

History and Description of El Sistema

The proposed program model for the Harmony Project draws central programmatic and philosophical elements from Venezuela's El Sistema. El Sistema is Venezuela's system of youth orchestras that serves over 400,000 children through intensive, ensemble-based music programming.

The mission of El Sistema is "to systematize music education and to promote the collective practice of music through symphony orchestras and choruses...as a means of social organization and communitarian development...in order to help children and young people in achieving their full potential and acquiring values that favor their growth and have a positive impact on their lives in society.



Since its inception in 1975 by Maestro José Antonio Abreu, and its establishment as a government-funded organization shortly thereafter, El Sistema has since gained both national and international recognition as a widely successful music and social program that is accessible to all children, and that facilitates the development of skills and core competencies that promote their longer-term social success.

El Sistema has had international reach and impact, and has inspired networks of programs in numerous other countries, including Canada, Mexico, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Korea, Sweden, Scotland, and the United States. In 2007, the Inter-American Development Bank conducted a cost-benefit analysis on the social impact of El Sistema in Venezuela. At the time, one-third of all participants in El Sistema were reportedly from the country's lowest income bracket. When compared to a control group, participants in this study reported significant gains in community participation and demonstrated substantially fewer behavior problems in school, among other impacts. Due to the social impacts identified by the Inter-American Development Bank, El Sistema was approved for a loan of one-hundred fifty-million dollars.

In the United States, El Sistema has received widely acclaimed attention as well. While interest in El Sistema has been percolating since at least 2007, widespread fervor was instigated in 2009 when Gustavo Dudamel—a product of El Sistema—was named the Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and when Maestro Abreu received the TED Prize to fund a training program at the New England Conservatory specifically to train young leaders to build and run El Sistema-inspired programs in the United States. Since then, over 50 new El Sistema-inspired programs have been created that use daily, intensive, ensemble-based programming for at-risk youth, integrating the core principles of peer-based learning and joy through mastery into their pedagogy. Over 6,000 children currently participate in El Sistema programs across the U.S., with the number rapidly increasing by the month.

Source: New Orleans Youth Orchestra of the Lower Ninth Ward – 2012