

YOUTH ORCHESTRA OF THE AMERICAS



Comprised of 100 gifted young musicians, ages 18-30, the YOA Orchestra of the Americas teaches artistic excellence and inspires its members to create their own music education programs

Founded in 2001 by New England Conservatory and Vision, Inc., the YOA Orchestra of the Americas (YOA) was inspired by the National System of Youth and Children's Orchestras of Venezuela, which was created by José Antonio Abreu with the mission of bringing together energetic, talented musicians to pursue excellence and celebrate cultural diversity as a catalyst for social change.

Arturo Sarukhan, Mexico's Ambassador to the United States, puts it this way: "YOA represents a unique opportunity for young musicians from the Western Hemisphere

to learn from the best in a multicultural environment and to become members of a very important network of support. Through its performances and educational activities, YOA not only helps its members discover new horizons and expand the boundaries of their artistic and professional possibilities, but it also represents a source of inspiration to the musicians, students, and indeed, all of us with whom they interact during their tours."

The impact of YOA extends beyond its concert performances in many directions:

➤ Participants return to their native countries to share experiences and knowledge with their communities, thereby increasing classical music appreciation and harnessing the power of music for social purposes.

➤ YOA is a model for music education programs in Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Panama, Saint Lucia, the United States, and Uruguay.

by Katarina Weir
Photographs courtesy of YOA



Opposite: YOA musicians rehearse to prepare for the diverse and challenging repertoire they will take on a month-long tour. Left: A young musician performs in the Sembrando Talentos Uruguay program, established by YOA alumnus Nicolás Giordano. Below: YOA member Ruza McIntyre from Canada is pursuing an undergraduate performance degree at McGill University



➤ YOA trains musicians as teaching artists and musical ambassadors. Conductors and guest artists serve as role models and set an example of community service. On every tour, the Orchestra leads music-education programs for those who have little access to a symphony or to proficient teachers. In side-by-side performances with professional orchestras, YOA musicians sit with seasoned players and are mentored by a leader in their field.

➤ Leadership skills are received and transferred back to the local community in meaningful ways as YOA musicians go beyond the bounds of the classical genre to share their art with the world.

➤ YOA connects musicians to institutions of higher learning and to professional job opportunities, directly impacting their career path.

YOA in 2010/2011

YOA has performed more than 200 concerts since its 2002 Inaugural Tour. Settings have ranged from the most prestigious concert halls of Europe and the Americas, to outdoor venues not often associated with symphonic music. Over 8 million people have been reached through live performances, television and radio broadcasts, CD recordings, print media, and documentary films.

The past two years exemplify the progress YOA has made in developing its programs. It has expanded its reach

considerably in this time, leveraging YOA's reputation of artistic excellence, its unique operating model, and its network of contacts.

In February 2010, the World Economic Forum and its Forum of Young Global Leaders invited YOA to perform at Carnegie Hall. Sixty YOA musicians were joined on stage by musicians from the Manhattan School of Music and the New England Conservatory in a sold-out performance with superstar guest artists Joshua Bell, Julian Rachlin, and Valery Gergiev.

That same year, in July, YOA presented at the Biennial of the Americas in Denver and was featured on NPR radio. From June to August, it did a 24-concert tour of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil, featuring performances with Joshua Bell and other special guests. Philip Glass served as Composer in Residence. In October, the YOA gave two concerts in Santo Domingo (at the Teatro Colón and the Plaza España) sponsored by the Foreign Ministry of the Dominican Republic and Fundación Sinfonía, in celebration of Santo Domingo's naming as the 2010 Cultural Capital of the Americas. Soloists included the winners of the Santander International Piano Competition.

Early this year, YOA partnered with the Washington Ballet to present David Palmer's "Passing Through" and Edvard Liang's "As Above, So Below," followed by a celebration of "Carmen." From June to

August, the orchestra also performed in a 15-concert tour of Mexico, featuring concerts with Mexico's oldest folkloric ensemble, Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán. A professional recording of Mahler's 7th Symphony with one of Mexico's most prestigious orchestras, Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería, was produced. In the past few months, YOA performed at the Young Euro Classic Festival at the Konzerthaus in Berlin, and YOA string players joined the Days And Nights Festival Players, performing with the Molissa Fenley and Philip Glass.

New developments and directions

Auditions

In 2010, YOA began to use YouTube to offer free and open auditions, which are held annually in January. The YouTube auditions remove the cost of international postage and ensure that any deserving and eligible musician can apply.



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The resulting expansion of the audition pool has dramatically improved the quality of the orchestra. It has provided deeper insight into the musical development of each country within the Americas, highlighting the places where YOA's experience can be most helpful and where support for local institutions is needed.

Collaboration and partnership

YOA has redefined its social and education programs by developing new collaborations and partnerships that have helped to enhance and clarify YOA's core values. One example is the collaboration with the Organization of American States in the development of three after-school music programs to support at-risk youth in the Caribbean.

Another example of partnership for mutual benefit has been the work with two Colombian institutions: Fundación Batuta,

a nation-wide music education program; and Fundación Bolívar Davivienda, a foundation with a strong social mission. The outcome of this dynamic collaboration is the Filarmónica Joven de Colombia (FJC)—the first national youth orchestra

based on the model of YOA. This orchestra will provide international-level training and performance experience to 100 Colombian youth selected annually through open auditions.



Left: YOA performed in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in 2008. Below: Philip Glass served as Composer in Residence in 2010 and currently serves on the advisory board for YOA. Right: Students in the YOURS Project based in Chicago

Not Just a Summer Tour

In recent years, YOA musicians have been performing together throughout the year in addition to the traditional summer tour. Special invitations and sponsorships to perform at music events as well as educational exchange programs provide the basis for bringing together selected members of the YOA orchestra. Programs range from chamber recitals to full-orchestra concerts. YOA musicians also serve as teaching artists in partner programs with conservatories and orchestras around the world.

Working with Alumni

While staying faithful to its original vision, YOA has inspired a growing number of its musicians to create their own initiatives, forming multi-national teams to lead music education programs for those who have little access to a symphony or to quality teachers. While this has always been the orchestra's ambition, such initiatives have really taken off over the past three years (*see sidebar*), with the engagement of YOA orchestra members in their home countries.

Bernardo Alviz, YOA 2010 musician from Colombia summed it up this way: "YOA is not an orchestra; it is a school of life, values, dedication, passion, and unconditional and never-ending love. All of those that belong to it are unique and special people, with an honest desire to do things right and give their all to others." ❀

Katarina Weir is the Executive Director of YOA. A management professional specializing in human resources management and not-for-profit organizations, she was born in Kenya, grew up in Switzerland, and obtained an MA in business administration from Edinburgh University, Scotland.



DEBORAH WANDERLEY DOS SANTOS

Planting seeds

YOA Musicians and Community Outreach

Named after The People's Music School founder, the Rita Simo United Youth Orchestra (YOURS) Project is a special initiative of the People's Music School in Chicago. Its mission is to develop social and cultural awareness, foster responsibility, and provide necessary tools for success using intense immersion in an orchestra-school training program to broaden horizons and develop potential. The Project aspires to be a city-wide network of nucleos, or hubs, that house these orchestras. The first one of these is located at the William G. Hibbard Elementary School in Albany Park.

YOA alumna Deborah Wanderley dos Santos and a group of volunteers launched the YOURS Project in October 2008 using donated instruments and makeshift accessories to teach 35 kids after school. Today, in partnership with the Ravinia

Festival, the Hibbard Nucleus has over 160 students in three different levels of orchestras. The program takes place every weekday morning, after school, and on Saturdays. The project is currently financed through both private donations and grants.

As a musical education program, YOURS has become a center of reference for Cook County. Numerous music institutions, including the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, the Ravinia Festival, the OrchKids Baltimore, and several Public School directors and teachers have visited the program to learn from their experience. The YOURS Orchestra received the maximum grading at the Chicago Public Schools Festival. This success has clearly shown that music excellence and social transformation can go hand and hand.