

# TO PLAY, TO SING AND TO STRIVE



Programs of the National System of Youth and Children's Orchestra and Choirs of Venezuela

In their true essence, orchestras and choirs are much more than artistic structures. They are fruitful soil for the cultivation of values, abilities, and attitudes needed for individual, collective, and civic growth and self-improvement. They are unbeatable social models and schools, which aim to perfection and excellence. Because playing and singing together means to coexist in an endearing and respectable way.

**Maestro José Antonio Abreu**





# A PEACE AND PROGRESS MODEL FOR HUMANKIND

The National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Venezuela (El Sistema) is a social and cultural program of the Venezuelan State. The organization belongs to the Simon Bolivar Musical Foundation and is attached to the Ministry of Popular Power for the Presidential Office and for Government Management Follow Up for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

This educational model, created in 1975 by the Venezuelan maestro and musician José Antonio Abreu, unfolds from early stage education into comprehensive learning for

individuals in the society. With its intensive individual and ensemble music practice, El Sistema includes children from all socio-economic levels: 66% come from low income homes or live in adverse conditions and vulnerable areas, while the remaining 34% come from urban areas with better access possibilities. This mix embodies a model of inclusion that mirrors the Venezuelan population, without any discrimination.

Over the last four decades, El Sistema has created innovative programs that not only nurture

excellent musicians, composers, conductors, soloists, and teachers, but also train these young people to make and repair their own musical instruments (Lutherie Program); to empower disabled children and teenagers through the Special Education Program; to assist hospital-confined participants; to offer spiritual and psychological guidance for men and women in prison through the Penitentiary Academic Program; to stimulate infant development with the New Members Program; and to motivate family togetherness with the Paper Orchestra program. Two additional programs round out the rich array of El Sistema's educational options: the Alma Llanera Program, which instills the love and practice of Venezuelan music in our young citizens, and the New Orchestra and Musical Genres Program that offers each musician the opportunity to create in their own style.

**1.000.000**

children and teenagers incorporated  
in our goal

# Orchestra and Choir Training Program

# VENEZUELA DEVELOPS THROUGH THE MUSIC

The intensive group and individual music instruction and practice model of the Orchestra and Choir Training Program is the basis for all El Sistema programs.

By belonging to orchestras and choirs, both of which are employed as instruments for social organization and human development, hundreds of thousands of children are socially included, providing them healthy life choices and a wide horizon of options as a professional musician.

In front of the music stand and under the leadership of the conductor, music becomes powerful agent for positive change. Students learn to work in teams, striving to achieve ambitious objectives; they progress through the challenges of escalating levels in the program; they master a sequential symphonic and choral



Gustavo Dudamel in concert with the National Children's Symphonic Orchestra of Venezuela

**787000**  
young venezuelans are the  
heart and soul of  
El Sistema

**440** branches hold orchestras, choirs, groups, and educational programs

**1340** modules allow El Sistema to reach communities, schools, and the most remote villages

**1681** children, pre-children, and youth orchestras are the sound of Venezuela

repertoire; and they succeed on national and international stages. The enormous scale and growth achieved by the Orchestra and Choir Program requires organizational structure and effective national management. This national efficiency has enabled the formation of a wide range of local branches. They are located in all regions and cities of Venezuela, and they contain seven regional-branches of the Simon Bolivar Music Conservatory. Each branch has enough space for 18 academies, specializing in the study of an equal number of instruments, and serves as the headquarters for all the orchestras, groups, choirs and programs of El Sistema. The modular structure allows El Sistema to reach the most remote towns in the country, in border area communities, in neighborhoods, and schools, so that no Venezuelan child is left outside the joy and growth brought by music.



The Simon Bolivar National Youth Coral in Cologne, Germany

**10000**

professors, teachers, and instructors train all musicians and choir members

**1340**

children and youth choirs are part of the National Choir System

**15**

programs assisted indigenous communities





# Special Education Program

# INCLUSION AND BARRIER-FREE DEVELOPMENT

The Special Education Program (PEE in Spanish) was created in 1995 with the intention to assist children and young people with functional differences or physical and cognitive disabilities. In the PEE, music works as a tool that develops potential, autonomy, and social inclusion. Since its beginnings, the PEE included children and young people with impaired hearing, sight or cognitive abilities; with motor disability; with learning difficulties, autism, Down Syndrome, among other conditions. The program started by assisting 16 children with learning difficulties and 12 with impaired sight. Today, over 4,159 children thrive under the care and supervision of over 100 specialized teachers and instructors. The PEE founded the Research and Printing Center for Braille Music Sheets in Barquisimeto (Lara State) to provide literary instruction and to enable the musical work of children and adults with impaired sight, so they can create music and join the choirs.

Later, a Functional Diversity Teaching Training Center opened its doors in Caracas. Among the ensembles and choirs created by the PEE, the White Hand Choir is the signature group, which emphasizes eloquent corporal expression and

gestural language. All of this awakens and strengthens the internal sense of rhythm in hearing-impaired students. Other artistic groups of the PEE program are: Alma Llanera Integration Typical Orchestra, the Drum Ensemble, the Rhythmic Band, the

Bell Orchestra, and the Recorder Ensemble, which are located in the states where the PEE program has been established: Aragua, Miranda, Distrito Capital, Guárico, Táchira, Falcón, Mérida, Zulia, Yaracuy, Trujillo, Lara, Portuguesa, Bolívar, Nueva Esparta, Anzoátegui and Vargas.



Lara Somos. Special Education Program Group



Member of the PEE in Zulia and Anzoátegui

“ I am a blind violinist. I have been able to read music thanks to the Braille system. I am a happy person because of El Sistema’s orchestras and choirs, and the light music has given to me ”

Luisana Freites. Barquisimeto branch



**4159** children are assisted by the PEE

**100** specialized teachers and instructors work for children with disabilities

**14** branches of El Sistema currently run the Special Education Program



# Healthcare

Program

# A HEALING AND LIVING TOOL

In June 2012, the Simon Bolivar Musical Foundation created the Healthcare Program (PAH in Spanish) to musically train hospitalized children and young people. With this, El Sistema seeks to help patients with illnesses that require that they stay in healthcare centers for long periods. Music becomes a therapeutic tool and healing hope for many of them. Through the close contact with music, this program decreases anxiety and stress levels caused by poor health, which benefits patients, and improves the family-patient-doctor relationship.

The PAH Program intends to incorporate sick children into the El Sistema orchestra and choir branch located closest to their homes, once they are released from the health facility. So music will still be with them as they return to their home lives. The José Manuel de los Ríos Children's Hospital, located in Caracas, is the pilot branch for this program. Since the effectiveness of the program was proven, this project has become a regular program that has cared for 836 children, partnering with 30 health professionals.



“ I have been battling against cancer and I feel very grateful to God for giving me this enormous strength to keep going. A year ago, music entered the hospital, and it interested me, so I started to play cuatro. I was a cuatro player. After that, I got a problem in my arm, and it was amputated. But we have to keep playing. Then, I got into percussion. Now, I play the xylophone, and I feel very happy ”

Rafael Rendón. Member of the Healthcare Program

**836** children participate in the PAH







# New Members of El Sistema Program

# BORN AND RAISE WITH MUSIC

The New Member Program (NIS in Spanish) started in December 2012. Integrating orchestra and family, it brings babies closer to symphonic music, develops their innate musical talents, from their prenatal period up to 3 years of age.

The NIS provides the opportunity for them to enter an orchestra or choir branch of El Sistema early to continue their artistic development. Through concerts and recitals in hospitals and in the National Social Action Center for Music, a National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Venezuela venue, the NIS invites the whole family to enjoy musical presentations by members

**2500**

pregnant mother, fathers, babies, and children of ages 1 to 3 have participated in the NIS



of El Sistema together. When the babies and their families attend these activities for the first time, they are enrolled in the program, and they receive a membership certificate, a

medal or musical pin, and a CD with educational and classical music content. And also, they are permanently invited to concerts and activities programmed especially for them.



“ The child contact with music should be established even before their birth. Music will generate a wonderful stimulus in the baby that will reach directly to their soul, spirit, and their emotional and physical growth. A baby who is stimulated with music from his birth, will be a calm child, closer to their family bonds. Music is a transformation vehicle since the moment you hear it for the first time ”

M.D. Rivali Soto José, NIS Program



# Alma Llanera

Program

# NATIONALISTIC CALLING

Since its foundation in 1975, El Sistema has strongly emphasized the knowledge and dissemination of Venezuelan traditional and folkloric music. El Sistema has made this repertoire more widely known and has formed diverse ensembles, orchestras, and groups dedicated to this musical genre.

This proud national commitment was systematized and intensified when the Alma Llanera Program was created. Following the educational and philosophical model of El Sistema, this program has initiated, developed and deepened the study and dissemination of traditional Venezuelan music. Among the main objectives of this program are the rescue of Venezuelan musical instruments considered extinct, such as the Carrizo. Also, it intends to transcribe, disseminate, and appraise the musical works from the national traditional repertoire, which have historically been preserved only orally. Through this program, children at all national branches of El Sistema can now study Venezuelan musical instruments, such as cuatro, guitar, bandola, mandolin, Creole harp, maracas, and popular bass, with an academic study plan,

directly linked to and guided by experts of the genre. The Alma Llanera Program combines traditional music teaching methods with the music's vision of collective practice. This program nurtures the cultural wealth of the nation's different regions, and disseminates traditional Venezuelan music through recitals, concerts, and festivals.



“ I waited 50 years of my life to listen to a children and youth orchestra like this one, from the Alma Llanera Program, so fresh and traditional. The Youth Orchestra and Choir System is the most wonderful thing that has happened to music in Venezuela. This program represents the future of Venezuelan music, and I am happy because all these children are getting to know all my music work, and that of those who make folklore music ”

**Juan Vicente Torrealba. Venezuelan composer, Creole harp player, folklore musician**

**166** Alma Llanera groups, folklore music orchestras, representing musical diversity in Venezuela

**40** musical compositions from Venezuelan folklore have been rescued and transcribed to music sheets







# Penitentiary Academic Program

# REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL REINTEGRATION

The Penitentiary Academic Program (PAP) was created in 2007 to reduce violence within prisons, and to strengthen the social reintegration process for male and female convicts. This program's implementation gave birth to the Penitentiary Orchestra and Choir System. This program is led by the Simon Bolivar Musical Foundation and the Ministry of Popular Power for Penitentiary Affairs under the sponsorship of the Inter-American Development Bank. The program is established in the National Institute for Women Orientation (INOF, in Spanish) in the Andean region, Santa Ana, Carabobo (Mínima de Tocuyito), Insular region Penitentiary Centers; Coro's Penitentiary Community; Judicial Facilities of Barinas; and Tocuyito's Women Annex. The goal of program is to provide musical education to 10% of the penitentiary population. Since its launch, the Penitentiary Orchestra and Choir System for Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration has benefited 10100 inmates. Through the PAP, about 270,000



hours of academic instruction have been provided, as well as over 700 presentations, recitals, education concerts, performances, and external and internal exhibitions have been accomplished. A number of the beneficiaries continue with their music studies once they are released.

**700**

concerts have been given by the Penitentiary Orchestra and Choir System

**270000**

academic instruction hours have been taught in the PAP



“ All this have been beautiful (...) I started to be very disciplined, and stopped cursing. We are so busy with the orchestra we have in prison, learning new musical works the teacher gives us, that we stopped being violent ”

**Heidy Seijas. Violinist. Inmate of the National Institute for Women Orientation (INOF). Los Teques, Venezuela**

**966**

citizens joined the Penitentiary Symphony Orchestras Program in 2015

**8**

penitentiary centers in Venezuela have orchestras and choirs



# Paper Orchestra

Program

# FUN MUSICAL INITIATION

Created in 2005, the Paper Orchestra Program (POP) was designed to make children's initiation into student orchestras and choirs at the ages of 3-6 a happy and positive experience.

POP aims for children and families to gain basic knowledge about the symphonic orchestra: identifying different instruments, sections, and tones; developing the psychomotor skills for a child to be able to play a musical instrument; and stimulating the sense of orchestra discipline and attention to the conductor.

The most important tool is singing. By singing the children develop basic musical abilities like rhythm and melody, accompanied by a harmonic instrument. The strength of the program lies in the link the children make with their instru-

ment, the social reinforcement acquired through collective work, and the closeness with the family in the musical activity. They make instruments with their parents, using papier-mâché or recyclable

materials. The program's audiovisual and artistic activities are scaled to meet different educational levels. Different ages are matched with the right level of theoretical and practical complexity.

**1983**

initiation groups present in El Sistema



Upon completion of the manufacturing process of the instrument, the young ones musicians integrate an orchestra



“The initiative to participate in the Paper Orchestra Program was great, and achieving our family integration through the project was a total success. All participating families were dedicated to instrument building, and usually we could run into parents who were also looking for materials. But the most important aspect was the contagious enthusiasm of Estefanía, the future violinist, who kept saying: we have to make my violin very beautiful.”

Higuera Malavé Family

**365** preschools have established the Paper Orchestra Program





# Academic Lutherie

Program

# MUSIC ARTISANS

The Academic Lutherie Center (CAL in Spanish) was created in 1982 by the Simon Bolivar Musical Foundation, to develop expert professionals who could manufacture, service, and repair symphonic and popular instruments required by musical groups, including those used in the Alma Llanera Program. Through the Music Artisans professional development process, young musicians learn the work of a luthier,

thus benefiting orchestras, bands, and other musical organizations. The program creates a sustainable pathway for young people who wish to train to assist musical making in this way. Nowadays, El Sistema has 30 lutherie workshops in the country, with a roster of 130 teachers who train young students who wish learn the manufacture and repair of musical instruments.

This integrates them into the job market and gives them the tools to start their own production business. This work has spread beyond El Sistema sites and Venezuelan borders. Through the Lutherie Roaming Workshop from the Andean Development Corporation's (CAF) Social Action Program, El Sistema has collaborated with luthier training in Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.



The teacher Alajuna Romulus, founder of CAL

**30** lutherie workshops from El Sistema present in the whole country



Young Apprentice Workshop Lutherie nucleo Guatire

“ One of my dreams is that we can cater the national market demand with our hand-made musical instruments, in which we poured our hearts. For us, the most significant aspect is that every violin, every viola, every harp, or every cuatro made in CAL, is played by a student of El Sistema, and that they feel proud to have it ”

**Henry Parra. CAL Coordinator and Instructor (String section)**

**300** scholarship students are prepared in CAL's luthier workshops



# New Orchestras and Music Genres

## Program

# CREATIVITY AND VERSATILITY

With professionalism and excellence always as the guide, El Sistema offers every student a wide horizon of artistic and creative possibilities. They can participate in a wide range of orchestras and ensembles with a diversity of musical genres and styles. From jazz to rock, all the way through Latin inheritance rhythms, African-Venezuelan, Caribbean, traditional Venezuelan, traditional world music, or cutting edge sounds like fusions and urban music are present in the New Orchestras and Music Genres Program. Some examples of the wide variety

of choices for El Sistema participants include new groups like the Symphonic Rock Orchestra, the Simon Bolivar Latin-Caribbean Orchestra, the African-Venezuelan Orchestra and the Simon Bolivar Big Band Jazz. These were born inside the Simon Bolivar Music Conservatory and

represent pilot orchestras that have been copied in other sites around Venezuela. This new generation of attractive artistic expressions brings high levels of creativity and versatility to our young music innovators, and also, brings new audiences of all ages and interests.

**3344** groups dedicated to all music genres in El Sistema

**132** high level instructors and professors teach in the Conservatory

**3919** students are members of the Simon Bolivar Music Conservatory



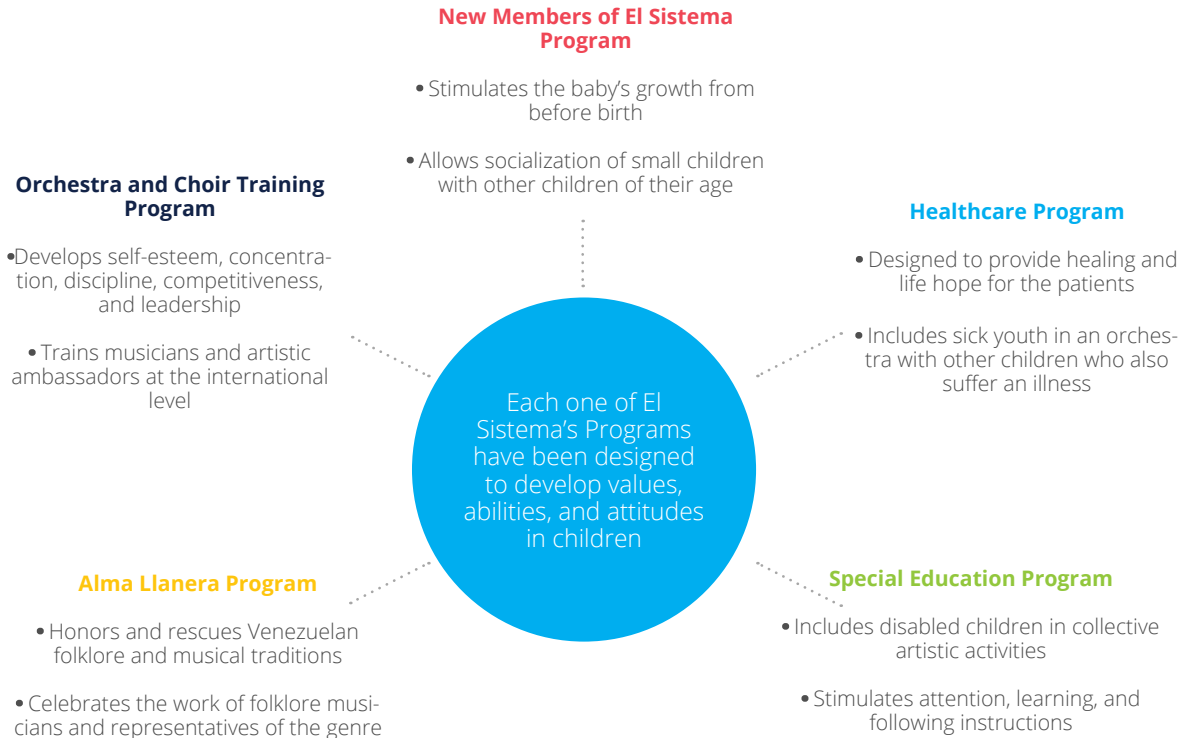
Afro Orchestra Simon Bolivar



The rock and jazz, two attractive genre for students of El Sistema



# ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAMS





# OF THE YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S ORCHESTRAS AND CHOIRS OF VENEZUELA

## Lutherie Program

- Offers work training in specialized materials for young people
- Generates new work sources for artisans and luthiers

## Paper Orchestra Program

- Secures a fun approach towards music
- Establishes music learning from preschool

El Sistema's positive impact spreads to teachers, families, and communities contributing with the formation and establishment of a peace and social justice culture

## Penitentiary Academic Program

- Diminishes violence in prisons
- Reinstates prisoner self-esteem, dignity, and personal assessment

## New Orchestras and Music Genres Program

- Offers academic formation for popular genre musicians
- Promotes the emergence of groups of all styles

“ Thanks to El Sistema, children all over the world can benefit from the power of music to achieve a change in their lives. However, in a deeper sense, El Sistema is a social program that has saved many lives, and will continue saving many more ”

**Sir Simon Rattle**  
Berlin Philharmonic's Musical Director

“ Maestro Abreu has placed Venezuela at the international cultural forefront. The Orchestra and Choir System has overflowed frontiers, and it has become a gift from Venezuela to the world. Thanks Maestro Abreu ”

**Rubén Blades**  
Panamanian Composer, Director, Singer


“ Many people know Venezuela as an oil exporter, but not everyone know the biggest and best export this country has to offer is the one that reaches most souls in Latin America: the System of Youth and Children's Orchestras and Choirs. A program through which we have seen many Latin-American children trade a gunshot for a violin, children who now have illusions, a useful life, and a future filled with opportunities ”

**Luis Alberto Moreno**  
President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

“ El Sistema surprises us even more as time progresses. We are witnesses of that now, here in Salzburg, with the tears of the audience. So, one wonders: How can we understand this? How is it that, at their short age, these children can play with such quality?. And I wonder again: What would have happened with these children if they did not have their music? ”

**Plácido Domingo**  
Tenor

# MUSIC'S SOCIAL ACTION INFRASTRUCTURE



National Social Action Center for Music (CNASPM), located in Caracas, is the model and pilot facility for a series of planned buildings that will be erected in all regions of the country, thanks to the support and cooperation of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). These El Sistema buildings will provide students, musicians and teachers worthy spaces to learn and enjoy the healthy coexistence music brings. Currently, the Teaching Training Center is being built next to the CNASPM.



EL SISTEMA 

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