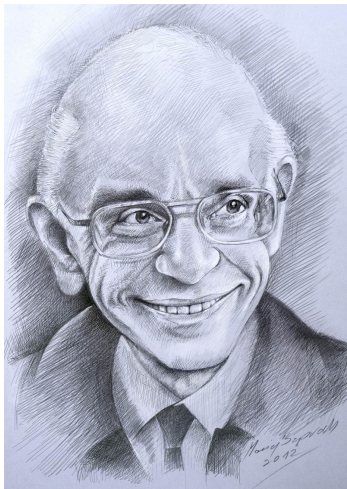


# El Sistema and the Power of Music to Transform Lives



Music has to be recognized as an agent of social development in its highest sense, because it transmits the highest values — solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion. And it has the ability to unite an entire community and to express sublime feelings.

– José Antonio Abreu

Presented by  
Jim Smith

[www.ClassicalTyro.com/presentations/elsistema](http://www.ClassicalTyro.com/presentations/elsistema)  
jameslsmith@icloud.com

Western Institute for Lifelong Learning  
Western New Mexico University  
July 2020

## The Wisdom of José Antonio Abreu

*In the struggle for human rights, let us vigorously incorporate children's sublime right to music, in whose bosom shines Beingness in its splendor and its ineffable mystery. Let us reveal to our children the beauty of music and music shall reveal to our children the beauty of life.*

\* \* \*

*The orchestra and choir are much more than artistic studies, they are examples and schools of social life. From the minute a child is taught how to play an instrument, he is no longer poor. He becomes a child in progress, a child who will become a citizen.*

\* \* \*

*To sing and to play together means to intimately coexist. Music is immensely important in the awakening of sensibility in the forging of values.*

\* \* \*

*When arts education takes the place in our society that it deserves, we will have much less delinquency and violence, and much more motivation towards noble achievement. My struggle is for a society in which art is not just an aesthetic dimension of life. It is a primary instrument for the development of individuals and societies.*

\* \* \*

*Poverty is not just the lack of a roof or bread, it is also a spiritual lack—a loneliness and lack of recognition. The vicious cycle of poverty can be broken when a child poor in material possessions acquires spiritual wealth through music.*

\* \* \*

*Poverty generates anonymity. An orchestra means joy, motivation, teamwork, success. Music creates happiness and hope in a community.*

\* \* \*

*In their essence, the orchestra and the choir are much more than artistic structures. They are examples and schools of social life, because to sing and to play together means to intimately coexist toward perfection and excellence. This is why music is immensely important in the awakening of sensibility and in the forging of values.*

\* \* \*

*Music can serve as a beacon and a goal for a vast social mission—no longer putting society at the service of art, but instead art at the service of society, at the service of the weakest, at the service of the children, and at the service of all those who cry out for vindications through the spirit of their human condition and the raising up of their dignity.*

## A. What is El Sistema?

The **National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras and Choirs of Venezuela** (better known as El Sistema) is a publicly-funded after-school program in Venezuela that offers children a free education in music. El Sistema's astonishing success in creating over 400 **núcleos** (music centers) that educate over 700,000 Venezuelan children (as of 2015) has led to an attempt to replicate El Sistema in over 70 nations.

## B. Who was José Antonio Abreu?

José Antonio Abreu (1939-2018) was the founder of El Sistema. His philosophy of music and music education was the guiding force behind El Sistema from its creation in 1975 until his death on March 24, 2018.

*The huge spiritual world that music produces in itself ends up overcoming material poverty.*  
– José Antonio Abreu

## C. Who is Gustavo Dudamel?

Gustavo Dudamel (b. 1981) is a product of El Sistema who has become one of the most distinguished conductors in the world, an international celebrity whose fame reaches far beyond the world of classical music. Since 2009, Dudamel has served as the music director of the **Los Angeles Philharmonic**.

*Playing music together is connected with being a better citizen, with caring about other people, with working together. The orchestra, you know, it's a community. It's a little world, where you can create harmony. And of course, when you have this, connected with an artistic sensibility, anything is possible. Everything is possible.*  
– Gustavo Dudamel

## D. Who is eligible to participate in El Sistema?

El Sistema offers a free music education to all Venezuelan children between the ages of two and eighteen. All **núcleos** are based on a policy of equitable access, and the overwhelming majority of children participating in the program are from poor families. El Sistema includes many delinquent and abandoned children, as well as special needs children.

## E. What is the mission of El Sistema?

El Sistema is a **program for social reform** based on the idea that music can transform society by improving the lives of children and their families. El Sistema attempts to address the sense of hopelessness and low self-esteem that leads to gang membership, drugs, and violence. El Sistema is based on a belief that performing music helps children grow in spirit, confidence, and self-discipline. A child's family will also be affected through pride in a child's achievements and an increased determination to support the child.

## F. What are El Sistema's guiding principles?

1. **Accessibility:** Every child is provided an instrument, music lessons, a place in an orchestra or choir, free meals, and social services at no charge to the child or the family.
2. **Community:** El Sistema children learn and perform in groups. Children are taught to work together, to encourage each other, and to teach each other. One-on-one learning exists simultaneously with group work.
3. **Performance:** El Sistema makes little distinction between rehearsals and public performance. Public performances are held frequently to help children overcome feelings of anxiety or stage fright. Concerts are scheduled for holidays, children's birthdays, public celebrations, visiting dignitaries, etc.
4. **Excellence:** El Sistema is dedicated to both unlimited access and a superior level of artistry.

*Culture for the poor must never be poor culture.*  
– José Antonio Abreu

5. **Playfulness:** El Sistema attempts to make little distinction between work and play. Teachers are trained to bring joy and fun into the process of learning music.

*In El Sistema we never forget fun.*  
– Gustavo Dudamel

6. **Flexibility:** El Sistema considers itself a dynamic organization, always changing as it adapts to changing circumstances. With no model to imitate, El Sistema has been continually reevaluated and modified since its creation in 1975.

***Tocar y Luchar***  
*(To Play and To Struggle)*

El Sistema motto engraved on the medallions that children wear during public performances

*The orchestra is clearly the most important thing in the world to all of these young people. And that comes through loud and clear in their music.*

– Simon Rattle, conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, 2002-2018

## Music Education – Two Approaches

Traditional		El Sistema
<b>A</b>	music is highly competitive; musicians compete for chair placements and solos	competition is discouraged in the núcleos; musicians learn through cooperation (placement in a national orchestra is highly competitive)
<b>B</b>	musicians develop their skills by practicing alone and attending private lessons; learning to play an instrument is a solitary activity	musicians develop their skills by playing in an orchestra and attending group lessons; learning to play an instrument is a social activity
<b>C</b>	learning to play an instrument is considered hard work; requiring much solitary practice and discipline	learning to play an instrument is considered fun, an activity shared with friends; rehearsals are intense, but playful
<b>D</b>	technical expertise precedes musicality; emotion and feeling are added to music after a musician can play all the notes	musicality precedes technical expertise; orchestra rehearsals begin with feeling and emotion; technical problems are secondary
<b>E</b>	practicing an instrument and developing musical skills are separate from public performance; musicians develop skills in private and then perform in public	learning to play an instrument is tied to public performance; public performances are frequent and routine
<b>F</b>	technical expertise and musicianship are expected to develop over time after much practice and many rehearsals	technical expertise and musicianship are expected to develop rapidly; teachers circulate among musicians during orchestra rehearsals, continually correcting mistakes, adjusting positions, and refining rhythms, a process that is continued in group lessons (Note: El Sistema maintains a low ratio of teachers to students.)

*For us music is never solitary. It's not a matter of practicing in a room by yourself for years, until you are ready to play together. We play together from the beginning, and we learn together, sharing so many different experiences.*

*– Alejandro Carreño, concertmaster with the SBYOV*

## G. How much time do children spend with El Sistema?

El Sistema is an after-school music program that operates as an independent organization, separate from Venezuela's academic educational system. Núcleos are generally open for students five hours a day, six days a week. To participate in El Sistema, a child only needs to show up at a núcleo.

## H. Where are núcleos located?

Núcleos are locally controlled and operate from almost any available building. The buildings are sometimes dilapidated structures with damaged roofs, peeling paint, and inadequate plumbing. Many núcleos have no air-conditioning or running water and are subject to frequent power outages. (Note: The words "núcleo" and "orchestra" are interchangeable. The orchestra is where everyone in the núcleo comes together.)

*The only experience of excellence I know is kindness.*  
– a quote from Ludwig van Beethoven that is posted in núcleos throughout Venezuela

## I. How does El Sistema structure its orchestras?

1. **Baby Mozart Orchestra:** Two-year-old children are taught songs that begin the process of developing social, emotional, and musical skills.
2. **Baby Vivaldi Orchestra:** Three-year-old children are taught to shake maraca eggs as they sing.
3. **Baby Haydn Orchestra (Paper Orchestra):** Four- to six-year-old children pretend to play string instruments made from paper-mâché.
4. **Núcleo Orchestras:** Beginning at age six or seven, students are provided with real instruments and taught to play simplified versions of orchestral masterworks such as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, Verdi's *Grand March from Aida*, and Rossini's *William Tell Overture*. An orchestra brings all students of a núcleo together and includes children of all ages and levels of ability. Beginners sit next to advanced students in a núcleo orchestra.
5. **National Children's Orchestra:** Children come to Caracas from all over Venezuela to form a national orchestra of the best musicians between the ages of nine and fourteen. In 2012, the National Children's Orchestra consisted of 360 musicians.
6. **Teresa Carreño Youth Orchestra:** A national orchestra composed of the best high school musicians from throughout Venezuela.
7. **Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela (SBYOV):** An orchestra created by José Abreu in 1978 for musicians who are eighteen and older. SBYOV had to be restructured in 2001 when it reached over 400 members.

**Símon Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela (A and B):** Semi-professional orchestras composed of Venezuela's best musicians between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six. Musicians go through an intensely competitive process to become a member of the SBYOV. Members receive salaries and benefits, allowing them to devote their time to rehearsing, performing, and traveling. Most members of the SBYOV are working toward degrees at universities that normally grant them as many as eight years to complete a degree. SBYOV tours the world extensively.

8. **Símon Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela:** A professional orchestra created in 2011 from older musicians who were original members of the SBYOV. Many members of the orchestra work as university professors or teachers and administrators for El Sistema. This orchestra, widely considered one of the best orchestras in the world, generally remains in Venezuela and does not tour extensively.

*Everybody who has been in El Sistema understands that the way you behave in an orchestra is the perfect way to behave in society. It's a social program, but we use music to get there. It's like El Sistema plants a chip in you, a chip of positivity. And it never leaves you. That chip of positivity stays with you for the rest of your life.*

– Alejandro Carreño, concertmaster with the SBYOV

*I was never conscious of getting a music education. I was just with my friends in the orchestra. Music was all about friendship and communication. If we started acting up, the worst thing they could say to us was, "You have to leave! No orchestra for you today!"*

– El Sistema musician

*Music opens up opportunities for a new life for children who would not have it any other way. And it teaches a child the meaning of discipline, and responsibility with conscience ... if you learn that when you are young, you keep it through your whole life.*

– Louisa, piccolo player with SBYOV

*Classical music for hundreds of years has been excluding people. We are about changing that. We are the opposite of that. We say to everyone, "You too can play classical music."*

– Rafael Elster, núcleo director

*The aim of the orchestra is to raise and develop human beings and citizens. It's not always easy. Sometimes it's very hard. There are many kids here who remind me of myself at that age.... But it cannot be done separately from making music. You have to work on both things in parallel: making music and making citizens.*

– Lennar Acosta, El Sistema teacher

## El Sistema Timeline

- 1939** **José Antonio Abreu** was born in Valera, Venezuela, and grew up 140 miles away in the city of Barquisimeto as the eldest of six children in a musical family.
- 1948** Abreu, as a student in a school run by Franciscan nuns, began taking piano lessons from **Doralisa Jiménez de Madrid**. Abreu claimed the philosophy guiding El Sistema came from Doralisa.
- 1957** Abreu moved to Caracas to study music and economics.
- Abreu became discouraged by the lack of opportunities for classical musicians in Venezuela—only one small conservatory with unqualified teachers and no orchestras.
  - As a music student in Caracas, Abreu organized rehearsal's at people's houses and apartments, as well as a local ice cream shop. From these rehearsals, he created **Festival Bach**, a series of weekly concerts featuring the music of Baroque era composers such as Bach, Handel, and Corelli.

*I felt as though I had come up against a big wall. It was completely different from the kind of musical learning I had experienced with my piano teacher. Students at the conservatory studied and practiced alone ... it was a very lonely and arid way of studying. I was a violinist as well as a pianist. I wanted to play, but the possibilities for playing were extremely limited. One had to study alone for many years ... and even then, the possibility of playing in an orchestra—it was like a myth.*

– José Antonio Abreu, speaking about his experiences studying music in Caracas

- 1964** Abreu completed his PhD in petroleum economics and a degree in organ performance. He then went to the University of Michigan for post-graduate work in economics and law.
- 1969** Abreu became a Professor of Economics and Law in Caracas at the Universidad Católica Andres Bello and the Universidad Simón Bolívar. He also became one of the youngest people ever elected to serve as a Deputy in the Venezuelan National Congress.
- 1975** **El Sistema's Origin Story**: Abreu wanted to create an orchestra and invited young musicians to show up for a rehearsal at a parking garage. Only eleven musicians showed up for the first rehearsal.

*Only eleven showed up! It was a disheartening prospect, and I knew this was a moment of truth: either something momentous had to happen, or it was over. I said this to the eleven students. I told them this could be a historic moment. And I asked them to come with me on this journey. Twenty-five young music students came the next day. The day after that, there were forty-six. We recruited students from the music school in Caracas which did not have orchestras. Some came with their own instruments; others, who did not have instruments, came with borrowed ones. Within a month we had seventy-five young musicians.*

– José Antonio Abreu, speaking about the creation of El Sistema



- 1976** Within a year of the Venezuelan Youth Orchestra's first rehearsal, Abreu took the orchestra to the **Aberdeen International Youth Festival** in Scotland, making the Venezuelan Youth Orchestra the first ensemble from Latin America to attend the festival. The orchestra won first place and musicians from the orchestra won most of the principal chairs to perform in a specially-chosen festival orchestra.

*It was incredible! They were auditioning individual musicians from each orchestra to create a select festival orchestra which would play in the Royal Albert Hall with Van Cliburn. I was chosen to be concertmaster of that orchestra. And there were at least twenty other people from Venezuela chosen for that orchestra—more than any other country.*

– Frank DiPolo, concertmaster for the Venezuelan Youth Orchestra

The orchestra's performance in Scotland helped Abreu convince President Carlos Pérez to support the orchestra. Pérez agreed to both of Abreu's requests:

1. **Make the Venezuelan Youth Orchestra a state-funded institution.**
2. **Create a state-funded program for the development of youth through music.** Abreu asked that the program (later known as El Sistema) be funded through the **Ministry of Youth** rather than the Ministry of Culture. From its inception, El Sistema was viewed as a social program to fight poverty, rather than a program to create an elite musical culture.

*Within all of Latin America, the ministries of culture upheld a very elitist idea of art, as something for a privileged minority. That is why, from the very beginning, I wanted the official acknowledgement of the state that this is a social program.*

– José Antonio Abreu

- 1978** The Venezuelan Youth Orchestra was renamed the **Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela**, becoming the first permanent orchestra in a country that had never had an orchestra before 1975. Abreu did not hold auditions for the orchestra. If someone wanted to play, they were welcome to join.

- 1980** El Sistema had established more than 50 núcleos across Venezuela.

*If you put a violin in the hands of a needy child, that child is less likely to pick up a gun.*

– José Antonio Abreu

- 1988** Abreu was appointed **Minister of Culture** to promote the arts in Venezuela.
- As one of his first acts, Abreu created the **Simón Bolívar Conservatory of Music** in Caracas. The conservatory is a university-level institute of music that allows talented musicians to study in Venezuela rather than travel abroad.
  - As Minister of Culture, Abreu oversaw the exponential growth of núcleos all over Venezuela. He also built government alliances with private businesses to raise funds to promote the arts and arts education throughout Venezuela.

- 1995** The National Children’s Orchestra of Venezuela performed for the first time at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.
- 1996** The state’s administration of funds for El Sistema was reorganized through **FESNOJIV** (Fundación del Estado para el Sistema Nacional de las Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela). The Venezuelan government funded 90% of El Sistema’s operating costs (teacher salaries, instruments, facilities, and supplies) through FESNOJIV, which also directed fundraising campaigns and grant writing to fund the other 10%.
- 1999** By the late 1990s, El Sistema was attracting worldwide acclaim.

*El Sistema is the most important project in the music world in our time.*

– Claudio Abbado, conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic (1989-2002)

*José Antonio Abreu is a Nelson Mandela, a revolutionary. He saves lives with a system that accounts for thousands of young people who now live in music.*

– Sir Simon Rattle, conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic (2002-2018)

*It was through the sheer force of [Abreu’s] personality and determination that El Sistema came into my life. He changed my life—not to mention literally thousands of others throughout the world.*

– Deborah Borda, CEO of the New York Philharmonic, former president and CEO of the Los Angeles Philharmonic

*Venezuela has not traditionally been a country with a very intense feeling of national identity, but as the orchestra travels abroad and receives recognition from great musicians everywhere, this brings a tremendous sense of national pride and belonging—not only for the orchestra members, but for all the students of El Sistema. It is so exciting for them to discover the unity of belonging to something great.*

– José Antonio Abreu

- 2007** El Sistema announced a plan to establish núcleos in Venezuelan prisons.

SBYOV performed for the first time at the **BBC Proms in London** in a performance posted on YouTube that made them an international sensation.

*Six thousand people in the Royal Albert Hall all on their feet, going wild. It was kind of stunning.*

– Dani, French horn player with SBYOV

**2010s** By the early 2010s, attempts to replicate Venezuela's success had led to the creation of El Sistema programs in over 70 nations.

- In 2007, the Inter-American Development Bank calculated that due to a falloff in school dropout rates and decline in crime, every \$1.00 spent on El Sistema secured \$1.68 in social dividends.
- In 2010, Venezuela's high school dropout rate was 26 percent. The dropout rate for El Sistema students was 6.9%.
- Studies showed that El Sistema's children had better academic achievement records and fewer behavioral problems than children who were not part of El Sistema.

Many of El Sistema's graduates had achieved distinguished careers in music.

- **Edicson Ruiz** – bass player; sent to El Sistema by his mother at age twelve to keep him away from street gangs and violence; at age seventeen he became the youngest person ever to become a member of the Berlin Philharmonic
- **Alexis Cardenas** – violinist; tours the world as a concert soloist
- **Natalia Luis-Bass** – oboist and conductor; music director of the Wellington College Symphony Orchestra in England
- **Pedro Eustache** – flutist; one of the founding members of the first Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra; tours the world as a concert soloist; has achieved much fame as a composer of world music and inventor of instruments
- **Gabriela Montero** – tours the world as a concert pianist; made her debut at age eight with Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela conducted by Abreu
- **Many International Conductors** – Christian Vasquez, Diego Matheuz, Manuel Lopez, Manuel Jurado, Rafael Payare, Diego Guzman, Joshua Dos Santos,
- **Gustavo Dudamel** – the son of a trombonist and voice teacher in central Venezuela; music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic

*If anyone asked me where there is something really important going on now for the future of classical music, I would simply have to say—in Venezuela. It is an emotional force of such power that it may take some time to assimilate what we are seeing and hearing.*

– Sir Simon Rattle, conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, 2002-2018

**2011** The completion of the **Center for Social Action Through Music** was inaugurated in Caracas with a series of concerts performed by children from all over Venezuela. Abreu wanted to make Caracas the **twenty-first century version of Vienna**, the world's traditional capital of classical music. He also wanted the Center to become a place that would attract the best music teachers in the world so that Venezuelan musicians could receive the highest quality education without leaving Venezuela.

*I dream of making all of Caracas a city of music, so that every family can share the joy. I dream of four concerts a day, every day. There will be beautiful centers like this in every one of the provinces, and El Sistema will keep expanding until we reach our goal of free and full access to music for every child in the country.*

– José Antonio Abreu

**2013** **Hugo Chávez**, the president of Venezuela from 1999-2013, died after a two-year battle with colon cancer.

Chávez, a strong supporter of El Sistema, was replaced by **Nicolás Maduro**, a man whose gross mismanagement of the economy has created a humanitarian crisis marked by hyperinflation (800,000% in May of 2019), severe food shortages, lack of medical supplies, and the absence of electrical power. Maduro has brought substantial political instability to Venezuela, ruling by decree, jailing or exiling critics, torturing political prisoners, and using lethal force against anti-government protesters.

Note: Abreu had led El Sistema for over 40 years with the backing and financial support of seven Venezuelan governments, ranging from center-right to leftist. Abreu had always been careful to keep El Sistema separate from partisan politics.

**2014** During a time of nationwide protests, Gustavo Dudamel made a public appearance with Maduro who was building a new concert hall in Caracas that would be named after Dudamel. Dudamel received much criticism for being too cozy with Maduro and not using his platform as the world's most famous Venezuela to speak against Maduro.

**2015** A national election placed representatives opposed to Maduro in power in the National Assembly. Maduro maintained power through control of the Supreme Tribunal and the Venezuelan military.

**2016** The National Assembly began the process of trying to recall Maduro. Maduro responded by rewriting the Venezuelan constitution and creating a National Assembly full of loyalists.

During three years of political turmoil, Dudamel continued to remain silent and not criticize the Venezuelan government.

*El Sistema is far too important to subject to everyday political discourse and battles. It must remain above the fray.*

– Gustavo Dudamel, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, September 2015

**2017** **May:** Anti-government protests swept through Venezuela, and musicians from El Sistema took to the streets playing instruments as a symbol of defiance. International news reports contained images of teenagers playing their violins in the midst of clouds of tear gas and encroaching riot police. During one protest, government forces killed a 17-year-old violinist named Armando Cañizales.

**July:** Dudamel published an editorial in the *New York Times*, angrily criticizing Maduro and the Venezuelan government. Madero warned Dudamel “not to attack those of us who have been crucial to the expansion of the musical movement.” The Venezuelan government canceled SBYOV’s tour of the United States and Asia. (Dudamel would have been conducting the orchestra.)

**August:** Dudamel helped win the release of Wuilly Arteaga, an El Sistema violinist who had been arrested in July for playing music in the street during protests against Maduro.

*As a conductor, I have learned that our society, like an orchestra, is formed by a large number of people, all of them different and unique, each with his or her own ideas, personal convictions and visions of the world. This wonderful diversity means that in politics, as in music, no absolute truths exist. In order to thrive as a society (as well as to achieve musical excellence), we must create a common frame of reference in which all individuals feel included despite their differences, one that minimizes the noise and cacophony of disagreement and allows us to fine-tune, through plurality and diverging points of view.*

– Gustavo Dudamel, editorial in the *New York Times*, July 2017

**2018 March 24:** José Antonio Abreu passed away at the age 78. **Eduardo Mendez** became the new director of El Sistema. Mendez had worked with Abreu for 15 years as an El Sistema administrator.

Mendez, as the newly-named executive director of El Sistema, issued a public statement that included the following information:

- a. El Sistema would continue, even though the economic crisis had forced hundreds of musicians to leave Venezuela.
- b. El Sistema had lost 8% of its teachers because they had fled Venezuela.
- c. The SBYOV had lost 42% of its musicians during the previous six months. Mendez stated that most of the lost positions had been filled by younger musicians and SBYOV would continue.
- d. El Sistema had closed about 100 núcleos and was down to about 300 from its high of over 400 in 2015.
- e. The total number of students in El Sistema had increased to 980,000 (up from 700,000 in 2015).
- f. El Sistema would work to avoid conflicts with the government.
- g. Dudamel would continue as El Sistema’s creative director and lead conductor for the SBYOV.

**2019 February:** Maduro led a celebration for El Sistema on its 44th anniversary, calling it “A marvel that thanks to the Bolivarian Revolution today reaches more than 1 million children and young people incorporated.”

**October:** Venezuela is in the midst of a political, economic, and humanitarian crisis that has caused over 4.5 million Venezuelans to flee their country.

*Oil extraction is much more capital intensive than it is labor-intensive—which means it doesn’t produce a lot of lasting jobs. But in the end, it does produce big revenues when it’s sold on the global market. That sets the stage for grand-scale corruption of the political class: people who can maneuver themselves into getting a cut of that sale price of oil will find themselves quickly rich, whether or not they actually expend any effort to pump the stuff out of the ground. Political elites that can get themselves in the catbird seat when it comes to oil revenues will have every reason to curry favor with the oil companies doing the drilling, and every reason to fight anyone else who might take political power and thereby edge in on the financial teat they’ve stuck themselves to.*

– Rachel Maddow, *Blowout*, describing what academics call the “resource curse”

## El Sistema – Repertoire for Lifelong Learners

1. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 7, Fourth Movement* (1812)  
SBYOV in Caracas, 2007
2. Beethoven, *Symphony No. 9, Second Movement* (1824)  
SBSOV at Barcelona's Palau de la Musica, 2017
3. Berlioz, *Symphony Fantastique, Fourth and Fifth Movements* (1830)  
SBYOV with the French National Radio Orchestra, location and date unknown
4. Bernstein, “Mambo” from *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story* (1955)  
SBYOV in Caracas, 2007
5. Fernández, *Batuque* (1933)  
SBYOV in Caracas, date unknown
6. Ginastera, “Malambo” from the *Estancia Suite* (1943)  
SBYOV at the Lucerne Festival, 2007
7. Mahler, *Symphony No. 8 in E-flat major* (1906)  
SBSOV with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Caracas, 2012 (over 1400 American and Venezuelan musicians, including 400 children)
8. Mancayo, *Huapango* (1941)  
SBYOV at Beethoven Hall in Bonn, date unknown
9. Márquez, *Conga del Fuego* (2009)  
SBYOV in Caracas, date unknown
10. Márquez, *Danzón No. 2* (1994)  
SBYOV in Caracas, 2007,
11. Messiaen, *Turangalîla Symphony* (1865)  
SBSOV in London, 2016
12. Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) Orchestrated by Maurice Ravel (1922)  
SBYOV, Salzburg Festival, 2008
13. Prado, *Mambo* (1949)  
SBYOV in Caracas, date unknown
14. Ravel, *Daphnis et Chloé, Suite No. 2, Part 1* (1912)  
SBYOV in Caracas, date unknown
15. Shostakovich, *Symphony No. 10, Second Movement* (1953)  
SBYOV in Caracas, 2010
16. Strauss Sr., *Radetsky March* (1848)  
SBYOV in Vienna, date unknown

*A mother told me that her husband mistreats her and she often feels absolutely worthless. And then she said, "But I made him come to the concert, and now I can say to him, 'look at this!'" She said to me, "Now my husband can see that Ernesto and I, we are doing something wonderful, that we are worth something."*

– Tricia Tunstall, writing in *Changing Lives* about a young cellist whose mother struggled with an abusive husband.

*As everyone knows who has been to Venezuela and seen El Sistema, you are so moved—you spend the first few days in tears. I'm a musician and I have been in music management for many years, and I have always said that music is fundamentally about our humanity. But this was the apotheosis of that idea. So I knew that whether or not Gustavo became our music director, I felt a sort of moral imperative to bring [El Sistema] to Los Angeles.*

– Deborah Borda, CEO of the New York Philharmonic, former president and CEO of the Los Angeles Philharmonic

*I did not expect to walk into heaven and hear celestial voices. The truth is, I have never felt so moved, not only because of the emotion but also, I must say, because of the quality.*

– Plácido Domingo, upon hearing El Sistema musicians

*When children are playing music together, all the differences in class, in race, everything—they disappear. They don't exist anymore. For a child, it gives the message that unity and harmony in the world are possible, that war is not necessary.*

– Fernando, trumpet player with SBYOV

*The poorer the community, the more you must aim for the highest level of artistic excellence.*

– José Antonio Abreu when asked how such small children could play so well

*To me, an orchestra is first and foremost a way to encourage better human development within children. That is why I always said, and I say today, that this is not an artistic program but a human development program through music. It is very important to be clear about this, because everything that happened then, and everything that has happened since then, has been a direct consequence of this concept.*

– José Antonio Abreu

## Resources

### Documentaries

1. *Dudamel: Let the Children Play*. Alberto Arvelo, director. (2012)
2. *Tocar y Luchar*. Alberto Arvelo, director.(2006)
3. *El Sistema: Music to Change Life*, Paul Smaczny and Maria Stootmeier, directors. (2009)

### Books

4. Baker, Geoffrey. *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth* (2014)
5. Tunstall, Tricia. *Changing Lives: Gustavo Dudamel, El Sistema, and the Transformative Power of Music* (2012)
6. Tunstall, Tricia and Eric Booth. *Playing for Their Lives: The Global El Sistema Movement for Social Change Through Music* (2016)

### Interview

7. Simón Gollo, Assistant Professor of Music, New Mexico State University

*For me, the most important priority was to give access to music to poor people. As a musician, I had the ambition to see a poor child play Mozart. Why not? Why concentrate in one class the privilege of playing Mozart and Beethoven? The high musical culture of the world has to be a common culture, part of the education of everyone*

– José Antonio Abreu

*All the time [Abreu] is teaching music, he is also teaching you social values. It is always about music. And it is also always about love. He's an amazing teacher, an amazing human being. He is an angel.*

– Gustavo Dudamel

*Music saved my life. It has saved thousands of lives in my country. I am sure of this.*

– Gustavo Dudamel