

Teaching the Future

By Michael Raiber, Director of Teacher Support, *El Sistema Oklahoma*; Busey Chair of Music Education, Oklahoma City University

The majority of the American music teaching workforce is white. This would not be an issue if it matched U.S. school demographics. However, in city schools where the general population is majority students of color, the music student population is considerably more white. While there are multiple factors contributing to this, it may be best understood as a lack of access to quality music education that provides opportunities for students of color to choose careers in music teaching. The fact that students of color do not see music teachers who look like them is a form of social injustice.

El Sistema Oklahoma (ESO) is addressing this issue with a program we call FAME (Future Awesome Music Educators). ESO is in its 6th year, serving over 200 students and families in northwest Oklahoma City. In addition to FAME, we offer opportunities in symphony orchestra, string orchestra, band, vernacular music, chamber music, fundamental music theory, and composition. We partner with the Wanda Bass School of Music at Oklahoma City University (OCU) and St. Luke's United Methodist Church.

Our FAME initiative began with our realization that to understand the issue of whiteness in music teaching, we must consider the process of music education degree entry. Music degrees require an audition for admission. The process is designed to grant access only to those who demonstrate musical ability in a way that requires knowing and having the capacity to participate in a culture with numerous hidden expectations. It requires having access to private music study and understanding the traditions of Western art music, right down to appropriate attire. I do not intend to argue the merits of the audition process, but only to state that it impacts the demographics of those admitted to music education degrees.

At ESO, we want to invest in students who could become future music educators. This means we must provide high quality music instruction that builds necessary technical abilities, music understandings, and cultural knowledge to successfully navigate a college/university audition, and we must provide opportunities for students to consider themselves prospective music teachers. FAME is our means to provide these opportunities.

For the past two years, we have allowed any high school student to opt into FAME one day a week. In their first semester, our initial 11 students explored what it means to teach, and expressed these ideas in multiple micro-teaching lessons. These activities had two goals: to help them put their beliefs into action, and to put them in the role of "teacher" so that they could begin to see themselves as music educators.

In the second semester, FAME members began to teach younger students. They began by writing lesson plans and sharing them with me and with their colleagues. We discussed each plan and made suggestions for improvement. Then all the FAME members taught their lessons and completed reflections. I reviewed each reflection, made comments, and the process started again. This was when they made the transition from FAME "students" to FAME "teachers."



Amaury teaches a peer lesson in the FAME teaching lab, prior to rehearsal with "her students." Photo: Michael Raiber

The transition was particularly evident with Amaury, a freshman violinist who consistently referred to "her students." Amaury made

a cube with possible problem-solving approaches printed on each side. When a student faced a performance issue, she would have them roll the cube, and they would apply the problem-solving strategy that came up. I have since "borrowed" this idea for my own classes!

Our second year welcomed 23 new FAME members. The second-year FAME teachers took on new roles as mentors to the first-year members, helping them with planning, teaching, and reflecting. Working with cooperating faculty members, FAME members also lead rehearsals of chamber ensembles of younger students. They are listed as chamber coaches in performance programs, and are viewed by the chamber members as "their teacher."

I have regular conversations with FAME members about becoming teachers who can make a difference. Some are entertaining the idea. We can't change the entire demographic makeup of the music teaching workforce, but we can impact opportunities in northwestern Oklahoma City for future students to see music teachers in their schools who look like they do, and who have come from their communities. For now, that's enough.

FROM THE EDITOR

In the time-honored tradition of pausing on the cusp of a new year to look both forward and back, I've been reflecting this week on two questions. How has our Sistema-inspired movement made progress, and what areas are most in need of improvement? Here are my thoughts.

Where have we made progress?

1. *Support for our developing programs.* In particular, the [PRESTO Grants](#) offered through [El Sistema USA](#) have begun to provide funding for a number of programs less than five years old, and Carnegie Hall's PlayUSA supports experimentation to advance practice.

2. *Expanding opportunities for advanced players.* These include expansion of the [Take A Stand](#) national orchestra to two ensembles instead of one, scholarships for some students to top music camps, and local program initiatives that help students prepare for professional music tracks.

3. *Sustained inquiry around the issue of student voice.* At Take A Stand, at the El Sistema USA symposium, and in local programs around the country, there has been a collective realization that for Sistema success, there is no element more important than student-led learning, student leadership, and student-created music.

What areas most urgently need improvement?

1. *Partnerships with other like-minded organizations.* Sistema-inspired programs still tend toward insularity. Important exceptions like the [Philadelphia Music Alliance for Youth](#) can serve as our models for aligning and working with other arts education/social engagement programs.

2. *Research.* Most programs are doing some kind of in-house evaluation of their impact on students, but as yet there's very little partnering with independent academic or research entities to produce thorough, rigorous results that can impact social, economic and funding policies.

3. *Social justice issues.* I make this point last, not because it's least important but because it's the one I most want you to remember. As a movement, we need to prioritize ongoing constructive discussion about how our field can actively combat issues of social justice and structural racism. We've begun this inquiry, bit by bit and here and there; but it's time to make it front and center.

Happy New Year!

Tricia Tunstall

"To stimulate life, leaving it free, however, to unfold itself, that is the first duty of the educator." - Maria Montessori, educator

News Notes

MYCincinnati's new [Creative Action Residency](#) will offer one national or international artist an opportunity to engage with the core question: How is musical practice uniquely qualified to develop human beings skilled in the art of citizenship? The Creative Action Resident Artist will work collaboratively with MYCincinnati's advanced students to co-create a performance project that directly engages with this core question, and puts the ideals of citizenship into embodied creative practice. The inaugural 2019 Creative Action Resident Artist will be [Shara Nova](#) of My Brightest Diamond, and the final work will be premiered at the [2019 Price Hill Creative Community Festival](#) (July 19-20). The program is supported by Carnegie Hall's PlayUSA.

The list of sessions for the [El Sistema USA National Symposium](#) is available here: <https://elsistemausa.org/2019-symposium-schedule>. There is still time to register to join the annual gathering, this year in Detroit on January 30-31, coordinating with [SphinxConnect](#) which happens Jan. 31-Feb. 2.

Announcing the [Sphinx Performance Academy \(SPA\) 2019](#), partnering with Curtis Institute of Music and the Cleveland Institute of Music and collaborating with The Juilliard School to offer [full-scholarship intensive summer chamber music and solo performance programs for string players](#) ages 11-17. This year, for the first time, they accept bass applicants in addition to violin, viola, and cello students. The SPA curriculum includes an intensive schedule of lessons and coachings in addition to master classes, recitals, career enrichment sessions, and mentorship. Applications due by February 12: <https://app.getacceptd.com/sphinxmusic>

While there are a number of factors influencing this stunning conclusion, new research by Ryan W. Coughlan (City University of New York) finds that between 1990 and 2015, 72% of major U.S. cities saw their [neighborhoods grow less racially segregated](#), and 62% saw their schools grow more segregated over that same period. <https://tinyurl.com/y76v6pe8>

Resources

The Aim High grant program of the New York Life Foundation, administered by the Afterschool Alliance, supports [out-of-school programs serving middle school youth](#). It aims to help economically disadvantaged eighth-graders reach ninth grade prepared to succeed in high school by supporting afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs. The application deadline is January 25, 2019. To find out more, go to: <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/awards.cfm#NewYorkLifeOverview>

Do you know a preK-12 teacher with a particular commitment to Sistema work? Maybe you are one! [Fund for Teachers awards fellowships for teachers](#) to design their own professional summer learning to improve teaching, deepen knowledge, and increase student engagement. Educators should propose a summer professional learning experience and explain how it will improve their teaching. Eligible teachers may apply as individuals (limit of \$5,000) or as a team (limit of \$10,000). The application deadline is January 31. <http://www.fundforteachers.org/>

The National Endowment for the Arts recently hosted a 90-minute webinar titled "[New Research on the Arts & Early Childhood: A Symposium](#)," showcasing a series of research articles in a special section of [Early Childhood Research Quarterly](#) that focus on the nature, value, and the impact of the arts for children in their early years. It provides a useful introduction to research that's pertinent to early childhood Sistema programs. Speakers address issues of researching impact, cultivating interest, arts in Head Start, approaches in Asia, and more. <https://www.arts.gov/video/new-research-arts-early-childhood-symposium>

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The Greater Sistema Vision

by Rodrigo Guerrero, Program Manager, SerHacer; Mass Cultural Council

In 2015, the Mass Cultural Council created the [SerHacer](#) program, a granting opportunity focused on intensive, ensemble-based music programs that use music as a vehicle for youth development and social change. Inspired by the work of El Sistema, the program supports a wide variety of in-school and community organizations, to expand access to social and artistic music-making opportunities.

The program is going strong in its second three-year cycle, funding 22 organizations across the state. SerHacer (a Spanish mashup for "to be" and "to make/do") does not limit programming to self-identified Sistema-inspired programs; rather, it focuses on Creative Youth Development principles and the primacy of ensemble participation.

You would think that after 17 years working with the Venezuelan Sistema, I'd be mainly focused on Sistema. But it's precisely because of my previous experience that I feel we need to look beyond branding and self-identification, and look more closely at the work being done, how participants are engaged, and what outcomes are sought.

After all, the name "El Sistema" is a result of bureaucratic nomenclature; it's not a fair descriptor of the work Maestro Abreu intended to do. When asked once how he would refer to it, he called it "Social Action through Music," a term he credited to Brazilian Sistema pioneer Fiorella Solares. That belief is what spurs my advocacy for more inclusivity in our field.

At the Mass Cultural Council, we use the six key characteristics of creative youth development as a simple but effective guideline in assessing programs' compatibility with our goals: They must: provide safe and healthy youth spaces; be assets-based; foster the development of positive relationships and social skills; be youth-driven; set high expectations for growth and learning; and address the broader social context.

It's a great source of joy for me to see the remarkable similarities between my mentor's vision and programs like Springfield's [SciTech band](#), [Boston City Singers](#) – and the many other programs we support. These programs are resonant with the spirit that a raucous [Venezuelan Youth Orchestra unleashed in the Royal Albert Hall](#), many years ago. I'm certain that they, in turn, will go on to inspire future generations.

ACTION FOR THE MONTH: Get All Teaching Artists on the National Map

The field of teaching artists is largely invisible to the public, even to the arts community. For the first time, a major initiative to create a national map with teaching artists, those who hire them (yes, all Sistema programs) and other assets to register their presence. This month, make sure every teaching artist you know takes a few minutes to get on the [Teaching Artist Guild's Teaching Artist Asset Map](#) – to make the whole field stronger. <https://teachingartistsguild.org/asset-map> Find out more [here](#).