

## Meet the National Alliance for Audition Support

By Johnia Stigall, Project Manager, *National Alliance for Audition Support*

For El Sistema students with aspirations to pursue music as a career, the idea of becoming a professional orchestral musician can seem daunting. It can be a tough, competitive journey, and for Black and Latinx musicians, who currently represent less than 5% of musicians in American orchestras, the journey can present challenges not readily understood or acknowledged by others in the field. To address these challenges, three organizations are working together to support musicians of color in achieving success.

This past April, the [Sphinx Organization](#), [New World Symphony](#), and the [League of American Orchestras](#) (representing 700 orchestras across the U.S.) announced the establishment of the National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS), an unprecedented effort to move the dial for diversity in orchestras. With the support of a four-year, \$1.8M grant from The Andrew W.



June 2018 NAAS Audition Intensive at New World Symphony. Photo: New World Symphony

Mellon Foundation, along with additional financial and programmatic contributions from America's orchestras, the NAAS works with Black and Latinx musicians to develop their audition skills and increase their participation in auditions, and, ultimately, to increase Black and Latinx representation in orchestras.

Through research and years of discussions with musicians, administrators, and other stakeholders, the NAAS has identified four areas of need commonly expressed by Black and Latinx orchestral musicians to address through this initiative:

1. **Mentorship.** In the same way that it can be challenging to spot a musician of color at any professional orchestra performance, it can be difficult for pre- and early-professional Black and Latinx musicians to seek out established musicians as mentors who can identify with or understand the intricacies of navigating an orchestral career as a musician of color. The NAAS's extensive network of musicians and industry leaders allows for countless possibilities to support each musician's needs and career goals through mentorship and coaching.
2. **Audition Training.** A surprisingly common observation we've heard from musicians across all career stages is that many learn the professional

audition process through trial and error, but few were ever trained in auditioning as a career skill. To increase audition readiness for Black and Latinx musicians, NAAS Audition Intensives hosted by the New World Symphony provide three days of audition preparation training, with mock auditions, lessons with orchestral musicians and teachers of orchestral playing, and optimal performance training with a performance psychologist. The inaugural Audition Intensive took place in June 2018 with 18 Black and Latinx violinists,

violinists, and cellists ranging from conservatory undergraduates to tenured professionals seeking to advance their careers. We're planning more intensives for Black and Latinx woodwind and brass players.

3. **Financial Support.** Taking a professional audition in which the musician might play just a few notes can easily cost over \$1,000 in travel, housing, and missed work. Thinking about financial sacrifices to take an audition can sometimes be as stressful as the audition itself. To remove the financial barrier to participating in auditions, the NAAS provides Black and Latinx musicians with grants to cover audition expenses, instrument-related needs, and expenses incurred while performing as a substitute musician.

4. **Audition Previews.** The [Sphinx Orchestral Partners Auditions](#) (SOPA) take place during the annual SphinxConnect conference in Detroit, MI. Musicians play a mock audition for representatives from orchestras interested in advancing diversity in their institutions through access to and engagement with a qualified pool of musicians of color. The process simulates a professional audition experience as closely as possible, but unlike a real-life audition, musicians receive an audio recording of their audition, written feedback from the orchestra representatives, and participate in a talk-back session to discuss the audition process. Following the SOPA auditions, many musicians are contacted by participating orchestras for future job and performance opportunities.

We look forward to working with El Sistema programs toward our shared goals of empowering musicians of color from all backgrounds to reach their full potentials. Learn more about the NAAS [here](#).

## FROM THE EDITOR

Do you think of yourself as a teaching artist? Many teachers in the global Sistema use that term to describe what they do. Sometimes, though, there can be a lack of clarity about what it means – and a lack of awareness that there is, in fact, a powerful and growing global movement for Teaching Artistry, just as there is for El Sistema.

That global teaching artist movement was out in full force in New York last month, when Carnegie Hall hosted the [4th International Teaching Artist Conference](#) (ITAC4), with 305 delegates from 28 countries. I was at the conference both to present – I co-led a session on El Sistema, with Jeehye Suh of Korea and Aristides Rivas of Venezuela – and to learn more about what teaching artistry looks like and aspires to, around the world.

For years now, I have been thinking about these two kindred global movements, trying to understand exactly where and how they intersect. Being at ITAC4 helped me understand that the intersection is vast.

Just look at ITAC4's official theme: *THE ARTIST AS INSTIGATOR: The Role, Responsibility and Impact of Artists in Global Communities*. The conference was brimming with teaching artists of many genres and contexts, but all shared a common goal: to *instigate* social change through activating the artistry of the people and communities they work with. Does that sound familiar?

ITAC4 also convinced me that the practices and inquiries of teaching artistry are crucial tools for all teachers in the El Sistema world. T.A.s are at the frontier of discovery around active, engaged arts learning. In almost every conference session, presenters were constantly and expertly tugging us into creative action and interaction. One conference room was devoted to creating a huge ITAC flag, with attendees bringing small pieces of cloth that represented something about their programs and sewing them all together. This new ITAC "flag" will travel the world for the next two years, with T.A.s adding to it at every stop, and will land in Seoul, Korea in 2020 for ITAC5.

Are you an "artist as instigator" – or do you aspire to be? Then you're a teaching artist. Find out more about teaching artistry [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). The more we can align our global movements, the more formidable our instigations will be.

Tricia Tunstall

"Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion."  
– Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, philosopher

## News Notes

Now's the time to submit proposals to present at the **2019 El Sistema USA National Symposium**, held in Detroit, MI, January 30-31; submission deadline is October 19. To see the themes and guidelines, go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/esusa-rfp-2019>

The D'Addario Foundation, long a supporter of Sistema-inspired and community music programs in the U.S., announces the launch of the **D'Addario Foundation College Assistance Scholarship Program**.

The support is for students who have actively participated in their community music program for at least 3 years, maintain a certain number of credits, a minimum GPA, and mentor in their local community program. The awards cover college expenses often not included in other scholarships: soft expenses of college such as books, food, and transportation. Qualifying organizations will receive an invitation for their students to apply. For more information, go to <http://daddariofoundation.org>.

It may seem like the summer just finished, but it is time to start thinking afresh about encouraging motivated students to apply for and prepare for **auditioning for Carnegie Hall's NYO2** – in 2018, a dozen students from Sistema-inspired programs were in NYO2 or the top orchestra NYO-USA, which goes on an international tour. NYO2 looks for talented 14-17 year olds from diverse backgrounds. They will work with conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto and perform on the famed Carnegie Hall stage. Find out more at <https://tinyurl.com/y87sf9pf>

## Resources

A newly released recorded webinar details how you can put the **Creative Youth Development National Blueprint** to work for you. Sistema programs are a significant player in this CYD movement that is gaining coherence and voice through a partnership of major organizations – the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the National Guild for Community Arts Education, and Americans for the Arts. This one-hour webinar pulls together the key conclusions

with suggestions about ways to take action based on them. We become more powerful when we align with other strong, committed colleagues. Find out how: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9b4rtOfnKGo&feature=youtu.be>

Do you know a researcher who would love to investigate something with your students? The Scientific Research Projects category of the GRAMMY Museum provides grants of up to \$20,000 for **research on the impact of music on the human condition** – such as the effects of music on mood, cognition, and healing, and the creative processes underlying music. The letter of inquiry deadline is October 15, 2018. To learn more: <https://www.grammymuseum.org/programs/grants-program>

The U.S. State Department has a program that might let you consider an international Sistema exchange. The **Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program: Host Family and School Placement and Monitoring** provides support to organizations that help administer a student exchange program. Organizations will identify host schools; vet, select, and monitor host families; and place, support, and monitor students. The application deadline is November 5, 2018. <https://tinyurl.com/yd9dn6hq>

Do you have a strong leader in your program with a passion to help young black men? Echoing Green invests in emerging social entrepreneurs to help them deliver bold, high-impact solutions to society's most difficult problems. Echoing Green offers **The Black Male Achievement Fellowship** to support emerging leaders dedicated to improving the life outcomes of U.S. black men and boys. Fellows get stipends of \$80,000 over two years, and leadership development and technical support. Applications accepted from October 9-30, 2018. <https://www.echoinggreen.org/>

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## Take A Stand Junior Strings

*by Jeffrey Grogan, Director of Orchestral Activities, Oklahoma City University, and Soo Han, Director of Orchestral Studies, Baldwin Wallace Conservatory*

The creation of the forty-member Junior String Ensemble for this year's **Take a Stand Festival** was a new step for the TAS Festival – and its success was beyond all expectations. The student musicians came wonderfully prepared. Our curriculum for them went beyond learning the concert repertoire to include leadership skills, chamber music skills, and interaction with a living composer.

The theme of leadership was embedded throughout the week. Sessions on servant leadership gave the students assignments to think about how they could help others. The importance of "leadership from every chair" was emphasized in our rehearsals – with everyone, not just the front rows, taking ownership of transitions, tempo changes, pitch, and keeping the ensemble together. In addition, during our concert for TAS conference-goers, several students took on speaking responsibilities, some introducing our pieces and others presenting projects they had developed that week, to help their programs back home

Chamber music was another thread in both small and large ensemble work. We taught the elements of good collaboration – pitch, rhythm, and pulse, and constant listening. To ensure that this chamber music sensibility was part of the large ensemble experience, we had the students perform the Vivaldi Concerto un-conducted, with everyone but the cellos standing. It was a wonderful learning experience for the students to take on the many responsibilities associated with a conductor-less ensemble. We all learned to move and breathe together, to listen and watch while playing (instead of heads buried in the music!), and to physically show the musical changes, especially dynamics, within the piece.

The students were also excited to spend time with composer Soo Han Newbold, whose work *Perseus* they were preparing to perform. Ms. Newbold answered their questions about composing and life. The Junior Strings were clearly in awe, knowing that she would hear them play her piece!

Their week was brimming with leadership thinking, focus on collaboration, and realizing composers are real people. And playing better than they ever dreamed they could.

### **ACTION FOR THE MONTH:** Improve the Wikipedia Entry on El Sistema

Go look at the [Wikipedia entry on El Sistema](#). It's weak and incomplete. This month, go to that site, see where you can add something factual and helpful, click on the "edit" tab at the top, and add, correct, improve. This is one of the key public faces of the El Sistema movement; let's make it better. For more detailed instructions about editing, look [here](#) or [here](#) (a YouTube video) For more about this Action, look [here](http://theensemblenewsletters.com/october-18_action-of-the-month/): [\[http://theensemblenewsletters.com/october-18\\_action-of-the-month/\]](http://theensemblenewsletters.com/october-18_action-of-the-month/)