportunities, and professional models to inspire the next generation of engaged musicians. For the past 15 years, Archipelago Project's iterative process in curriculum design has resulted in our Musical Leadership Academy, a summer music camp focused on providing a diverse population of students and teaching artists with opportunities to create music together, learn when to lead and to listen, and thrive in the ensemble as a metaphor for community.

Archipelago was founded in 2005 by Dan Trahey and Garrett Mendez (Artistic Director of Project Music, Stamford, CT). Originally formed as a brass band with highly trained musicians from around the world, our main objective is to inspire students and audiences from diverse ethnic, geographic, and socio-economic populations to make music a more important part of their lives by demonstrating music's reflection on cultural identity.

In 2009, Archipelago was invited by Maestro José Antonio Abreu to bring its principles and teaching styles to El Sistema in Venezuela. This amazing experience had a deep impact on us, and helped solidify Archipelago's commitment to socially motivated music making. We were especially struck by the statement by Roberto Zambrano, director of the Acarigua núcleo, that the only way to make true social change is for these programs to be for everyone, not just the poor; we need to bring all communities together to create more open dialogue, because there is no better vehicle for communication than the music ensemble. With that in mind, Archipelago started looking for more programming vehicles to bring music students from different communities together. Our existing summer music camp in Traverse City seemed to be the perfect place to do it.

To build a diverse community, we initially brought in culturally and racially diverse teaching artists and musics. Then we began to connect broader communities by bringing in students from urban areas, to meet their Michigan counterparts and explore the natural wonders of Northern Michigan. We brought students from El Sistema programs around the country, hosting 20 students from the Baltimore

Symphony OrchKids program, Peabody's Tuned In Program, Sistema Ravinia, YOURS Project, Project Music Stamford, and Bravo Waterbury. These students joined 25 local music students for a ten-day music camp, to create original compositions and Jazz/Pop/Folk/Hip Hop arrangements. The fellowship and creative process exploded. We heard reports that camp participants were developing into leaders at home in their ensembles. To deepen these results, we added an intentional musical leadership focus for students and experiential learning for educators. The leadership component involves daily meditations on aspects of exemplary musicianship, with discussions led by students, and directives to guide daily rehearsals.



Archipelago Sax players at a student-led performance in a brewery. Photo: Keirson Scott

Archipelago implemented collective composition into its core curriculum in 2013, to promote authenticity in local sound, community voice, and a platform for students to musically express their thoughts and feelings. (<https://youtu.be/blg33etELCI>) We believe that creativity must be cultivated simultaneously with technique. Participants at Archipelago perform at least ten times during the two weeks, premiere at least two compositions and several arrangements, and learn to be supportive colleagues. Instruction focuses on music theory, orchestration, and aural skills, to develop freedom of musical choice. We have found that the more students know about the music, the freer they are to manipulate it, even spontaneously, in rehearsal and performance. This "ownership" results in deep interest in the activity of music-making. Our overall goal is for the students to perform and create music at their highest level as life-long practitioners. For participating educators, we offer an opportunity to learn from inside student-empowered lessons. In the afternoons, we hold philosophical and pedagogical discussions about how to create the environment for this work.

One last aspect of the Archipelago experience is the "Band as Family" experience, when students and teachers are gigging, eating, swimming, and maybe even cherry picking together. The informal time spent with our fellow musicians helps set the foundation for trust, appreciation, and listening – three things we feel are necessary to create great music.

## FROM THE EDITOR

Here's a challenge for you: define "excellence." How did that go? Did the perfectly satisfying definition pop right up? Or are you doing some backing and filling?

If you are, I think you're in good company. This is a time when longstanding assumptions about excellence in music, and in all the arts, are being unsettled. Last week, at a meeting of the El Sistema New Jersey Alliance, leaders of the state's Sistema-inspired programs were discussing how to articulate the fundamental values our programs share. We were pretty much in sync until we began to talk about excellence as a primary goal. Some members were not entirely comfortable with the word, saying that when used in a music education context, it can represent a kind of coded language that evokes a traditionally elitist ideal of refined technique in classical music.

No one at our conference table suggested that this tradition should simply be jettisoned. But everyone felt that other crucial priorities also guide our programs. Creativity, cooperation, peer learning, community, student voice – all these goals inform the work of shaping our music learning environments. Does the word "excellence," we wondered, have too much connotative baggage to serve as the right term for these goals?

We experimented with other words we might substitute. Rigor? Intensity? We're still at it, and would love to hear what language works for you.

But perhaps we can keep using the term to mean intensive effort toward bold aspiration – an aspect of Sistema learning we all value deeply – if we agree that there are many kinds of excellence, not just the conservatory-honed one. Howard Gardner posited that there are multiple kinds of intelligence; let's conjecture that there are multiple kinds of excellence. In specific learning situations, we need to be clear about whether we're prioritizing excellence in social communication, in creative energy, or in technical finesse.

Our students, I think, are abundantly capable of multiple excellences. It's a mistake to assume that we have to teach one kind, to the exclusion of others. Can our students achieve excellence of musical technique AND excellence of collaborative creativity? I believe the answer is yes. I also believe that for the global Sistema-inspired movement, there's no more important question.

Tricia Tunstall

"You must protest / It is your diamond duty / Ah, but in such an ugly time / The true protest is beauty." – Phil Ochs, folksinger

## News Notes

June 21 is **Make Music Day** around the world. Musicians of all kinds come out and play on the streets – amateurs, professionals, teachers giving free lessons, *students* giving free lessons, audiences. It began 36 years ago in France, and now earphones are being shed and the joy of live music is being celebrated in over 800 cities. Might your city/town be the next, or might your students [join existing activities](#)? It's easy to join, and you can use the day in whatever way makes sense in your community. Maybe your students can both perform and give free lessons? Maybe you can work with other performing groups, and even store owners, to attract business to their shops? Find out more at the website (<http://www.makemusicday.org>) where there is a short film about it. If you have questions, contact Executive Director Aaron Friedman: [aaron@makemusicday.org](mailto:aaron@makemusicday.org)

## Resources

The **Curtis Scholarship**, an annual leadership development program, supports 16-20 year olds from underserved communities in the U.S. who embody the values of **global citizenship**. Curtis Scholars join a ten-day learning trip to South Africa, plus an advocacy trip to Global Citizen Week Events in NYC. The Scholars explore social issues, innovative international organizations and cultural sites, with a focus on poverty alleviation. Apply by April 21. <http://tinyurl.com/yxv7mabw>

The **OrchKids Fellowship Program** provides two years of professional development experience, over half of which involves teaching, learning effective group management skills, and OrchKids' distinctive approaches. Fellows also learn about nonprofit administration and performance cultivation, culminating in their creating at least one community concert each year. Additionally, Fellows have opportunities to learn from Baltimore Symphony Orchestra members and staff. To find out more, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/y2n6v7mm>. For more information, email: [orchkids@bsomusic.org](mailto:orchkids@bsomusic.org)

You knew that poverty leads to fewer arts learning opportunities in the summer, but now government

research affirms it – a new study from the U.S. Dept. of Education analyzed results from a national survey focused on summer experiences. It shows that **students from affluent families are nearly twice as likely to participate in summer out-of-school arts or cultural experiences as are their peers from low-income families**. This article in **Chalkbeat** shares more and examines related research to more closely explore the causes of these participation gaps. <https://tinyurl.com/y7vkb5oh>

A report from the Aspen Institute's National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development recommends that schools **weave social and emotional learning throughout all activities**, and also branch out into the community. The report's authors say that instilling characteristics such as empathy and perseverance improves students' academic performance as well as other aspects of their lives. <https://tinyurl.com/y3b6mo69>

The **Sparkplug Foundation** primarily provides grants to start-up nonprofit organizations, or new projects of established nonprofits, that address the fields of music, education, and community organizing. Go to their [website](#) to review their definition of terms, mission, and guidelines, to see if you are a fit: <https://sparkplugfoundation.org> The first step in the application process is to complete the online questionnaire by April 9, 2019.

This article from Grant Station Advisor by author Diana Holder presents an analytic overview of the **Canadian funding sector** with a birds-eye view of Canada's current philanthropic landscape, looking for patterns and trends that may be on the horizon. This article includes an analysis of Canadian government funding and of individual donations, while a subsequent article will examine corporate giving and foundation grants. <http://tinyurl.com/yf92u2m>

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## Meludia in Action

by *Sean Elligers, Teaching Artist, Berkshire Children and Families' Kids 4 Harmony (K4H)*

How to teach children music theory, composition, and technology? Many El Sistema programs are exploring this important question. At our Sistema-inspired program in Pittsfield and North Adams, MA, students study music theory fundamentals and regularly compose music that is performed by their classmates.

Through a META Fellowship with the Massachusetts Cultural Council, I discovered **Meludia**, an ear-training online platform that uses fun exercises to develop the ability to hear, understand, and identify aspects of rhythm, melody, harmony, and intervals. Meludia offers its program free to Sistema-inspired programs.

I have found Meludia to be impressively polished and aesthetically pleasing. The vibrant yet calming color palette supports the beautifully recorded instruments, generating that immersive feeling you find in your favorite video game. It seems to posit that music is something to be first experienced, then followed by knowledge and analysis; this ensures accessibility for all ages and abilities. Like other El Sistema programs, we deal with the challenge of meeting individualized needs of our students. Meludia addresses this by providing the students with an outlet to develop musical fundamentals at their own pace.

The scaffolding in Meludia keeps my students (ages 8-17) engaged, and is ripe with opportunity for follow-up lessons you can conduct in your classroom. Over the past year, I've been working on melodic dictation with my older students. The melodic and rhythmic components of Meludia help to support this skill. After students practice on Meludia, I ask them to notate simple melodies using the same rhythms and intervals they were just hearing in Meludia. The same exercise works in the reverse order as well!

In [this link](#), you'll see how I design lessons that involve groups of students; this addresses the issue of computer access. The students rotate jobs of "Listener" and "Operator." Reimagining the Meludia lessons with live performance helps younger students practice playing rhythms and maintaining a steady beat.

Having Meludia in our program enhances our musical and social benefits. I am excited to continue this work, to help our students reach their full potential.

*[Editor's Note: If you are interested in finding out more about Meludia, contact [b@meludia.com](mailto:b@meludia.com)]*

*In commemoration of the first anniversary of José Antonio Abreu's death on March 24, 2018:*

"The orchestra and chorus are much more than artistic structures. They are schools of social life. Because to sing and play together is to intimately coexist toward perfection and excellence, through harmonic interdependence of instruments and voices."

*This quotation comes from Maestro Abreu's iconic 2009 TED talk (19 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uintr2QX-TU>, which can be said to have launched the growth of the U.S. and Canadian El Sistema movements.*