



The Power of  
Music Education:

# Unlocking the Talent of Latin American and Caribbean Youth



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# Introduction

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**“Beyond learning music, it awoke something bigger in me. . . . This is what I have always been searching for, the room to be taken seriously as an artist.”**

/ Merily Ajcip, cellist, Orquesta Alaíde Foppa, Antigua, Guatemala

The so-called orange economy—powered by artists, musicians, designers, and other creative innovators—is a crucial engine of social and economic development in Latin America. The music industry is a major force within this economy, fostering international exchange within and beyond the region.

In 2017, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) published a study titled “Orange Economy: Innovations You May Not Know Were from Latin America and the Caribbean.” Findings from Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, Bolivia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic highlighted the creative talent helping to build globally competitive, knowledge-based economies across the region (Luzardo, de Jesús, and Pérez, 2017).

Building on these findings, “Future Landscapes of the Orange Economy: Creative Pathways for Improving Lives in Latin America and the Caribbean,” illustrated how art, music, design, and other creative sectors can be leveraged for sustainable development and prosperity (Finlev and others, 2017). Communities turn to the arts to find meaning in the wake of natural disasters. Emerging technologies engage a new generation in traditional cultural knowledge. Social media opens new pathways for “digital creatives,” people who create using digital technologies, to make a living. Employment cooperatives provide the management structure and administrative support to make art a career. Government investments and social safety nets empower artists to thrive as entrepreneurial risk-takers (Finlev and others, 2017).

Young people throughout Latin America have a wealth of talent that could contribute to the orange economy if they saw a future in it. The region is rich in diverse cultural histories, as well





as powerful modern arts movements. Yet too few opportunities exist for youth to benefit from the training, support, and imaginative freedom they need to thrive in creative sectors.

Challenges abound. Young people who are vulnerable to economic marginalization, violence, sexual assault, mental health problems, and educational inequality are particularly excluded from the orange economy. Policy makers, educators, and international development practitioners at times believe that investing in music and the arts is frivolous, particularly for vulnerable communities facing severe social and economic challenges. When this attitude persists, the orange economy becomes an elite space that does not reflect the rich diversity of human experiences in Latin America. Art suffers as a result.

International evidence demonstrates that music education can play an important role in childhood and youth development. Music provides a creative outlet for emotions, a bridge between people, and a way to experience the power of persistence. From Germany to the Republic of Korea, studies have tested the music education-based “theory of change,” according to which musical training improves brain function, creative collaboration builds social emotional skills, and music students attend school more regularly, engage in less risky behavior, and are more likely to find a job (Mateo-Berganza Díaz and others, 2019).

Evidence from randomized control trials in Peru (Díaz, 2018) and Venezuela (Alemán and others, 2017) shows that music education can enhance vulnerable students' social and emotional skills. The outcomes are strongest when programs are designed with the specific needs of vulnerable populations in mind. For example, programs that can provide mental health services or cover the costs associated with music education, such as instruments and travel, have a greater impact.

This growing field of scholarship highlights the need for more study to better understand the nuanced benefits of music education for youth development. One emerging area is music entrepreneurship. In 2018, the IDB interviewed creative entrepreneurs across the region on how they generate employment, build prosperity, and deal with adversity in their communities. They identified digitization and entrepreneurship as the two main drivers of cross-cultural exchange in the arts (Luzardo and Gasca, 2018). With more investment and evaluation, we should be able to discover how helping young people become creative entrepreneurs might enhance their personal growth—and the region's orange economy.




The IDB already supports youth empowerment through music education in Latin America and the Caribbean. This note draws on conversations with beneficiaries, project team leaders, and partner organizations about music as an engine of social inclusion and economic development. It highlights successful initiatives, including a program focused on music entrepreneurship among young people in Colombia, an all-female orchestra and a choir for women's rights in Guatemala, young luthiers crafting stringed instruments in Peru, and a program preventing violence through music education for children and their families in Nicaragua.

As Cairo Amador Arrieta, the president of the Nicaraguan Cultural Forum (Foro Nicaragüense de Cultura), put it, "To mend the soul, there is no better therapy than music."

# Case Studies

“Music is a peaceful place... where I can free myself.” / Andrey, student DJ

## MUÉVETE

	<b>MUSICIANS</b> 2,000 young musicians	<b>AGES</b> 14–28	
	Music schools in Antioquia, Chocó, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, and San Andrés, Colombia		
	<b>IDB SUPPORT</b> US\$1 million	<b>FOCUSRITE IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION</b> US\$1.7 million	<b>UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID)</b> US\$100,000

From the Andes Mountains to the Pacific Ocean to the Amazon Rainforest, Colombian music is a source of great pride. The country is home to a variety of beloved music genres: *cumbia* and *vallenato* from the Caribbean, salsa from Cali, and some of the most innovative and popular *música urbana* artists in Latin America from Bogota.

The Colombian music industry is also a window to the world—a chance to represent talent, free expression, and growth on the global stage. “Here in Colombia, we have a wealth of culture and artistic possibilities,” said Juan David Pedreros, a sound engineer and music business teacher. “In fact, the orange economy is an introduction to the real world for many of our young people.”

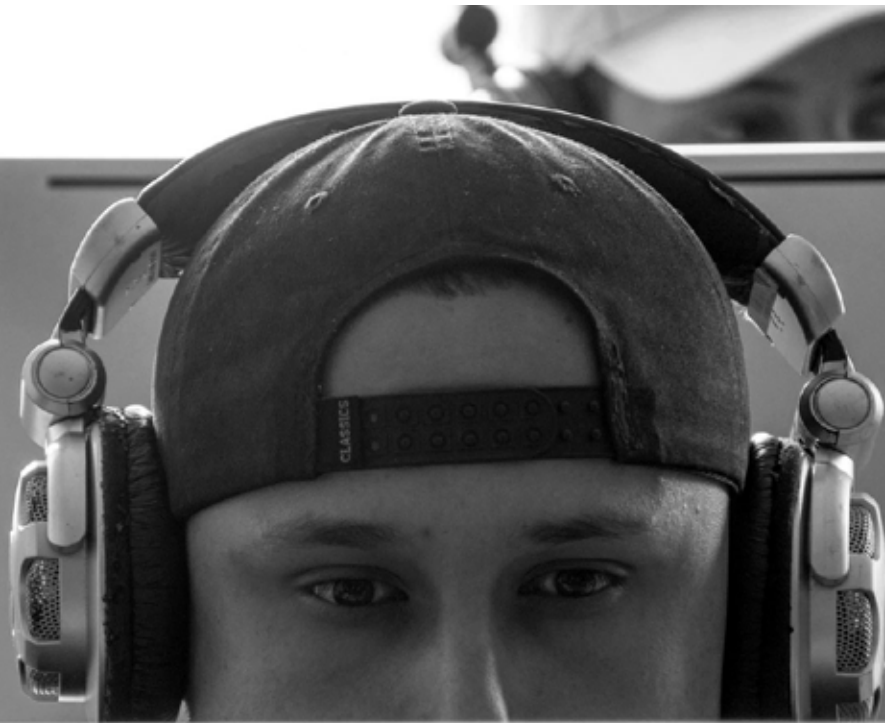
Muévete—a music, creativity, and entrepreneurship program for Colombian youth—is infusing cultural industries with 21st-century talent. Rooted in the rich musical traditions of Colombia’s Pacific region, Muévete brings popular, modern music and art into the spotlight. In 2022–23, the pilot trained 2,000 young people in music performance, production, and entrepreneurship, partnering with nonprofits DNA Music and Fundación ACADI/VOCA.



Focusing on communities heavily affected by the war in Colombia, Muévete prioritizes socioeconomically vulnerable youth ages 14–28 in Antioquia, Chocó, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, and San Andrés. Through blended in-person and online learning, students develop their creative voices along with their entrepreneurial skills and life plans, while also engaging in dialogue on diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

“We live in a society of broken hearts,” one Muévete student reflected during a workshop discussion of core values in Cali. “We cannot mend them without empathy.”

For many Muévete students, music is a way to honor their roots and build hope for the future. Anderson Ivan Quinayas was born in La Vega, a small city in Cauca. His grandparents loved music. His mother’s parents performed *serenatas* with their children. On the *chirimía*—a wooden relative to the oboe—his father’s father could “take melodies that would sound simple in anyone else’s hands and bring out the rhythms and bring out the joy.”



When he was three years old, his family was displaced by violence in the region. They made a new home in Cali's *comuna siete*, which he described as "a heavy neighborhood," referring to high levels of poverty and violence.

Anderson became Navi, a freestyle rapper, five years ago "to leave the negative environment I found myself in, on my own terms, and make it so that more young people from my neighborhood choose a positive path through rap and hip hop." He sees writing, art, and music as powerful ways to change mindsets. "Music is about feelings. It's about the experiences of the marginalized, and the things people won't talk about on the news."

Muévete aims to promote curiosity and self-awareness in young people through cross-cultural and creative immersion, focusing on social inequality. The music program encourages young people to maximize their potential, strengthen their innovation and life skills, and sustainably join the orange economy. Young musicians are encouraged to start local projects to benefit their communities, channeling their creativity as agents of change.

At 14 years old, Camila Delgadillo is already a pianist, violinist, budding academic, and aspiring DJ with Muévete. Far from the city center, in Bogota's southern district, Camila used to wake up at 4:30 every morning just to get to arts school. As her love of music grew, so did her curiosity about how music shapes the mind. "As a musician, you can feel the math in your body," she shared in an interview with the IDB. "You grow up counting, with that mentality."




Camila's interest in music brought her to music education. She asked, "How many children don't have access to education? And how many more don't have an arts education? Prisons teach art workshops. Why? Because artistic expression can purify your soul. But if we teach art to children, starting when they are very young, maybe we won't need to teach it in prison."

To foster a broader ecosystem of music for change in Colombia, the Muévete trains instructors and makes its curriculum freely accessible. The IDB has teamed up with several tech companies to provide free hardware, software, and music production training to 4,000 eligible students. Muévete's goal is to catalyze a universal music coalition, promoting cultural industries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

For yet another student, Juana Valentina Gomez, joining Muévete was a simple decision. "I signed up," she said, "because music is what gives life meaning."

“Whoever understands music, everything in their life will be different because music marks your heart.” / Elba, grandmother of two musicians

## EL SALVADOR SYSTEM OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH CHOIRS AND ORCHESTRAS (EL SISTEMA EL SALVADOR)

	<b>MUSICIANS</b> 2,500 musicians	<b>AGES</b> 4-24
	Four music schools in San Salvador, San Vicente, and Ilobasco	
	<b>IDB SUPPORT</b> US\$300,000	

A decade ago, the El Salvador Ministry of Culture studied how music influences communication, socio-emotional health, and economic growth. From the premise that music helps build cultural identities, the ministry looked closely at how musicians across the country engaged youth, encouraged personal growth, and promoted peace. At the time, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development had just named El Salvador as the most violent nation in the world, with 69.2 violent deaths for every 100,000 people (Innocenti, 2014).

In this context, the Ministry of Culture decided to launch a system of community music schools to teach children and youth, using Venezuela’s El Sistema as a model. The goal of the El Salvador System of Children and Youth Choirs and Orchestras, or El Sistema El Salvador, was to “promote the arts and culture as a mechanism for sustainable quality of life” (Innocenti, 2014).

El Sistema El Salvador teaches musical instruments and voice in the Suzuki method, a classical music pedagogy created by Shinichi Suzuki in the early 1900s. Students start young, play music in groups, and receive intensive ear training before learning to read music. Beginner-through advanced-level students join ensembles to practice creative collaboration. The schools host public concerts frequently to celebrate artistic expression within the young musicians’ families and broader communities.

Cristian, an oboe student in the program, described the context of El Sistema El Salvador like this: “Instrumental music culture was limited, so the majority of us didn’t know how to play these types of instruments . . . for me personally, it is essential. Music is an essential part of your character, especially as a young person. This orchestra has given me joy, satisfaction in what I do, and dreams about what I can do through art and music” (Innocenti, 2014).

The goals of the community music schools include preventing violence, providing safe alternatives to drug and alcohol consumption, encouraging school attendance, and meeting the social and emotional needs of marginalized youth.

The combination of community music and social dialogue made a powerful impression on participants. As one choral student in an El Sistema El Salvador focus group described it, “For me, El Sistema is my family. It made me a better person because it made me accept myself as I am, no matter what other people say” (Innocenti, 2014).

From 2012 to 2013, the IDB provided technical support to train new teachers and build a pipeline of staff for El Sistema El Salvador. Training sessions covered orchestral technique, the Suzuki method, music administration, and communications management. This project enabled El Sistema El Salvador to reallocate resources for greater impact. The program began serving a wider age range of students, offering new music ensembles, and deepening their social inclusion. During this time, the Ministry of Culture built new music schools in San Vicente and Ilobasco.

In 2014, El Sistema El Salvador launched “music nurseries” to teach stringed instruments to young children and other beginners. The purpose of the nurseries, according to Natalia, a cello instructor, was to “give students the opportunity, in an inclusive way, to broaden their musical horizons before they can join the youth orchestra” (Innocenti, 2014).

In 2019, the music schools expanded to a new location in the San Salvador cultural center, Ex Capres San Jacinto. Lessons and ensembles continued virtually in 2020–21 amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, El Sistema El Salvador introduced TÓNICA, a new program for children ages 4–5, to explore percussion, voice, and movement.

Today, five youth orchestras and four youth choirs, each with accompanying children’s programs, engage young musicians across the country. Each year, more students have access to rigorous music education. As Cristian put it, “More than anything, I have always thought that a commitment to music is very personal. When the program is demanding, you find your personal best.”

Music provides a creative outlet for emotions, a bridge between people, and a way to experience the power of persistence.








# “We have access to places I never imagined or dreamed I would perform.”

/ Merily Ajcip, cellist

## ORQUESTA SINFÓNICA JUVENIL FEMENINA Y CORO ALAÍDE FOPPA

	<b>MUSICIANS</b> 190 girls and women musicians	<b>AGES</b> 13–42
	Conservatory in Antigua, Guatemala	
	<b>IDB SUPPORT</b> US\$371,000	

In 2015, Merily Ajcip was a cellist looking for an orchestra. She had grown up in a musical family, singing in her church choir and listening to her father play the guitar. She loved the music courses she took in college. Yet Merily did not see a future for herself as a musician.

“Orchestras were very closed off across the country,” she explained in an interview with the IDB. “They tended to be competitive, exclusionary spaces.” At 22 she had finally saved enough money working as a graphic designer to buy her own cello, but no symphony would admit her. Then she heard about a new orchestra in Antigua, filled with young women musicians like her.

The Orquesta Sinfónica Juvenil Femenina y Coro Alaíde Foppa (Alaíde Foppa Female Youth Symphony Orchestra and Choir) is the first all-female youth symphony in Guatemala. It was founded in 2015 by the NGO Memorial para la Concordia (A Monument to Harmony), which advocates for truth, memory, justice, and peace across the country. Named for the Guatemalan-Spanish feminist poet Alaíde Foppa, the ensembles integrate sex education, violence prevention, and self-advocacy into their approach to music education.

Merily, now the orchestra’s lead coordinator, said, “Alaíde Foppa doesn’t resemble competitive orchestras. It’s a safer space, and our goal is to cultivate a secure, harmonious mindset.” In a country where one in five female adolescents ages 15–19 has already been pregnant, and girls age 10–14 are most at risk to become survivors of sexual assault (Harrison Fernández, 2020), the program uses music to build the trust necessary to address these weighty topics.



In the ensembles, trust and collaboration work hand in hand. “The beauty of this project is the feeling that you are part of an ensemble of women, all working toward one goal,” Merily reflected. “At the end of the day what we play together is what the audience hears.”

“Alaíde Foppa is a unique initiative in Central America,” said Hugo Amador Us Alvarez, senior diversity specialist at the IDB and leader of the IDB collaboration with Alaíde Foppa. “It not only teaches music to talented girls and young women, but also promotes empowerment and self-esteem, especially among indigenous women.”

In 2018, the Orquesta y Coro Alaíde Foppa opened a new music conservatory with IDB funding; 190 girls and women ages 13–42—most from Sacatepéquez along with 9.5 percent from indigenous communities—joined the program (Harrison Fernández, 2020). They participated in 15 hours a week of free music lessons, ensemble rehearsals, and workshops to build a “culture of gender-based empowerment and peace” (Orquesta y Coro Alaíde Foppa, 2022). No prior knowledge of music was required to participate; workshop topics included diversity and equity, women’s rights, civic engagement, public advocacy, sexual health, armed conflict, and educational inclusion (Orquesta y Coro Alaíde Foppa, 2022).

“It changed my life because it made me a woman more aware of the situation in my country,” Merily shared. “Beyond learning music, it awoke something bigger in me, through the gender workshops and concepts I had never heard before.”

Merily was not alone. In a 2020 qualitative impact study, evaluators found that participating in the Orquesta y Coro Alaíde Foppa improved musical ability, increased self-esteem, deepened musicians’ knowledge of women’s rights in Guatemala, and cultivated organizational skills. The majority of participants felt the music lessons, rehearsals, and social workshops to be an empowering experience (Harrison Fernández, 2020).

Since she joined the orchestra, Merily has performed in the Teatro Nacional Miguel Ángel Asturias—the largest concert hall in Guatemala City, reserved for the country’s most elite musicians—on multiple occasions. “This is what I have always been searching for,” she concluded, “the room to be taken seriously as an artist.”

# “I finally feel sure of who I am and what I’m doing.” / Keyling Jassmin Mercado Bustos, cellist

## MUSIC AGAINST VIOLENCE (PREVENCIÓN DE LA VIOLENCIA A TRAVÉS DE LA MÚSICA)

	<b>MUSICIANS</b> 350 children and youth musicians	<b>AGES</b> 6–25
	Music schools in Managua, Diriá, Masatepe, and San Marcos, Nicaragua	
	<b>IDB SUPPORT</b> US\$650,000	

When Keyling joined Music Against Violence (Prevención de la violencia a través de la música), she struggled with insecurity. At 17, she had just started college to become a medical lab technician. She found it hard to connect with her peers, and her family faced financial difficulties. Four years later, she left as a highly capable college graduate and skilled cellist. Her music teachers described her as “determined to take on new challenges” (Amador Arrieta, 2018).

Keyling credits her emotional growth to the support of her parents and instructors. Music Against Violence invites musicians and their families to explore the power of music to restore peace in the face of the highest youth suicide rate in Central America and ongoing child labor injustices. As Cairo Amador Arrieta, president of the Nicaraguan Cultural Forum (Foro Nicaragüense de Cultura), reflected, “to mend the soul, there is no better therapy than music” (Amador Arrieta, 2018).

Guided by Nicaragua’s National Strategy for Citizen and Human Security, the Foro Cultura and the IDB invested in a network of youth orchestras and choirs across the country. In Managua, Diriá, Masatepe, and San Marcos, 300 children and youth ages 6–25 learned to play instruments and joined ensembles. The programs were designed to welcome young musicians with disabilities, as well as those who had experienced violence and sexual harassment in their communities. Roughly one in six musicians had a disability.

“From the beginning, we did not want the experience in our programs to feel like a traditional music school, academy, or conservatory,” technical artistic director Gregorio Fonseca wrote in the organization’s impact report (Amador Arrieta, 2018). Instead, instructors interspersed music lessons in the traditional Suzuki and Orff methods with social inclusion workshops on violence prevention, empathy, self-advocacy for teens, and building solidarity among families. A series of luthier workshops taught violinmaking and upkeep for financial sustainability. When parents and guardians expressed interest in music, Fonseca started a choir just for them.

The music schools devised psychosocial interventions to address violent trauma directly with students and families. Mental health professionals conducted evaluations and used the results to inform socio-emotional workshops for students and their guardians.

The results of this work have been tangible. A qualitative study of Music Against Violence (Gutierrez, 2018) found that:

- Participating in the program helped develop social and emotional skills, in particular listening, self-control, and respect for others.

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- Musical expression was a force for empowerment, giving students the agency to identify their own goals and think more expansively about their futures.

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- The program increased self-confidence and motivation.

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- Participants developed values that contribute to peaceful communities, such as respect, unity, and solidarity.

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- Learning music together cultivated a better relationship between young musicians and their families.

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- Instructors and parents reported that the program improved their students’ self-discipline and grades in school.

Music Against Violence seeks to strengthen intergenerational bonds to address trauma specifically. Musicians and their parents are often vulnerable to the same cycle of violence, and they can benefit from experiencing creative freedom together. As 12-year-old singer Carlos Alberto Sol Vasquez put it, “When someone makes fun of me at school, my mama tells me ‘just keep going, ignore that negativity’” (Amador Arrieta, 2018). Carlos’s mother bravely separated from his physically abusive father when Carlos was just three years old.

When he joined the music school, Carlos was often unresponsive in lessons and would isolate himself from the other children. Through Music Against Violence, he joined a youth choir and received psychological support. His emotional resilience developed over time alongside his love of music.

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Musicians and their parents are often vulnerable to the same cycle of violence, and they can benefit from experiencing creative freedom together.

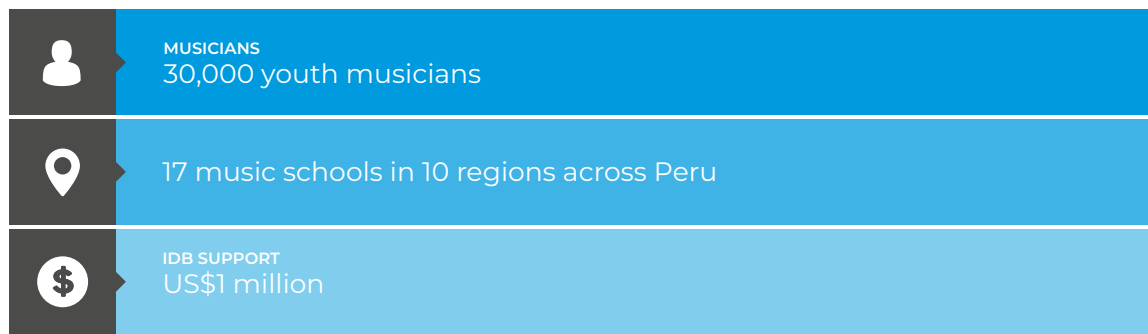




“I had to teach my hands that they should not go at their own pace, but at the rhythm of the wood.” / Charles Paulino Rojas, student violinmaker

## **SYMPHONY FOR PERU: MUSIC AND SOCIAL INCLUSION** (SINFONÍA POR EL PERÚ: MÚSICA E INCLUSIÓN)

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In Rímac, one of the most culturally rich yet economically marginalized areas in Lima, Peru, dozens of young musicians are learning the ancient art of lutherie, or making stringed instruments by hand. In this studio, novice luthiers learn how precise engineering meets emotional expression to unlock the music in a piece of wood (Sinfonía por el Perú, 2020).

Since he was a child, Charles loved watching the symphony orchestra perform on television. He was always eager to discover how instruments worked. He bought his first violin when he was 20, and he describes that moment as “one of the most beautiful experiences.” He had some access to lessons, but as he shared in an interview with the IDB, “the issue of resources sometimes hindered my learning process, so lutherie was a good way to nurture my curiosity and my love for music.”

Charles is one of hundreds of children and young adults across Peru who are joining communities built around orchestras, bands, and choirs. Symphony for Peru: Music and Social Inclusion (Sinfonía por el Perú: música e inclusión social) is a network of local music schools launched by the Asociación Sinfónica del Perú to empower children and youth by providing a safe environment and the space in which to flex their creative muscles.

With an investment from the IDB, the symphony opened four new community music schools, and each welcomed 200 students from socioeconomically vulnerable backgrounds in 2011 (Díaz, 2018). From the mountains of Huancayo to Trujillo along the coast and Huánuco in the rainforest, the schools sought to make music and artistic expression central to the journey of growing up.

Charles described one of the broader life lessons he absorbed through violinmaking in this way. “Before the workshop, when I was frustrated, I did not recognize that frustration, and my reaction was not so positive. But after the workshop the dynamic began to change, and I began to think ‘this is normal. I can be calm, and it’s okay to feel like this, as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone. I just need to learn from my frustration and let life continue.’”

Specialists at Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE) conducted two randomized control trials in 2014 and 2018 to measure the impact over time of participating in *Sinfonía por el Perú* on 701 Rímac youth ages 6–16. Focusing on personal growth, family dynamics, and academic achievement, both studies found powerful results for socioeconomically vulnerable girls and young women, in particular (Díaz, 2018).

Through this process, GRADE analysts identified the symphony effect (*efecto sinfonía*). They found that building a safe space for participants to channel their imagination and become agents of change in their own families and communities had ramifications far beyond the music schools (Díaz, 2018). Among the *Sinfonía por el Perú* participants, compared to their peers, young women spent 13 percent more time studying, 15 percent less time on jobs and housework, and 93 percent more time practicing music.

Mothers were 23 percent less likely to tolerate child labor as an outcome for their children. Families were 49 percent less likely to use corporal punishment in response to disobedience.

Teens were 57 percent less likely to have unprotected sex and 75 percent less likely to be pregnant. Students were 29 percent more likely to plan for postsecondary studies in a specialized field, and 26 percent more likely to believe they would complete their studies.

Charles is now pursuing a career making and restoring stringed instruments. When asked what he gains from this work, he reflected, “I know that violinmaking is not a team activity, but in the learning process you fail a lot at the beginning. You end up leaning on people, and they end up leaning on you. So I learned, not only to be patient with myself, but also with other people.”

“Tell me what it was like the first time you picked [your clarinet] up to play it.”

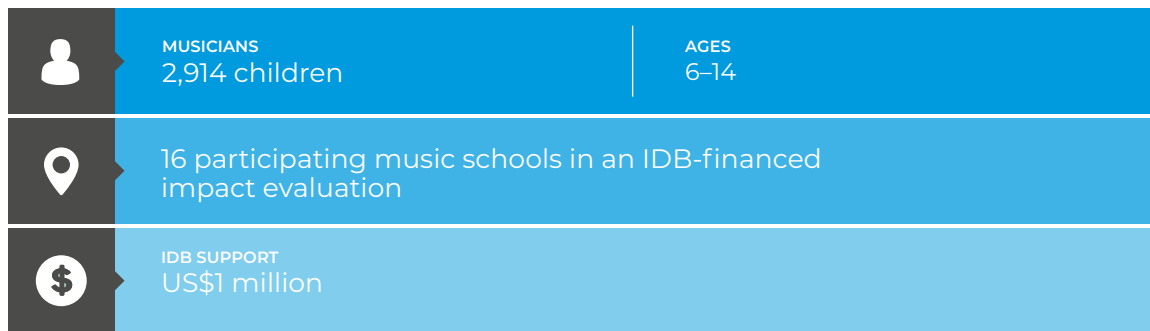
/ Ed Bradley

“It’s completely different than when you hold a gun.” / Lennar Acosta

Interview on “60 Minutes, El Sistema: Changing Lives through Music” (Bradley, 2008)

## EL SISTEMA: MEASURING IMPACT

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In 1975, composer and economist José Antonio Abreu launched what would become the most famous musical ensemble targeting economically marginalized children across Venezuela and one of the leading youth orchestras for social inclusion in the world. Called El Sistema, or the System, the state-sponsored program is now a national network of more than 443 community music schools that have taught more than 1 million Venezuelan children and youth.

El Sistema’s founding documents did not mention social inclusion or poverty alleviation when they were initially signed in 1979 (Decree 3093, 1979), nor when they were amended for the first time in 1996 (Decree 44, 1996). Advocates and critics of the organization agree that the goal of social inclusion was officially added in the late 1990s as a way to maintain political support for the project in the face of significant cuts to arts funding (Urrutia, 1995).

Today’s El Sistema, which has inspired youth orchestras around the world, is a self-described “social endeavor of the Venezuelan State dedicated to the pedagogical, occupational, and ethical rescue of children and youth, by means of collective musical instruction and practice, devoted to training, prevention, and recovery with the country’s most vulnerable groups, due as much to their ages as to their socioeconomic situations.”

Fernando, a young trumpet player and participant in El Sistema, illuminated this mission when he said, “We don’t just play to interpret the music—we play with an underlying social purpose. And that’s the most important, right? To let the world know that using music we can rescue children, purify the soul” (Tunstall, 2012).

The El Sistema approach has garnered global acclaim as well as criticism. Academics and practitioners have expressed skepticism over El Sistema’s pedagogy, distribution of funding, and impact on social inclusion. Yet, ultimately, the program’s role in bringing the topic of music as an engine of social change to the forefront of Latin American public policy is undeniable. According to one of the program’s harshest critics, Geoffrey Baker, “Perhaps the principal and lasting value of El Sistema . . . is putting the idea of social action through music on the international public agenda” (Baker, 2014).



From May 2012 to November 2013, IDB researchers conducted a randomized control trial of 2,914 children ages 6–14 in 16 El Sistema music schools across the country. The study measured the impact on students' self-regulatory, behavioral, prosocial, and cognitive skills of attending an El Sistema school one semester longer than their peers. The researchers compared students of the same age to control groups at the same developmental stage. Students' socioeconomic background was determined by their mother's level of education (Alemán and others, 2017).

The study found that more El Sistema training improved young musicians' self-control and reduced behavioral difficulties in a statistically significant way. The effects were most powerful for children with less-educated mothers and for boys, especially those who had experienced violence in their communities or homes. Boys with less-educated mothers improved their self-control by 50 percent more than their peers; their aggressive behavior decreased 24 percent more than their peers.

Longer evaluations might allow particular skills to be understood over time. Group lessons seem to improve collaboration and cognitive development more than private lessons, but further in-depth studies should test this theory.

Using music to build peace, fight discrimination, encourage solidarity, and benefit people from all walks of life is a beautiful, inspiring idea. More research is needed to explore its full potential.



We don't just play to interpret the music—we play with an underlying social purpose...To let the world know that using music we can rescue children, purify the soul.



“My instrument is a double bass, which is not very common in a small city like Popayán.” / Mónica Rivera Hernandez, student of the Berklee Latino program in Colombia

## BERKLEE LATINO MUSIC EDUCATION

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	<b>MUSICIANS</b> 1,000 youth musicians	<b>AGES</b> 6–14
	<b>IDB SUPPORT</b> US\$700,000	

In 2016, the IDB partnered with the Berklee College of Music to help Latin American institutions expand access to critical education and training programs. The Berklee Latino Music Education program reaches a broad audience of students and educators through three interlocking components:

- Berklee Latino Workshops—week-long, intensive youth music education programs taught in Spanish
- The Berklee Pre-University Learning Experience System (PULSE®) Music Method—an interactive, online music education platform
- Teacher Training for PULSE—empowering educators to incorporate PULSE in their music education curriculum

These programs offer learning experiences free of charge to communities and individuals not otherwise able to participate. Berklee Latino workshops provide high-quality music education to disadvantaged and at-risk youth in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America. The sessions exposed students to composition, musical performance, and basic production techniques; improved their musical ability; and gave them the confidence to take their artistic knowledge to the next level.



PULSE, Berklee's interactive online music education portal, gives students access to music instruction no matter where they live. By placing computers in local classrooms, translating PULSE course modules and materials into Spanish, incorporating more Latin American rhythms into the curriculum, and training teachers to use the platform, Berklee has unlocked the innovation and creativity of thousands of school children in Colombia and other Latin and South American countries. Pablo Mayor, a Colombian musician, composer, and PULSE programmer and educator, described the goal of the program in these words: "It was born with the idea of [taking] study materials to places where there is a population of children without economic capacity. It was to teach the popular music of the United States in these schools. There are so many schools that have benefited from this."

A 20-hour course helps teachers learn to navigate PULSE and develop lesson plans for its use in their classroom. To date, more than 100 Latin and South American music educators have trained in and mastered the pedagogical skills required to teach using the tool.

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# SELECT LIST OF INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

## **Merily Ajcip**

**Cellist**

Orquesta Alaíde Foppa  
Antigua, Guatemala

## **Hugo Amador Us Alvarez**

**Senior Diversity Specialist**

Inter-American Development Bank

## **Keyling Jassmin Mercado Bustos**

**Cellist**

## **David Najera**

**Executive Director**

DNA Music

## **Krystal Prime Banfield**

**Vice President for Education Outreach and Social Entrepreneurship**

Berklee College of Music

## **Mónica Rivera Hernandez**

**Student**

Berklee Latino program in Colombia

## **Charles Paulino Rojas**

**Student violinmaker**

Lutherie Workshop, Sinfonia por el Perú



