



Music and Arts in Action – Call for Papers

Thematic Issue

El Sistema, Youth Orchestras and Ensembles as socio-artistic intervention: Exploring contradiction, ambivalence and complexity

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The *El Sistema* program of youth orchestras founded by J. A. Abreu in Venezuela in 1975 aimed to foster the social inclusion of children and adolescents seen as vulnerable or at risk socially and educationally. It has since grown and extended itself well beyond the borders of Venezuela to become a well-known project internationally and globally. Although much published research on the outcomes of youth orchestral programs has focused on *El Sistema*, there are other *Youth Orchestra* projects worldwide worth investigating that are autonomous, unaffiliated, or even totally unrelated to *El Sistema* from a formal point of view, albeit driven by the same general intention: fostering positive changes in the lives of participants through learning and making music.

Widespread social, artistic, and media recognition of Sistema as an astonishing demonstration of the “transformative power of music” (Tunstall, 2012) has praised the program for its positive social impacts upon its young participants by fostering life changes, inclusion, and social mobility. Recently, this consensual view has been challenged and criticized as being idealistic and emotionally driven: other research claims that these positive ‘effects’ and social outcomes are overstated and that there is a negative side related to autocracy and exclusion (Baker, 2014).

The controversy is set and positions tend to be polarized between proponents and detractors of these socio-artistic and educational projects. For the social and artistic researcher, this leads to the danger of pursuing an unidimensional perspective that tacitly follows a previously defined agenda of seeking only *either* ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ aspects, producing an incomplete account based on results that fit into and confirm the observer’s initial position and assumptions.

What needs to be done? The discussion must be pushed into a whole new level, by treating symmetrically both potentially positive and negative implications of these youth orchestra programs. Put simply, while some research has lauded *El Sistema* for its positive social impacts, other research has raised a critical voice about its limitations and failings. This thematic issue seeks to go beyond this simple polarity by examining precisely how, when, and where youth orchestral projects work, and in the process, answering the question of why.

***Music and Arts in Action* challenges its readers and contributors to develop an in-depth approach to the complexity of what happens in youth orchestra projects (*El Sistema*, *Sistema*-inspired or others) as well smaller musical ensembles.**





- **First, this thematic issue will seek to develop a symmetrical perspective equally open to potentially positive and negative aspects and implications of these programs.**
- **Second, it wishes to foster an in-depth exploration of the shades and nuances located in-between those two (positive-negative) extremes.**
- **Third, by analysing and reflecting critically on the contradictions, paradoxes, and ambivalences of these projects, it intends to examine how various aspects may be, eventually, positive and negative at the same time and in different ways, depending on who is involved and on various socio-cultural variables, or even according to the perspective taken.**

For this volume, MAiA welcomes the following contributions:

- **Papers grounded on empirical observation, in-depth analysis with relevant implications for the debate**
- **Papers based on practitioners' experience-based accounts, research, and reflections**
- **Papers of a more reflective and essayistic nature, as long as they represent a relevant contribution to the discussion**

While MAiA encourages authors to address the active roles of aesthetic materials in social life as part of their focus, a list of possible topics includes: socio-musical roles and interactions; discourses and narratives; trajectories and life histories; pedagogies and teaching practices; collective experiences; orchestral training and socialization; music materials, repertoire, and instruments; aesthetic experiences; performance; cognitive and embodied dimensions; cultural and local adopt-adapt tensions; institutional and organizational aspects, as well as wider cultural and historical issues.

MAiA expects to receive proposals that will represent valuable contributions to the aims of this thematic issue – developing a nuanced and symmetrical perspective that brings out the complexity, contradiction, and ambivalence implicated in these socio-artistic projects. The aim is to foster collaboration and exchange among academics and practitioners and that the volume may become a useful and impactful resource for both thinking and acting within this type of socio-artistic and educational interventions.

To submit a proposal, please submit an Abstract, with background/aims, methods, results, conclusions/implications (500-600 words), to sysyouthorch.maia@gmail.com until 16 February 2018. These initial submissions are expected to provide a clear insight into the results and implications.

It is our intention to form a STUDY GROUP and organize a MEETING (conference-symposium) associated to the publication of this volume (to be announced in due time on MAiA website)

If you have any questions you are welcome to contact Dr. Pedro Santos Boia at the same email address.

