

### Canada Connects

*Kathryn Cobler, Teaching Artist, OrKidstra, Ottawa, Ontario; Jacque McNulty, Site Manager, Youth Orchestra of Northern Alberta (YONA) - Sistema, Edmonton; Karma Tomm, Director, Sistema Kingston, Ontario*

As El Sistema-inspired programs, we value community. Over the years, programs of various shapes and sizes have sprung up across Canada, laying down roots in priority communities. Although each program is unique in how it strives to support the students and families it serves, we are united as El Sistema-inspired programs in our shared belief in the transformative power of music. We are also bound together in confronting issues that concern all Canadians—issues of income inequality, racism, and systemic oppression, to name a few.

Each country grapples with these issues, and Canada has its own flavor of systemic problems. For example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), launched in 2008, was a nationwide documentation process that gathered truth-telling testimonies from people affected by the government-run Residential Schools between 1831 and 1996. The TRC published a final report with 94 calls to action. Canada is now in a process of reconciliation wherein people—including those of us working within El Sistema-inspired programs—are reckoning with all the questions that come with unlearning racist ideas and ideologies in favor of more equitable ones. This process of decolonization is becoming an integral part of the Canadian psyche today.

As in other countries around the world, the sudden and harsh realities of COVID-19 brought these issues into sharper focus for us in Canada. Lack of access to technology, the need for homework help, and the lack of healthy, accessible food were some of the major challenges our students faced. We were moved to reach out to one another and felt the need to convene as a network of Canadian El Sistema-Inspired programs, in order to grapple with the realities of our changing world and learn how we can do better together to support our communities individually. This national connection was something we had long desired, and this pandemic made it an inescapable necessity. We began to convene monthly over Zoom.

Carving out space in our days to connect has allowed us to envision and unpack what it means to develop citizen artistry in our students and to be in tune with and respond to the needs of our communities. This experience has taught us that the strength of our national body relies on the relationships we have built with one another. As we continue to nurture these connections, we will adapt to the needs of our national community.

The “magic” that has taken place as a result of our monthly zoom meetings is that as Canadian El

Sistema-inspired programs, we have deepened our sense of unity. Space has been created for us to share, learn, and grow from each other's experiences. These calls allowed us to share our challenges, successes, and not-so-successful endeavors in creating online programming for our students. We have created resources that will continue to make our programs stronger.

As an example, OrKidstra (Ottawa, Ontario) has expanded upon its existing professional development to invite teaching artists and arts educators across the country to participate in this season of engaging in online programming. To start, presenters from [Sistema Toronto](#) and [Sistema Winnipeg](#) shared their expertise and practical tools of engaging their students in musical and social development in the digital space. We look forward to building upon this engagement in the months ahead. We have also collectively begun to advocate for our programs on a national level, and we are seeking to develop anti-racist policies to better educate our field in racial literacy and hold our programs accountable.

Our participating organizations so far represent five provinces, and include [Saint James Academy](#) (Vancouver), Youth Orchestra of Northern Alberta (YONA)-Sistema (Edmonton), [CPO PhilKids](#) (Calgary), Sistema Winnipeg, Sistema Toronto, OrKidstra (Ottawa), Sistema Kingston, and [Sistema New Brunswick](#). These monthly meetings, and the “ensemble” that has formed as a result of them, have allowed us to look more broadly at the El Sistema-inspired movement across Canada as a whole, identifying its needs while still celebrating the beautiful identities of each region and its communities.

Looking toward the future, many of us see a new momentum building upon these relationships that will strengthen connections among programs across Canada. Several Canadian programs are already members of El Sistema USA, which certainly offers a wealth of resources and support. But some things we deal with are uniquely Canadian, including a different culture around fundraising and our own heightened response to racial and economic injustices. This leads us to consider whether the time is right to develop some kind of support structure and a unified voice for advocacy across our own nation. As funding resources tighten and we recognize that the needs of underserved youth are growing, we contemplate what a new normal might look like. Why not build it together?

### Editorial: On Organizational Service

*Patrick Slevin, Executive and Artistic Director, Austin Soundwaves, TX*

The El Sistema-inspired field is committed to ongoing dialogue, reflection, and adaptation. We regularly analyze our successes and failures, and ask questions like, “What more can we do to support our communities?” and “How can we respond to events happening in our backyards and across the nation?”

These are important, healthy questions that are worth coming back to consistently. At Austin Soundwaves, we have started to think more broadly and generally about these questions, asking ourselves, “What more can we do with what we have?” We try to generate multiple responses and ideas, especially ones that don't necessitate new funding sources or new programs.

One of our answers was to designate one day each quarter as an organizational service day. These service days are a way for us to deepen our community impact and strengthen relationships among our students, staff, and partners. They also provide more entry points for exploring the broader aspects of our mission. This is especially important for students, part-time staff, and others who may not see the full scope of our work on a regular basis.

On organizational service days we cancel all classes, rehearsals, and meetings whenever possible. And while it may be relatively easy for a board member or salaried staff member to participate, we recognize that this isn't the case for everyone. For hourly staff we provide a participation honorarium as well as compensation for any missed classes that would have taken place that day.

Our first service day took place on October 16 and focused on assisting our alumni to get to the polls. In the weeks leading up to this day, staff supported voter registration efforts and helped our alumni create a voting plan. This also gave us the opportunity to update our alumni database and ask graduates what they might like to see from future service days.

Establishing organizational service days was a small step that has already elevated our actions and conversations around artistic citizenship. It started by asking the simple question, “What more can we do with what we have?” I encourage you to pose this question to your students, staff, and collaborators. I'm sure you will get meaningful and unexpected responses.

*Patrick Slevin*

*“Your voice will be heard. And speaking as a bit of a singer myself, I know that can be a pretty good feeling.”*

*~ Eddie Vedder, Pearl Jam frontman and Global Citizen Advocate*

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

### News Notes

As a result of the pandemic, El Sistema programs are launching **initiatives that aim to share their learning more widely**. Play On Philly is opening its resources and programming to students in non-Sistema programs across the country—not just in Philly. Read more about how they're doing it [here](#). Similarly, the Harmony Program in New York has developed an original series of YouTube-based beginner music lessons for learners ages 7–10, called “**Harmony at Home**.” This free, year-long series consists of weekly, 30-minute lessons in music fundamentals from prominent artists, including Joshua Bell, Anthony McGill, Jamie Bernstein, and Imani Winds. No instruments necessary.

To honor the four decades of service that Leni Boorstin has dedicated to the Los Angeles Philharmonic in shaping their community and learning programs, with a central role in launching YOLA, the L.A. Phil has created **The Leni Boorstin YOLA Administrative Fellowship**. This is a paid **annual fellowship for two young people, to provide YOLA graduates an even greater role in shaping its future**. Working alongside staff members at the new Beckman YOLA Center at Inglewood, they will contribute to the learning programs and build connections in the community.

**The Abolitionist Teaching Network** is offering two online sessions for educators looking to **continue the work of unlearning racist practices** in the classroom. BIPOC are invited to attend Freedom Fridays with Noor Jones-Bey on November 6 (and every first Friday), 8–9 p.m. EST. The workshop will offer art forms such as poetry, movement, music, writing prompts, and more to help you through the month. Learn more and register [here](#). And on Thursday, November 12, 8–9:30 p.m. EST, you can attend an online event titled, “No Matter Who Wins the Election, We Need an Abolitionist Agenda.” Panelists include 2018 and 2019 National Teachers of the Year, ATN cofounder Bettina Love, and more. Register [here](#).

Project 440 will host its **fourth annual free college fair for musicians virtually**, Tuesday, November 10 – Thursday, November 12. This fair brings together representatives from universities, conservatories, colleges, and summer music festivals from across the country to connect directly with emerging youth leaders interested in music. Inclusive in this three-day event are workshops on financial aid, admission processes, different careers in music, and more. Students and adults can both register; learn more [here](#).

**Applications are now open for Carnegie Hall's National Youth Ensembles**. Please let your most promising students know about NYO2, a free orchestra program of intensive training and

performance opportunities with a track record of recruiting musicians from communities underrepresented in classical music. **The National Youth Orchestra of the United States (NYO-USA)** deadline is November 12; the **NYO2 application** is due December 1; and **NYO Jazz** is due by January 21. All are free and led by distinguished artists.

### Resources

Americans for the Arts has launched a **Cultural Equity Resource Center**. Like their widely used **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resource Center**, this will be updated regularly with information about **programming, resources, and news to assist all in achieving our racial/social justice goals**. They will keep adding to it—upcoming is a directory of equity consultants and service providers. If you have a resource to add, let them know.

**Big Note, Little Note** is a **new early-childhood music program for families with infants**. Designed by Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute in partnership with local community centers and organizations, the new ten-week music class offers a range of experiences for families to engage with their babies through musical play, singing, songwriting, instrument exploration, and more. The program is offered free to families around the world to support family well-being, early child development, and parent-child connection.

Teachers working in high-need communities may want to explore **STAT**, or **Support for Teachers Affected by Trauma**. Geared primarily toward PreK–12 educators, **STAT** offers a **five-module, self-paced course that invites participants to engage in a range of STS learning interactives**, explore scenarios that highlight the impact of STS, listen to teachers describe their experiences, and more.

The staff of Chamber Music America has compiled **a collection of resources in support of Black Lives Matter to advance anti-racist work in the music community**. You can also find **BLM support resources** from Creative Capital.

Classics for Kids Foundation offers matching grants to K-12 schools and nonprofit organizations throughout the U.S. to **help purchase high-quality stringed instruments and to build sustainable stringed instrument music programs**. Grants cannot exceed 50% of total instrument cost. Requests are reviewed quarterly and the upcoming application deadline is December 31, 2020. Learn more [here](#).

### Subscription Information

To subscribe for yourself or others, or to update your information:

[longy.edu/ensemble-news/](http://longy.edu/ensemble-news/)

Back issues are always available at:

[theensemblenewsletters.com/ensemble-archive](http://theensemblenewsletters.com/ensemble-archive)

### Collective Action for Greater Impact

*Armand Hall, Executive and Artistic Director, ROCmusic Collaborative, Rochester, NY*

I am a musician, conductor, and educator who strives to bring reason and connection to my community. This focus was emboldened in 2009 when I was invited by Roberto Zambrano to come to Venezuela as a teaching artist with the **Archipelago Project**. There, I saw how real community engagement and collective effort can produce excellence. In 2018, I was fortunate to apply for a leadership job with the ROCmusic Collaborative in Rochester, NY. What interested me was the opportunity to work inside an atypical structure that could pool resources and work to recreate the communal spirit I witnessed in Venezuela.

When societal problems are addressed by a single organization, all too often those honorable efforts could have been exponentially enhanced by a collective approach. However, with private nonprofits and municipal funding structures competing in the same funding pools, it is difficult to budget, plan, and work for a common cause.

Rochester, New York's third-largest city, is teeming with arts and cultural institutions, and has a history of philanthropy led by the example of George Eastman, founder of the Eastman Kodak Company. However, Rochester struggles with the lasting effects of institutionalized segregation, and in a city with stellar music programs, there is a severe lack of access to music instruction for a large portion of the population.

Recognizing this, Dr. Jamal Rossi of the Eastman School of Music used his influence to bring together leaders of major private and municipal institutions to address the issues of access and quality of instrumental education. These entities (Eastman School of Music, Hochstein School of Music, Eastman Community Music School, City of Rochester/Mayor Lovely Warren, Rochester City School District, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Gateways Music Festival) created the ROCmusic Collaborative.

The group leverages its collective organizational resources to provide access to music instruction and performances for every school-age child in Rochester. Working with an MOU, each organization provides financial, in-kind support to accomplish the functions of a traditional organization. The city of Rochester gives access to neighborhood R-Centers for instruction. Our education-focused members provide access to instructors, professional development, training, and curriculum planning. Our performing-focused members provide free or reduced-cost access to performances and other opportunities.

These efforts bring our students direct connections to intentional programming with great arts institutions. The ROCmusic Collaborative is committed to breaking down longstanding barriers and uplifting our community, modeling a different approach to creating equal and equitable access for all.