

Speaker Presentations

About the Speakers



Richard Hallam, MBE, is England's National Music Education Grant Director and member of the steering group for In Harmony Sistema England. Globally recognized for his leadership in programs that use music to bring positive change to the lives of children and youth in some of the most deprived areas of his country, he shared his experience developing England's National Plan for Music Education.



Jonathan Govias, Phd, based in Boston, is a distinguished conductor, author and speaker and a leading consultant on organizational, strategic and pedagogical practices for social initiatives. He brought to the discussions his passion for working with young orchestras and the transformative power of "social music."



Tina Fedeski and **Margaret Tobolowska**, professional flutist and cellist respectively, are co-founders of the Leading Note Foundation and Executive Director and Artistic Director of *OrKidstra*, the Ottawa music program for inner-city children. They spoke of the many successes, lessons and challenges that they have experienced during the five-year life of the program.

Summary of Speaker's Remarks

Richard Hallam, MBE

Richard Hallam began his presentation, entitled "Dare to Aim High Enough," by citing the key problems with traditional approaches to music education as "isolation, too little music making, and too low expectations." These were not, he emphasized, a problem for *El Sistema*.

For those looking to develop *Sistema*-inspired programs, he suggested several challenges: what are the non-negotiable central features; what do you adopt, what do you adapt; what influences those decisions; and how do we learn from the phenomenal success of *El Sistema*?

Though *El Sistema* is primarily a social program, its relationship with music education program cannot be ignored. In England there is already an entitlement to music education for all children in school and for every child to learn a musical instrument from specialist teachers. In the last four years alone almost 2.5 million pupils have had the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. Forty-four percent have continued to learn. There are some 35,000 ensembles of varying sizes and composition, but these are not 'joined up' into a network as they are in Venezuela.

In the UK context Hallam cited *El Sistema* principles as six-fold:

- The importance of learning together and helping each other;
- The centrality of the ensemble;
- The importance of challenging repertoire and high expectations;
- The total commitment of all involved;
- The importance of performance; and
- The greater good of the whole.

Commenting on several of the salient features of England's National Plan for Music Education, he underlined the unwavering commitment by both the Department for Education and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport - a duality that recognizes the music education and social development objectives inherent in *El Sistema*. This commitment recognizes the importance of music in the lives of young people and the need to ensure that they are given a music education of the highest quality.

The engagement of the entire community is key. Hallam described great music education as a partnership between classroom teachers, specialist teachers, professional performers and a host of organizations, including those from the arts, charity and volunteer sectors. The National Plan was clear about the importance of music: it will ensure not just that more children have access to the greatest of art forms, but that they do better as a result in every other subject. Hallam emphasized that a high quality music education enables lifelong participation in, and enjoyment of, music, as well as underpinning excellence and professionalism for those who choose not to pursue a career in music.

Hallam urged the widest possible coverage, cautioning that a high quality music education must not become the preserve of those children whose families can afford to pay for music tuition. While music touches the lives of all young people, the disadvantaged can benefit most.

He noted that music helps bind pupils into the wider life of the school. He also emphasized that schools cannot do everything alone, but need the support of a wider local music structure. Accordingly, central to the National Plan, is the creation of new music education hubs – that will provide opportunities that reach beyond school boundaries and draw in the expertise of a range of education and arts partners.

Hallam identified core roles of the National Plan for Music Education as follows:

- Ensure that every child aged 5-18 has the opportunity to learn a musical instrument;
- Provide opportunities to play in ensembles and to perform from an early stage;
- Ensure that clear progression routes are available and affordable to all young people;
- Develop a singing strategy to ensure that every pupil sings regularly and that choirs and other vocal ensembles are available in the area.

During the question and answer period, Hallam focused on the relative merits of in-school and out-of-school music education options and the connection between the two. He acknowledged the argument, consistent with the *Sistema* philosophy, that out-of-school options had the advantage of better breaking with the rigidities of the traditional school environment in favour of one of which the children could better “take ownership”. He also cited the “whole school engagement” model followed in one of the *In Harmony El Sistema* pilots. In short, he saw merits in both in-school and after-school programs and valuable connections between the two.

The U.K.'s national plan for music can be found at www.education.gov.uk/publications (see “The importance of music. A national plan for music education.”) For more information on the *El Sistema*-inspired pilot projects, see www.ihse.org.uk.

Jonathan Govias, Phd

Jonathan Govias' presentation focused on the contrast between the highly-structured model of teaching/learning traditionally followed in schools and the freer environment found in the *El Sistema* model, which places much more emphasis on social interaction.

He began with a review of some of the research, psychology and sociology underpinning the learning process – highlighting “the fundamental of learning through interaction with the environment, repetitively.” He contrasted this with the hierarchical, highly structured and, for the student, largely passive environment which has traditionally marked educational practices, with little change in the past one hundred years - “*Moses on high, children of Israel below.*” This was illustrated by a dramatic photograph of a large classroom, with rows of desks and children uniformly resting their heads on folded arms.

By contrast, Govias highlighted the literature emphasizing the importance of social interaction and greater spontaneity in the learning environment in which expertise can be shared between children of different ages and/or different levels of competence. Two quotes underscored his emphasis on the importance of social interaction as a catalyst for learning: the significance of “*stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself*” (Dewey); and “*Every function in a child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, then the individual. All higher functions originate as actual relationships*” (Vygotsky).

Govias then introduced the *El Sistema* model as an example of what might result if one took away all the constraints which mark our traditional educational environment. He emphasized the compromises which *El Sistema* refuses to make – beginning with time. *El Sistema* restores the time appropriate to a child's development. It offers a low-intensity setting where one learns through doing – and in a highly social learning environment where older children assist younger ones or where the more advanced work with the less advanced. He contrasted this to practicing solo in a lonely environment, a practice which, in his view, explains why many leave music around the age of 12. He also emphasized the inclusive nature of the *El Sistema* model. The less skilled can readily participate; in that regard, “bigger is actually better”.

In his view, Venezuela's pursuit of the *El Sistema* approach reflects the fact that it is, first and foremost, a program for social development through music. Its emphasis on ensemble playing, peer engagement and aiming for excellence provides a “clear path for children both cognitively and socially – the uncompromising system.”

A participant asked whether the *El Sistema* model uniquely focused on classical music. Govias replied that, though late in coming, one now saw increasing diversity of musical genres within the program, citing jazz and aboriginal music as two examples. He suggested, however, that a major advantage of the classical music genre was the scale of its repertoire, permitting both small and very large ensemble playing.

Interesting material can be found on Jonathan Govias' website: www.jonathangovias.com ☞.

Tina Fedeski and Margaret Tobolowska

Tina Fedeski and Margaret Tobolowska focused on the principles underlying the *OrKidstra* program – most of which have been drawn from the *El Sistema* philosophy. In brief, these principles are:

- Social change through musical excellence: accentuating the joy of making music together; inheriting the “play and struggle” (tocar y luchar) motto of *El Sistema*, playing as if it's the last time one will be able to do so”;

- The fundamental role of the ensemble: mentorship, always helping each other; the importance of group interaction; and the social aspects of learning, working and performing together;
- Frequency: the development of “Kid-powered program levels,” which vary according to the degree of commitment the child is able and willing to make. These include: *Community Program* – once-a-week, introductory level, typically choral programming; *Commitment Program* – minimum of one/up to three times a week, instrument typically given; *Dedication Program* – additional instruction tailored to the interests/needs of the highly committed student;
- Accessibility: 85% of children receive free instruction; otherwise, contributions are made on a sliding scale based on income level; one intent is to accentuate that *OrKidstra* is a community, not a “poor kids’ program”;
- Connectivity: broad engagement of mentors, students, parents and volunteers; links with the local cultural, educational and social infrastructure.

Fedeski characterized her “Blue Sky” thoughts and ambitions as three-fold: a desire for *OrKidstra* to be the biggest feeder program to the Ottawa Youth Orchestra; a wish to inspire music educators and to create bridges between schools and the *OrKidstra* program; and optimism that this was a time of considerable creativity – a possible ‘tipping point’ in music education within the Ottawa educational community.

More information on the *OrKidstra* programs and on the work of *The Leading Note Foundation* can be found at www.orkidstra.ca .

Panel Discussion: Relevance of Music Education for Ottawa Schools

Moderator: (centre, below) **Richard Hallam, MBE**, National Music Education Grant Director and consultant to the UK Department for Education in the development of the National Plan for Music Education.

Panellists: (left to right, below):

- **Dr. Peter Gamwell:** Teacher, author, Superintendent of Instruction and Member of the Director’s Executive Council, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB)
- **Jennifer McKenzie:** Trustee and Chair of the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB)
- **Jennifer Martinez:** Head of Senior Music at Immaculata High School, instructor with the Ottawa Youth Orchestra Academy, Conductor of the New Horizons Advanced Band and *OrKidstra*’s Band Director
- **Yasir Naqvi:** MPP for Ottawa-Centre and Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance (Ontario)

Summary of Discussion

The Moderator invited panellists to describe the context for music education in Ottawa.

Jennifer McKenzie noted that the OCDSB is strengthening music education across all its schools. Some years ago, the position of music in schools was weakened and there is still some variation between schools. Some are very strong, others lag. The Board is now hiring qualified music teachers which will support her 2011 motion directing staff at the Board to make music education a

priority in elementary schools so that all children are exposed to learning and understanding music, and can experience playing an instrument.

Peter Gamwell, a self-confessed avid rock, jazz and blues practitioner, pointed out the fun and energy that music-making brings. This feeling of joy and achievement has a life-long effect on people. He commented that Ontario's 'reform agenda' (initiated 30 years ago) is based on assumptions which are now challenged by the research community. There is a new understanding of intelligence and motivation which is changing approaches to learning—in the fields of business and politics as much as in education.

MPP Yasir Naqvi explained that Ontario's Ministry of Education operates at a macro level: setting the curriculum and providing funding. Not long ago, studies revealed a major problem in literacy and numeracy levels in Ontario in comparison with other provinces and countries. The Government has worked hard to raise levels and Ontario now enjoys top ranking. Arts and music were not actively promoted during this period but he surmised that, now that the 'hard' goals have been achieved, there is room for a new focus.

Jennifer Martinez, who teaches music "to students from 3 to 93", noted that recent brain research shows a strong relationship between emotion and information processing capacities. The current education system may be missing out by not teaching music more intensively. Teachers tend to be generalists and to overcome this the Catholic School Board has hired five roving music coaches to help teachers become more comfortable teaching music. There are still large gaps between desire and achievement, but she reported that Superintendent Brenda Wilson (Superintendent of Student Success Department [Elementary], Ottawa Catholic School Board); is keen to explore OrKidstra-like programs for the schools.

Moderator Richard Hallam referenced studies showing that replacing regular curriculum with equal amounts of music education not only maintains but raises literacy and numeracy scores. What then stops us from using this tool widely and immediately?

Panelists agreed that music should be more closely integrated into schools, as promoting an holistic education is more in line with current research. Even business schools are changing their approach to learning and leaving behind a 100-year old model. Schools are generally behind the game. Teachers often panic if traditional subjects are pushed aside for music and although it is easy to show how mainstream subjects can be taught or supplemented through music, there is resistance. Perhaps the answer lies in adopting a few pilot projects to develop local statistics which might then convince educators that music is a fundamental and beneficial teaching tool.

The Moderator commented that members of the panel seemed to be of one mind: music education is nothing but a good thing. How then to turn words into action?

McKenzie felt that even though individuals might be passionate on the subject of introducing music to schools, only *collective* thinking would make change happen. Teachers, school boards, politicians and community leaders must come together—in just the way The Leading Note Foundation has done in convening this Symposium. A collective approach would end siloed thinking. In addition, there could be better focus on social development needs in the City, where much more could be done. *OrKidstra*-like programs should be introduced to schools where social development is a challenge.

Gamwell cited the mantra 'think globally, act locally', suggesting that now that numeracy and literacy levels have been raised, Ontario might show world leadership on a new front. Governments everywhere struggle to meet budgets. Most progress relies on the magic of the collective. Public

involvement is critical. If music education is strengthened, the joy and success achieved will speak for themselves.

Naqvi noted that parents more often focus on achievements in 'hard' subjects even if they recognize the importance of an arts-influenced education and may well pursue music education for their children outside school. We need to create a new dynamic. We need to start a few pilot projects and collect data so that results can be measured in concrete terms. Broad-based change will follow.

McKenzie agreed that parental views were most important to making change. She cited recent survey results where middle- to high-income parents were keen to foster music in schools, but lower-income parents were not as convinced. Martinez suggested that the weak response might be explained at least partly by lack of fluency in responding to surveys, a limited understanding of how music strengthens academic performance overall and lack of awareness of alternative education methods. She urged that music programs should simply start. The results would speak for themselves.

Gamwell predicted that things will change. Literacy and numeracy are indeed crucial, but there are many ways to reach these goals. Everyone learns in their own way; one single education model cannot produce the best results on an individual basis. Children need to feel the joy of learning; to be immersed in learning such that they forget time; to realize that there are many paths to success, not just the conventional way; to see that they each have something to offer in life.

Martinez agreed, saying that real learning depends on emotional involvement and social contact. Most school programs are overly structured, due to constraints of time, numbers, budgets and teaching skills. Out-of-school programs, such as *OrKidstra*, are more open and organic, more child-centered.

McKenzie felt that music should be offered during the school day **and** outside schools—as one of several after-school opportunities.

The Moderator then opened the mike to the audience for comments, questions and ideas on how to bring music education to the fore.

One participant, an expert in neuro-plasticity and a leader of Friends of Peace, commented that pursuing social harmony through music education represents a revolution in thinking. He felt such programming should immediately be introduced in at least three local schools. Evaluation results should be prepared as soon as possible so that other schools can benefit quickly. He invited skeptics to come to Peace Day celebrations in September, where *OrKidstra* would be performing. The children may speak two dozen languages as individuals, but their voice is strongest in the one they share when they are together: music.

Another participant suggested that Music Monday (musicmakesus.ca/musicmonday *) should be adopted by schools. She also felt new teachers should study music or it should be made a pre-requisite to employment. The Ministry of Education could adopt this rule. She suggested more discussion aimed at educating those who do not understand the importance of music programs. She challenged parents and teachers to lobby for increased music education in at least the first three primary grades.

Dr. James Wright, music professor at Carleton University, picked up on the panel's desire to introduce new learning approaches. He noted we have always vested knowledge in verbal expression, but that there are other ways to express knowledge: through physical activity, artistic endeavour, and music-making. Although this is recognized in higher education practice, it needs to start at primary levels.

Noemi Weis, producer of the film *Teaching the Life of Music*, suggested that we already have over 35 years of research results on how *El Sistema* works. She urged that these programs be seen more through the lens of social development than as part of the formal education stream. Perhaps redefining this kind of music program would lead to new sources of support: cultural institutions, social agencies or those responsible for immigration and citizenship.

Gamwell agreed, saying that we need to connect *El Sistema* and *OrKidstra* to themes of social justice and social interaction. This would provide a more hopeful future for societies which, in Ottawa and across Canada, are increasingly multi-cultural.

Jonathan Govias, conductor, author and *El Sistema* advocate, pointed out that there are two simple systems in use throughout the world, no matter the cultural context. These are Hindu/Arabic numerals and Western musical notation. Why should one be considered more important than the other in our education programming? Have we missed the boat?

A participant noted that he now sees a concerted effort to get children exercising to fight obesity and ward off future health problems. In the area of music education, despite its recognized importance and value, he sees no similar plan of action. He feared that today's discussions ran the risk of dragging on for years with no real results.

The Moderator pointed out that major changes do take time. They do have to follow a process. The important thing is to start and not waste more time. Statistics can help. Cost benefit studies in the UK demonstrate the high value of introducing music education, with impacts on several fronts: economic achievement, academic standards, health goals, civic order and social justice.

Naqvi suggested that the time is ripe for introducing music programs. Now that the Government of Ontario has achieved its goals for literacy and numeracy, and has shown the benefits of all-day kindergarten, it is exploring before- and after-school programs for 6-to-12-year-olds. Programs should be developed by 2014/2015, using schools as city 'hubs'. We should work out how music programs could be part of this new model.

Other ideas emerging from participants included the following:

- School boards should fund the evaluation of the impact of music programs
- Requiring Ontario public officials to consult widely on the benefits of music programming before developing education policy proposals
- Introducing music to carefully selected schools in Ottawa—offering music once weekly, twice weekly or twice weekly with teachers included as students—and then comparing results. This might open a path for widespread *OrKidstra*-type programming in schools
- Could Symposium participants take up the challenge of spreading the word about music education? Could they identify those who would be willing to work with or fund music programming, such as that offered by *OrKidstra*?

In closing, the Moderator thanked panellists and the audience for their focused discussion, creative ideas and suggestions for next steps.