

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

Stronger Together: The Longy Sistema Side By Side

By Ann Welch, COO, and Cara Kinney, Program Manager, Longy School of Music

At a Celtics game in Boston's TD Garden this past January, the national anthem was played by an ensemble making their arena debut: the [Longy Sistema Side By Side Orchestra](#), made up of graduate students at the Longy Conservatory and students from El Sistema-inspired programs in the Boston area and in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. For the young Sistema players, it was an unforgettable moment. For Longy, it was a milestone in our mission to support connections between music education and social justice.

When administration and faculty at Longy first learned about El Sistema some years ago, it seemed like something we had to join – but we weren't sure how. We started by asking, "What does the El Sistema field need, and what could be our role to address that?" In response, we heard two resounding needs: funding and teachers. As a school with a deep belief that musicians should also be good teachers, we created scholarships to place our students in teaching positions in El Sistema-inspired programs. Creating the Sistema Side by Side orchestra was a natural next step. Sistema Side By Side launched with a seed gift of just \$5,000, with 35 graduate students and Sistema students playing together in one orchestra. Today, the program, directed by Venezuelan Jorge Soto, has over 100 participants from the Boston area and Pittsfield. Our three instrumental ensembles and choir make music together year round in academic-year programs and in the intensive Summer Academy.

Sistema Side By Side addresses the pressing need for high-quality, accessible music education for children in under-resourced communities, in several ways. First, since rehearsals are at Longy, students travel outside their neighborhoods to a college campus, and they begin to be able to picture themselves in such an environment. Second, because our program brings together wind, percussion, and string players as well as a choir, students learn symphonic repertoire that they would not necessarily experience otherwise. Exposure to this complex repertoire inspires them to play better. Third, the program promotes community-building; students make friends with people from

different backgrounds and become more flexible as musicians. Finally, our graduate students help to meet the Sistema demand for more teachers.

Can Sistema Side By Side be done elsewhere? Let's examine the essential elements:

1. *A regional density of music programs.* Longy students travel to program sites to teach, and families come to Longy for rehearsals, so it helps that most programs are concentrated in the Boston area.
2. *A conservatory or music department that values teaching.* A vital part of the program is the impact it has on our graduate students. To supplement their pedagogy classes, Longy students can observe and evaluate how trained teachers explain concepts, teach in group settings, and demonstrate passion in their lessons. They learn by doing as they teach in El Sistema classrooms.

3. *Funding.* Funders are often attracted by the opportunity to support collective impact. Sistema Side By Side has become a meaningful way to engage donors and friends, as it demonstrates one of the signature ways Longy pursues its social justice mission.

4. *Stakeholder Alignment.* Sistema Side By Side relies on all its stakeholders. The families, students, teachers and directors of Sistema programs, together with the Longy faculty, graduate students, and staff, must collaborate to ensure success day after day and year after year. Longy could not be a hub for these programs without their ongoing, generous commitment, and programs could not benefit without our genuine interest in providing service to the field.

We hope that Sistema Side By Side can be used as a model to make a difference across the country – and even the world. Conservatories and El Sistema-inspired programs have a profound opportunity to increase their collective impact by partnering. If more music schools can adapt the Sistema Side By Side program model for their communities, music students will grow as teachers, programs will have more teaching artists to lead their classes, and together we will create greater social change through music.



Cellists in the Sistema Side By Side Orchestra at center court at the Celtics game.

FROM THE EDITOR

Many of us know by heart this quote from [José Antonio Abreu's televised TED talk](#) in 2009: "Orchestra and chorus are much more than artistic structures; they are schools of social life, because to play and sing together means to intimately coexist toward perfection and excellence."

That last phrase was exceptionally startling and beautiful to me, as it may have been to you – if you, like me, had never considered that intimate coexistence could be channeled *toward* something...and that the something could be art.

The trouble with this Eureka moment has been that in practice, it's very hard to get a student orchestra to look or act anything like peaceful intimate coexistence toward perfection. We count ourselves lucky if we can keep bow fights from breaking out among the second violins. When the notes are hard, the music is unfamiliar and it's almost dinnertime, rehearsal can feel less like a school of social life than like a supervised recess.

And yet. Those of us who have been lucky enough to observe Latin American Sistema orchestras know that they often do, in fact, look like successful schools for social life. Pairs of kids at music stands taking turns with the single available instrument...older kids mentoring younger ones; young kids swaying like their mentors... How is it possible that the structures of cooperation are more easily achieved in those cultures than in our own? Perhaps it's because in Latin American cultures, "the orchestra" still stands for privilege, so it's more likely to be valued than in our culture, where kids tend to think of orchestras as old-fashioned rather than as icons of prestige.

Here's something else Maestro Abreu said in that TED talk: "The orchestras prove to be the creative spaces of culture – the spaces of exchanges and new meanings." This quote is less familiar to us, but perhaps more relevant. If our students can experience their orchestras as the creative spaces of their culture, where new meanings are explored and shared, they will be highly motivated to try coexistence toward excellence in those spaces. Many U.S./Canadian Sistema programs are already experimenting in this direction, making changes in repertoire, rehearsal process and performance to give kids a greater sense of meaning-making. Moving in this direction isn't "un-Sistema". You heard it from the Maestro.

Tricia Tunstall

**"If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow."
– John Dewey, philosopher**

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News Notes

New England Conservatory's Center for Professional Development and Performing Arts Leadership offers a new three-day Institute (June 1-3, 2018) entitled *Understanding El Sistema*. Drawing on expertise developed through NEC's Sistema Fellows Program, and led by experienced teaching artists and leaders in the Creative Youth Development (CYD) field, it is designed to help teaching artists and administrators advance their careers and invest more deeply in the mission-driven work of CYD organizations. Tuition is \$400 (\$300 for NEC alumni and direct colleagues of Sistema Fellows); the application deadline is April 1. For more information: <https://necmusic.edu/musiciansatwork>

The Longy School of Music of Bard College holds its annual *Dalcroze Institute* from June 25 to July 13. Dalcroze Eurhythmics is used in Sistema programs around the world to more fully engage the whole musician, with rhythmic movement, intense listening, and improvisation. The approach is adapted to unlock creativity and enliven music making, while complementing traditional kinds of study and practice. Participants can opt to come for 1, 2 or 3 weeks. Longy offers a 50% discount to the Dalcroze Summer Institute to all El Sistema-inspired program teachers and directors. For more information, and to apply: Longy.edu/dalcroze

Coinciding with the National Take a Stand Festival (see *January '18 issue of The Ensemble*), the 2018 *Take a Stand Symposium*, July 12-14, will bring together Sistema-involved and Sistema-interested teachers from around the world – open to any teacher in a Sistema program or with a demonstrated commitment to social change and youth development through instrumental music. <https://www.laphil.com/education/national-programs/take-a-stand-symposium-2018>. Applications open March 15, 2018. Email questions to yola@laphil.org.

MYCincinnati has created an *annual community creative festival* in their Price Hill neighborhood. *Artists in residence* (yes, with a stipend, and yes, using all art forms) create work with young people and

present it in the culminating festival. Selected artists will work with MYCincinnati staff to design and lead a collaborative performance project with a small ensemble of students. Submit your proposal by March 19. Information: <http://creativecommunityfestival.org/artists>

The *Sphinx Performance Academy (SPA)* is a *full-scholarship*, intensive chamber music and solo performance program designed for aspiring black and Latino string players, ages 11-17. There will be two sessions, both with distinguished faculties. June 10-June 24, SPA at Curtis Summerfest (the inaugural SPA session at Curtis Institute of Music); July 21-August 4, SPA at Cleveland Institute of Music and Case Western Reserve University. Application deadline is April 11. For information and to apply: <https://sphinxspa.fluidreview.com>

Two Sistema programs have recently performed on big stages. *ComMUSICation's (St. Paul, MN) youth choir* accompanied Leslie Odom Jr.'s version of "America the Beautiful" at *Super Bowl LII*. And *five students from the People's Music School* in Chicago opened the Obama Foundation Summit, performing Coldplay's "Viva La Vida" (having learned the music in two days!), with the Obamas in the front row.

Resources

The *research study Culture Trak'17* by LaPlaca Cohen illuminates the changing definition of "culture" and what audiences want in attending such events and in supporting organizations. There are significant implications and opportunities for Sistema programs embedded in this study. The key finding is that the number one reason people attend cultural events is "fun." Sistema presentations need to prioritize fun in the feel of every public event. <http://2017study.culturetrak.com>

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Setting the Stage for Sistema

by Ronnie Ragen, Founder/Director, Music for the Very Young

Music for the Very Young (MVY), *Trenton Music Makers'* early-childhood music and movement program, was created in 2000. Our goal was to serve Trenton's pre-K children, teachers, and families, not only by creating joyful and interesting early musical experiences for the children, but also by weaving music and movement into the fabric of the preschool day, and engaging the children's families in their music learning. We worked closely with the school district and with Music Together, creators of the music resources used in MVY, to ensure we addressed district goals with high-quality materials. Weekly classes led by early childhood music specialists, PD workshops for classroom teachers, family music parties – all these create an immersive music-making opportunity that is very much aligned with Sistema practice.

MVY succeeded beyond our expectations. Classroom teachers reported using music throughout the day to ease transitions and support learning. District music teachers found our 4-year-old MVY kids better prepared for their classes than first graders without MVY experience. Research funded by a federal grant showed that MVY kids were better prepared to enter kindergarten than the control group. And parents told us their children *loved* music and asked when and where they should start them on an instrument.

So, of course, we started an El Sistema-inspired afterschool program. Trenton Music Makers Orchestra was introduced in 2015; it currently serves 115 children grades 3-8. We introduced Pre-Orchestra for second graders this year; more expansion is planned.

MVY sets the stage for TMM in essential ways:

- MVY children enter kindergarten as comfortable, confident music makers, better prepared to undertake instrumental instruction.
- MVY parents recognize the value of music making in their children's development and are motivated to advocate for and actively support such opportunities.
- MVY builds strong connections with the district, helping to build district support for strong, immersive music making throughout the school years.

ACTION FOR THE MONTH: Protect Sistema Students from ICE Arrest in Program Sites

*Directive #11072.1 from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) instructs agents to make arrests of undocumented people at "sensitive locations" including courthouses, hospitals, churches and schools. This new policy puts some Sistema students and families directly at risk. Contact your Congressional representative and urge support for the *Protecting Sensitive Locations Act*, which would prevent ICE intrusions into Sistema program sites. Find out more about this Action [here](#), and then take action.*