



Sistema Toronto Upbeat

In Tune with *PLAYING TO POTENTIAL*

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A Word from David

I recently attended the three-day [Take A Stand 2012 Symposium](#) hosted by the LA Philharmonic, Bard College, and the Longy School of Music. Over 300 social change advocates from 27 states and 13 nations took part in interactive workshops, inspirational talks, and some great networking. I made lots of new contacts, and came away with plenty of ideas. The best part was seeing first-hand how much momentum the Sistema movement has been gaining world-wide. We were all there to "take a stand" on children's right to education and to share our views on how we can help them reach their potential for growth.

David Visentin, Executive & Artistic Director, Sistema Toronto

Alison Liliani



Our newest music intern comes to us from Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, where she's completing her teacher's education program.

Alison has a rich musical background. She has her Bachelor's degree in

Creating Communities: Ken MacLeod

One of the driving forces behind Sistema Toronto's growth is the dedication of people who have seen what Sistema has done for their community and want others to share in this wonderful program.

Ken MacLeod is one of those people. He's president of the [New Brunswick Youth Orchestra](#) and founded Sistema New Brunswick in 2009. When he heard about our program, he immediately offered to share his resources and considerable expertise.

A visit to Venezuela in 2009 inspired Ken to bring Sistema to New Brunswick: "Seeing all those young faces full of joy and hope was very moving, and every kid in Canada deserves that too". Though Venezuela's challenges are more pressing than ours, Ken saw a need for it here: "Even in a country as privileged as ours, too many kids are excluded from opportunities".

The biggest question was: would it work here? "We heard that you couldn't interest North American kids in sitting through three-hour music class. We thought otherwise", says Ken.

Sistema NB received 200 applications for 50 spaces. "They came, they stayed, and we soon began to see the same wonderful results for children here that we saw in Venezuela" says Ken.

Sistema NB serves two neighbourhoods in Saint John and Moncton, where up to 60% of the children live in poverty and 40% of parents are unemployed. Says Ken: "This is where we knew we wanted to be. We were convinced we could make a difference for all those children that had been left out".

That conviction has been confirmed. Students are engaged with joy and passion, and parents and teachers quickly reported improved behaviour and school performance. Adds Ken: "What's really gratifying is how the kids who advanced more quickly were mentoring their fellow musicians".

Sistema NB anticipates 600 students and two more centres by 2014. There are the usual challenges, such as finding funds, teachers, and instruments. But Ken notes, "The biggest obstacle for any Sistema program outside of Venezuela is leadership. We need people with vision and enthusiasm, but we also need the knowledge, experience, and the networks to move our programs forward".

That's what Ken brings to the table. "We are working hard to facilitate musical initiatives", says Ken. "Last May we hosted a National Summit, and August 14-17 we're holding the first-ever Sistema Teaching Academy".

Sistema is all about strengthening communities. As Ken puts it, "my community is in my neighbourhood, my province, and the entire country."



Music from McMaster University, specializing in the piano. She also studied cello from grades 4 through 12 in the Toronto District School Board's music program, and sang in the High Park Choirs of Toronto.

Alison is excited to be part of our program: "I love music, and I love working with kids, so this is a great opportunity".

Alison has a passion for social justice, and has worked with the Global Youth Volunteer Network in India, Tanzania, and Latin America: "I learned a lot about education in different cultures, so I'm really looking forward to working with Parkdale's diverse cultural mix".

Alison's here to learn too: "This will give me more insights into the impact that a musical education has on a child's growth and on the community".

Alison starts April 30, and she'll be with us for the rest of the school year. Welcome Alison!

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Celebrating Communities: A Carnatic Concert



On March 2, Carnatic violinist Subhadra Vijaykumar and mridangist Arvind Venkataraman gave a performance that enthralled the children. The Carnatic musical tradition is south India's classical music. It is closely linked to a style of singing that's common in southern India, and the violin and mridangam are two of its principal instruments. The students were shown new postures for holding the violin and they learned about a different tuning system. This was a wonderful opportunity for our children to celebrate the wonderful diversity of culture and talent in our city.

Connecting Communities

In a [recent essay](#), educator/conductor [Jonathan Govias](#) identifies five principles that every Sistema program shares with Venezuela's youth orchestra network:

1. *Social Change* - the program's primary objectives are social transformation through the pursuit of musical excellence, and they are mutually reinforcing.
2. *Ensemble* - children work together in an orchestra or choir to encourage collaboration and peer support.
3. *Frequency* - having frequent sessions throughout the week increases the program's positive impact on the children's lives.
4. *Accessibility* - making programs free and non-selective ensures that no one is excluded.
5. *Connectivity* - linking nucleos at the urban, regional, and national levels creates a cohesive network of opportunities for students across the country.

Connectivity is the biggest challenge for a new Sistema program. As Venezuela's national program, El Sistema provides a ready-made template for new centres. New Sistema programs in other countries lack that connectivity, and they must often find their own way and define their own structures.

Yet there's great potential to build connectivity. Sistema's rapid growth has generated a wealth of resources and expertise around the world. By recognizing and acting upon our mutual responsibility to share that wealth, we can create a robust network for transformative change that spans the globe.

Mark Your Calendar

Our Sistema Toronto kids have been invited to perform at two exciting events. On May 6, they'll be part of the Children's Aid Foundation's [SPARK Gala](#) at The Carlu. Luminaries at this event include Randy Bachman, actress Lisa Ray, and figure-skating champion Patrick Chan.

On June 18, our kids appear at the Four Seasons Centre for the International Conference on Pediatric Cancer. The concert also features Tafelmusik, under the baton of Jeanne Lamon.

Watch for more announcements in the coming weeks!

You will find as you look back on your life that the moments when you have truly lived are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love. - Henry Drummond, Canadian poet