

Changing Lives; Changing Interlochen

By Trey Devey, President, *Interlochen Center for the Arts*

I first discovered Interlochen as a young child. The campus is just seven miles from my grandparents' summer cottage, and my love of classical music was inspired by Interlochen Public Radio.

By middle school, I was a budding musician myself. Although I attended a rural public school, I was fortunate to have a dedicated band director who fostered my passion for the trombone. Music became my joy and center. Although I could picture myself at Interlochen, the tuition seemed beyond my family's means, and I was intimidated by its reputation for artistic excellence. I didn't realize it was a place where young artists at every stage can unlock their potential.

The welcoming community I discovered first as a Camp parent and later as President of Interlochen Center of the Arts stood in stark contrast to perceptions I'd held as a teenager. I wondered how we could tear down our ideological and financial inaccessibility to create opportunities for more young people to be immersed in the life-changing experience of Interlochen.

Our first step toward increasing accessibility was to identify organizations that develop the type of gifted, passionate musicians who would thrive at Interlochen. We found perfect partners within the El Sistema movement: New York City's Harmony Program, the Miami Music Project, Youth Orchestra Los Angeles, Omaha Conservatory of Music, and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's OrchKids program.

From the beginning, we understood there would be challenges in bringing El Sistema students to Interlochen. The vast majority of these students and their families had never heard of Interlochen, and needed assurance that ours is a safe environment and that the experience would be a worthwhile investment. For many, Camp would be their first experience away from home – a difficult transition for any family.

There were also logistical difficulties. Some El Sistema families have limited access to technology, which makes filling out online applications or recording an audition nearly impossible. Language was also a barrier. To mitigate these challenges, several partner programs held "application nights" during which their staff helped students prepare their applications. Representatives from our admission department attended several of these sessions to conduct onsite auditions. Later, our teams collaborated to arrange transportation, uniform purchases, and other details.

Tuition costs were another hurdle, but generous donors rose to the occasion. Thousands of Interlochen

friends supported scholarships through our Create Amazing Opportunities Challenge. A donation from Daniel R. Lewis and M:X allowed 46 students from the Miami Music Project to attend Interlochen – at no cost. Lewis and M:X have extended their support for the next three years to fund more than 45 full-tuition Camp scholarships each year. Donor support also enabled us to hire dedicated "inclusion champions" who encouraged cross-cultural friendships, and all Camp life staff received specialized diversity training.

Thanks to our artistic and financial partners, more talented and dedicated young artists from coast to coast joined us at Arts Camp 2018. One result: the domestic diversity of our Camp student body increased by over 30% compared to the previous year. The diversification of our population benefits all students, giving them opportunities to experience new cultures, explore new ideas, and forge new friendships. Campers from all 50 U.S. states and more than 40 countries live, learn, and achieve together, in a harmonious global community.

El Sistema students made the Interlochen community stronger. Our faculty praised El Sistema students for their hard work and passion for music. One Miami Music Project student finished the summer as the associate principal viola of the World Youth Symphony Orchestra – our most advanced ensemble. Three Miami Music Project students accepted offers to attend Interlochen Arts Academy, supported by another generous gift from Daniel R. Lewis. One of these outstanding students earned a full scholarship to attend Peabody Conservatory.

In 2019, musicians from our five 2018 partners, as well as from our new partner, MyCincinnati, are attending Interlochen Arts Camp. Our goal is to continuously improve these partnerships so that the Arts Camp experience is the best it can be for these young artists.

If there is a cliché among our alumni, it is "Interlochen changed my life." Two years into my tenure, I am beginning to appreciate that this statement is more than a platitude: It is a testament to the life-changing power of the arts. Over the past year, I have seen the powerful influence of El Sistema programs in the dedication of their students, and I am excited to continue and expand our partnerships. We are committed to using our strength to build strength in others, regardless of their zip code or bank statement.

Together, we can create inspired opportunities for the students we serve and transform the lives of America's youth through the unifying power of the arts.

FROM THE EDITOR

I went last week to [Side By Side By El Sistema Sweden](#), an intensive international music camp sponsored by the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in partnership with the city and El Sistema Sweden. Let's start with the statistics.

The five-day camp was attended by 2,500 (not a typo) students aged 7-17. They comprised no fewer than 13 ensembles – six orchestras, four choirs, early music and folk groups, and a special needs ensemble. Add to all that the members of the professional orchestra. Over 100 volunteers assisted the paid staff. Over 10,000 bananas were consumed at snack time. The full-camp concert took place in a municipal hockey arena.

All quite wonderful, you may be thinking, but not relevant to those of us who can't serve 2,500 children or commandeer hockey arenas. For me, some of the most impressive aspects of the camp had nothing to do with big numbers; they were the kind of small but potent leaps of imagination that revitalize El Sistema principles in practice.

Consider, for example, the many meanings given to the phrase "Side By Side." Yes, it often meant professional players alongside students. But it also meant experienced student groups alongside beginner student groups. It meant mixing up conventional programming: Berlioz and Billy Joel and folk tunes. It meant that volunteer teachers, experienced T.A.s, and renowned conductors worked together in rehearsal and performance. Kids from Sistema programs and kids from non-Sistema programs couldn't tell who was which.

In general, there was a consistent and resolute equal valuing of experienced and novice, skilled and unskilled players. In the big concert, all the ensembles were literally arrayed side by side across the arena floor. As they played and sang Bernstein's "Somewhere," the area microphone nearest the special needs choir picked up some voices singing discordant but emotionally charged notes. No one turned off the microphone, resulting in the most moving rendition of "There's a place for us" I have ever heard.

Side by Side was huge. But it was also inventive, playful, and virtuosically inclusive. These are takeaways to inspire all of us, large or small.

Tricia Tunstall

"That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great." - Willa Cather, novelist

News Notes

Applications are now being accepted for the next **NAAS Audition Intensive** for woodwinds & brass, August 25-29, 2019. NAAS (National Alliance for Audition Support) Audition Intensives, hosted by New World Symphony, offer mock auditions, lessons, and performance psychology training for Black and Latinx orchestral musicians. For information: <http://www.sphinxmusic.org/naas-audition-intensives> or to apply: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LLXFBNY>

Resources

Here is a new resource for our field – **The Music in Action Journal**. It's written by and for practitioners on the frontlines of music-for-social-action. The Journal applies the lens of Case Study Analysis to an expanding sector in global development – exploring local challenges, diagnosing root causes, and offering viable solutions. The case studies are by socially committed musicians who studied different programs around the world. With a foreword by Plácido Domingo, and three useful introductions, *The Music in Action Journal* is an initiative of the Organization of American States, the Government of Canada, The Global Leaders Program, McGill University, & The OA Group. Thanks to Mariano Vales and Mark Gillespie for creating this new contribution to the field. http://rootcausejournal.org/?fbclid=IwAR1cBjP0xQRvsvy_IVOSxMVNUKwb-wAtK6BxeuKPlBjctIU1CL1IWr0Qi00

The Institute for Composer Diversity, based in SUNY (State University of New York) Fredonia, promotes and advances music created by composers from historically underrepresented groups, including women; underrepresented racial, ethnic, and cultural groups; LGBTQIA+ composers; and disabled composers. It contains useful databases, research, advocacy tools and resources. <https://www.composerdiversity.com/about>

Here is a beautiful new resource from Carnegie Hall. Their beloved **Musical Explorers** program is now available free in digital format. It's designed for students in grades K-2, providing clear fundamental musical learning (singing, listening, moving) with three artists from different cultural/musical traditions in each program. It is well done, and already finding use around the world. <https://www.carnegiehall.org/Education/Educators/Musical-Explorers/Digital>

www.carnegiehall.org/Education/Educators/Musical-Explorers/Digital

A new study offers a helpful idea for students who suffer from anxiety – an idea so simple that you probably haven't thought of it. Researcher Douglas Gentile reports in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* that young people who practice feeling kindness to others while walking around their school campus felt less anxious, more connected, happier, caring and empathetic. Results suggest these simple strategies reduce anxiety and increase happiness and feelings of social connection. <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2019-04-03/kindness-12-minutes-to-a-better-mood>

Good "safeguarding" of students includes addressing policies and practices with all faculty. Two articles in the *ASCD Express* add the importance of dealing directly with students too. "Start Talking With All Students about Consent" urges beginning when students are in elementary school. <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol14/num28/start-talking-with-all-students-about-consent.aspx>. "Don't Sideline Teenagers in Me Too Conversations" offers suggestions about ways to include teenagers in "Me Too" conversations to protect them from inappropriate or abusive behavior. <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol14/num28/dont-sideline-teenagers-in-metoo-conversations.aspx>

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 on student summer experiences – 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>

Subscription Information

To receive monthly issues, to arrange issues for others, or to delete or change names, contact:

TheEnsembleNL@gmail.com

Back issues are always available at:

<http://theensemblenewsletters.com/ensemble-archive>

Fostering Epic Parents

by Anne Campbell, Education Director, Catamount Arts/EPIC Music

EPIC Music, in St. Johnsbury, VT, was one of four El Sistema-inspired organizations recently invited to partner with a team of Duke University undergraduates to explore parent engagement in El Sistema USA member organizations. Parent engagement is an important goal for us; we have talked for more than a year about offering violin workshops for parents, so that they can understand our students' challenges and learn how to help their children practice at home.

However, in our second year of operation, we have been focused primarily on engaging students, building curricula, and creating a safe and nurturing environment. Parent engagement has fallen lower on our list of priorities, as we struggle to find time for anything beyond the basics. Families are supportive of the program, but we have found it challenging to engage them beyond transporting their children and attending performances.

The partnership with Duke's **Bass Connections** program, an interdisciplinary initiative that enables Duke students to apply classroom knowledge to real world problems in collaboration with faculty and community organizations, gave us an opportunity to readdress this priority. We were part of a project called "Music for Social Change: Research in Practice with Kidznotes and El Sistema USA." Our student team's focus was to understand the strengths and challenges of engaging parents in El Sistema-inspired programs. With the help of our student researcher, Dayna Price '21, we decided to start parent violin lessons by incorporating them into our summer camp rather than offering separate workshops. We have two parents among our summer team of volunteer coaches, and they are now learning to play violin along with the children. We hope to expand this in the coming year and to develop some parent/child side-by-side performance opportunities.

We're also exploring new ways to engage parents by tapping into their wide range of skills beyond violin performance. Amy, a parent who volunteered weekly with the program this year, created a memory card game to help students learn music symbols and developed an online survey form for us. Katrina, a seamstress, offered to stitch up a torn violin case. We realize we need a process for shining a light on our parents' skills and finding ways to utilize those skills, and have moved this higher on our list of goals for the coming year.