Cultivating Future Leaders and Sites

By Dan Trahey, CoFounder and Artistic Director, OrchKids, The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

The vibrant atmosphere of collaboration and knowledge-sharing is a key component of El Sistema. Venezuelans are eager to open their musical home to thousands of visitors; the L.A. Philharmonic sponsors convenings of the eager and interested. In this spirit, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra offers yearly training sessions through the Community Engagement through Music Education (CEME) series. The BSO’s third annual installment in this series, in November 2011, brought together a number of organizations interested in creating El Sistema within their organizations and in their communities.

Sessions focused on the essentials: everything from solidifying mission and goals to the nuts and bolts of site selection, fundraising, staffing, partnership, pedagogy, repertoire selection, assessment, and community development. Most important, participants explored how to take the first step towards creating a program.

Baltimore Symphony conductor Marin Alsop inspired the gathering with her observations about how OrchKids is changing the ethos of the BSO. The image of Meyerhoff Hall, the orchestra, and classical music more inclusive and community-minded. She spoke about how to truly engage a community new to the idea that making the pursuit of music part of their daily lives can have extraordinary benefits.

This year’s CEME was the strongest yet, and I was struck by the remarkable maturation of individual and organizational thought regarding El Sistema since the first event just two years ago. In general, attendees’ knowledge about the Sistema is much broader and deeper than it was at the beginning, and there is a stronger conviction about using music as a vehicle for social change. People are no longer asking “Why?” but simply “How?”

There’s much more diversity than there used to be in the types of organizations attending. The national network is already heterogeneous, including symphony and youth orchestras sponsors, schools, foundations, social service centers, and independents. The attendees at our workshop epitomized this diversity—a promising sign for the future of the movement. And the participants keep getting younger and younger.

Our CEME culminated in a community performance that included kids and workshop attendees alike. OrchKids students by performing with them.

CEME participants Charles Murrell and Matthew Thompson (Morgan State University) and Gary Padmore (Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra) inspire OrchKids students by performing with them.

Subscription Information

Please distribute this newsletter widely to build awareness of the national movement.

1. Please print out copies and give them to students, families, supporters, anyone...
2. Please post issues on your website.
3. Soon we will have a web address where issues will be archived.

The only reality we had at the start was a small group of very good teachers. This is the true seed of a program.” – José Antonio Abreu
News Notes

**Kids 4 Harmony** launched on October 27, 2011 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. State Rep. William “Smitty” Pignatelli, Mayor James Ruberto, and Pittsfield School Superintendent Jake Eberwein all spoke at the launch, lending their support for this new initiative. An intensive after-school classical music program (five days a week), Kids 4 Harmony has the advantage of being sponsored by Berkshire Children and Families, a social service agency with nearly 125 years experience helping families build strong futures. Under the direction of 2011 Abreu Fellow Marie Montilla, Kids 4 Harmony offers instrumental music instruction to 70 first to third graders at Conte and Morningside Elementary Schools. Facebook: Kids 4 Harmony. Twitter: @Kids4Harmony

**MYCincinnati** launched in October, led by Laura Jekel, a 2011 Abreu Fellow. She is working with Price Hill Will, a non-profit Community Development Corporation committed to the revitalization of Cincinnati’s Price Hill neighborhood. The program meets from 4pm to 6pm every day at the Roberts Academy (a public school) and is open to anyone living in Price Hill. MYCincinnati’s mission is to use classical music as a tool for youth development and community engagement by providing urban children with access to free, intense, high-quality musical instruction. Currently, there are 15 children in the program learning violin, viola, and cello. Laura@pricehillwill.org

**“Seminario” opportunity.** On Feb. 2, 2012, three southern California sites (Santa Barbara, San Diego, Pasadena) will bring together over a hundred students, teachers, and parents in LA for a day of focused learning and performing. All attendees of the Take A Stand Symposium are urged to stay an extra day in LA and participate actively (a number of roles are being offered) with El Sistema teachers from across the country. More information available in mid-December.

**Online assessment site.** The excellent arts education organization CAPE (Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education) has created and posted an excellent resource for assessing student learning. El Sistema educators search for good background information, usable tools, and advice on ways to apply them to illuminate the learning in El Sistema programs. CAPE’s new site is the best new resource to help us find effective ways to improve our programs and share their effectiveness through assessment practices. [http://www.capeweb.org/what-we-do/chicago-programs/arts-assessment-toolbox](http://www.capeweb.org/what-we-do/chicago-programs/arts-assessment-toolbox)

**El Sistema program tool site online.** Many have already used the variety of resources that the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s YOLA program (Youth Orchestra Los Angeles) has generously placed online for benefit of all sites. Perhaps most popular has been the Paper Orchestra Cookbook and Video—giving all the basics to launch such a project. There are sample teaching artist job descriptions, parent handbooks, partnership agreements, teaching schedules, some research and foundation documents, and more. [http://www.laphil.com/yola/yola-resource.cfm](http://www.laphil.com/yola/yola-resource.cfm)

**Grants for music commissions.** Meet The Composer/MetLife Creative Connections grants offer modest support (under $3,500) for commissions of new music and composers’ active involvement with communities in connection with them—making commissions by El Sistema-inspired organizations particularly interesting. Next grant deadline (they recur quarterly) is Jan. 7, 2012. [http://www.meetthecomposer.org/creativeconnections](http://www.meetthecomposer.org/creativeconnections)

---

**Fellows in National Action.**

By Erik Holmgren, Program Director, Abreu Fellows

The Abreu Fellows Program at New England Conservatory has two primary goals: to educate ten people each year to make significant and sustainable contributions to the growth of the El Sistema movement in the United States, and to create knowledge and information useful to those who are deeply engaged in the work.

In September of this year, the third-year Abreu Fellows, with the support of the LA Philharmonic, the Longy School of Music, and the network of El Sistema-inspired U.S. nucleos, began the process of contacting every program in the U.S. with the goal of learning about the successes and needs of each. The project results will include the first estimates of the number of children being served by El Sistema in the U.S., a new, enhanced Nucleo Network List, and an identification of the challenges programs face nationwide in the hope that, collectively, we may develop strategies and materials to help address them. The findings will be reported in Los Angeles at the Take a Stand Symposium in January 2012, and a report will be made available to every nucleo in the United States immediately thereafter.

Immediately after initiating this effort to understand and listen to the field, the Fellows departed Boston in late October on internships throughout the U.S. and the world. This year the Fellows worked with 15 programs in the U.S., one in Scotland, and four in Costa Rica. Additionally, several Fellows opened conversations with the broader arts learning community through meetings with the NEA, the National Association for Music Education (formerly MENC), the League of American Orchestras, Arts Education Partnership, the National Guild, and the Organization of American States. Stay tuned for stories, data, and resources from the field in the coming months.

---

**Subscription Information**

To ADD or DELETE names in the free subscription list for The Ensemble, send an email with instructions to: TheEnsembleNL@gmail.com

---

“I asked Venezuelan colleagues what to look for in my teachers, and they said ‘the spark, the passion, and you’ll know it right away.’” - Anne Fitzgibbon, Founder/Director of The Harmony Program, New York