

## Summer Camps for Young Sistema Musicians

By Kerrigan Dougherty, Artistic and Program Operations Coordinator, *OrchKids*, Baltimore

In the vast network of Sistema-inspired programs across the U.S., there is nearly as vast an array of summer programs. Each summer camp has distinguishing features, but all are united around a common purpose: preventing “summer learning loss.” Every executive director and program director surveyed for this article told me that summer programs are important bridges of learning between one year and the next.

At the three programs interviewed and the additional four programs researched, summer sessions range from one to eight weeks in length. Sessions can include lunch, breakfast, or both, as well as snack. Programs meet three, four, or five days a week. Offerings include group classes, ensembles, and performance opportunities; some programs offer individual lessons.

Preventing summer learning loss is a significant reason, if not *the* reason, that programs take on this work, but each program tailors also its offerings to its constituent community. This creates a fascinating variety among programs. *BRAVO Youth Orchestras* of Portland, OR, uses the idea of a theme to govern each summer session. Having a fun theme creates a cohesive and memorable experience for students, and ties together all the different components of the summer program. Executive Director Seth Truby described particular success during the “Animal”-themed summer, where all the repertoire, for the most experienced ensembles as well as for the beginners, was about animals. There was also a theme-related fieldtrip.

*Soundscapes*, of Newport News, VA, offers two separate program tracks. The first track encompasses returning instrumental students in ensembles and group classes, and is split between the end of school and the end of summer. The second track is for beginner students in an “Extended Learning Initiative” program called SPARK, where students take bucket band, recorder, and note-reading classes. Program Director Rey Ramirez described “seeing each individual as an important contributing member to the project.” It’s important, he said, to remember not only what Sistema programs can

offer to students, but also (and equally importantly) what students can offer programs.

*Miami Music Project*, in Miami, FL, makes the most of hot summers by infusing fun into every aspect of its summer camp. Executive Director Anna Pietraszko



*OrchKids students in Maine at Camp Encore / Coda* Photo:

listed many offerings that make the summer special: students participate in creative composition projects, play contemporary and student-driven repertoire, have the chance to travel to *Interlochen*, MI to attend camp, and – not least – often get to eat lunch from local food truck vendors! The summer music camp is a great recruiting tool; fully one-third of the students each summer are new to the program.

*OrchKids*, in Baltimore, MD, focuses on summer as a chance to explore beyond one’s own community. For younger students, this means opportunities to play music, eat meals, and do activities with students from other neighborhoods. Senior Site Manager Camille Delaney-McNeill noted how special it is for older *OrchKids* to travel to Los Angeles for *Take a Stand*, Michigan for *Interlochen*, upstate New York for a program in Ithaca, and even as far as Europe. In addition to exploring places, *OrchKids* of all ages are encouraged to explore new disciplines – from nutrition, dance, and art classes to field trips to baseball games and the zoo. A similar horizon-expanding focus occurs among programs in New Jersey, which come together as the *El Sistema New Jersey Alliance* to offer a three-day nature camp for students from all seven programs in the state; kids hike, swim, enjoy campfires and games, and also rehearse intensively for a culminating concert.

A thread that emerged in research and interviews was the importance of not only what is being prevented – summer learning loss – but also of what is being created. Summer sessions provide students with experiences that blend the known with the unknown. Without the constraints of a busy school-year schedule, students can stretch into new kinds of musical and social learning, individually and together.

## FROM THE EDITOR

A recent article in the academic journal *JAMA Pediatrics*, on the subject of teaching students self-regulation, bears the subtitle “A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis” – a phrase so densely academic that I almost stopped reading right there. But I’m glad I didn’t. There’s some important good news here for Sistema programs.

“Self-regulation” refers to a set of competencies that includes the capacity for controlling emotions, the ability to have positive social interactions, and the ability to self-direct one’s learning. The *JAMA* article cites growing evidence that these competencies play “an important foundational role” in children’s wellbeing.

The article reviews the results of 50 “interventions” intended to increase children’s capacity for self-regulation. Some of the interventions happened in classroom settings, others in family settings. Still others involved physical exercise or yoga and mindfulness. Finally, there were six studies about interventions that focused on social or personal skills in group settings. This kind of intervention proved “highly effective.”

That’s why the study is good news for us: focusing on social and personal skills in group settings is precisely what Sistema programs do. And we have an advantage none of those six studies had: we do it through music, which is a particularly elegant, efficient and pleasurable way to learn. So we can take heart from this research. It affirms with academic rigor what we already observe and intuit: social interaction through music is a great way for kids to learn the skills of self-regulation.

But there’s something else we intuit – something we know – about self-regulation, and it doesn’t appear anywhere in the *JAMA* report. Because art is our medium, we know that self-regulation isn’t just about self-control. Yes, we want our kids to learn behavioral control and self-discipline. But we also want our students to be capable of creative spontaneity. The philosopher Eric Fromm wrote that artists can be defined as an individuals who can express themselves spontaneously. So we teach kids the skills of self-regulation in order to more fully free up their capacities for expressivity. It sounds like a paradox, but it’s one of the truths of our practice: self-regulation makes true spontaneity possible.

*Tricia Tunstall*

## News Notes

The Los Angeles Philharmonic has announced the **2018 Take a Stand Symposium** – July 13-14, 2018 in Los Angeles. The theme is “Empowering Voices: Cultivating Student Ownership in the Classroom and Community.” There will be a new-this-year three-day teaching intensive (July 12-14) where social impact/youth development music teachers will explore truly student-centered music education together. The Take a Stand Symposium (July 13-14) will bring together leaders, teachers, and key stakeholders from around the world to focus on fostering youth voices as a means of improving musical and social outcomes in Sistema-inspired programs. The Symposium will culminate in a performance by the National Take a Stand Festival orchestra, comprised of Sistema program students from across the U.S.. Registration is limited. Some travel support is available for teaching artists. For more information, and to apply: <https://tinyurl.com/y8nne3sx>

New York City’s **Harmony Program** (HP) celebrated its **tenth anniversary** in true Sistema style by creating a three-day seminario that included top students from three of the largest programs on the East Coast. HP students were joined by OrchKids students (Baltimore) and Sistema Side by Side students (Boston) to create an orchestra of sixty, who were joined onstage by guests from the New York Philharmonic teaching artist faculty and From The Top. The free public concert in Manhattan was held in a high school in Harlem.

The **Global Leaders Program** (a program of the Orchestra of the Americas) led a ten-day **Teaching Artist (TA) Bootcamp** in Honduras, which included 14 TAs from U.S. Sistema programs and others in Latin America. The program featured a ten-day Collaborative Composition project led by Dan Trahey (from OrchKids). To read a detailed story about this process and the benefits of Collaborative Composition, go to: <http://theworldensemble.org/feature-the-americas-take-on-collaborative-composition-a-right-answer-to-the-hard-questions/>

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**Sistema Toronto** (ST) just received a **\$500,000 grant** from the Government of Ontario. This grant is part of a \$21 million new commitment by the provincial government to arts education. ST currently has waiting lists at all three sites, and this new grant will enable them to serve more than their current 250 students.

Loirie Heagy, the founder/director of **JAMM (Juneau Alaska Music Matters)**, has been **awarded a Fulbright scholarship** to study several music education programs in the U.K. and bring new ideas back to her program. Her studies will include the Sistema-inspired Big Noise program in Scotland as well as Scotland’s “Musical Futures” program, which focuses on improvisation and creative music-making.

## Resources

**Philanthropic Foundations of Canada**, the member association of Canadian grantmakers, in collaboration with Community Foundations of Canada, has prepared a **profile of the practices and trends of philanthropic foundations in Canada**, with world comparisons. The study is part of a collaborative global effort led by researchers at the Harvard Kennedy School at Harvard University. Go to: <https://pfc.ca/resources/>

**Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice** is a report that clarifies an active but elusive sector of the arts ecosystem and provides new ways of describing the work. Authors Leeis Frasz and Holly Sidford of the Helicon Collective wrote the report to help increase the visibility and legibility of this increasingly important field, a field familiar to many in the Sistema movement. <http://artmakingchange.org/background/#the-report>

Many students (and faculty members) in Sistema programs discover a passion for **Social Practice**. But they don’t know where to go to develop their skills and build careers. Shawn Lent, a dance artist and program leader, has compiled a useful (though admittedly incomplete) list of places to learn more: <http://shawnlent.com/my-2018-resources-for-social-practice-artists> The list includes: Undergraduate and Graduate Degree Programs, Professional and Certificate Programs, Fellowships, Jobs/Internships, Volunteer Opportunities and Residencies, Groups, Initiatives and Organization, Readings, Videos, Webinars and MOOCs. Shawn was the first person featured on the blog Seriously Badass Women. (<http://www.seriouslybadasswomen.com/about>)

## The Global Challenge

*by Aristedes Rivas, Cellist and Strings Specialist*

When I was 12 years old, I was invited to join the Los Llanos Symphony Orchestra in Guanare, Venezuela. I was the youngest of a group of children who joined the orchestra that year. The first rehearsal was of Tchaikovsky’s 4th Symphony. I have never in my life felt more lost than I did in that rehearsal. Three years later, I became co-principal cellist of this orchestra, along with my former teacher.

Most children (whether they admit it or not) like to be challenged. This has been a constant in my personal experience as a music educator. Regardless of socio-economic class, emotional situation, or culture, there is nothing more exciting for kids than facing a big challenge together with peers. At the same time, there are many variants in children’s behavior across local societies and cultures. The following thoughts about this are based on my own experience teaching in East Asia, Latin America and the U.S.

Teaching in Venezuela and other Latin American countries, I have found that most children are enthusiastic and ready to absorb everything thrown at them. This may have something to do with the lack of resources and access that characterizes this part of the world. But with the excitement comes a lack of discipline that is expressed in a resistance to order. In other words, it’s typical to have a group that is both very happy and very noisy. For Latin America, El Sistema’s great contribution has been not only to open doors to the musical universe but also to change the social fabric by teaching the rewards of discipline.

In contrast, students in South Korea, as in some other East Asian countries, are highly disciplined; there are no noisy classrooms. However, many students suffer from depression, stress and a lack of self-confidence. There, I have tried to help them play expressively by connecting the music with their personal feelings.

In the U.S., the land of abundance, I often face the problem of having to convince students and families that this opportunity is valuable. My solution to this is to set high standards for work, behavior and respect.

No matter where I’m teaching, I have come to rely on what I know works: challenging students, but with a high degree of trust and respect. Children in different cultures may have different reactions to what we offer, but the throughline is that for kids everywhere, finding out they can accomplish results they thought were unreachable can raise self-confidence and set precedents for dreaming bigger, and accomplishing more, than they ever have before.