

# SISTEMA MAGAZINE

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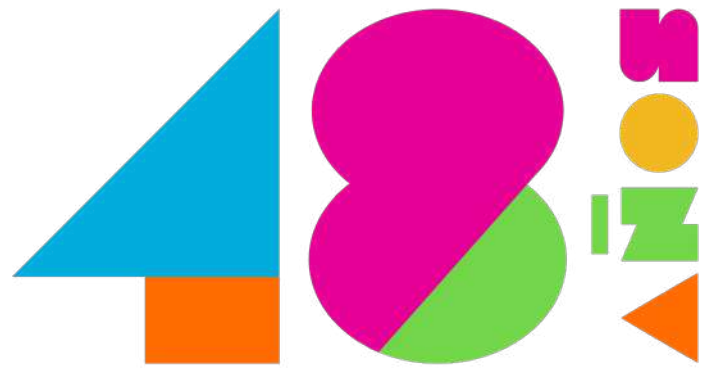
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## II WORLD CONGRESS OF EL SISTEMA

Volume I





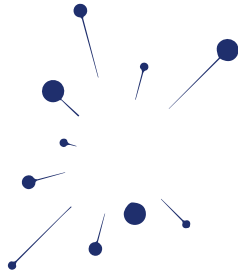
EL SISTEMA

MÚSICA PARA TODOS



# EL SISTEMA

MÚSICA PARA TODOS



CENTRO DE INVESTIGACIÓN  
Y DOCUMENTACIÓN  
DE EL SISTEMA



II WORLD  
CONGRESS OF  
EL SISTEMA



# SISTEMA MAGAZINE

**National System of Orchestras,  
Youth and Children's Orchestras  
and Choirs of Venezuela**

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# Summary

## Papers Academic Topic

PRESENTATION  
**Eduardo Méndez**

**Enrique Márquez** 14  
Ethics, Aesthetics, and Education

**Karen Cueva** 19  
Transformation Through Music and  
Community

**Thibault Vieux** 24  
Technique, Musicality and Presence

**Xavier Bouvier** 27  
Music Projects with Social and Cultural  
Dimensions in the Middle East and Central Asia

**Mark Churchill** 31  
The Beginnings Of Organization And  
Leadership Training In The United States

**Andrés David Ascanio** 35  
The Collective Practice Of Music





# Summary

## Papers Social Topic

**María Guerrero**

**44**

Spiritual Wealth Overcomes Material Poverty

**Stanford Thompson**

**59**

Fifteen Years of Transcribing U.S. Leadership Philosophy

**José R. Espinoza**

**50**

One Million Hearts For The Rights Of Children And Adolescents

**Luis Velásquez**

**63**

A Social Strategy for the Rescue of Vulnerable Groups

**Xiomara Alemán**

**54**

Impact Evaluation of El Sistema



# Presentation

*"It is my most passionate dream that El Sistema interconnects the countries of the world, thus constituting the Global Sistema... The most glorious emblem of the culture of peace."*

José Antonio Abreu.

The second edition of the International World Congress of El Sistema was held to honor the contributions of Maestro José Antonio Abreu Anselmi. His comprehensive and extensive vision encompassed the realms of social, musical, and educational welfare, propelling over 70 nations across the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Oceania to devise musical and orchestral programs modeled after El Sistema's formative paradigm. These initiatives were designed to transform the lives of children, youth, families, and communities through the pedagogy and collective engagement in music. In the context of post-pandemic recovery and with a focus on the future, the global community is confronted with the imperative of cultivating conducive environments for the attraction of talent. In this regard, the II World Congress emerged as a pivotal venue for the exchange of academic experiences and the interpretation of the diverse perspectives and methodologies that contribute to the development of educational models inspired by El Sistema.

The II World Congress of El Sistema convened representatives from 44 countries across five continents, showcasing 88 experiences drawing inspiration from the Venezuelan program. The event also featured the participation of three international organizations: UNICEF, UNITAR, and UNESCO. A significant highlight of the congress was the signing of Agreements of Understanding by over 60 programs inspired by El Sistema, aiming to establish institutional links. These agreements signaled a collective commitment to the pursuit of universal and inclusive access to quality music education. The underlying philosophy emphasizes collaborative learning of music, fostering values of teamwork, and the development of socio-musical intervention initiatives. From September 18 to September 23, 2023, a comprehensive academic program was conducted, encompassing lectures, workshops, academic exchanges, visits to Núcleo, and other activities.

During this program, participants engaged in an immersive experience, acquiring knowledge about the 12 programs developed by El Sistema; the scope of the Núcleo and modules; the artistic level of the professional orchestras and choirs, as well as the methodology used to provide musical education to more than one million Venezuelan students who are currently part of El Sistema in Venezuela. A notable highlight of this event was the debut of the World Orchestra and Choir El Sistema (OCMES), which was held in honor of Maestro Abreu in the fifth year of his physical disappearance. This event served as a tribute to Maestro Abreu and symbolized the aspiration to advance towards the realization of the El Sistema Mundial de Orquestas y Coros (The World System of Orchestras and Choirs).

The OCME represented the most outstanding multicultural expression at the international level. Integrated by musicians between the ages of 16 and 30. The symbol of their union, fraternity, and solidarity became a symbol of the shared commitment between countries to cooperate, educate, and promote the arts in global times. The reflection, diffusion, and dissemination of academic, artistic, organizational, social, and cultural knowledge; as well as the interpretation of the philosophical, methodological, and axiological referents around the inspired programs, made it possible to articulate thematic routes in the academic, social, research, organizational, and artistic spheres addressed by 21 speakers.

The Proceedings of the II World Congress El Sistema allow us to recognize "the intangible" of musical practice in the highly tangible and instrumental results from the perspective of ethics and aesthetics of education and the various initiatives that support community partner organizations to ensure equitable access to music education programs. Furthermore, the characterizations of the dynamics of the Núcleos through ethnographic perspectives, intuition, and the guataca as new research tools have facilitated the analysis of the methodology of El Sistema in diverse epistemic relationships.

The present study aims to explore the correlation between techniques, musicality, and the presence of interpretative and stylistic elements of symphonic repertoires. It also seeks to examine the underlying values of a spiritual nature, the integration of young people from different cultures to the collective practice of music, the experience of refugees, and the practice of improvisation in academic training from the intercultural approach. Ultimately, the study will observe the impact of new ways of conceiving music as an instance of musical and artistic sensitivity. Conversely, the constant transformation that emerges through the collective practice of music in the so-called culture of adaptability makes the nucleus visible as a space for development and happiness.

From this perspective, the interplay among analytical units—comprising social, cultural, musical, and educational dimensions—emerges as a critical lens for interpreting the meanings of El Sistema. This interpretive framework elucidates concertation as a social strategy, instrumental in the formulation and realization of development objectives within a flexible framework. It underscores the capacity to translate the socio-educational and aesthetic signals inherent within the artistic process, thereby fostering a comprehensive understanding of its nuances and implications.

These subjects, among others, were addressed during the four-day presentations by international and national experts at the II Congress. To disseminate the results of this invaluable experience and its impact on the various communities of the participating nations, the Memoirs of the II World Congress El Sistema, Volumes I and II, are hereby shared. The objective is twofold: first, to facilitate a more profound comprehension of the significance of arts education as a domain of opportunity for human development and societal advancement; and second, to serve as an educational resource for the next generation of trainers, musicians, and leaders of El Sistema and its affiliated programs.

This publication serves as an educational resource for emerging generations of trainers, musicians, and leaders of El Sistema and its affiliated programs. It is also a valuable resource for individuals seeking to learn from an intersubjective perspective about the successful experiences of El Sistema as a social program and as an exemplary educational practice. In this vein, the memoirs offer a reflection on the "II World Congress El Sistema" manifesto, emphasizing the importance of a profound examination of socio-musical practices through a pluricultural lens. This examination unveils the intricate web of continuous and disruptive global transformations, facilitating the acquisition and re-evaluation of tools for comprehending the phenomenon of social action through music.





II CONGRESO  
MUNDIAL  
EL SISTEMA



# Academic Topic



II CONGRESO  
MUNDIAL  
EL SISTEMA



II CONGRESO  
MUNDIAL  
EL SISTEMA

# Enrique Márquez



(Member of the  
*Advisory Council of the  
Global Leaders Institute*)

A leader in the arts based in New York, Márquez has experience in a variety of fields, including the performing arts, arts administration, educational leadership, public policy, and administration. He currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Global Leaders Institute. Most recently, Márquez served as Assistant Dean of Youth Programs and Director of Precollege at the Manhattan School of Music, and as Director of Music at the Interlochen Center for the Arts. He has also served as Events Manager for the Department of Music at Harvard University, where he was a trustee of the Fromm Music Foundation, which has commissioned over 400 new compositions. Furthermore, Márquez has engaged in active collaboration with a variety of musical institutions, including Tanglewood, the American Composers Orchestra, the American Academy in Rome, and Sony Classical, among others. In addition, as the Director General of the Veracruz Cultural Institute in Mexico, he spearheaded the establishment of a statewide youth orchestra in collaboration with El Sistema Venezuela. This initiative also involved the development of the inaugural Encounter of the Arts in Veracruz. In collaboration with the British Council, the Performing Arts program was established. Márquez's professional background includes serving as the inaugural Executive and Artistic Director of the Boca del Rio Philharmonic Orchestra. In this capacity, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of Orchestrated harmony, an after-school program encompassing an orchestra and a choir, catering to 350 economically disadvantaged children. Furthermore, Márquez's contributions were instrumental in the conceptualization of the award-winning Boca Forum. An experienced violist, Marquez has performed in more than 25 countries under the baton of renowned conductors Gustavo Dudamel, Kurt Masur, Lorin Maazel, and Leonard Slatkin. He served as principal violist of the Orchestra of the Americas and Jeunesses Musicales World Orchestra. Márquez also performed extensively as a musician in New York City, where he made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2005. He was recently selected as a member of the Sphinx LEAD Program. Márquez holds academic degrees in music performance from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University and the Manhattan School of Music, a master's degree in cultural policy and management from City, University of London, and a master of arts in education from Harvard University.

# Ethics, Aesthetics and Education: Pillars of the Integral Development of Young People Through Musical Education.

**I**n this presentation entitled Ethics, Aesthetics and Education: Pillars of the Integral Development of Young People through Music Education, I will provide definitions, a brief philosophical context, case studies, and the conclusions regarding the question: Why is learning to play an instrument, sing and be part of an ensemble so effective for the human, spiritual and social development of young people? It is answered by a positive answer since several studies certainly confirm it. In fact, we all here today know firsthand that this effectiveness is an undeniable reality. This is why we are gathered here.

In my own experience working with El Sistema inspired music education programs in Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, England, and the United States, I have found strong common denominators that indicate that our work as teachers rise above any other discipline or practice. First, it is necessary to address the specific study, technical of the voice or any instrument. Once considerable skill is established, the search for beauty through sound begins, by reflecting about the possibility to conceive it as sublime as possible. This process takes years and never really ends.

On the other hand, the musical education of young people is one of the noblest achievements, because along with the orchestral, choral or ensemble practice, one can glimpse the field of aesthetic and ethical values that serve as a guide in the work we carry out every day in the classroom, in the núcleo, in the concert hall: the training of citizens with principles that could be conscious, and above all, they could feel fulfilled. This preamble serves as a prelude to the three pillars of musical education that I would like to share with you today. I am referring to Ethics, Aesthetics, and Education. Let us first look at the definition of these words in the Cambridge Dictionary.

In the above source, we find that Ethics is "the set of moral principles that rule the conduct of a person or an activity"; also, "the branch of knowledge that deals with moral principles". Similarly, the aforementioned dictionary states that "aesthetics" is both "the set of principles relating to nature and to the appreciation of beauty, especially in Art" and also as "the branch of philosophy dealing with the principles of beauty and artistic taste. While "education" is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, as "the process of receiving or imparting systematic instruction, especially in a school or university.

Therefore, each of these three words is in itself fundamental and extremely profound; but each one of them independently does not achieve a transcendental projection in the life of human beings. I believe that the axiom coined by Aristotle, "the whole is more than the sum of its parts", applies to the triumvirate of Education, Aesthetics and Ethics; triumvirate that allows the formation of citizens who can count with tools to live a full, dignified and, above all, happy life. Musical education, like few other human activities, combines these three elements (Ethics, Aesthetics and Education) and promotes them in the most accessible, sophisticated and humane way. The above trilogy is considered as a pillar of our daily work. Given the frequency of our interaction with music education, it is possible to eventually lose sight of the importance of classroom and rehearsal activities.

#### **Philosophical context:**

Properly documented music education for children and youth dates back to the time of the classical Greek philosophers. Due to the Greek thought and Roman political structures that continue to influence today's social, political, and academic structures, it is important to highlight Plato and Boethius who provide examples of the importance of music education in their texts.

Plato states that "musical education is the most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the deepest part of the soul and cling to it more strongly to bring and transmit grace, if one is well trained; otherwise, the opposite". This quote is particularly relevant. Plato emphasizes that the student must be "well trained," and this training, in turn, is directly related to pedagogical didactics in order to truly reap the benefits of musical training. A proper academic path from the beginning of a child's education is of paramount importance, as this will give the child a full musical experience and allow him/her to be exposed to meaningful socio-musical experiences.

Plato adds another layer of usefulness to Music Education by saying that Music "by analogous methods inculcates self-control and restrains the youngsters from doing evil," which is interpreted as an ethical and moral sense. This quote shows how Education and the Aesthetic sense, like few other disciplines, can inculcate a high sense of Ethics. From the immaterial which comes from the musical practice, we can observe very tangible and instrumental results that are obtained, and have been measured by our colleagues at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and other multinational institutions.

On the other hand, Boethius, a Roman senator and philosopher, agrees with Plato about the ethical effects of musical training on young minds. Boethius mentions that "there is no greater way for the instruction reaches the mind than through hearing. Therefore, when rhythms and modes enter to the mind in this way, there can be no doubt that they influence and shape the mind according to their own character". Martin Luther goes a step further and demands that musical education should be part of the school curriculum, agreeing with Plato and Boethius when he states that "the young should be constantly practicing this Art [Music]; it makes them good and skillful people". In this sense, this summary of philosophical thought gives us a glimpse of the broad scope of the work we are all doing here, thanks to the influence and example of El Sistema in our countries.

#### **Study cases**

In the following part, I am going to present three cases of study to show the evidence of this thesis that is applied in a practical and daily sense:

#### **MESDA Group: Haiti and Dominican Republic**

While pursuing my Master's degree at Harvard University, I had the privilege of founding the MESDA Group. Fellow musicians and educators worked with social development programs through music education in Latin America. I will



mention the specific case of the Binational Youth Orchestra of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This cultural diplomatic initiative proved once again that musical practice, in this education case had an instrumental function: to engage in binational dialogue. Through appropriate academic profiles, appropriate rehearsal dynamics, and strategic assignment of parts to students, the search for aesthetic meaning fostered binational community.

### **Orchestrating Harmony: Boca del Río, Mexico**

As Executive and Artistic Director of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Boca del Río, Mexico, I was able to create the Orchestrating Harmony program. This extracurricular initiative includes orchestra and choir practice for 350 children, and is taught every afternoon for three hours. However, I have learned over the years to recognize the limitations we have, though, I have sought the advice and support of El Sistema experts in any socio-musical work I have undertaken. In this case, the Ethics we talked about was applied to me and the team I was leading. Therefore, it was necessary to be aware of how appropriate was to seek support of people with more experience and training to ensure that a program of the magnitude of Orchestrating Harmony would have the best curricular and pedagogical foundations.

In order to achieve such mastery, an official collaboration agreement was signed with El Sistema. We relied on expert Venezuelan teachers to launch this great program inspired by El Sistema. The presence of these esteemed colleagues, along with their profound knowledge of musical didactics, academic pathways, and curricular adaptation, provided to the Mexican musicians and teachers a very solid base of socio-musical experience and allowed them to raise their consciousness by exposing them to the highest levels of experience of Latin American and Venezuelan colleagues. This linkage also helped us to achieve a high level of commitment from the local teachers, who very quickly

realized the magnitude of their pedagogical work and the positive social consequences. In this way, we were able to provide a catalytic experience for the young students in the program.

### **3. New York: MSM Summer, Harmony Program, UCMP, Bloomingdale MAP**

As director of MSM Summer, the Manhattan School of Music's pre-college summer program, I worked to establish connections with El Sistema-inspired programs in New York City in order that their students could participate in the summer camp and the orchestra program would be truly representative of the city's children and youth as well. Through personal and institutional contacts, students from the Harmony Program, the United Children Music Project, and the Bloomingdale MAP received full scholarships to participate in the MSM summer program. One of the goals was for children from El Sistema programs in New York to bond with each other and develop a sense of civic belonging, through orchestral practice and training. Under the conduction of Venezuelan violinist Samuel Marchan, the selection of appropriate repertoire and intensive workshop work created a dynamic of excellence that culminated in a beautiful orchestral experience, with a sense of brotherhood and goodwill among the young musicians.

## Conclusions

Furthermore, I have tried to show how education, ethics, and aesthetics serve as pillars for the development of citizenship through music education, by using concrete examples, a philosophical account, and an exposition of motives. Thanks to the example, vision and leadership of Maestro José Antonio Abreu, El Sistema has achieved the greatest expansion of music education in the world today, transforming the lives of millions of children and young people around the world and inspiring us to work every day for music education. I conclude this presentation with a quote from Maestro Abreu: "Music profoundly transforms the child's psyche because it opens his intellect and sensitivity to an explicit horizon. Music sows values in the soul of the child. It teaches him to appreciate beauty and nobility, and therein lies the germ of what will later become aesthetic values, which are then translated into ethical values".

Thank you!



# Enrique Márquez

# Karen Cueva



*(Associate Director of Learning and Engagement, Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall)*

Karen Cueva is a Peruvian-American violinist, educator, and arts administrator. In 2015, Karen co-founded the Du Bois Orchestra, a Boston-based orchestra that sought to amplify the orchestral repertoire by performing works of underrepresented composers. Passionate about ensuring that young people have equitable access to high-quality music education, Karen currently serves as the Assistant Director of Learning and Engagement Programs at the Weill Music Institute of Carnegie Hall. There, she oversees the professional development of music educators in public schools and community music education programs across the country.

She is also a Knowledge and Strategy Associate at The Lewis Prize for Music, which partners with leaders who create positive changes in their communities by investing in youth through music. Karen enthusiastically supports The Dream Unfinished and believes in the urgency of addressing systemic inequity and fighting for social and racial justice. Karen holds degrees from the Juilliard School and Harvard University.

# Transformation through Music and Community: Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute Education Impact of Social Programs

**A**s Director of Learning and Engagement Programs at Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, I have spent the past seven years working with music educators and teaching artists in schools and community music programs to create professional development learning opportunities in New York City and across the United States. On a personal level, this meeting represents a full circle of joy for me, as I witnessed the power of El Sistema firsthand when, as a sixteen-year-old violinist in Boston, Massachusetts, I attended a concert of the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra on tour in 2007. At the last minute, two hours before the performance, a classmate gave me a ticket to the concert at Symphony Hall.

The Weill Music Institute (WMI) is the educational arm of Carnegie Hall. We have a wide range of programs that encompass both our artist training programs - national youth ensembles and master classes; our social impact programs, which work with individuals and families in hospitals, courthouses, and homeless shelters; and our learning and engagement programs, which serve our school, fellow orchestra members, and faculty. Locally, our programs, both in the classroom and in the local New York Community, serve over sixty-eight thousand students and four hundred music teachers. This season, four hundred and ninety schools, select venues, galleries, various organizations, and other sites host WMI programs.

Across the country, more than eight hundred thousand students, teachers, and people of all ages participate in WMI programs in their communities. And virtually, our online curricula, resources, and videos have received more than two and a half million hits through our website. At WMI, our work is guided by three core values: community, art, and justice. These values were chosen by our staff through a year-long series of meetings in which we discussed which values best reflected the environments we seek to create through our programming.

We know that we have a large staff to do a large amount of work, and over time we have learned that the long-term work that seeks to transform relationships must be driven from within the institution, outward to our partnerships, but nurtured by the experiences of our participants.

In addition, our Music Educators Workshop is a community of more than 120 teachers who work in New York City schools and communities with students in grades one through five. From September through June, New York City teachers at all stages of their careers have the opportunity to participate in workshops with visiting faculty, learn from professional artists through our Meet the Artist series (which featured Maestro Dudamel last season), and attend concerts at Carnegie Hall. In addition, each July, an additional one hundred and fifty teachers participate in our national Music Educators Summer Workshop program for four days of intensive workshops focused on instruction and classroom strategies.

In addition to supporting teachers' classroom practice, it is very important to us that teachers are seen and recognized as performing artists as well as classroom educators. As such, each group of teachers can choose to join a choir, jazz ensemble, string ensemble, or creative ensemble to prepare for a performance in Zankel Hall at the end of the school year.

Seeing these teachers celebrated by their students, friends, and family is an incredible way to affirm that this community extends beyond the confines of their classrooms. PlayUSA is a program that supports community partner organizations across the country to ensure equitable access to instrumental music education programs. PlayUSA serves students in grades one through five. Partners receive a total of five hundred thousand dollars in grants, but in addition to this financial support, our partners join a national network of innovative organizations committed to providing transformative music education opportunities for youth across the country.

Through PlayUSA, partner organizations receive mentoring from Carnegie Hall staff, professional development for teachers, and virtual engagement with their cohorts. In addition, PlayUSA visits partner organizations to provide them with the opportunity to build a partnership in their city and help them understand the complexities of what makes a program unique and work for the needs of their community.

In both our Music Educators Workshop and PlayUSA communities, one resource that has become a mainstay of our conversations about teaching practice is the Great Music framework. It is a framework that was developed five years ago out of conversations with teaching artists in our WMI programs. We wanted to understand the momentum that exists in a thriving classroom when great music instruction is taking place; building on this concern, we asked teachers what music instruction in this space looks, feels, and sounds like.

Here's what some of our teachers said: "It's amazing to see them [the students] debating the merits of different dynamics in Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, and then asking the teacher to let them listen to the work again to hear how that section resolves" (Briony). "Good music education responds to students' stories. It allows compassion to take the baton and guide students to make their voices heard. Depending on how students respond to music education, they will be able to enrich and uplift their communities with their art." (Graham)

Finally, seven themes emerged from conversations with educators across the country: agency, artistry, intention, inquiry, inspiration, compassion, and expression. These themes and their manifestations in the classroom are explored in more detail in audio-visual format on our website. We see the Great Music Framework as a dynamic framework and would like to see it evolve as we connect with more educators. Also, in the short time I have left, I would like to share the scope of some of our other impactful programs taking place in our local New

The Lullaby Project brings together new and expectant parents and caregivers with professional artists so that, through these encounters, they can write and sing personal lullabies for their babies. This supports maternal health, aids child development and strengthens the bond between parent and child. In New York, Project Lullaby reaches out to parents in health care settings; homeless people living in shelters; high schools; and correctional facilities.

The process of creating a lullaby often begins with the following exercise: first the child's parent or caregiver writes a letter; then themes or rhythms are drawn from the text of the letter to which instrumentation is added; and finally, when the song is recorded, parents, caregivers or the entire family are invited to join in musically.

The development of the melody is a key part of the lullaby writing process because, although it is often thought that parents do not actually write the lullaby, in reality they do. The Lullaby Project now has over fifty national and international partners and a repertoire of lullabies that have been written all over the world. Some of our favorite lullabies are on an album entitled "Hopes and Dreams".

Another program with a significant social impact is Musical Connections, which invites the men of Sing Correctional Center to create and perform music with the support of guest artists. After a series of workshops focused on developing compositional, arranging, instrumental and vocal skills, concerts of original works created by members of the Correctional Center are performed for the enjoyment of residents, staff and family members. We have been working at Sing Correctional Center for more than twelve years, and the program has evolved significantly during that time through the collaborative participation of the men, artists, and teachers involved in this administration.

Musical Connections participants continue to meet regularly after leaving Sing Correctional Center and have formed an advisory committee to support each other, learn about program design, and continue to make music with the help of the program's teaching artists. Their compositions can also be found on our website.

It should be noted that this is not the full work of the Weill Music Institute, but it shares some of our priorities in making Carnegie Hall a maker institution for programming that serves participants on-site, in our Resnick Education Wing, as well as off-site in schools and courthouses, and in places where music has the opportunity to be, perhaps especially, a catalyst for growth and development. We welcome everyone to visit our work and look forward to building relationships here at the El Sistema International Congress that will further enhance our collective efforts to transform society through music.



# Karen Cueva

# Thibault Vieux



(Violinist at the Paris Opera)

Thibault Vieux was born in Lyon and began his musical studies at the CRR in Lyon (Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Lyon/The Regional Conservatory of Lyon). Admitted at the age of 16 to the Conservatoire National Supérieur Musique et Danse de Paris (CNSM), he pursued his studies there under the tutelage of Jean Lénert, Jacques Ghestem, Pierre Doukan, and Bruno Pasquier. His academic achievements include being awarded first prizes in both violin and chamber music. Consequently, he was admitted to the violin improvement cycle, violin solo class, and musical analysis. Invited to study in the United States by Eduard Schmieder, a student of David Oistrakh, Vieux obtained an "Artist Diploma" in 1992 from Southern Methodist University of Dallas and subsequently a "Master of Music" in 1994. His accolades also include first prizes at international competitions in Paris, Geneva, and Murcia, as well as the Fondation pour la Vocation award and the Prix de l'Académie Maurice Ravel in 1997. Yehudi Menuhin regarded him as "an excellent violinist, with an exquisite musical taste." He participated in the recording of Poulenc's complete chamber music with Alexandre Tharaud on Naxos (Choc du Monde de la Musique, May 1999/ Shock of the World of Music). He has performed as a soloist with a variety of orchestras, including the Orchestre de Picardie, the Orchestre des Pays de la Loire, and the Orchestre Simon Bolivar de Venezuela. He has also been regularly invited by the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Bruxelles, and the Orchestre de l'Opéra de Lyon. Demonstrating a commitment to diversifying his musical repertoire, Thibault Vieux engaged in baroque violin studies with Patrick Bismuth at the CRR in Versailles from 2005 to 2008, concurrently pursuing his roles as a performer and educator. In 1998, he joined the Orchestre de l'Opéra de Paris, currently under the direction of Gustavo Dudamel, and has served as its third violin soloist since 2007. He performs on a violin crafted by Joseph Gagliano in 1768. He is frequently invited to deliver masterclasses as part of El Sistema in Venezuela, and he is on the faculty at the CRR in Paris and serves as an assistant professor at the CNSM(National Superior Conservatory of Music) in Paris.

# Technique, Musicality and Presence

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hat I am going to try to offer you today is a perspective on European criteria, a set of concepts that are important when you finish your studies within an institution and start a professional life on your own. I have exchanged ideas with the founding members of El Sistema, with professors, with different teachers and collaborators, and I have realized that we all have a common goal: to continue to improve ourselves and each other, and above all, to make the students the best they can be, as individuals and as part of a team.

It is a kind of pyramid that goes from initiation, when you are a child, to the highest level, when you are a young person.

I very much regret that the main difference between El Sistema and the European criterion is that we, in conservatory-type educational structures, tend to throw out, to expel the weakest and the slowest. Therefore, our pyramidal system is based on elimination and therefore on frustration. El Sistema, on the other hand, is universal, it is designed for each and every child, and at the same time, talent and/or motivation can be identified, nurtured and guided to higher levels.

After a conversation I had several years ago with my friend José Ángel Salazar Marin, conductor of the orchestra, I realized that we both agreed that our pyramids and those of El Sistema are very similar in shape, from the basic initiation to the top; and the level of demand is also very close. However, last year, when I was invited to be a member of the jury of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra, I discussed the selection criteria with some colleagues from Europe, and I must confess that they were puzzled by the evaluation criteria. They were technique, musicality and presence. Therefore, based on this triad, I will present to you the structure of my intervention.

Most of the students I have met, listened to, and followed over the years show a very solid technical foundation. However, I have a general feeling that, beyond the first impression, things could and should be taken to a higher level. I will try not to focus only on individual intonations,<sup>1</sup> but we can blame the French artistic obsession with cleanliness in detail, whether in Impressionist painting, classical dance or music.



On the other hand, the second technical point I would like to emphasize is the production of sounds. There is a whole universe of sounds, not only the rich, full, intense and dramatic ones, but also those that go from soft to strong, from sweet to sour, from simple to rich, from transparent to almost saturated. Coming from a wine-growing area and having a family of winemakers, I have learned that wine tasting is done on a scale from zero to ten: from acidic to basic, from watery to very alcoholic, from a discreet taste to a full taste. In this sense, I would like to encourage you to imagine similar scales in terms of sound production, always seeking, as a kind of metaphor, a greater variety in the production of sound.

Also on the subject of technique, I would like to tell an anecdote about having the good fortune to meet Yehudi Menuhin, one of the greatest violinists of the 20th century, who taught me that "70% of the musical creation on the violin comes from the right arm". In this sense, the technique of producing sound on any instrument, just as with the voice, must be brought to the highest possible level for musical purposes. For this reason, my belief, shared by many colleagues, is that imagination is a powerful tool for improvement, so that cultivating an "ideal intonation" and an "ideal variety of sounds" based on the inner ear is our equivalent of visualization. This is why my fellow dancers at the Paris Opera are trained to "visualize" a perfect version of their choreography, and after this visualization, they let their bodies bring it to life. I firmly believe that we must do the same: build a strong imaginary universe to make it happen in real life.

We have to realize that learning classical music is really learning romantic music. The codes, the filters that we use to produce music, are all Romantic. The tempered intonation, the nature of the sound, the phrasing, the dynamics, the articulations, everything points to the 19th century.

<sup>1</sup> **At the Paris Conservatory, I am known as the "Ayatollah of Intonation".**

For decades we have been playing all kinds of repertoire under these codes. It is clear that the students of El Sistema have a deep respect for their teacher, and the teacher, in turn, is faithful to his teacher. Oral transmission is a way of whispering a secret into someone's ear. But if you transmit that secret ten times in a row, the secret will have been transformed, distorted; this phenomenon applies in the same way to the teaching of music. I was born in 1970, which means that I knew musicians like Pierre Boulez, Luciano Berio, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Leonard Bernstein, among others. My French teacher was born in 1935, his in 1898. The transmission of the interpretation of Gustav Mahler, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel or Béla Bartók is quite direct.

But to go back to the classical or baroque period is another story: its codes have changed along the way. I was brought up to play everything in the same way, with the same codes. I would even say with the same program. But in the last thirty years, things have changed a lot from a musicological point of view. Let's take sound production as an example: a romantic sound is synonymous with a full, sustained sound, with constant vibrato. On the other hand, a beautiful baroque tone must have a birth, a life (or evolution) and a death. To appreciate an example of Baroque aesthetics, one might listen to the first fifty-three seconds of François Couperin's Royal Concerto No. 1, composed five years before Johann Sebastian Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin.

The huge aesthetic discrepancy between the Baroque and Romantic eras can be summarized in terms of codes or software. Nowadays, playing classical or baroque repertoire requires a minimum of "update" or, as they say in Spanish, *de actualización*. Musically speaking, this is a defect that I see in most of the students of El Sistema, they lack this update, and consequently they continue to use the romantic codes for any type of music. Regarding this appreciation, I want you to know that I am sympathetic because I had to do this update myself and I still have to correct some mistakes from my years of learning.

<sup>2</sup> **Royal Concert No. 1** [https://youtu.be/w\\_hizk4hqwQ?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/w_hizk4hqwQ?feature=shared)

Within this framework of examples, I would like you to appreciate four versions of the opening bars of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 3. I would like you to focus your attention on the musical message, on the energy that comes from the music.

The first example is from the sixties, it's full of romantic codes; let's appreciate the first thirty-six seconds.<sup>3</sup> The second example is recent, it's up to date; let's listen to the first twenty-eight seconds.<sup>4</sup> The third example is also recent, but almost out of date; it is played by the great stars Pinchas Zuckerman, Maksim Vengérov, Vadim Repin, Leónidas Kavakos, Misha Maiski, and others. I admire each of them as interpreters of 19th and 20th century music, but they have not made the update. Let's listen to the fourth, the first twenty-two seconds.<sup>5</sup> The last version is my favorite; it's performed by Reinart Goebel and the Concerto Köln; let's hear the first nineteen seconds.<sup>6</sup>

Now, I do not mean that we have to turn ourselves and the students into baroque musicians. What I mean is that the current classical and baroque repertoire requires a minimum of historical culture to avoid anachronism. Auditions for most orchestras in the world require this updating. Playing Bach or Mozart is usually required in the first round of auditions because this repertoire is a kind of x-ray of our abilities as instrumentalists and musicians. This reflection gives me the opportunity to move on to the third criterion: presence.

Some of my colleagues and I were very surprised by this notion of "presence", especially as seen in a video of an audition. Many orchestras in Europe have adopted the practice of preliminary auditions.

**3** <https://youtu.be/mB1M2HaEbI4?feature=shared>

**4** <https://youtu.be/qr0f6t2UbOo?feature=shared>

**5** <https://youtu.be/fMm2bShS2cY?feature=shared>

**6** <https://youtu.be/20tau1ngCtY?feature=shared>

This is done behind a screen to avoid any kind of pressure from one judge on the others. Presence can be our weak point, because we often see it as a godsend, when it can and should be developed as a powerful tool for making music. In this regard, I am surprised at how little chamber music is taught in your programs. In my opinion, playing chamber music is a great way to express one's artistic feeling and at the same time it is a way to learn to adapt to one's peers. In this work you learn to make compromises (sound, intonation, phrasing and style) to make the ensemble work. But the goal is to merge musically with your colleagues.

I see chamber music as a middle ground between orchestra and solo performance. For my part, I have learned to embrace artistic presence as part of my teaching, because it takes music-making to a whole new level for students, colleagues, and most importantly, the audience.

Finally, I would like to share with you my absolute admiration for Maestro José Antonio Abreu for his relentless pursuit of humanity and perfection at the same time. I would have loved to have met him, but I know that he is still alive through each of us here and through many other people. We are his legacy and he is watching over us.

# Xavier Bouvier



(Ordinary  
Professor at HES)

He has been awarded a Composition Prize and a Diploma in Musical Culture from the Geneva Conservatory of Music. Following a two-year program of study in mathematics at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, he elected to pursue a career in music. At the Geneva Conservatory of Music, he has held several positions, including professor of counterpoint and musical analysis, head of the library, and, since 2001, vice-dean of the directorate. From 2009 to 2018, he served as the teaching coordinator at the University of Music of Geneva. Currently, he holds the position of regular professor at the HES (Haute École Spécialisée/ University of Applied Sciences), serves on the board of trustees, is the head of the HEM (Haute Étude de Musique/Higher Education of Music) of the Master in ethnomusicology, and acts as a project manager. In addition to various special projects, the mandate of the aforementioned individual includes representing the institution on the HES-SO Domain Council for Music and Performing Arts and on the HES-SO (Haute École Spécialisée)-(Suisse Occidentale/Western Switzerland) Teaching Council by delegation of the Head of Domain. Xavier Bouvier, former director of the Bologna group of the Swiss Conference of Colleges of Music, has been a member since January 2019 of the Swiss Accreditation Council, a joint body of the Confederation and the cantons for accreditation and quality control in the Swiss landscape. Institute. A specialist in music theory from a Western perspective and beyond, Xavier Bouvier has been conducting various courses in the field of ethnomusicology. He carries out various research projects, focusing on 18th-century music theory, the question of musical cultures, cultural diplomacy, and even comparative education. He is an active participant in conferences and congresses in Europe and Asia.

# Music Projects with Social and Cultural Dimensions in The Middle East and Central Asia

**O**n several occasions, Maestro José Antonio Abreu has mentioned the fundamental values of El Sistema, emphasizing those of a spiritual nature. In my reading of Maestro Abreu's thoughts, I believe that this spiritual dimension has something universal about it, that it transcends borders and musical styles, while its practical realization takes into account the specificity and diversity of musical cultures. Undoubtedly, the symphonic practice of the great works of Western classical music seemed ideal for Maestro Abreu to develop this collective project with ambitions of excellence; but it is no less certain that he placed artistic culture at the center of his project, for which he maintained that culture "constitutes the order par excellence to forge our physiognomy as a people, to delve into the historical gesture of our identity (...)". (José Antonio Abreu).

We can say that Maestro Abreu's love for his own culture is manifested when he affirms that Latin Caribbean culture presents itself with greater coherence and expressive uniqueness than that of any other continent or region of the world. I believe that this question of cultures and their diversity has run through my own career. My institution, La Haute école de Musique de Genève, is anchored in the tradition of European classical music, but in the last fifteen years it has opened itself to practices from other cultural epochs. I have had the opportunity to travel extensively; and I would like to testify to several music education systems that I have been able to visit and with which my institution, the Haute école de Musique de Genève, has established collaborations. Like El Sistema, each of these projects that we have approached from my institution has a social dimension and contributes to the preservation of traditional repertoires of high spiritual and artistic value, ranging from classical Arabic, Persian and Indian music to the music of the nomadic societies of Central Asia.

Among these projects, the first example I would like to mention is the Action for Hope program, which is implemented in Lebanon and Jordan. Action for Hope is supported by several organizations; one of them is Al Mawred Al Thaqafy, which is one of the most important Arab cultural organizations. This program targets underprivileged children from refugee communities, mainly Palestinians and Syrians. Through conversations with its founder, Basma El Husseini, I learned that the program was conceived as a music school with a two-year curriculum; its purpose was to provide children from very low-income families with a background that would enable them to earn money through music. This characteristic of Action for Hope is far from what my school proposes, since in this school the training program lasts between five and seven years and has no guarantee of professional integration.

On the other hand, candidates do not have to be able to play an instrument to join the Action for Hope program, but they must have a connection to music, such as singing. The young students are considered "young talents" and receive a salary of thirty dollars a month, which is significant for their families. Finally, the school, i.e. the Action for Hope program, includes a music section, a film section, and a school that trains children to make Arabic instruments such as the oud.<sup>1</sup>

The Al Darb Al Ahmar School of Arts is located in one of the most underprivileged areas of Cairo, although it is a cultural and historical center of the city and has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

About the school, we can say that it was founded in 2011 and is part of the Aga Khan Development Network, a very large organization, of global importance and active in many fields. The uniqueness of this school is that it is integrated into a holistic development project that benefits the entire neighborhood. The project includes, among other things, the restoration of monuments, the revaluation of local handicrafts and micro-banking.

**<sup>1</sup> At this link you can watch a video that summarizes some of the work of Action for Hope.**

Like the Action for Hope project, the Al Darb Al Ahmar School of Arts aims to train underprivileged youth through short programs that will enable them to obtain the license issued by the Egyptian Musicians Syndicate. Several wind instrument students from the Haute école de Musique in Geneva have taught at this school in recent years.<sup>2</sup>

The Ustatshakirt Center in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, is a non-governmental organization founded in 2003 with the support of the Aga Khan Music Program. It should be noted that Ustatshakirt is the Kyrgyz version of the Persian *ustod-shogird* and is an expression meaning teacher-pupil, a relationship that characterizes the traditional mode of transmission throughout Central Asia, not only for music, but also for many other applied arts and professions. The Ustatshakirt Center was founded and conceived by Raziya Syrdybaeva. In the course of our conversations, Raziya referred to me in particular to the situation of musical culture in Kyrgyzstan.

Ustatshakirt aims to restore a very specific tradition, a practice of traditional Kyrgyz music that has partly shamanic roots and does not use the *maqâm* system of other Central Asian traditions. The center's main program, *Umtul*, provides Kyrgyz arts education to elementary schools through classes and group ensembles on the *komuz*, a traditional stringed instrument. A complementary program, *Muzchyrak*, is aimed at the professional training of music teachers and the distribution of instruments.

It is worth considering that more than ten thousand students and six hundred teachers have been trained through this work program, and although it is not comparable to that of *El Sistema*, it represents a considerable development for Kyrgyzstan. The consistency, diligence, and ambition of Ustatshakirt and its team

of trainers are also impressive. The program has the potential to be sustainable and to become a national program.<sup>3</sup>

These three programs have similar characteristics in that they combine, to varying degrees, the social project and the project of preserving the local musical heritage.

<sup>2</sup> In this link you can watch a video summarizing the work of Al Darb Al Ahmar School of Arts.

<sup>3</sup> In the link you can watch a video that shows the work of Ustatshakirt Center.

For its part, the Haute école de Musique in Geneva has collaborated for many years with several social programs. These include the NEOJIBA system in Brazil, the Edward Said Conservatory in Palestine, and the RET International program in Mardin, Turkey. Students from the HEM, the Haute école de Musique de Genève, regularly travel to teach and share their instrumental skills and knowledge of the instrumental repertoire with the members of these structures.

In order to promote a more bilateral circulation of music, we decided to go one step further. To this end, we have asked the Edward Said Conservatory in Palestine to send its advanced students or young teachers playing instruments from the Arab tradition to our school in Geneva. Beyond the repertoire, these guest musicians have brought their excellence in ornamentation and improvisation, areas in which our classical students have limited skills. As a result, these exchanges have allowed the creation of an Oriental Ensemble within the HEM, which has been very successful with both students and audiences.

The results of this bilateral exchange allow us to observe that the teacher becomes a student of another tradition and the student becomes a teacher of his own tradition, a double role well identified by the UNESCO models of intercultural education. Our students and teachers, who are excellent classical musicians, find themselves in the position of being initiated into practices that they do not master and that are only partially transferable or reducible to an "international" culture of classical music. In this space of diversity, musical cultures (which, in the words of Maestro Abreu, "forge the physiognomies of peoples") enter into a rich dialogue, fertilizing each other and shaping new practices that we are just beginning to glimpse.



# Xavier Bouvier

# Mark Churchill



*(Cellist, Conductor, Educator,  
and Thinker)*

Dr. Mark Churchill has had the privilege of a long career as a cellist, conductor, educator, and innovative thinker. He is Dean Emeritus of New England Conservatory's Department of Preparatory and Adult Education, which he led for 31 years. Under his leadership, the Preparatory School became known as one of the best programs of its kind in the nation, emphasizing serious, professional training for pre-college students.

He established the School of Continuing Education (now Adult Education) and Department of Community Collaborations in addition to numerous community-based programs and local, national, and international partnerships, most notably NEC at Walnut Hill, the Orchestra of the Americas, Project STEP, and El Sistema USA and the Abreu Fellows Program at NEC. In 2021 El Sistema USA established the Mark Churchill Teacher of the Year Award to honor his legacy.

Mark is currently on the faculty of the NEC Preparatory School and has taught at major summer programs including the Heifetz Institute, Musicorda, Cremona International Music Festival, Foulger Institute, and Greenwood Music Camp.

As a cellist, he has appeared as soloist, recitalist, and chamber music player throughout the United States and on tours of South America. He has performed as soloist with the NEC Symphony and Youth Philharmonic Orchestra, Hartt Symphony Orchestra, Thayer Conservatory Orchestra, Symphony Pro Música, and Merrimack Symphony, among others. He has also appeared in Seoul, Hong Kong, and Taiwan with Trio Pro Música and on tours of New England and Brazil with Trio Pan Americano. In 2016 he was named Cellist of the Year by the Boston Cello Society and in 2005 awarded Harvard's prestigious Luise Vosgerchian Teaching Award.

Mark is widely known as a conductor in New England and abroad. He has been Music Director of Massachusetts-based Symphony Pro Música since 1982 and was Associate Conductor of the Boston Ballet from 1990 to 2012. He was also Resident Conductor of the Asian Youth Orchestra (1990–2001) and Conductor of the Thayer Symphony Orchestra (1976–1983) and the Salisbury Lyric Opera and Chamber Orchestra (1986–2005). Guest conducting engagements include Tokyo's Komaki Ballet, the National Ballet of Mongolia, and the New Zealand National Youth Orchestra.

Throughout his career, Mark has been an active advocate for the improvement and expansion of music education programs in American schools. In addition to El Sistema USA and Project STEP, a pre-professional support program for string students of color, he was a founding board member of the Conservatory Lab Charter School and the Berkshire Institute of Theology and the Arts. Churchill was married to violinist/educator and NEC faculty member, the late Marylou Speaker Churchill. His twin daughters, Emma and Julia were students of the NEC Preparatory School for 14 years before pursuing professional music studies in college.

# The Beginnings of Leadership Organization and Training The United States: The United States El Sistema and The Abreu Fellows Program



would like to talk about the beginnings of the El Sistema organization in the United States, the Abreu Fellows Program, and the El Sistema USA curriculum. I will briefly describe how this program was created, its models and values, and the organization that was based on the vision of networks in Venezuela and its programs.

First, I would like to recount some important events related to El Sistema. In the mid-1990s, I received a visit from the Venezuelan Maestro Igor Lanz, who was on a tour of the United States to present the work of Venezuela. His visit not only allowed me to see what was happening in Venezuela and to learn about the aspirations of El Sistema, but also had a great impact on me in terms of musical education and social development in general. After Maestro Lanz's visit, I attended a documentary in Boston called "Dream Orchestra" about El Sistema.

In that documentary, we could feel the same spirit that we feel today. At that time, the vision that we all had to take on was clear, because the mission was already born out of that calling. In terms of my own calling, and by that, I mean my own dreams, I could see that the music that I loved and that benefited me personally would also be accessible to everyone because it would be part of every child's life. From that moment on, I remember Maestro Lanz saying that "El Sistema is the realization of what we can all hope for".

In 1999, I was developing the Youth Orchestra of the Americas (YOA), and I knew that leadership had to be developed together with Latin America. At that time, I met Maestro José Antonio Abreu and immediately an agreement was made and accepted between the two Institutions. Later, in 2001, the Youth Orchestra of the Americas visited Venezuela, and from there the Later, in 2001, the Youth Orchestra of the Americas visited Venezuela and from that moment on, a personal bond began to develop.



After an hour-and-a-half concert by the two orchestras, the Youth Orchestra of the Americas and the Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, we announced the creation of the Orchestra of the Americas, with Maestro Abreu and myself as founders, to be conducted by Gustavo Dudamel.

Subsequently, Maestro José Antonio Abreu was awarded the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa, which led to a rapprochement between our Institutions and a recognition of the values that we would share in the years to come. These ties have allowed many exchanges, such as: the visit of professors to Venezuela to participate in seminars, or the visit of professors to North America to share their knowledge in our Institution.

It was with great conviction that we signed a friendship agreement in 2005 and began to work together that year. Later, the visit of Maestro Simon Rattle allowed us to tell the world that what was happening in Venezuela was the most important thing that was happening in the world of music. At that time, I presented to the Maestro the possibility of developing the concept of El Sistema in the United States, and he agreed with great enthusiasm.

In 2007, we made the first tour, which was very important for the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, and the first symposiums were held in Venezuela. The project was called "Venezuelan Educational Miracle"; it was without a doubt a work that gave El Sistema a lot of visibility in the United States, and also generated interest among people in the musical world in how to learn more about El Sistema and how to develop such "systems" in their own cities.

In 2008, at my suggestion, Maestro Abreu received the TED Award and the Make a Wish organization was invited to attend the ceremony. From that celebration, after much discussion and consideration, Maestro Abreu announced the creation of a special documentary program for fifty talented young musicians to help develop El Sistema in the United States and other

countries. The following year, a Memorandum of Understanding was written between Maestro Abreu and the NEC (New England Conservatoire) organization.

It was a very important year because not only did the training of the fifty young musicians begin, but also the introduction of El Sistema in the United States and the beginning of the network of El Sistema programs to provide the necessary education and training to the new núcleos and their new leaders.

In the years that followed, this work inspired many other musicians and the creation of other programs. In turn, El Sistema USA has become an independent and successful organization with nearly one hundred and fifty affiliates. At NEC, we made sure that these musicians became very successful musicians.

In the United States, other collective formation processes were also applied, called the Fundamental Elements of El Sistema. In this sense, it was known that El Sistema offered an intensive after-school music program and that, in addition to striving for excellence, it used certain resources but did not cost the students anything.

This knowledge allowed me to articulate the main values of this program, linked to dignity and contribution, because every child can learn to experience music in the deepest way; the most important thing is to develop in children the love for music. I thank Maestro Abreu for all that I have experienced and that I have been able to share in these lines; joy and music are a community that nourishes us as if we were children; they are the concept of being and doing.

In the same way, we have identified nine main aspects of El Sistema; I will not mention each one of them, but I will point out that its foundation lies in social change, in the fact that each child feels like an asset that develops a human bond. In order to include so many children who are trying to achieve musical excellence, it is

essential to create an enabling environment. This place is the Núcleos; it is the space where all children can thrive in their communities in an environment of joy, friendship, happiness and positivity. The Núcleo is a place that generates intense emotion, and for us that translates into profit, because it is there that deep affection and important human values are developed.

As far as the assemblies in the communities are concerned, we can see that there is a great and an excellent balance, between the achievement of the individual and the achievement of the group; because it is about involving everyone, students, administrators and teachers in a total curriculum. It is a program for different years and levels. It is also important to mention the participation of the family, which is essential for the achievement of the goals and which Maestro Abreu has often described as an important element in the development of the children in the Núcleos.

Finally, we must mention connections and networks. In this regard, it is important to note that Venezuelans are very emotionally connected in the most human way possible. We were inspired by this model and wanted to follow these ideals in the same way. As for the Abreu Fellows Program, I must point out that it was a seminar that took place from Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 17:00.

Within the activity we carried out in groups or individually, different topics related to music education were developed; we studied the mechanism to work on fundraising, board development, social dynamics, education in the city, and leadership training. Fortunately, throughout this multi-week activity, we also had the participation of many incredible people from the TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) community who in a very meaningful way dedicated themselves to learn the different topics in the different Núcleos I visited. For this reason, we will always be very grateful for the generosity of Maestro Abreu and all the Venezuelans who received us.

In this way, the leaders of El Sistema in the United States have not only been able to learn, but have also taken the Venezuelan values to use them to help young people in the United States. The young people in the USA program are committed to coming to Venezuela to learn directly from the most important work in the musical world. Thank you so much, Maestro Abreu and all those leaders who are dedicated to giving hope and helping all children reach their goals.



# Mark Churchill

# Andrés David Ascanio



He initiated his musical education at the age of 4 with piano lessons and subsequently enrolled in the Emil Friedman School, where at the age of 11 he began studying the trumpet. In 2000, following an audition, he was admitted to the Venezuelan National Children's Symphony Orchestra, with which he undertook tours to Germany, Austria, Italy, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and the United States, among other destinations. In 2004, he joined the trumpet section of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, with which he has performed under the direction of renowned maestros such as Claudio Abbado, Sir Simon Rattle, Lorin Maazel, and Gustavo Dudamel. These performances have taken place in a number of venues considered to be among the most prestigious on the international circuit, including the Berlin Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, Royal Albert Hall, Southbank Center, KKL Luzerne, Walt Disney Hall, and Teatro alla Scala de Milano. In addition to his performance activities, he has participated in a number of recordings released under the Deutsche Grammophon label. He is also a member of the Simón Bolívar Trumpet Ensemble, with which he has performed in a number of cities, including New York, Rome, Paris, Berlin, Athens, Valencia, Melk, Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Bogotá. In addition, he has accompanied maestros James Morrison, Eric Aubier, Thomas Gansch, and Alexander Baty. The Simón Bolívar Trumpet Ensemble is currently sponsored by the prestigious brand of musical instruments Schagerl. His pedagogical background includes studies with renowned maestros Jairo Hernández, Alexander Barrios, Alfredo D'Addona, and Eduardo Manzanilla at the Superior Institute of Musical Studies, as well as with professors Hernán Quintero and José Zerpa. His pedagogical experience includes participation in master classes with renowned musicians and ensembles such as Wynton Marsalis, Gabor Tarkovi, Rolf Smedvig, Thomas Clamor, Pepe Ortiz, and Max Sommerhalder. He has also collaborated with renowned groups, including the Empire Brass, Canadian Brass, and Spanish Brass. In 2008, he initiated his orchestral conducting studies under the tutelage of Maestro José Antonio Abreu. He has received instruction from distinguished maestros Eduardo Marturet and Pablo Castellanos. He participated as a conductor in the first Teresa Carreño Youth Symphony Brass Festival, as a guest conductor of the Youth Orchestra of Guanare and of the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Chacao, and performed as its musical director in the first Opera Festival of Chacao, interpreting the opera "Gianni Schicchi" by Puccini. In 2018, he was invited to participate as a conductor in the first Youth Orchestras and Choirs Meeting. In the city of Xalapa, Mexico. He has served as assistant conductor to Maestro Gustavo Dudamel. In collaboration with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, he has orchestrated the performance of numerous operatic works, including Mozart's "Idomeneo" and Bellini's "Capuleti e Montecchi." He has also served as their guest conductor during their tour in Italy, where they performed at the International Conference "Religions and Sustainable Development Goals" in March 2019 in the Vatican City, Rome, and in 2022 during their tour to Turkey. He currently serves as musical director of the National Youth Orchestra of Venezuela, with which he performed in the city of Vienna in 2018, and of the National Children's Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, with which he made his debut at the Victoria Hall in Geneva, Switzerland in April 2023. In addition, he participated as a member of the jury in the II International Conducting Competition Liria City of Music. He frequently represents El Sistema in a variety of roles, including conductor, workshop leader, and lecturer, at events in America and Europe. In these roles, he presents and promotes the work and social transformation achieved through the collective practice of music. He is currently serving as its Academic Director. In addition to these roles, he serves as the Musical Director.

# The Collective Practice of Music

**I** am going to talk about three fundamental points that encompass the collective practice of music, which is nothing less than the essence, the heart of El Sistema, from both an academic and a social perspective. We are going to go into more detail about these aspects in the course of this presentation.

In order to introduction, we can say that El Sistema is an educational and social initiative that seeks to educate citizens through the art of music, which Maestro José Antonio Abreu has described as the most sublime of the arts, and which, as our colleague Enrique Márquez has well explained, is based on Platonic ideas.

In this sense, the entire foundation of El Sistema is based on the principles of innovation, creation, and education through and for art; these principles were proposed and emphasized by our beloved Master José Antonio Abreu with the goal of maintaining a constant search for artistic excellence and education through musical practice that is experiential, disciplined, persistent, sustainable, and innovative.

As perceptive as the maestro was, he realized that what was missing was found in what he had experienced as a child, at his grandparents' house. There he could see how the whole community participated in the activities of the local band, not just one person. They participated in the showing of movies and plays. They all participated together, and they all felt an integral part of what they were doing.

For this reason, this integration in the musical education was considered necessary by Maestro Abreu, without a doubt the philosophical foundation of El Sistema, and also the way the Maestro always wanted the education to be: Collective and not individual, as it is traditionally done throughout the world and here in Venezuela. Therefore, what happens? this idea of the collective finds its foundation in a unique time and space, in what we call the Núcleos, because the Núcleos is where the integration happens.

For that reason, this integration in musical education was considered as necessary by Maestro Abreu considered, without a doubt the philosophical foundation of El Sistema, and also the way that Maestro always wanted the education to be: Collective and not Individual, as it is traditionally done throughout the world and here in Venezuela. Therefore, what happens? this idea of the collective finds its foundation in a unique time and space, in what we call the Núcleos, because the Núcleos is where integration occurs.

<sup>1</sup> Guest teacher at the II International Congress of El Sistema. His presentation is also available in this publication.

### THE NÚCLEO

Though, El Sistema is a social salvation project that promotes inclusion, participation and community transformation; it is a collective and inclusive teaching model that favors collaborative learning and the integral development of the participants. It is a network of youth and children's orchestras and choirs that covers the entire national territory and its essential unit is the *Núcleo*. And I would like to stop here for a moment, because the most important thing, the most important figure in El Sistema is the *Núcleo*. Here are the reasons.

In order to explain why the *Núcleo* is the most important figure in El Sistema, I would like to recall an anecdote. I had the opportunity to ask Maestro Abreu, a few months before he died, what a *Núcleo* was to him? and he defined the *Núcleo* as the place where children and youth play or sing together and learn from their teacher. Since the children and young people are the most important thing, the *Núcleo* is also the most important place, because it is certainly that space that is not only physical, but also philosophical, where collective learning and rehearsing takes place, and as Maestro Abreu defined it, as the happiest moment of the day.

In this sense, it is very important that we never lose sight of the importance of the *Núcleo* within El Sistema, but that we also constantly emphasize it, because in each of the four hundred and forty *Núcleos* that we have throughout the country, the collective practice of music takes place in the different programs. And thanks to this practice, El Sistema has developed more than twelve academic programs and has also created the schools where individual technical-instrumental instruction is given. In this way, the schools and the academic programs are two fundamental pillars of El Sistema, because it is through them and

the *Núcleo* that both the collective practice and the individual instruction are produced.

Now, what about the collective practice of music? in this practice, both playing and singing, are learned social values that are immersed in El Sistema, and the technique and execution of the instrument. It is a technical learning that is acquired from the first rehearsal, when you are still a child, and from the first moment you join the orchestra.

With regard to the Collective Practice of Music, I would like to share an approach that Maestro Abreu made in an interview with him; the Maestro maintained that, first of all, the linear and bookish methodology of instrumental teaching should be replaced by the course-workshop system that is inserted in a permanent orchestral practice, and, secondly, I would say that there should be the involvement of the young musician in a very intense relationship of the young musician in a very intense relational dynamic from his first steps in the Art.

In this sense, we are talking about a change from this student-teacher-classroom dynamic, which is much more individual, due to a broader social dynamic that involves the daily confrontation of the young person with the orchestra, the choir, the conductor, the audience, the community, the state and the country.

Thus, El Sistema course-workshop and the inclusion of the young musician in a relational dynamic are the foundations of the Collective Practice of Music, in which each of the aforementioned elements takes place. In fact, it is very impressive to see how, in the collective practice, the musician (and I propose this from my experience as an instrumentalist). First of all, he or she learns the technique, reinforces it and increases his/her technical capacity, which in turn is linked to the individual class. Due that it is not the same to be in an individual class as it is to be and to learn to play, either in an orchestra or singing in a choir. This

process is similar to the language acquisition, because first we learn to speak, then we learn to write, and then we learn grammar. This is what the Collective Practice of Music is somewhat based on.

#### CONCEPTUAL REFERENCES:

Though, the whole approach of Maestro Abreu has always had several conceptual references. I will mention two that allude the importance of the Collective Practice of Music. One is Axel Honneth, whose theory of the otherness of recognition focuses on the importance of social recognition for human development and social justice. Likewise, the author points out the need that the "I" has for others to recognize and validate it as a free and active subject. In the same way, Honneth states that "social life is fulfilled under the imperative of mutual recognition, since subjects can only have access to a practical self-relation. They learn to conceive of themselves from the normative perspective of their interaction partners.

In this approach of Honneth, we have one of the philosophical concepts on which the mission and vision of El Sistema are based; we start from the natural respect for heterogeneity and human diversity and their dialogue of simultaneous experiences of physical, biological, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual values, in order to be able to build and produce, as the ultimate goal of a collaborative task, the beauty of a common goal: Music, in which individual effort and attitude are found only as a reason of the existence in the harmony that derives from collective well-being. Besides El Sistema is an example of how the recognition of the other, as a dignified human being with potential is fundamental to the creation of a collective and harmonious musical work. El Sistema is also able to promote respect for diversity and dialogue between the different human experiences found in Music. All these approaches are lived in the orchestra, in the choir, in the Núcleo.

On the other hand, within the philosophical perspective from which Maestro Abreu starts, we find another reference; it is Albert Bandura and his

theory of social learning. Bandura focuses on the study of how people learn by observing others and also from each other, and how social factors influence human behavior. In other words, the individual learner and his or her environment. And in this learning process, we must be linked to certain sets of conditioning and reinforcement, where there must be present three essential requirements: first, retention: when it is remembered what has been observed; second, reproduction: the ability to reproduce the behavior; and third, motivation: that there is always a good reason to be motivated. In this sense, this argumentative scenario of social learning constitutes a conceptual reference of great value for the ontological position that also underlies the philosophical and methodological structures of El Sistema.

Now, in the light of the conceptual approaches mentioned above, those of Honneth and Bandura, we can see that El Sistema is based on the generational formative action, which implies that the beginners are musically trained by the more experienced children and adolescents, so that the latter assume the role of what we call monitors, one of the most important figures we have within the Institution, as many of those present here have been like me. For example: I began giving trumpet lessons and working as a monitor when I was sixteen years old. Always under the supervision of my teacher, of course. But not only I learned how to play by playing, sing by singing, I also learned to teach by teaching. And this process is extremely important; if we analyze it, we can see that is an example of the learning theory proposed by Bandura, because the monitors share all their technical and artistic experience, acquired by helping everyone to grow personally and collectively.

With this phrase from Maestro Abreu, which sums up something of what we have discussed so far, I will close this section in which I have approached some of the conceptual references on which El Sistema is based. Maestro Abreu says that "Music introduces children and adolescents to the collective life in a solidary coexistence, in a

common task that deeply develops the personality and generates self-esteem, with a marvelous fruitfulness that works simultaneously in terms of training, rescue and prevention”.

#### PRINCIPLES - ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

Regarding the principles - organizational dynamics of what is the Collective Practice of Music in El Sistema, we must speak of the Sequential Repertoire, which goes hand by hand with the technical evaluation, the ethical, the aesthetic, the rehearsal, the workshop, the section, the ensemble, the "master class," the individual class, and the concert. In other words, everything is linked, because the Collective Practice of Music is linked to the two pillars.

I mentioned earlier the Academic Programs and the Schools and the individual lessons, and all of them, again, are connected by a common thread, which is the Sequential Repertoire. Now, the development of the Sequential Repertoire is very important, as a dynamic, as a challenge, as a challenge, since we start in Music and as we progress, step by step, in the different instances that we have within the Institution, which are the orchestras or the preschool, the children's and youth choirs; the transition to a regional level and then the professionalization. Together with these organizational principles and dynamics, we have the technical, ethical and aesthetic elaboration.

On the other hand, Maestro Abreu said that "musical education trains not only the intellect, but also the moral and ethical feeling. It educates with the ability to appreciate the aesthetics of life. Also, Maestro Abreu expressed in an interview that in a world of constant confrontation, the orchestra offers children who have already spent half a day in school the opportunity to rehearse in the orchestra or choir for the other half of the day, or at least four hours. In this sense, if we consider the case of an orchestra that plays at least sixty concerts over a period of two years, we can imagine the variety of passages, the stylistic difficulties of all

kinds, the different bowings and articulations, among other things, that it has to face.

Every performance is a lesson. The difference between a boy who has had two years of orchestral or choral practice and sixty concerts and a boy who has spent two years with his teacher alone in his classroom is great. In solitude, for example, you cannot tune. Tuning is always an agreement between two or more people. If you have another instrument next to you, you can focus your attention. In this way, the child who begins to play the strings in the air collectively begins to hear the relationship of the fifth or the fourth collectively and not just individually.

And to be able to appreciate this relationship develops the ear in a surprising way; because when the child reaches the age of ten, who has already had four or five years with the instrument, his level of auditory perception will be immense. In the orchestra, a dynamic is created that begins with individual work of great intensity, because this is the moment that allows the mastery of the first part of the concerto, the symphony of the concerto or the overture; therefore, the young person is forced to overcome the difficulties much faster. All these dynamics also work in traditional musical education, but it may take longer.

Obviously, what is included in this musical training work is done with the same importance in terms of rehearsal, workshop, ensemble, and performance. "The master class and the individual class within the *núcleos*. We can say that these two activities are as important as the workshop of the row, or the "individual sectional", as it is called abroad, in which not only the repertoire to be played is worked on, but also, based on this repertoire, the line is worked on technically, warm-ups and technical studies are done according to the passages that the child will have to face.

The workshop, on the other hand, is already a collective work, because we have the violins together, or the violas together,

or the trumpets together, or the percussion line. But then all this work is taken to the sectional, where it will be necessary to unify and where the technical work done in the workshop of the row will be done with a larger collective. This sequence of work transforms the young person technically, not only in his instrument, but also, as Maestro Abreu pointed out, in his aural perception.

In this sense, we see that all the activities that take place before the general rehearsal and we can think of the work of the individual class, the chamber music, the brass ensembles, the strings or percussion, or the woodwind quintets always take place in a collective; and in a collective, the works that have a sequence are overcome technically. Because it is not a question of doing it in a nonsensical way, from one side to the other, but of doing it under a guide, and that is the reason for the existence of the sequential repertoire: to guide. In the end, we see how everything comes together to produce the result we all hope for: the concert.

And the concert, well, it is simply the moment in which the orchestras, the choirs, come to meet Art, because, to quote Maestro Abreu once again, "in this way, El Sistema reveals a close relationship of accompaniment, solidarity, co-responsibility, cooperation, and the applause ceases to express the monotony of a laborious rhythmic beating to configure a new musical composition that expresses melodies and harmonies valued in the context of teamwork".

Within this framework of analysis and observation that I have presented, I would like to give an example that shows how this work becomes a reality in El Sistema and how we have been able to observe the progress of the children in an instrument that was not their main instrument. We wanted the National Children's Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela, which was founded in 2022, to also sing. But it was not our wish, it was Maestro Abreu's wish, and in fact it is fulfilled in many *Núcleos* thanks to the choral practice, but the activity that we wanted to do with the National Children's Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela had not been done in the past with the different National Children's and Youth Teams, but we saw that we had found the right moment to do it.

Dedicated to this work, the members of the National Children's Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela had a constant group choral practice during the seminars that took place during the years 2022 and 2023. They did not have individual singing lessons and in their *Núcleos* they did not have the choral activity of the orchestra, but the choral practice activity that is usually done. Let us remember that for these children, their main instrument is not the voice, but the violin, the double bass, the flute, the oboe, the horn, the percussion; and yet, in a very short time, with an excellent methodology, with excellent teachers, and with collective practice, they were able to sing in an incredible way.

The first rehearsal took place last August at the *Núcleo* of Montalbán. The chosen piece was inspired by the "March of Creation". Then, practically nine months later, in April 2023, we had the opportunity to be in Geneva and perform at the Victoria Hall, where the same young people and children, after several seminars and with this collective methodology, we were able to sing. With this information, we can see how the collective also learns, even in the case of an instrument that does not belong to each musician.

And before ending, I would like to conclude with the definition, taken from a methodological, philosophical and social point of view, of what an orchestra is,



according to Maestro José Antonio Abreu:

What is an orchestra? An orchestra is a community whose essential and exclusive characteristic is that it is the only community formed for the sole purpose of performing concerts. It alone has this characteristic of being the only community formed for the sole purpose of performing; therefore, whoever practices the orchestral practice begins to live it. In other words, what is the practice of concertation? The practice of the team, the practice of the group that recognizes itself as interdependent. Where everyone is responsible for everyone else and everyone is responsible for everyone else. What is the purpose of concertation? To create beauty. The practice of the team, the practice of the group that recognizes itself as interdependent. Where each one is responsible for the others and each one is responsible for one.

To come together for what?

To generate beauty. (José Antonio Abreu A).

First of all, I would like to say that I am extremely happy and honored to be able to participate in this II World Congress of El Sistema, but also to be able to see so many people from different countries, who carry this beautiful and wonderful message that our beloved maestro Abreu, for forty-eight years, wanted to promote; likewise, I feel very privileged to be part of this great team that is El Sistema, made up of more than eight thousand workers who are fighting day by day, as our Maestro José Antonio Abreu used to say, "Playing, Singing and Striving for more opportunities for each one of those young people and children of Venezuela to have access to Music: Playing, Singing and Striving so that each one of those young people and children of Venezuela have more opportunities to have access to Music.

<sup>1</sup> The link will take you to the video of the first rehearsal of the National Children's Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela.

<sup>2</sup> The link will take you to the video of the concert at the Victoria Hall.



# Andrés David Ascanio

**CORAL NACIONAL SIMÓN BOLÍVAR**  
Simón Bolívar National Choir  
Lourdes Sánchez  
Directora / Conductor



# Social Topic



# María Guerrero



María, born in Madrid in 1983, founded Action for Music in Spain in 2013, drawing inspiration from the "El Sistema" model. She currently serves as the organization's president, with a mission to empower children and young individuals facing the risk of social exclusion. Notably, María has also played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Social Music Network, of which she currently serves as the vice president. Through this organization, she has contributed to the promotion of the National Children's Inclusion Orchestra, in collaboration with the High Commissioner of the Presidency of the Government against Child Poverty. María is a professor of leadership at ICADE Business School and other universities, a facilitator at Acumen Academy, and a speaker at social innovation forums. In 2018, she was included in the ranking of The Top 100 Women Leaders in Spain, placing in the top 10 in the third sector. She holds a Postgraduate Degree in Public Leadership and Entrepreneurship from the University of Deusto (2020) and a Postgraduate Degree in Leadership and Social Innovation from ESADE (2017). She holds a degree in Law and a degree in Business Administration and Management from ICADE (2007). Furthermore, she also belongs to the first class of Acumen Fellows in Spain. Her accolades include the 2020 Emilio Castelar Award and the 2019 Recognition from the Ministry of Culture of the Dominican Republic. She has three children and is dedicated to social transformation in Spain, with a focus on promoting a more humane culture and enhancing the lives of the most vulnerable individuals.

# Spiritual Wealth Overcomes Material Poverty

**I**n July 2003, I was on a beachfront in Sao Tome and Principe, on the Gulf of Guinea. He was doing cooperative work with elderly and sick people who had been slaves. These people, already in old age, were resting in the House of Mercy. That afternoon, at the end of the day, just as the sun was setting, we performed our ritual, which consisted of singing accompanied by the guitar played by Mr. José. Then, in that moment of gathering, meeting and singing, a new level suddenly opened up. Something happened; yes, when we sang together, suddenly the relationships of help disappeared and a place of dignity appeared, a place for everyone; something happened, something transformative. After that moment we return to life, but we return in a different way.

Likewise, in 2011, I was in Madrid, and while I was watching a documentary about El Sistema, I realized that this organization was carrying out, in a massive and systematized way, actions like the experience I had had on that promenade in Sao Tome and Principe. The documentary on El Sistema captivated me so much that I ended up creating Action for Music, a foundation that has been working in Spain for ten years and has changed the lives of more than a thousand people, their families and their communities.

In addition to the previous experiences, we had the following one. On June 14th of last year, we were in the National Auditorium for an important concert that we had been preparing for the whole year. For me, it was very important that it was understood that besides playing and doing different activities, we were transforming the human fiber and the social fabric at a very deep level. As part of the preparations, some of the actors had prepared a script that they would read to explain to the audience what was happening in the concert.

On the day of the concert, however, we realized that we really understood what was happening not when the actors spoke, but when the children played the "Ode to Joy" from Ludwig van Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Then it happened again. A new level opened up where we could feel deeply united and connected.

From these reported experiences come these questions: What was the magic? What was that? Is it something that just happens? Is it something we can intend? What is it? and a phrase by Maestro José Antonio Abreu that caught my attention from the beginning: "spiritual wealth ends up overcoming material poverty". This phrase not only impressed me, but also puzzled me, because every day we are confronted with this immense gap that exists between this kind of ethereal magic of music that we perceive, this beauty that belongs to this elevated world; and the gravity, seriousness and urgency of the social realities that we work with, that is, the tremendous material poverty, social exclusion, marginalization and oppression that so many communities experience.

So sometimes it seems that what we are doing is ethereal when we contrast it with this constant reality. In that sense, I have wondered how, by trying something that can sometimes seem very mechanistic because of the constant repetition, we are really transforming this very complex social reality. I also wonder what he could say about beauty, about the ethereal magic of music, or about spiritual richness, to the girl who is not allowed to come to the orchestra rehearsal because she is not allowed to play with a man because of her culture.

Now I have learned that what was raised in the previous reflections works on two levels. In our socio-musical intervention there are two levels. This would be the first level of reality, we see the forest, we prune the trees, we take care of the bark of the trees, the branches, in short, the forest as a whole in which we work every day. This forest is a rigorous, professionalized terrain where we measure, program and execute. But what supports the forest, the roots, is not visible, it is underground; what supports the tree will be the second level.

Let's dwell a little more on our first level of socio-musical intervention. This first level is better known; it is the processes, the phases and all those elements that we have to take care of; those that sequence, measure, manage and program. The first

level obeys our theory of change, and there comes a time when we become so obsessed with it that we believe it is everything and that it is the only thing there is; we can spend many years producing good results of social change by focusing only on this first level.

In fact, I spoke at 2023 about theory of change and impact measurement. In fact, we make music. It is an activity that consumes massive amounts of free time, generates immediate products, and promotes the acquisition of a range of musical and psycho-emotional skills that, in the medium term, lead to outcomes that improve self-esteem and, although not in all cases, academic performance. Likewise, we know that psycho-emotional skills begin to develop at the individual, family, and community levels, which over the years create new opportunities that could reduce the risk of vulnerability of individuals and communities.

Now let's move to the second level. The one that is under the earth, the one where the roots are, which we do not see, but we know that they emerge in moments like the ones I have told you about. In this regard, I would like to say that I have always noticed that in television interviews, when the young people in the orchestra are asked what they feel when they make music, they answer that they feel free. What kind of freedom is that? Is it freedom at the first level of reality? Or is it freedom at the second level of reality? Let us consider that the second level of socio-musical intervention is the level at which realities are given meaning; it makes us uncomfortable to enter it, because since we are always operating at the first level, the second level seems elusive to us.

It's like when we ask ourselves what beauty is and try to define it; it's probably frustrating to find the exact definition. We could spend hours in discourse and perhaps we will not be able to define what beauty is; however, we can experience beauty, witness it; if we listen to a beautiful symphony, in the moment, instantly, we will know that this is beautiful, we will know that this is beauty. That is to say,

when we live it, even though it could be elusive, it works; it works with a different logic, a logic that here in El Sistema is called mysticism.

So something either has mysticism or it doesn't. Now, what we mean by mysticism is a state of splendor of consciousness in which we experience at the same time a connection, a deep union with ourselves and with all people, with nature and with something that we feel transcends us. That's mysticism.

But there is a transcendental difference between a beautiful, nice experience and one that opens the level of mysticism in the second level of socio-musical intervention, how do these experiences differ? Well, in one experience, after listening to a very beautiful symphony, although at the moment it has put us in a trance, we feel that when we stop listening to it, everything remains the same; that is, it is a kind of experience, but a different kind.

The other experience allows us to feel, after listening to a beautiful symphony, that something has changed, that something has been rearranged in our relationship with the world, with ourselves, with others, with nature. Somehow, something sensitive, something that we can hear, that we can feel, that we can experience through our senses, opens a door to the meta-sensory, to the meta-sensible; in other words, to something that is beyond and that rearranges our relationship to the world.

Professor Alfonso López Quintás, whom I must quote, develops very well how the second level of reality works. The professor affirms that in this second level, where human values live, the logic that operates there is different. It is a logic of attraction; when we come into contact with beauty, we are attracted to what is most valuable, because all the values of this socio-musical level are connected to each other like the roots of the trees in the forest, which we do not see, but we know that they are connected to each other.

In this sense, when I experience the beauty of a symphony, whether in rehearsal or in concert, I am immersed in a place where I can experience human dignity, shared humanity, social justice, because we are all connected. That is why the socio-musical intervention is so interesting; as a social intervention, it is almost the only one, or one of the few, that can materialize and allow us to access this universe of values that is so interesting and necessary.

At this point, it is worth asking how to access this second level. Keep in mind that the second level is not only somewhat esoteric, but also invisible. However, there are many things we can do to reach it. In fact, all these possibilities have been invented in Venezuela, because everything that is necessary to reach this second level is done here. Therefore, the first thing we can do to reach this second level is to manage the encounter between people; this fact, in turn, will allow the recognition of the other, and with this recognition of the other, there is an encounter that generates new possibilities. Friedrich Nietzsche says that the social instinct arises from the joy of encountering the other; because this social instinct makes us recognize our interdependence, care for each other, coordinate with each other, depend on each other.

Likewise, there is another interesting terrain to access the second level, and that is the symbolic terrain. We are constantly working with sensitive realities; a score or a piece that we interpret are elements that refer us to realities that are beyond. What repertoire are we performing, what identities are represented in it, what does it mean, are questions that allow us to relate to the notion of the symbolic. In this regard, Christine Small defined "musical" as the participation of all people, at all levels of ability and within their possibilities, in music, and not just the performer, conductor, listener, or writer. On the other hand, it will happen that the gaze will become accustomed, that is, when we get used to the second level, we will acquire more finesse to recognize when this level opens up in any place.

All these reflections make me remember the experience of the second level that I had on June 14th, in the concert I mentioned above, because it is certainly not a question of talking about values, but of living them. When we live them, we are possessed by their energy, and this energy transcends.

On another note, let's think a bit about what happens to the experience of social justice. It is possible that all of us have been curious about social justice at some point, even if only a little. I believe that the first approach to social justice is through curiosity; that is why contact with communities, with daily work, puts us in the radius of action where social justice is produced, and from there we get new energy, new strength to continue to search for it, to continue to pursue it, to dedicate ourselves to it, to discover it, and to fall in love with it.

And it is that action on the second level works through this force of attraction, so when we ask ourselves what we can do and what conditions of possibility will help, we can say that on the one hand we have to encourage attention to the interior in our groupings, in our daily work, in our team meetings. Questions such as what do I feel, what do I sense, what is going on inside me, are part of the vocabulary that we need to work with in order to have this fluency on the second level.

And on the other hand, we have to work on the state of flow, which is nothing more than the moment when the young musicians perform a musical work and they do it in this space of concentration. This state of flow is very interesting because it is a condition of possibility of the second level; it is the "from where do we do what we do, from where are we doing it, from what world of values, what are the power dynamics among us, in our team, what are the power dynamics in the orchestra, from what place? The place from which we make music determines the results. In the same way, it is necessary to develop rituals, habitual practices, or that our decisions are made from a place of discernment, that is, that we make decisions considering our world of values.

In short, we see that this second level, which seems so ethereal, operates effectively in material reality and transforms it because the moral force that exists in the values with which we work makes us return to reality and transform it. Marshall Ganz, an American activist from Harvard University, maintains that leadership, capable of generating social changes, is "accepting the responsibility of joining communities and people to help them transform their experience of themselves and their vital resources; that world of values, transform it into the power they need to effect the change they want in their lives and in their environments; "Any social movement begins with this power that starts from the world of values."

But this is not the end, because when we want to generate social changes we do not have to operate only on what is superficially seen, that is, on the behaviors and structures that we see are unfair and that we want to change; That, certainly, is done at the first level. We must, instead, go to a deeper level, because only if we change the paradigms of thought, the sources of inspiration, the mentalities that underlie those behaviors and structures, can we generate systemic and lasting transformations and that is done, as we have already seen, from the second level of intervention.

Now, how can you measure the second level. The first thing we must keep in mind is that just because something is not seen, does not mean that it is not happening and that it cannot be measured. Yes, it can be measured. In this sense, the tools we have to manage and measure the impact at this level cannot be mediating, they cannot be limited. For this measurement process, open questions and in-depth interviews can be used; On the other hand, classroom observations and the intuition of any teacher are very important because as professionals we know how interesting it is when we see something happening.

Likewise, in music there is something we call golden threads, which are life stories in which changes can be appreciated. For example, what is behind a mother who



transforms and leaves her addictions behind due to the fact that her children are in the orchestra? With this example I just want to recap and draw attention to how these two levels operate and interrelate in a very similar way to the way the water cycle works.

The water, let's think, evaporates gradually and, suddenly, when we stop seeing it, it seems that it is no longer there; but the truth is that it is there, what happens is that the appropriate atmospheric phenomena are lacking so that water can be seen again, but in the form of rain, for example, and nourish the earth and fill it with life. In conclusion, we need to be constantly activating these two levels so that, just as in the example of water, this transformation occurs.

The intention of the socio-musical intervention is to transform an unjust reality based on an interrelationship with a community and through the great human and social values to which we aspire. In short, as Maestro Abreu said, so that "spiritual wealth overcomes material poverty."



# María Guerrero

# José Ramón Espinoza



(Deputy Representative  
of UNICEF Venezuela)

Mr. Espinoza is a health professional with nearly two decades of experience in children's rights issues, working with UNICEF. He currently serves as Deputy Representative in UNICEF Venezuela, and previously held the same position in Honduras. Part of his experience with UNICEF also includes positions in planning, monitoring, and evaluation in the UNICEF regional office in Panamá and in Nicaragua. In Nicaragua, he began his career with UNICEF as a health officer and later as an HIV specialist.

Mr. Espinoza has experience as a professor and researcher at the Center for Health Research and Studies of the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua. He holds a Master's degree in HIV Clinical Care from the Rey Juan Carlos University of Spain and a Doctorate in Internal Medicine from the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua.

# A Million Hearts for The Rights of Children and Adolescents

**I**would like to begin my participation by pointing out that music gives us the elements to build, from childhood, the changes we want for our societies. I work for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), an agency of the United Nations (UN) responsible for promoting or helping to strengthen the capacity of States to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents. In order to fulfill this mandate, UNICEF seeks to mobilize the will in all contexts to safeguard obligations and achieve transformations in children and adolescents who are subjects of rights.

In this sense, the Goodwill Ambassadors are important actors in helping to mobilize this will, especially that of the high authorities of governments, and for this reason I would like to dedicate a few words first to the role of El Sistema and its performance as Goodwill Ambassador. Goodwill Ambassadors are volunteers who excel in their field and are willing to become spokespersons for children's rights. Furthermore, an ambassador is someone who represents, and in order to represent, he or she must first be convinced and have adopted what he or she represents as a way of life.

For us, it is important that the children and adolescents who are part of El Sistema, who are ambassadors, who are representatives of others, also have a life practice of rights. It is important that they have the right to grow up in a society free of violence, to grow up protected, to have opportunities to develop and to learn according to their age. These are all central elements. Now, in the case of Venezuela, we are very fortunate to have not just one ambassador, but a million UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors concentrated in this prestigious and much-loved figure of El Sistema.

It was in 2004 that El Sistema became a Goodwill Ambassador, so it will soon be twenty years since El Sistema made the commitment to work hand by hand with UNICEF to promote children's rights. In all this time, El Sistema has been able to spread this voice throughout the country, which is often more difficult to carry through other means; that is, the message is more easily carried when it comes through the children, through their experiences, through beautiful stories like the ones they have told, through the way El Sistema and music help to transform lives and involve children, and how children and adolescents who are in this process are also transformed with the guidance of adults.

On the other hand, what El Sistema offers the children also empowers them for life. Every member of El Sistema is an example of good citizenship. At UNICEF, we believe that citizenship is built from childhood, because citizenship is not limited to the ability to vote. Citizenship is basically the awareness of having rights and the mechanisms to exercise them, and this awareness begins to be built from childhood; for this reason, children are also citizens and also bearers of their rights.

Additionally, we understand that the role of El Sistema is to help, to promote rights; it has to do with the transformation that is achieved in every child. Its work is based on making sure that music is not only focused on cognitive development, but also on spiritual development, because when you feel good about yourself, you can give to others what you have received. That is the exercise of being an agent of change, when you have that transformation, you can take that message, first to your family, then to your friends; and then you can impact a whole community with a message that really transforms, that changes lives.

It must be emphasized that it is in the stories of transformed lives that the power of this work can be seen. At the end of the day, it is not just about statistics, nor is it about issues that some may find ethereal or rhetorical, but it is about people; for that reason, when we talk about El Sistema taking care of the transformation of a million children, that means a million families in this country. In this transformation is the power, in this systematic transformation that goes beyond the events themselves, although they are important. But without a doubt, it is the daily process that gives rise to this transformation, the construction that is being worked on.

What is the potential of working with institutions such as El Sistema? For UNICEF, El Sistema is a fundamental support in spreading these messages that try to reach families and have an impact on large conglomerates of people. It gives us

the opportunity to bring them together, to tell them stories, and help them, in order that the message that an ambassador of goodwill conveys reaches not only the mind, but also the heart, because music allows us to reach people's hearts and minds.

In this way, we have created thanks to El Sistema some alliances that allow us to contribute to the strengthening of the country's capacity to defend rights; this aspect is important to us because truly creating awareness of rights is tantamount to creating a social movement.

It is like a kind of snowball that starts with a few people and little by little more wills are added, including those of the children's families. All of this work allows us to see the full potential that El Sistema has to transmit the message to all societies in an effective way and, moreover, in a different way than when it is done through communication strategies. Let us remember that it is a matter of reaching, first of all, the emotions and feelings of the family that supports the children.

Before concluding, I would like to emphasize two aspects that are essential; one of them has to do with the fact that we at UNICEF believe that music plays a fundamental role in the development of children from early childhood; this is supported by the fact that people who have usually had musical education have been able to develop better in other disciplines. Consequently, children immersed in musical activities learn better and are more disciplined; music provides them with a cognitive and also affective development that makes them better than other boys and girls of the same age. In this sense, the fact that we can work with this contribution of music is an important opportunity.

Therefore, when we try to save this population - already in late adolescence, let us say after the age of fifteen - we find young people who have begun to get involved in problems and situations, such as: early pregnancy or in cases of violence due to recruitment by armed groups.

Then, when it comes to problems at this level, we could say that we have lost this period of adolescence, which is so important. Let us remember that when we talk about adolescence, we are talking about three specific areas. One of them has to do with physical development; therefore, since this area is related to health, it is the best known and the one that receives the most interest. However, the other two areas, which deal with both psycho-affective and social development are forgotten.

Regarding these two areas, we must emphasize that El Sistema allows for the physical development of cognitive skills, which are linked to psycho-affective development, and relational skills, which are linked to social development. For this reason, we firmly believe that music is a gateway to the development of lifelong skills, skills that are transferable from one person to another. Finally, our belief relies on the idea that we can reach the heart means that this message will have a lasting impact on the lives of millions of people. We also believe that the alliance between El Sistema and UNICEF has been an opportunity to promote the rights of children and adolescents, and we are confident that this alliance will prevail and be strengthened with many other work programs that will allow us to continue promoting the rights of children in Venezuela together.



**José Ramón Espinoza**

# Xiomara Alemán



(Sociologist with a Master's degree in Public Policy, graduated from UCV)

Sociologist, with a master's degree in Public Policy, graduated from UCV. She worked at the IDB (Inter-American Development Bank) as a social protection specialist for 23 years, formulating, executing and evaluating social projects in several countries (Venezuela, Brazil, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico, Brazil and Ecuador), being the leader of the Orchestras and Choirs System Project and of the impact evaluation study of El Sistema.

Orchestras and Choirs System Project and of the impact evaluation study of El Sistema. Currently, she is a private consultant in social projects. She is an executive Director of the SPES (Sustainability Performances, Evidence & Scenarios) consortium, formed by several NGOs.

# Impact Evaluation of El Sistema

**F**irstly, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to be here and present the evaluation results of the System, which took us many years to complete. Despite the passage of time, the findings remain relevant and pertinent, necessitating further consideration and continuation. The presenters are discussing the impact evaluation that was carried out of the System in 2012. This evaluation took four years of learning, experience, and reflection.

The composition of the study is as follows. Furthermore, it is imperative to elucidate the distinguishing characteristics that set our study apart from the multitude of evaluations conducted for the purpose of analyzing impact or long-term effects. To elaborate further, Specifically, we measured causal effects.

Typically, evaluations assess correlations, children's exposure to music, cognitive enhancement, the development of social or prosocial skills, and soft skills. However, we endeavored to transcend these conventional limits and ascertain the underlying causes of a system's behavior on a large scale, encompassing national and even international dimensions.

A significant distinction emerges when impact evaluations are conducted for reasons of cost and time. In such cases, a pilot study is typically undertaken, wherein a sample is collected. However, the study is conducted on a very limited sample. In contrast, the present study was conducted on a large scale, with the objective of observing the impact of a musical program in a highly diverse and culturally rich environment, characterized by significant socioeconomic and sociocultural variations. The population under study is a middle-class population, not a poor population, and it is vulnerable. There is a confluence of children, knowledge, behavior, and characteristics, which makes it deeply integrating but also deeply challenging.

The objective of this study was to ascertain the correlation between exposure to El Sistema and exposure to violence. The undertaking proved to be intricate, necessitating extensive collaboration with El Sistema's Orquesta. The incorporation of El Sistema proved instrumental in achieving the objective. It is noteworthy that the absence of El Sistema would have impeded the realization of this endeavor. The selection of 16 national-level nuclei was predicated on their demonstrated commitment to the System. We selected 16 centers in the Federal District, in Miranda, in Lara-Barquisimeto, and Ciudad Bolivar, and we enrolled the children who expressed an interest in joining the System during the 2012-2013 period.

The final number of participants was 2,919 children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 14 years. In accordance with the methodological rigor employed, a clinical trial was initiated to obtain international certification of the evaluation. The children were divided into two groups: the treatment group and the control group, with each group comprising half of the total sample. It is imperative to elucidate the conceptualization of the term "treatment."

Exposure to El Sistema, individuals who had secured admission for the 2012-2013 academic year, attended their designated classes and engaged in all the activities associated with El Sistema. The complexity of El Sistema, which extends beyond musical training, is a contributing factor. The second group was guaranteed admission for the 2013 academic year and commenced their 2013-2014 school year. What factors enabled the differentiation of these two groups?

Having similar groups from the point of view of characteristics, ages, socioeconomic status, culture, etc., what differentiated them? The subjects of this study were exposed to the System, and as a result, the children, adolescents, and representatives or foster caregivers had to commit themselves and the System also did so, not to admit them to any other group so that they could really be a comparable group and what is referred to as the control group.

How did we do it, what was our methodological rigor, first we determined with the help of experts which were the variables that we should study, and we selected 26 variables, 26 variables with a short-term exposure of one school year with two rounds of observation, the scientific protocol for this evaluation to have the guarantee of quality at international level, obliged us as I said initially to declare it a clinical trial, as a clinical trial we then had to go through a series of international committees where they gave us the ethical certification of the questions and the work protocols, and so we went through the University of the

Web. We went through a series of international formats, all with certification and appropriation from the scientific point of view.

It was determined that participation in the study was to be conducted with the utmost confidentiality. To this end, an informed consent form was developed and disseminated to all participants, with the objective of safeguarding their rights within the framework of the child protection system. The initiation of the study proved to be a formidable challenge. It was conducted across 16 centers, encompassing a total of 2,914 children, 2,529 foster caregivers or representatives, along with the directors, teachers, and collaborators of the centers participating in El Sistema. A multidisciplinary team of researchers, including sociologists, psychologists, economists, and statisticians, was convened to conduct surveys, psychometric scale measurements, and focus groups.

As is customary in impact evaluation, the initial step is the formulation of a theory of change. In this case, the activities of the orchestra and choirs were analyzed to identify the elements to be improved. Four constructs were analyzed in the short term. These constructs are methodological theoretical constructs that are very powerful when one works on psychological analysis, sociological analysis, etcetera.

The initial concept pertains to self-regulation, defined as the capacity for self-control. Those versed in music, such as musicians, are likely to have a more developed sense of when to enter, when to cease, and when to remain silent. The voice, in its capacity as an instrument, must be timed with precision, as must the spaces between notes. The impact of a child's participation in a performance of a piece, singing in a choir, and other such activities, on their self-regulation, is a subject of interest. Furthermore, we assess the impact of a child undergoing a performance of a piece, singing, and establishing in the choir. Is there a short-term impact? It is important to note that the child was exposed to music for a



year. According to the literature, if children at an early age are trained in self-regulation, self-inhibition, and control of emotions, language, and vision, these skills will persist over time.

There are several well-known examples in the world, one of them is the marshmallow experiment in New York, where children in Brooklyn schools were given a candy, a marshmallow, and they were told, for 10 minutes you have a marshmallow here, but you have two marshmallows, which are these little white candies.... The experiment involved a manipulation of time, with the subjects being given 10 minutes to enjoy one candy, and a longer period of time (typically 10 minutes or more) to enjoy two. The objective was to observe the subsequent outcomes in the subjects' lives. A comprehensive and rigorous scientific study was conducted, encompassing a longitudinal evaluation of the subjects from elementary school through their thirties.

From the perspective of institutional evaluation and longitudinal studies, it was observed that the children who delayed the consumption of marshmallows until a later age exhibited a higher probability of leading a fulfilling and gratifying life. This observation was made on the premise that their success was not contingent upon material wealth, but rather on their ability to cultivate autonomy and pursue personal, professional, and other interests.

A similar phenomenon was observed in Spain with the Candy experiment, which served as a foundation for our decision to utilize this construct. The underlying principle is that exposure to the System leads to self-regulation, a concept that is closely related to the cultivation of patience, respect for others, and related values.

The second construct pertains to prosocial skills, which encompass self-esteem, empathy, and the ability to place oneself in another's perspective. It is important to note that the consequences of a rapid and unsuccessful attempt, such as a lack of harmony, are not fully understood. The

conductor's role, as envisioned by the presenter, entails issuing instructions to cease until the auditory outcome is deemed satisfactory. This process is reiterated on a daily basis, both in the classroom settings and during rehearsals and performances. The outcome of this practice is the cultivation of prosocial skills, fostering a sense of belonging to a specific musical group, such as the wind or brass sections, while also fostering a sense of belonging to the larger entity of the orchestra.

This fosters social cohesion and contributes to the overall success of the El Sistema initiative. The issue at hand is also related to behavior, which is precisely the reduction of those negative behaviors. As the presenter mentioned at the beginning, risk factors versus protection factors, that is, avoiding risk. There is a considerable amount of risk involved, as it is well known that a child in El Sistema's Orquesta is a child of the streets. In the streets, there are many things, both positive and negative, regular and irregular, etcetera.

Finally, a subject that is, in essence, critical is that of cognitive abilities. This is a subject that is frequently mentioned by numerous individuals, yet there is a paucity of certainty regarding it. Consequently, it was necessary to incorporate it into the study. A substantial body of unproven literature suggests that music exerts a positive effect on processing speed, memory, and visual and spatial memory. To this end, we conducted a longitudinal evaluation of the impact of El Sistema on these constructs and variables over an extended period. The two-hour interviews were meticulously designed to elicit detailed information from the participants. The evaluation process involved the measurement of short-term impacts and the subsequent longitudinal assessment in the New York style.

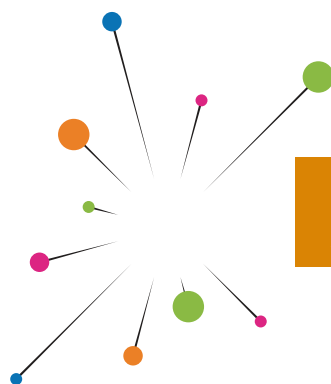
The preliminary enrollment and lottery were completed, constituting a formality within the El Sistema framework. The integrity of the lottery process was ensured through the presence of judges, who verified that the randomly selected

children from the control group were indeed included in the treatment group, and vice versa. The data was subsequently stored on a flash drive and secured under lock and key. To facilitate the survey, a consulting firm was contracted.

The treatment period, as previously indicated, occurred from September 2012 to July 2013, while the control period spanned from 2013 to 2014. The initial phase was conducted in October 2012, and the subsequent phase, which enabled the assessment of causal findings over a protracted exposure duration, took place from September to November 2013. The systematization process was subsequently completed, and the findings were disseminated through a prominent scientific journal in 2016. The success of this endeavor can be attributed to the transformation of the study into a clinical trial, which facilitated its publication in a highly respected international journal.

The results of this study are of the utmost importance. Following one academic year of participation in El Sistema, positive findings were observed in two constructs: improvement of self-control, which is related to the self-regulation construct, and reduced behavioral difficulties, which is related to the behavioral construct. The question arises whether these findings were general or limited to those who attended El Sistema. The results were found to be concentrated in children and adolescents whose mothers did not attend university, a finding that merits further examination. Notably, these children did not come from families where the parents were professionals, but rather from families where the parents were not university students. Furthermore, the children were exposed to very violent contexts. A particularly noteworthy finding is that, among all the children, aggressive behavior was the most reduced.

What are the conclusions that can be drawn from this, and what are the subsequent steps that should be taken? The study's findings enabled the establishment of an enrollment system, underscoring its significance for individual well-being and its role as a preventative strategy. The present challenge lies in the considerable time that has elapsed since the study's publication in 2016, a period during which Venezuela has undergone substantial changes, leading to significant migration. A notable proportion of the System's children and adolescents have relocated to other countries, many of whom have gone on to form orchestras. This prompts the crucial question of how to sustain the study's efforts to assess long-term impacts and conduct longitudinal evaluations. We extend our profound gratitude for your attention and input.



# Xiomara Alemán

# Stanford Thompson



(Director of Goldsmith Strategies and Executive Director of Equity Arc)

He is the principal of Goldsmith Strategies and the executive director of Equity Arc. He is a leading voice in promoting cultural equity and leading change in nonprofit arts organizations. A TED Fellow, Stan founded and led the internationally recognized Play On Philly organization and served as founding board chair of El Sistema USA. He is a faculty member of the Global Leaders Institute and holds degrees in trumpet performance from the Curtis Institute of Music and El Sistema Fellows Program at the New England Conservatory of Music.

# Fifteen years of transcribing The Philosophy of El Sistema in the United States

**I** am the founder of Play On Philly, in Philadelphia; CEO of Equity Arc; and director of Extended Education at the New England Conservatory in England, in Boston. I grew up in Atlanta and am the son of retired music teachers. I started studying trumpet when I was eight; I subsequently moved to Philadelphia to study at the Curtis Institute of Music. I received a Certificate from the Abreu Fellows Program of the New England Conservatory and El Sistema.

It was learning, about Maestro Abreu's vision and how it has transformed millions of people in the world through music, that motivated me to transcribe the philosophy of El Sistema in the United States, obviously in English.

In a meeting with Maestro Abreu, I realized that he was giving us a roadmap to create, grow, and sustain our programs by sharing his philosophy and story of how El Sistema started. For those who reside in Caracas or other parts of the world, those who are at the beginning or in the depths of their journey through El Sistema, I want to share the key lessons I learned from Maestro Abreu that continue to guide my work and have inspired me in then and now.

It is important to remember that Maestro Abreu was opposed to defining the work as a "system" and considered that it would be dead if it were seen and conceived in that way. Living in a society that loves to build systems and processes, this philosophy, proposed by the Maestro, is the most difficult to implement, but the most rewarding when developed. The Maestro admired social discipline in America, but he still thrived in what he described as "controlled chaos." Also, creating a system was an approach I tried many times in my programs; However, over the years I have learned that nothing is more restrictive than developing systems and structures for a program that is evolving, with teachers, staff, and students constantly growing.

As has been noted, El Sistema is in an exciting renaissance, as it is already approaching its fiftieth anniversary accompanied by many new leaders and students who will shape this program for the next fifteen years. Now, as we ask ourselves how we can embrace this philosophical idea of Maestro Abreu as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and accept the challenges and opportunities that surround us, I propose that we rely on Being-Doing, just as he did Maestro Abreu when he gave rise to El Sistema.

With his words, he tells us that El Sistema began “in a very chaotic way, with whoever we could, when we could and where we could. We started in garages and old houses with a small group of very good teachers – the true seed of the program – working with their own teaching and own instruments, and helping me develop a single orchestra. One that would allow us to show the rest of the country that an orchestra could be an instrument for social change.”

Thus, Maestro Abreu made me reflect on how fortunate I was to have belonged to a musical elite and for the cultural experiences I have had. The connection between El Sistema and the Department of Social Development and not with the Department of Culture has also been beneficial; Well, in the United States, we have a concept that only minorities are the ones who have access to the cultural elite, as well as to quality education and artistic experiences, because they are the ones who can pay for such activities.

“...have the State recognize that this [System] is a social program and, as an artist, demand that my art be dignified with the mission of creating better human beings. Not artists or technicians; “We want human beings to develop more, update themselves, and have a more integrated and community education.”

As our educational systems struggle to balance intellectual and social development, I am reminded that we have something that our educational systems, schools, and communities need more of. I have learned to change my mindset from “no one wants us” to “everyone needs us,” to ensure that the next generation of young people does not enter society as dehumanized beings.

It is important to remember that before El Sistema, Venezuelan music schools and orchestras were influenced by elite European musical systems. Maestro Abreu wanted to change this model and built El Sistema, whose fundamental principle was opposed to that which formerly prevailed in Venezuelan music schools and orchestras. Because for the Master “the culture for the poor should not be a poor culture.” That means we must prepare the best instruments for the poorest children, provide the best teachers for the poorest children, and build the best buildings for the poorest children. For that reason, Maestro Abreu was proud that spaces were built in which those people with fewer resources could also enjoy.

Maestro Abreu began with five great maestros of the violin, cello, double bass, oboe, and trumpet; but once the orchestra grew, it had a great teacher for each instrument. What we hear and see today is the direct result of those first teachers who worked together. Over three decades, they created a standardized teaching methodology to ensure that every student could train and join an orchestra or choir without causing any musical trauma. This time-consuming work of developing a unified teaching philosophy is something that needs to be done well even if there is no manual for it.

“What we want him to do is live with us for a while in any way possible. See the Núcleo with different programs and observe the interactions of the orchestras with their community. See how this happens, create your concept, and find a way to incorporate yourself in the way that you think best fits within the process.”

Finally, I would like to add that Maestro Abreu wanted a world miracle. I wanted a global marriage of programs, teachers, and leaders coming together for the good of the children and youth we serve. This agreement has been achieved through practice, building face-to-face relationships, visiting the programs of each of the project members, attending their concerts, and sharing ideas and resources. Let us be the next generation to promote these ideals, but let us learn from those who came before us and serve those who will come after.



# Stanford Thompson

# Luis Velásquez



(National Manager of the Academic Training Program of El Sistema)

He began his musical studies at the age of 8 years old in the National System of Orchestras and Youth and Children's Choirs of Venezuela, in the San Agustín Núcleo in the classes of singing, musical language and instrumental performance (Viola); He was part of the Children's Orchestra of the same Núcleo, in the first selection of the National Children's Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela (1994-2001), Vicente Emilio Sojo Youth Orchestra of the Núcleo of Guatire (1995-1996) and then in the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Chacao (1996-1999).

In 2001, he joined the Simón Bolívar Venezuelan Youth Symphony Orchestra, currently known as the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela (2001-2013), with this group he toured nationally and internationally throughout the continents of South and North America, Europe, Asia and Oceania. In 2013, he began a service commission as Academic Director at the Guatire Center in the State of Miranda and in charge of the Special Education Program of the Guarenas-Guatire Axis in the same state. He assumes as Research Coordinator at the Research and Documentation Center of El Sistema during the period (2018-2019).

Then, he was appointed Manager of the Simón Bolívar Program (2020-2022) and Manager of the Training Program and Head of the Academic Management Inspection of El Sistema, where he currently performs his duties. He pursued his undergraduate studies at the Universidad Rufino Blanco Fombona, where he obtained a degree in Administration with a specialization in Tributes (2004–2008). He subsequently attended the Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador (UPEL), where he obtained a special education degree with a focus on Learning Difficulties (2012–2016).

Furthermore, he then continued his education at the Universidad Católica Santa Rosa, where he pursued a comprehensive education with an emphasis in Conducting, Orchestration, and Music Pedagogy (2016–2021). At the postgraduate level, he obtained a degree in: he completed a Specialist in Education for the Integration of People with Disabilities program from 2016 to 2019 and a Magister in Special Education program from 2019 to 2022, both of which were carried out at (UPEL). He is also graduated of the Simón Bolívar Conservatory of Music, having completed a Music Theorist and Solfeggio program in 2021.

# The Practice of Concertation: Social Strategy for the Rescue of Vulnerable Groups



*"In their essence, the orchestra and the choir are much more than artistic structures. "They are models and schools of social life." <sup>1</sup>*

Maestro José Antonio Abreu



In today's world, globalization has marked constant changes in political, economic, cultural, religious, social and profoundly technological orders that have driven organizations, public and private, to review their strategies to generate mechanisms and tools that allow them to face the challenges. . that society lives worldwide.

Globalization has particularly affected the social segment of children and adolescents, who are exposed to situations of exclusion, poverty, discrimination, inequality and complex migratory processes. The economic, educational and social barriers are even more pronounced in these groups, hindering their full development and limiting their opportunities, forcing them to take wrong paths, to face unfavorable conditions, and to leave their future adrift, without goals or directions that allow them to build a good destiny and a healthy quality of life.

This globalization has brought with it phenomena such as the increase in migratory flows, the polarization of wealth, and the homogenizing influence of Western culture. These factors directly affect children and youth, who are often separated from their families or forced to live in precarious conditions. Lack of access to quality education, exploitation of labor.



**<sup>1</sup> Phrase from Maestro Abreu's speech at the TED Award ceremony. February, 2009. California, USA.**

Violence and lack of protection of their rights are some of the realities that children and adolescents face as a result of the globalization process. In the case of Venezuela, alternatives have been designed to alleviate the problems described in the previous paragraphs. This is how El Sistema was born: a social, educational and cultural program that seeks to rescue, educate and empower vulnerable groups through the collective practice of music.

This strategy has had a significant impact in Venezuelan society and in many countries that have been inspired by the program. One of the practices of El Sistema is the concertation, which is based on the creation and training of youth and children's orchestras and choirs, which are organized structures and carefully planned spaces where children and adolescents learn to play instruments and sing together in order to focus on a common goal: to make music, the best music, music of excellence.

In this sense, this experience, which takes place two, three or four days a week, for weeks, months, years, in rehearsals, recitals, auditions and individual lessons, includes the challenge of learning (a score, a new work, a composer, another work and another composer), studying in the evenings or in free time; alternating the dedication to musical learning with schoolwork; following the teacher's instructions; grasping rhythms and chords; understanding the conductor's and choir's rules; sharing the music stand with peers; it is what we might call "the design of an ideal life routine, planned and nurtured to bring about positive achievements in the life of a child and adolescent." This strategy has had a significant impact in Venezuelan society and in many countries that have been inspired by the program.

One of the practices of El Sistema is concertation, which is based on the

creation and training of youth and children's orchestras and choirs, which are organized structures and carefully planned spaces where children and adolescents learn to play instruments and sing together in order to focus on a common goal: to make music, the best music, music of excellence.

Thus, this dynamic of life offers multiple benefits for the healthy development of children and adolescents on a personal, social and emotional level. In this sense, we will list some of the benefits of the El Sistema program:

1.- The practice of concertation in El Sistema promotes the personal development of the young participants. Through music, children and adolescents acquire skills, abilities, physical and mental agility that allow them to face discipline, teamwork, understanding of rules and attention to orders in the orchestra, quick reading of scores, concentration and commitment to the tasks assigned, the ability to breathe and the physical demands of playing different instruments. All this without forgetting that the sense of hearing is greatly enriched and accelerated.

2.- Inclusion in the social organization. El Sistema is based on the premise that every child and young person has the right to participate in groups and to join orchestras, regardless of their social, racial, linguistic, religious or philosophical background. The program also promotes access to music education for students from different socio-economic backgrounds and encourages their integration, regardless of their origin or family situation. It is an inclusive program based on humanitarian law.

3.- El Sistema is a stage for socialization, coexistence and solidarity. The orchestra and the choir are ideal and stimulating grounds for sharing. The group becomes a society, a community in which the leader is the director and the citizens are the musicians. In this society, they exchange music stands, chairs, and sheet music; each musician or choir member must

respect, align, and work as a team to achieve a harmonious sound. Collective performance prevails over individualism and ego. Solidarity and cooperation among peers develop in a remarkable way because everyone is behind a common goal and achievement.

4.- The practice of concertation in El Sistema provides a comprehensive education to train citizens and leaders of their own families and communities. Children and young students, members of an orchestra and/or choir, become the pride of their families and prominent figures in their neighborhoods, urbanizations, regions and states. Youth and children learn and experience the transformative power of social organization based on arts and culture.

5.- The vision of the future, learning a trade and a working tool. The opportunity to study music, to learn to play an instrument, to become a musician, a soloist, an orchestra conductor, a music teacher or a violin maker, offers to those who earn their living in the concert of an orchestra or a choir a valid work tool and a noble profession with which they can live in the future, feed themselves and become important professionals. From a young age, they can forge a profession that will provide them with a salary that will allow them to live well.

6.- Development of the sense of aesthetics, leadership and purpose. Making and listening to music at the highest level, attending El Sistema concerts, appreciating the sound of musical instruments, entering the world of stages and theaters; all of this together constitutes a stimulus for children and young people to get used to appreciating beauty and to form their sense and aesthetic appreciation. Moreover, in orchestras and choirs they learn to recognize leaders and to train themselves as leaders, to set goals and objectives that will lead them along the path of demands, performance and achievement of goals in their lives.

El Sistema has distinguished itself as a promoter of diverse societies. The implementation of music education has proven to be an agent of social change, providing equal opportunities to children and young people at risk of exclusion. The program has succeeded in keeping many young people out of situations of violence and crime by providing them with musical instruments, education and support, offering them a healthy and constructive alternative.

In this sense, all this work has been a positive support in the communities where El Sistema operates, by promoting peace, coexistence and social integration. Another important aspect of El Sistema, as a promoter of diverse societies, is its focus on teamwork and youth participation. Through orchestra and choir training, students learn to collaborate and value the diversity of talents and abilities of their peers. This not only promotes social inclusion, but also develops leadership, empathy and respect skills that are essential in a diverse and just society.

It should also be noted that El Sistema has reached beyond the borders of Venezuela, promoting cultural diversity and dialogue among different nations. Through international tours and participation in musical events around the world, the young musicians of the program have had the opportunity to exchange experiences with students from other cultures and to share their music with audiences around the world. This cultural exchange fosters appreciation and respect for diversity, strengthens bonds, and creates greater understanding and alliances between countries. It is important to note that this El Sistema program has a wide reach throughout the country.

In this way, by reaching communities, both urban and rural, children and young people from all socioeconomic levels and from different cultural contexts can have access to music and quality musical education. In this sense, all of this work has been a positive support in the communities where El Sistema operates, promoting peace, coexistence and social integration.

Another important aspect of El Sistema as a promoter of diverse societies is its focus on teamwork and youth participation. Through orchestra and choir training, students learn to work together and value the diversity of talents and abilities of their peers. This not only promotes social inclusion, but also develops leadership, empathy and respect skills that are essential in a diverse and just society.

It should also be noted that El Sistema has reached beyond the borders of Venezuela, promoting cultural diversity and dialogue among different nations. Through international tours and participation in musical events around the world, the program's young musicians have had the opportunity to interact with students from other cultures and share their music with audiences around the world. This cultural exchange fosters appreciation and respect for diversity, strengthens bonds, and creates greater understanding and alliances between countries.

It is important to note that this El Sistema program has a wide reach throughout the country. Thus, by reaching out to communities in both urban and rural areas, children and youth from all socioeconomic levels and cultural backgrounds have access to music and quality music education. El Sistema is based on the premise that music is a human right and a powerful tool for developing social, cognitive and emotional skills. This approach has proven to be highly effective in promoting the human development of participants.

In terms of social development, El Sistema encourages participation and collaboration in musical groups such as orchestras and choirs. This activity involves practicing teamwork, respecting the ideas and talents of others and developing effective communication skills. All of this helps to strengthen the social skills of the participants and promotes a culture of peaceful and respectful coexistence.

In conclusion, this program has succeeded in involving children and adolescents from all over the country, especially those who live in disadvantaged communities and risk situations, to provide them with a better quality of life and opportunities for comprehensive citizenship development through music, teamwork and the promotion of values such as discipline, respect, responsibility and personal improvement. In this space, music becomes an escape and a source of inspiration for their peers, families and communities, offering them a positive alternative to the adversities they face in their environment.

Finally, and no less transcendent, let us remember an inescapable premise in Maestro Abreu's conception of this program: "El Sistema and the coordination of human groups in music are fundamental for the formation of happy men and women, who are cared for, appreciated, accompanied and valued as human beings".



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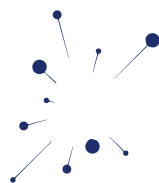
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