

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

## Music as a Birthright in Elkhart County

Hillary Harder, Program Director, *ECoSistema*, Indiana

In Elkhart County, Indiana, our goal is to provide all people with equitable access to quality music education from birth to young adulthood. We believe music is a birthright for every child in our community—that the extraordinary benefits of music education should be built into the fabric of every young person's upbringing. It's not a coincidence that the name of our program, *ECoSistema* (Elkhart County El Sistema), means "ecosystem" in Spanish: we believe that the El Sistema-inspired field can have the greatest impact when we take the overlapping systems already in place in our community and build music into them.

Our work begins, of course, at birth. Eleven years ago, Elkhart County became a hub for Music Together, the research-based early childhood music program. Music Together classes now take place all across our county: at community centers, preschool programs, and even nursing homes, where seniors can make music alongside toddlers. At Goshen High School, Music Together classes help teen parents bond with their babies. A local medical clinic that serves undocumented and uninsured folks holds prenatal classes for pregnant moms—and then offers free Music Together classes for newborns (ages 0–8 months). This is all made possible through partnerships between Horizon Education Alliance, Goshen College, and local business and nonprofit leaders. In working to provide widespread access to these systems, we have embraced Music Together as the natural early childhood leg of our programming.

As *ECoSistema* has developed, we've had to redefine our relationship with public school music programs. Elkhart County is fortunate to have well-established, robust music programs in its schools. What, then, is El Sistema's role? In thinking about music as a birthright, we must constantly adapt our programming to truly serve students who face access barriers to music—not just follow the convenient paths.

We recently faced this dilemma at one of our public school sites. Although it had been an *ECoSistema* núcleo for several years, the reality was that this school had one of the district's highest percentages of white, middle-class families. Were we really working toward our mission of increasing access to music? On the other hand, if a school is predominantly white and middle-class, does that mean our programming has no place there at all? What about the families with fewer resources who might be slipping through the



*ECoSistema students perform in a side-by-side concert at Goshen College. Credit Horizon Education Alliance.*

cracks? That led us to realize that there was already a centralized location where under-resourced families from across the district, including this school, could send their children: the Boys & Girls Club. By pivoting to establish a núcleo there, we avoided severing ties with the families we hoped to reach and increased our focus on *which* families we were connecting with.

Higher education plays a critical role, too. Goshen College, a liberal arts Christian college in our county, recently launched a music for social change concentration for undergraduate students. This is an incredibly valuable piece of our musical ecosystem, creating the potential to train our program's next generation of teachers. This program represents the young adult population, where students ages 18–22 can delve into El Sistema-inspired pedagogy, philosophy, and practice. Upon graduation, we hope many of them will choose to enter the field as teachers in our núcleos, helping our program expand to reach more children. As *ECoSistema* is already located at Goshen College, this partnership is both logical and mutually beneficial.

Essential as each piece is, *ECoSistema* hasn't always been a neatly aligned pipeline of early childhood through school-age to higher education music study. Eleven years ago, Music Together took root; six years ago the first El Sistema-inspired núcleos started to spring up; Goshen College's music for social change track launched five years ago; and in the past two years these once-separate initiatives have finally begun to grow together into one interconnected system called *ECoSistema*.

This system requires support—long-term partnerships, strong stakeholder engagement, a sense that each piece is strong on its own but ultimately interdependent—but I invite you to picture with me how it could look, perhaps even in your community. Babies are born and nurtured in music classes from their earliest moments; a little older, they enter into El Sistema-inspired programming at their local núcleo, leading them to explore their schools' music programs or other musical opportunities. The students' studies propel them into higher education, where they are perhaps inspired to become teachers, coming full circle. Even if not, they are equipped with the tools to pursue any discipline they choose. We strive toward this lifespan approach with the conviction that music is the birthright of every child; the beauty of that work is that it is the community's work, too.

## Editorial: Waking the Sleeping Giant

Eric Booth, Founder, *ITAC*

Every two years, the international field of teaching artists gathers at ITAC (the International Teaching Artist Conference), the first global network of artists who work in communities and schools. *ITAC5* just ended; it was based this year in Seoul, South Korea, but was forced by the pandemic to become the first virtual ITAC. ITACs always sell out, with 50% of the seats reserved for the home country and the rest allocated to delegates from 20-plus other countries. Most delegates describe the immersive experience as lifechanging.

At *ITAC5*, our Korean hosts quickly created a highly engaging online conference, with 65 workshops and a dozen other ways to connect to colleagues around the world. All 350 full-delegate slots were filled, and there were also 1,000 free participants and 6,000 visitors from at least 44 countries checking out session highlights on YouTube.

Teaching artistry is alive in every country, in all artistic disciplines, successfully tackling the most challenging issues around the world. There are teaching artists driving Sistema programs in 66 countries, and driving other music for social change programs in dozens more. The power of personal artistry is one of the great forces on this planet—creative ambition drives even the evolutionary process itself—and we are the ones who know how to activate this force.

Yet the field is mostly invisible to the power players and agencies that address poverty and other crises. We can't let ourselves stay invisible any longer, when the need is so great.

Teaching artistry is a sleeping giant. And now is the time to wake up.

The size and vibrancy (even over the Internet!) of *ITAC5* clearly stirred this giant. But it's only when all teaching artists work in concert, announcing our presence and impact everywhere we go and connecting to other teaching artists through our institutions and across boundaries, that the field really awakens.

*ITAC* has grown up to become the *ITAC Collaborative*, making it possible for us to connect year-round, both locally and internationally. All successful social change movements require this, and it's especially urgent now, when our field is so vulnerable. Now is the time to shed old habits of working miracles locally, keeping our heads down, and to rise together as a giant force for change in the world.

*"Fight for the things that you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you."*

*– Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court Justice*

## News Notes

A new initiative has launched to promote the composition of original works for remote performance, intended to amplify the work of women and composers of color: [The Youth Orchestra Commissioning Initiative](#). Many of the initial compositions in this project are intended to be recorded separately and assembled as a video performance. Youth orchestras who join will be required to contribute at least one original composition and will have cheap access to the entire library of works. [Click here](#) to begin an application and learn more about current members.

Things are (always) busy over at Sphinx. Registration is open for [SphinxConnect](#), their annual convening of artists and leaders who advance diversity in music learning. Happening January 28–30, 2021, this year's theme will be Unity. Also, applications are open for the next LEAD cohort, due by October 20. LEAD (Leaders in Excellence, Arts & Diversity) is a two-year professional empowerment program that annually selects ten arts leaders of color to work with a distinguished faculty; LEAD includes mentorship, networking, and leadership retreats at top institutions nationwide. Finally, now is the time to apply for the [24th Annual Competition](#) for young Black and Latinx classical string players. The deadline to apply is October 20, 11:59pm EDT.

From August 10–14, El Sistema USA and the Collective Conservatory partnered to host the Northeastern Seminario, this time with a special focus on blues music. [Eight programs from the Northeast participated in this virtual Seminario](#), providing the 60 participating young musicians with many opportunities to connect and collaborate. Their week of jamming and improvising together will be presented in a live "Drop Party," taking place Thursday, October 8, at 7:00 p.m. EDT. Check out [ESUSA's Facebook page](#) for the watch link, which will be accessible after the event as well.

Microgrants of \$200 are available for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) artists and arts administrators impacted by COVID-19, from the [Arts Leaders of Color Emergency Fund of Arts Administrators of Color](#).

ArtPlace America celebrates its 10th year as a collaboration among foundations, federal agencies, and financial institutions that support and strengthen a field of creative placemaking—the

field that increasingly uses artists in planning and developing equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities. To celebrate, ArtPlace is offering its annual Summit virtually (October 26-30) and for free this year (you must register); it includes over 50 sessions, and affinity groups you can join to engage personally.

## Resources

The [Lewis Prize for Music](#) has expanded its website to feature [essays about "Responsive and Collaborative Leadership" by its three 2020 Accelerator Awardees](#): Brandon Steppe, Ian Mouser, and Sebastian Ruth. The three essays give insight into these leaders' and their programs' focus on building trusting relationships with young people, using creativity to support youth mental health, and rethinking the Euro-centric norms of classical music to foster more egalitarian and inclusive musical practices.

Three new podcasts have been launched to broaden your musical perspective. First, Garrett McQueen has co-created a classical music podcast called *Trilloquy* with Classical MPR host Scott Blankenship. The podcast seeks to explore and uplift classical music of all cultures beyond the Western European canon. The Lewis Prize has also announced the launch news of *Original Score, an Indigenous perspective on music*, a new podcast produced by Navajo composer and Native American Composer Apprentice Project (NACAP) teaching artist Michael Begay. Read more and share widely using their [Announcement Toolkit](#). And finally, the [Atlanta Music Project](#) has launched a podcast series hosted by Cofounder and CEO Dantes Rameau. Titled *The Next Movement*, it features in-depth video interviews with artistic luminaries that culminate in Q & As with AMP students and faculty. Watch Episode 1 [here](#).

Something to consider. One school district has added twice-weekly virtual "wellness blocks" requested by students to [reduce the stress and boost socio-emotional learning](#) during long weeks of online learning. Here's an [overview](#).

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## Continuing to Make Music, One Virtual Video at a Time

Laura Patterson, Executive Director, [Make Music NOLA](#), New Orleans, LA

Like programs all over the country, Make Music NOLA (MMN) was forced in March 2020 to quickly reinvent our programs for virtual learning. For our after-school students, we created weekly video lessons designed to take the place of their music theory, chamber ensemble, and fiddle classes. But these videos weren't workable for the 100 students we reach through in-school programming—who attend several different charter schools, were doing remote learning through different systems, and, because of the abruptness of school closures, didn't even have instruments at home.

For these students, we created and emailed a ten-minute video every week. Each video focused on a different topic—ranging from careers in music to different instruments, music writing, and music listening—and included a short homework assignment. We provided extra incentives, such as memes, for sending in assignments, and every week we chose five samples of student work to highlight on social media.

The results surprised us greatly. We were used to having little communication with our in-school students' families. Suddenly, we were getting emails and phone calls from parents we'd never heard from before. They texted six assignments to us at 10 p.m. on Saturday night. Sometimes they sent us eight weeks' worth of lessons at once. We discovered that families were under so much stress that having the ability to do things on their own time, instead of within a schedule of virtual classes, was a huge relief for them. They started to look forward to receiving our emailed videos each week. Sometimes we got advance requests from parents worried that they'd missed an email!

For the students, knowing that their teachers were creating something special for them every week gave them something to look forward to. They felt relieved because the videos were short and the assignments were done offscreen. For their parents, having assignments that students could complete and return on their own time gave them a sense of agency and control.

Our school partners heard about the work we were doing from parents. When it came time to renew our contracts for this coming school year, all of our hours increased. And although we are very excited to see our students in person again, we are working on a weekly video series for independent learning. For the simple reason that it works for our students!

## Action for the Month: Calling on Young Arts Heroes to Help

An unprecedented coalition of youth arts organizations is striving to get the U.S. Congress to consider the [DAWN Act](#) (Defend Arts Workers Now). It seeks to get economic recovery support for arts workers that is equal to what other industries get—we currently get almost nothing. We ask young people who love the arts to join the [Arts Are My Superpower](#) campaign—can they help by writing their Senators this month about the importance of the arts in their lives. Students (or adults) can join with letters, post on social media, and respond in their own creative ways. Resources (including letter templates and social media wording suggestions) available [here](#). Arts organizations who would like to send information out to their constituents can use the campaign resources found [here](#).