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The Search for Coexistence and
Citizenship in Medellín's Music Schools

Rethinking Social Action Through Music



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5. Change

In some sense our ability to open the future will depend not on how well we learn anymore but how well we are able to unlearn.

Alan Kay

In her imagining of real utopias in music education, Ruth Wright (2019, 217) draws on Erik Olin Wright's vision of social justice-oriented research or emancipatory social science as focused on three tasks. Thus far I have focused on the first: "to elaborate a systematic diagnosis and critique of the world as it exists." I now pivot my attention towards the second—"to envision viable alternatives." Part II builds on the Red's search and fleshes out its rethinking of SATM, adding both complementary and contrasting analyses. To begin with, in this chapter I consider how changes in society and music education raise questions about orthodox SATM, how the search for alternatives to that orthodoxy has already begun, and where this path might lead.

Change in the Red

The original SATM programs were created at times and in places when most young people had few or no alternative activities, and keen students were willing and able to spend most of their non-school time studying music. Indeed, the idea became to occupy all their spare time to keep them off the streets. Abreu's main concern was training orchestral musicians quickly, but one of his many Victorian reformer-esque traits

was a quasi-religious elevation of work and an explicit abhorrence of *ocio* (leisure, free time). Mantie (2018, 546) writes that “self-appointed moral guardians sought to impose their vision of proper behaviour through recommended free time activities. Concern over the conduct of others was often driven by a fear that people—that is, people of lower social classes—would not use their time appropriately.” He is describing nineteenth-century advocates of “rational recreation,” but he could just as well be referring to Abreu proposing to rescue disadvantaged youths from “an empty, disorientated, and deviant youth.” The original SATM programs were essentially *intensified* versions of conventional music education, and their level was high because students dedicated so much time to them. There was no miracle, no revolutionary pedagogy: musical achievements rested on a huge investment of time and a leader who persuaded young people to make it through a mixture of charisma, incentives, and promises. El Sistema and the Red had two levels of intensity: high and higher. Weekends and holidays were seen as an opportunity to increase the workload, not rest. Even Abreu himself said that there was no secret: El Sistema was built simply on “work and study.”¹

But twenty years on, Medellín is full of free cultural and sports programs, and new technologies provide endless sources of distraction. The old model of intensity and exclusive focus is no longer so appealing to many students or their families. In the global North, programs inspired by El Sistema did not even attempt to adopt a similar level of intensity, acknowledging—sometimes grudgingly (see Mota and Teixeira Lopes 2017)—that it was impossible to recreate in their social contexts, but they did generally opt for a higher amount of instruction than was the norm. However, even this more modest attempt at intensity can be a source of friction. In their study of a North American SATM program, Hopkins, Provenzano, and Spencer (2017, 254) found that “increased intensity was the source of most of the benefits *and* challenges reported by the participants.” The high level of time commitment required meant that attendance was a problem, and some students (and the researchers) raised concerns over the focus on excellence that accompanied the intensity. Most strikingly, “[i]n the student focus-group interview there

1 YOLA National at Home, “The Philosophy of El Sistema”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMDTfTgFaOA>.

was near unanimous opinion to reduce the number of meeting days per week or the length of the after-school rehearsals" (251). El Sistema's only unique selling point was thus difficult to implement in practice and unpopular with the students.

In the Red, too, intensity might be regarded as a major source of both benefits and challenges—another example of SATM's ambiguity. The program's "golden age" had been characterized by intensity not just of time but also of atmosphere. It shared with El Sistema teachers, repertoire, and methods, and also charismatic leadership, inspiring pep talks, total commitment and absorption, and a quasi-religious or cult-like aspect. For those who stuck with the Red, intensity had its upsides, and gradually rowing back from it since 2005 provoked a sense of loss and nostalgia for some members of the first generation. Yet it also incited more ambivalent and negative reactions, and most staff recognized that twenty years on, it was no longer possible or appropriate.

The Red started to acknowledge and tackle the downsides of intensity quite a few years ago, questioning the El Sistema-esque focus on endless playing in search of artistic perfection, and encouraging instead a diversification of activities and a less pressured approach. In 2014, the social team asked: "How can we minimize the [Red's] negative impact on formal education [and] guarantee space for family life [...]?" (*Síntesis* 2014, 5). Historically, the Red had absorbed time that would otherwise be used for recreation and domestic chores, but the social team recognized such activities as important and did not agree that music education should compete with them.

During my fieldwork, a number of teachers stressed that leisure time was important for students and that young people should not have an overly packed schedule. In one meeting, a director argued that it was scientifically proven that downtime, rest, and moments for doing nothing were important to human beings. This was a far cry from Abreu's demonization of *ocio* as a root of crime and social problems, but it was in accordance with local youth researchers: Rincón (2015, 132), for example, argues that youth "is a state where you have to lose yourself to find yourself, where it is worth wasting time, where free time (*ocio*) is gained to relax [...]. What have to be created are the conditions

to waste time in useless projects and collective play, and thereby carve out time to be young.”²

José, a school director, reflected at length on the issue of change and diversification since the 1990s:

Before there was just music, [but] the offering has changed [in the city], now there is theatre, literature, photography, painting... For me it's great that a kid says: “Sir, I can't stay here till 9 pm playing like a crazy thing, because I've got to go to my art class.” That was fine at the time, but... we've got to move on.

He was sceptical about the nostalgia of the Red's first generation, arguing that the first phase had been less rosy than they claimed:

The Siempre Juntos generation never read a book, painted, played, no family time, cinema... it was all orchestra. How sad to have a life where you don't want to be in your own house. It didn't lead to social improvement in the sense of forming better citizens; rather, they created a parallel society where they enjoyed being together and that was it. Play, play, play [music], and nothing else.³ [...] There were no alternatives, the only book that people had in the house was the Bible. Now that has changed, there are the library parks, Comfama, the public programs. There has been a big transformation in the city in recent years, now the kids don't want to devote themselves only to music and close the door to everything else. It's more important to be a rounded kid who reads and does other things and not just be glued to their instrument. [...] I prefer a kid who reads, who can talk about politics, than an idiot who just plays and plays.

Even nostalgic members of the first generation acknowledged that society and culture had changed, and with young people now presented with many more options and distractions, there was no going back to the intensity of the old days. One, now a school director, told me: Medellín is a different place today, and the Red should adapt to the world that the students live in, rather than trying to adapt students to the ways of the 1990s. Intensity—even the lowered level in comparison

2 An increasing number of writers on work, productivity, and creativity, too, argue for the value of alternating periods of intensity and rest in order to improve the quality of work and allow for the incubation of new ideas. Unrelenting intensity can have both mental and physical costs.

3 The Spanish word *tocar* does not have the dual meaning of the English “play.” It simply means to play music.

with the past—was seen by many staff, students, and parents as an impediment and a source of attrition: they often remarked about older students dropping out because the Red took too much time away from schoolwork and hobbies. In 2018, both management and staff pointed to the rapid escalation of time commitment between the first and second years as an important factor in the high dropout rate among younger students. A first-generation student-turned-teacher noted that the age profile was much lower in 2018 than in the early years. Most of his students were now in the eight-to-ten age-range. His implication was that the Red was losing its hold on teenagers. Indeed, in 2018, 64% of students were twelve or under—a revealing figure considering that the Red’s age range was seven to twenty-five and students could start as late as fourteen. Demand was still high at entry level, but interest dropped off dramatically. SATM had been very appealing when there were few alternatives but it struggled with retention now that young people had more options.

By 2018, intensity seemed to hang over the Red like a ghost: many of the Red’s veterans lamented its departure, yet they generally acknowledged that it was gone and could never return. There was nostalgia for the first phase, but I never heard the argument that the Red should simply turn back the clock. The Red’s past was a ghost that some could not quite let go of, rather than one they actively desired to bring back to life.

Practice and research in music education more broadly have changed considerably since El Sistema was created and spread across Latin America to places like Medellín. Greater emphasis on child-centred learning, creativity, and curricular diversity raises major questions about a narrow, top-down, repetitive model. El Sistema has been revealed as riven with operational and educational flaws, but allegations of serious irregularities have also emerged from El Sistema-inspired programs in Mexico and Guatemala, suggesting issues with the model itself.⁴ Not only is it out of kilter with contemporary educational thinking, but it has also in some places reproduced rather than challenged societal problems such as authoritarianism and corruption.

4 See for example my blog post “‘False philanthropy’ in the Sistema-inspired sphere”, <https://geoffbakermusic.wordpress.com/el-sistema-the-system/el-sistema-blog/false-philanthropy-in-the-sistema-inspired-sphere/>.

El Sistema was created to train orchestral musicians, and while this focus may have made sense in oil-rich, twentieth-century “Saudi Venezuela,” as it was nicknamed, massifying this approach around the world is much harder to justify today. Since the late 1990s, El Sistema has claimed that its purpose is not in fact to train musicians, yet not only is this strategic discourse a denial of the program’s origins, but also many students who are given this pre-professional training do indeed go on to develop professional ambitions (Agrech 2018). In Medellín, 20% of Red students were expected to go on to music performance degrees in 2006 (Arango 2006). Yet they are trained for a profession that, even before COVID-19, was not only hyper-competitive but also stagnant or shrinking in many parts of the world. The challenges of trying to make a career in classical music have become increasingly obvious in the twenty-first century. It is one thing to provide young people with music education, but another to provide them with training that encourages them to aspire to an orchestral career. Such training may be perfect for those who want to be orchestral musicians, but it is an illogical choice for mass music education in the 2020s. Whether one looks at the career prospects for musicians or the social goals of SATM, music education on this scale should be broader.

At the projects fair in 2019, the head of the Red’s popular music ensemble gave a heartfelt and somewhat anguished speech questioning whether the Red was preparing students for the future. Today, he said, you don’t need to play an instrument to make music or write notation to compose. Conventional figures like the composer and the instrumental performer are in decline. Young people have a different conception of music than adults. Major technological changes are happening and adults are being left behind by young people and their ways of working. How is the Red reflecting this new reality, he asked? How could it persuade young people to play instruments like the oboe or the tuba that do not feature in their lives? And why should it? Do we really know what music the kids listen to and want to make? Are we preparing them for the world of music that they live in and the one that is around the corner, or are we recreating the world of the past that we come from?

In short, the original model of SATM—long hours, exclusive dedication, little life outside music, preparing students for the orchestral profession—is poorly suited to the social and musical realities of the

present in contexts of digital, cultural, and recreational abundance. In many places it is impossible to reproduce today. Its constituent elements have been much critiqued by music education researchers for many years. The challenge is therefore to create new forms of SATM that accord with current values, possibilities, and musical and technological realities, allow students to be involved in other extra-curricular activities as well, and can be pursued in more humane and time-efficient ways.

Giraldo spoke often about changes in the city and the wider world over the twenty years since the program's foundation, and he presented change in the Red as a logical and necessary response. *Reading the city* was central to the discourse of his team. When management and staff mentioned the old slogan "a child who takes up an instrument will never take up a weapon," it was often to point out its decreased relevance twenty years after the program's creation. There was widespread recognition that keeping children off the streets was no longer enough—that the Red had to imagine a new purpose and a new form.

SATM in Movement

The Red is not unique; change is in the air elsewhere too. In South America, Argentina's Programa Social Andrés Chazarreta is a national SATM program that focuses on Latin American traditional and popular music. It was founded on a critique of, and as an alternative to, Abreu's model.⁵ Other programs have adapted over time. Eduardo Torres, musical director of the Brazilian SATM program NEOJIBA (Núcleos Estaduais de Orquestras Juvenis e Infantis da Bahia), wrote: "the management team of NEOJIBA read your book in November 2014, and in December, we presented, chapter by chapter, your findings and critical comments to our pedagogical team and to all members of the main orchestra, in order to foster discussion. Some strategic decisions we have been taking since then had influence from the book, and from these internal discussions."⁶ These decisions included creating a psychosocial support team; producing annual reports on the social profile of beneficiaries; increasing the diversity of musical practice; enabling

5 Personal communication from the program's founder, Eduardo Tacconi.

6 Personal communication (cited with permission).

students to take decisions about repertoire and activities; and creating a more comprehensive but also flexible curriculum. Batuta, a nationwide program in Colombia, started with close ties to El Sistema, but it has forged a distinctive path in recent years. At the SIMM conference in Bogotá in July 2019, a senior Batuta representative presented a four-part model: collective musical practice, a constructivist pedagogical model, collective creation, and psychosocial accompaniment.⁷ Of these elements, only the first derives from El Sistema (and it is hardly unique to that program).

In mid-2018, the Red participated in a three-day international conference in São Paulo organized by the Brazilian SATM program Guri and the international NGO Jeunesses Musicales. Entitled “For all: Youth and musical connections,” the event explored issues such as autonomy, identity, youth development, collective composition, group improvisation, and the changing nature of the music profession. It thus addressed a number of SATM’s historical weak spots, and with no mention of El Sistema in the conference program, it provided further evidence of moves to decentre the Venezuelan model and explore alternatives in some corners of South America. When Giraldo returned from Brazil, he talked about his desire to align the Red further with this progressive current. Inspired by this snapshot of life outside the box of orthodox SATM, he realized that the Red could work on bigger problems, in tougher contexts, with more innovative methods.

The label “El Sistema-inspired” (ESI), now widespread in the global North, therefore reflects a historical reality but also obscures a more nuanced contemporary scenario, in which some programs have distanced themselves from the Venezuelan program in practice and/or ideology. There was a clear rupture in the case of the Red, but my private conversations with staff in some other Latin American programs have revealed attitudes to El Sistema and its model that are more mixed than is commonly supposed. Argentina is an example of a country where there is a variety of orchestral programs with different origins, aims, approaches, and political leanings, including the Chazarreta, whose founder was scathing about Abreu’s Eurocentrism. The reality is thus

7 Catherine Surace, “Batuta y su papel en la consolidación de un discurso sobre las artes y la transformación social”, SIMM-posium 4, 26 July 2019.

more complex than the reverential “El Sistema-inspired” movement that some would like to imagine.

Shifting to North America, one of the first ESI programs to be created in the US, Orchkids in Baltimore, has emphasised the development of collaborative composition in recent years. In 2018–19, Sistema Toronto implemented a Social Development Curriculum, which looks like an attempt to prioritize social action in practice as well as discourse. Each month, students explored a theme such as teamwork, listening, or respect, and discussed its meaning and applications.⁸ The El Sistema-inspired Sister Cities Girlchoir is a “girl empowerment choral academy”—a fascinating inversion of the Venezuelan “masculine brotherhood of Knights Templar of classical music” (Kozak Rovero 2018) with its glass ceiling for women and troubling gender relations. The YOLA National Symposium in Los Angeles in mid-2019 focused on topics such as power, voice, and creativity, thereby drawing much closer to critical scholarship on SATM. Such research may still have been viewed askance in some North American Sistema circles, but the gap in ideas had shrunk considerably; what had been controversial or even unmentionable just a few years earlier was now at the heart of the discussion. The 2020 edition of the YOLA event gave the impression of a program moving further away from El Sistema and closer to progressive music education each year.

Brad Barrett’s work at the Conservatory Lab Charter School (CLCS) makes an important contribution to the topic of artistic citizenship, and if the school was initially inspired by El Sistema, its more recent work is worlds away from Venezuelan practice. According to Barrett (2018, 10):

resident artists at CLCS have developed a learning community that balances technical development with creative practice, encourages reflective processes, and places importance on democratically run ensembles—with the overall intention of developing artistic citizenship. [...] At CLCS, there is a clear shift from simply supporting students to execute written music provided for them to guiding students who create music, text, and art for the purpose of examining and expressing their social realities.

8 Sistema Toronto, “Social development”, <https://www.sistema-toronto.ca/about-us/our-program/social-development>.

In a study of SATM programs in Canada and Argentina, Brook and Frega (2020) argue that the field has moved so far from its progenitor that it should stop using El Sistema as a point of reference.

Beyond the labels, then, a decentring of the Venezuelan model is in progress, if to differing degrees in different places. One current in SATM has seen an initial burst of enthusiasm for El Sistema, followed by an awakening to certain weaknesses and a sotto-voce process of critical distancing. The Red started out as virtually an annex of El Sistema, yet today there are no connections and the Venezuelan program is not mentioned in any public-facing materials. The International Society for Music Education adopted an advocacy stance when it created an El Sistema Special Interest Group in 2012, but it changed the name and removed the reference to El Sistema in 2020, as the group had become both more wide-ranging and more critical. Such examples may point to a future in which there is more that separates SATM programs from El Sistema than links them, and the Venezuelan program is gradually sidelined within the field (except for publicity purposes).

The momentum behind change is thus building, in the practice sphere as well as within the research world. New paths are opening up, but much still remains to be done. The Red serves as a perfect example of both. It was a force for good in a complicated city, providing access to music education to many who might otherwise have missed out and also a space of socialization that had positive sides. Particularly in its first phase, it provided safe spaces for young people that were sorely lacking elsewhere. There *was* something miraculous about the emergence of this program in the dark decade of the 1990s. Yet as times changed, the need grew to conceive of music education as more than just an escape from the problems of the streets. A succession of Red leaders felt that the program ought to go further, that its social processes were incomplete, that students deserved more agency and voice. Other social programs—including arts-based ones—grew up around the Red and implemented more progressive agendas, treating students as protagonists, creators, and citizens. A comparative perspective did not flatter the Red. In 2017–18, the Red was engaged in an ambitious process of transformation, yet it remained the most conservative of Medellín’s municipal arts education programs, the only one to have resisted revolution several years earlier.

The Red had achieved a lot in its first twenty years, yet like the city of Medellín, the miracle was only half-complete.

However, there is a curious paradox here. My research suggested that public perceptions of the Red were overly optimistic—that it was not quite the success story that was widely imagined. Yet when it came to internal perspectives, I had the opposite sensation: that they were sometimes overly pessimistic. The disruption that accompanied change meant that the glass looked half-empty to many staff and students, and even broken to some. But as a researcher who had spent the previous decade examining a flawed program defined by stasis, I saw the changes—however halting and contested—as a sign that the glass was half-full. To return to the notion of growing pains, many employees felt the pains more clearly, whereas what caught my attention was the growing. Recall Bartleet and Higgins (2018, 8) on CM: discomfort and tensions “are quite possibly a sign of health and growth.”

The path has not been straightforward and progress has been bumpy at times, but the Red has taken important steps. It has recognized the need for change, identified important issues, and made a real effort to tackle them. Its leaders deserve credit for attempting to modify a large, longstanding, highly regarded program, especially given the larger hemispheric context where continuity has generally been the norm. External consultants hired by the IDB in 1997 urged major reforms on El Sistema, but Abreu ignored them, buried the reports, and continued to pursue his personal mission and his own formula of the same but bigger (Baker and Frega 2018). In contrast, I encountered the Red—also around the twenty-year mark—trying (once again) to change course, taking the need for reform seriously. It serves as an example that self-critique and change *are* possible in such programs, even if they are not easy.

If El Sistema is a supposed success story that turned out to be riddled with failures, the Red’s changes of direction were often regarded internally as partial failures, yet some elements were successful and, from an educational perspective, they constituted a valuable experiment. As Bell and Raffe (1991) note, an operational failure can still be a scientific success if it contributes to knowledge and points towards more productive paths. The change in emphasis from transforming lives to transforming the city constituted a positive development from deficit thinking to artistic citizenship, and the fact that there was much more

discussion in meetings of transforming the Red than transforming its students underlined the recognition that a paradigm shift was in order.

In this sense, there may in fact be more for the rest of the world to learn from Medellín than from Venezuela. With its vast size, its politician-leader, and its petro-state support, El Sistema at its peak was simultaneously the cornerstone of SATM and completely inimitable—a cultural manifestation of Venezuela’s highly peculiar “magical state” (Coronil 1997). Medellín’s combination of progressive surface and neoliberal underpinnings is closer to many of the contexts where SATM has taken root in the global North, and the possibilities and limitations of SATM emerge more clearly in this somewhat less baroque context. This is not to suggest that the Red’s experiences will be equally relevant everywhere, but they provide a concrete example of El Sistema’s adaptation, a word that has been central to the ESI field since 2007. The program’s successes, struggles, and failures in adapting SATM may be instructive for many.

A Need for New Models

The discourse of SATM was created to advocate for Venezuela’s orchestral culture and classical music education; it was in essence a funding and marketing strategy.⁹ This approach has been widely reproduced with the international spread of El Sistema since 2007, which has seen SATM adopted by many symphony organizations. It is no coincidence that Los Angeles emerged as the centre of SATM in the US under the reign of the orchestral über-strategist Deborah Borda at the LA Philharmonic (see Fink 2016). If such institutions’ priority is for SATM to contribute to their image and sustainability—justifying and promoting their work to funders, donors, the media, and the public, and pitching for new audiences—then perceptions may be paramount. As Rimmer (2020, 3) notes in his study of the English ESI program *In Harmony*, a policy may be ineffective as a program but perform well in terms of optics and political benefits; policies thus have symbolic dimensions and “questions of ‘success’/‘failure’ are as much bound up with the ways

9 Hence it is unsurprising that the IDB’s 2017 evaluation found so little evidence of social effects.

they are presented and perceived as their efficacy in achieving specified goals." His evidence suggests that In Harmony's social achievements have been modest, but the program has attracted outsized government, institutional, and media attention because it "appears to have provided a rhetorical platform from which to rejuvenate classical music's image at a time of diminishing cultural relevancy, audiences and funding" (5). In these terms, it has been a great success. As a support act for classical music, SATM is a winning formula and no change is needed.

From the perspective of social development, however, its effectiveness is much more questionable, and it raises myriad cultural, political, philosophical, and ethical questions. In the 1990s, Abreu mixed orchestral training with social development discourse and deliberately muddled the issue of what his real goal was. This blurring has continued as ESI programs have blossomed around the world. But those who are serious about SATM need to re-clarify this issue and ask: what is the ultimate goal? Is it social change or musical development? Are music students the ends, or are they the means to ends like diversifying, marketing, and funding music organizations? Is SATM at heart about rebranding and opening up new markets for orchestral music, or is the social objective paramount and therefore the format and genre up for negotiation? Is orchestral inclusion a response to demand from communities or is it driven by supply from the classical music sector?¹⁰

The answer to such questions cannot be "both," because marketing classical music and pursuing social development demand different approaches. If social change is the primary objective in reality and not just a strategic discourse, then new models are required. As Govias (2020) put it caustically, there is little sense in hoping that "outdated, deprecated or conservative pedagogies or models [...] will someday produce results different from the last 300 years of their implementation."

10 Godwin (2020, 16), who worked for an Australian ESI program, considers such questions, and her conclusion is clear: "the primary interest of the symphony orchestras running Sistema-inspired programs is to support the continuance of the institution of classical music and the orchestra." She pinpoints the moral ambiguity of this approach: "El Sistema, when appropriated by classical music organisations in Australia, is an effective tool to harness the hearts and wallets of donors, media and supporters. This appropriation, when done uncritically, enmeshes all involved in a deceit, unknowingly or knowingly, consciously or unconsciously" (19).

In other words, as successive Red managements have understood, the focus needs to shift from *changing the world* to *changing SATM itself*.

There is, put simply, little chance of the former without first embarking on the latter. Just as studies of development have put the spotlight on development organizations, SATM needs to re-envision itself before it re-envisions society. In their critique of the Canadian orchestral sector's engagement with Indigenous artists and artists of colour, Peerbaye and Attariwala (2019, 24) argue that inclusion is not enough; rather, a fundamental shift is required by symphony institutions, "to un-settle their own systems and structures: not only organizationally, but artistically and creatively." This is not a call that SATM—which recruits BIPOC students into orchestral culture around the world—can afford to ignore.

We have seen much evidence of past and present changes in the preceding pages. What might be key topics for attention in the future? Where might imagining new models begin?



Fig. 28. Archive of Red de Escuelas de Música. CC BY.

The Social in SATM

The most obvious place to start is by reconsidering the key elements of the SATM equation—the social and the musical—and the relationship between them. The word “social” is central to the SATM field, sprinkled over its activities like magic dust, but what does it mean? In Medellín it

was a disputed term. The Red's founder, Ocampo, saw it as synonymous with "human" and criticized the tendency to use it as signifying "for the poor." There was a move in 2018 to understand it in more political, spatial, and relational terms: to conceptualize society as "those out there" and not just "us in here," and to focus on how students related to the former (community, territory, city, including those with no direct contact with the program) as well as the latter (other music students, families, audiences). In SATM more widely, the social is often interpreted by students as socializing, by leaders as moral and behavioural improvement, and by advocates as a cognitive and academic boost or a tool against poverty and violence. For Montoya Restrepo, behind the miracle narrative, the "social" in social urbanism was a mixture of basic state obligations, marketing, and control—a conclusion that is very important for an analysis of SATM, pushing us to think beyond emotive but problematic narratives about saving the poor and consider the social label in terms of power, politics, economics, and image.

The main practical effect of the word "social" has been to open the door to funding, prestige, and media coverage. The late twentieth century saw a move toward a utilitarian view of culture around the globe; increasingly, the prime way to convince government and business leaders to support cultural activity was to argue for its social and economic impact (Yúdice 2003). For example, the rhetoric of social inclusion entered the arts world in the United Kingdom during the 1990s, as a response to the previous decade's decline in public funding and questioning of high culture's automatic right to subsidy (Belfiore 2002). Social discourse has been central to the rhetorical transformation of classical music, particularly in the realms of education and outreach; it has increasingly displaced cultural arguments to justify training many young people in music that is a minority interest. "Social" is a word that, in practice, is closely tied to strategy and resources. If some of my interlocutors saw this word as charged with human meaning, others regarded it as an empty term that was increasingly attached to many cultural activities in a bid for public funds.

It is important also to consider the words to which "social" is attached—such as action, inclusion, mobility, change, justice, and impact—and how each one signifies a different and sometimes

contradictory ideology.¹¹ There is often slippage and confusion, particularly as practices and terms cross international borders. In North America, El Sistema attracts labels like “social justice” and “social change” that are rarely if ever attached to the program in Venezuela, and in fact jar with Abreu’s political conservatism.¹² In Chapter 4, I raised questions over the framing of orthodox SATM in terms of social change, given its propensity to social reproduction. Similarly, the term “social justice” should not be connected to a program founded on the ideology that social problems result from individual deficits, since social justice social work explicitly rejects this stance (e.g. Baines 2017; Nixon 2019). Nor should it be attached to a program whose social injustices have been repeatedly documented over a period of two decades and which has reduced music students to playing a propaganda role for an authoritarian government accused of grave violations of human rights. As Spruce (2017, 723) notes, partly in relation to SATM, “although there is a strong commitment to the ideals of social justice within the music education community, these ideals are often not underpinned by the conceptual and theoretical principles which might enable them to be argued for and acted upon.” What is more, “an absence of conceptual and theoretical underpinning leaves social justice *as a term* vulnerable to being appropriated in order to promote and/or sustain approaches to, and discourses of, music education that work against these ideals.”

“Social” thus covers a dizzying variety of meanings and aspirations. Bringing clarity and rigour to this conceptual proliferation and (at times) confusion is an important step towards sharpening understandings of the field, strengthening its theoretical base, and achieving greater alignment between ideals, discourses, and actions.

As leaders of the Red have argued consistently since 2005, if such an institution is to present itself as a social program, to claim social outcomes as its key purpose rather than an accidental byproduct, then it

11 For example, the UK’s Labour Party abandoned social mobility as a goal in 2019 in favour of social justice (Stewart 2019). See also my blog post “Is Sistema a ‘movement’?”, <https://geoffbakermusic.wordpress.com/el-sistema-older-posts/is-sistema-a-movement/>.

12 El Sistema sponsor Hilti Foundation combines linguistic slippage with historical revision, confusing Abreu’s “social inclusion” with “social change” and projecting it back to 1975, more than two decades before its emergence (<https://www.hiltifoundation.org/music-for-social-change>).

needs to take the social more seriously. This step has both conceptual and practical angles: analyzing the term “social” more deeply and specifying the objective, but also designing activities around that objective rather than musical goals. The word that the Red’s social team used frequently was *intencionar*. This word encapsulated a sense of taking an active rather than passive approach to social action: shaping and directing activities towards specific goals rather than allowing processes to occur spontaneously (or not). The team was aware that positive social effects sometimes arose as a natural consequence of music-making, but it urged the Red to hone its activities so that they were focused on producing such outcomes more consistently.

The form that this directing or honing might take deserves further consideration. The Red saw a contest between two visions of SATM (as discussed in Chapter 2). The dominant (though not universal) view among the musical staff was that social action was an inherent feature of music education. The management and particularly the social team, however, discovered negative social processes in the Red as well as positive ones and thus argued that explicit, compensatory social activities were necessary. Some musicians, too, recognized that music education sometimes fostered undesirable social and personal traits and that their training did not prepare them properly for achieving the social objective of the Red; consequently, they saw social action as primarily a job for non-musical professionals. In very simplistic terms, the Red’s first decade was dominated by the implicit view, the second by the explicit one.

Both visions have their merits. Implicit social action is a real phenomenon, and there were musicians within the Red who bolstered the implicit argument: who put the human side first, whose practice matched their discourse, whose students seemed positive and empowered, and who carried off SATM successfully with a mixture of musical skills and radiant personality. The problem for a large program is that it is challenging to find hundreds of teachers with these characteristics. Human beings are imperfect, and so SATM based on the implicit philosophy shows the full range of human flaws. The evidence from Medellín and Venezuela suggests that conventional orchestral or band training does not necessarily constitute either a thorough or an entirely positive social education, that an implicit approach to the social can pass on problematic aspects of social and musical cultures, and that

music education could have more significant positive social effects if it were tailored and strengthened. A large public program cannot run equitably and effectively on charisma alone; explicit methods and tools for social action are also necessary.¹³

However, if the Red's first decade revealed the flaws in the implicit approach, the second did the same with the explicit, not least because the latter encountered resistance from musical staff. Attempts to add a social ingredient around the music-making had limited success because of the squeeze on time and musical activities that they produced. The social became seen as a distraction or waste of precious rehearsal time. As noted in Chapter 2, one school director described the work of the social team as: "1. A balm that soothes the injustices and tough demands [...] and softens the rigidity of the musical processes. 2. Interventions that make no sense" ("Informe" 2017a, 148). The implicit approach led to problems (injustices, tough demands, rigidity), but the explicit approach soothed those problems only to create others (interventions perceived by musicians as senseless). Adding the social side to the musical—for example, social discussions in the spaces around conventional music education—led to mixed results.

The solution is a combination: implicit *and* explicit, with the social action working *through* music as well as *around* it, in the form of music educational activities shaped by the social objectives. For SATM to work implicitly, musical activities need to be congruous with social goals. It makes no sense for a program to claim that it is striving towards peace, coexistence or solidarity, yet to structure itself in a way that produces competition between individuals, instruments, and ensembles. It makes no sense for a program to claim that it is fostering teamwork, yet to deny students opportunities to negotiate, collaborate, solve problems, and take collective decisions. Research in Medellín, Venezuela, and Buenos Aires has shown that students generally saw SATM as a space of enjoyment and socializing rather than an opportunity to develop social skills (see Chapter 4). The Red's social team pursued the latter goal, but still largely missing were *ways of learning music* designed to foster social skills and exploiting the distinctive features of this art. The implication is that for all the Red's concern over its social objective from 2005 onwards,

13 Rimmer (2020) shows that relying on teachers' charisma loomed large in plans for In Harmony Sistema England.

what the program really needed was a musical revolution, not just a social one.

The Red made moves towards such a revolution during my fieldwork. The social team argued that “the pedagogical model should set out which specific values should be fostered in the students and how they may be developed in every action and learning situation” (“Informe” 2017a, 188). The shift to PBL, though, was the biggest step in this direction. The best projects combined implicit and explicit approaches, musical and non-musical activities. They were at heart musical projects, but they often began by identifying a social topic or problem, and their collective construction was a form of social learning. The example of San Javier from Chapter 1 illustrates this advance.

Such questions find echoes in music education research. In their study of an ESI program, Ilari, Fesjian, and Habibi (2018, 8–9) noted that “effects of music education on children’s social skills have been found mainly in programs that followed specialized curricula,” and

for music education programs to be effective in developing social skills, perhaps it is necessary to devise curricula that not only break down traditional hierarchies found in collective musical experiences, but also afford children ample opportunities to exercise social skills such as empathy, theory of mind, and prosociality in more direct ways.

In other words, they suggest that for SATM programs to be socially effective, they ought to develop socially focused curricula (such as Sistema Toronto’s), rather than relying on a social reading of conventional collective music-making (like El Sistema). Laurence (2008) and Rabinowitch (2012) provide two examples of music education designed specifically for the promotion of empathy, which looks quite different from conventional musical training.

Other researchers point to pedagogy as a focal point for reform. Cobo Dorado’s (2015) analysis of group pedagogy shows how more innovative ways of learning music collectively may foster more positive social outcomes. Hess’s (2019) vision of music education and social change resolves the implicit/explicit tension: her pedagogies of community, expression, and noticing all have explicit dimensions, yet they also work through, not just around, music-making. But whether the focus is curriculum or pedagogy or both, such work points to the importance of looking beyond the orthodox conception of SATM—as

conventional music education with a (theoretically) expanded social constituency—towards the creation of a distinctive SATM method, one that makes the social objective visible in the activities themselves.

In the wider music education field, then, there is increasing critical awareness of the relationship between the social and the musical, and a growing understanding that some kinds of musical activities might be more promising from a social perspective than others. Large, conducted, performing ensembles are an efficient and attractive way to organize large numbers of young musicians, but they may actually be the least effective tool for fostering social skills in students through music education. Govias (2015a), a conductor himself, has called the conventional orchestra “the most anti-social mode of cultural expression.”

Orthodox SATM is built on an idealization of large ensembles and an assumption that playing music together with many others generates positive interpersonal dynamics. The flawed nature of this assumption is laid bare in studies of El Sistema and internal documents from the Red. Many of its component elements, such as the supposed generation of teamwork, turn out to be questionable. Orchestras may create various kinds of communal identity, but this is not the same as teamwork; indeed, they may foster cliques and divisions, tensions and rivalries. Competition ran through El Sistema and the Red in their heyday, as it does in the classical music world. It is important to examine collective musical activities in more precise and realistic ways. If “collective” means everybody doing the same thing at the same time with minimal communication between them, directed by a single figure of authority, then the social benefits are likely to be minimal; the political drawbacks are even more obvious, since this is a model of autocracy. With so much research now available on SATM in particular and orchestras and music education in general, there is no excuse for avoiding taking a hard, critical look at the version of SATM popularized by such programs.

The crucial issue is the quality of the interaction between participants. Both research and experience suggest that smaller groupings and activities other than performance (such as composing, improvising, or arranging) may be more productive in this respect.¹⁴ Franco’s urge for

14 Another logical response is experimenting with or removing the role of the conductor (the focus of Govias’s reformist efforts).

more informality and smaller ensembles in the Red was driven primarily by musical considerations, but there is also research to support this shift from social, political, psychological, and cognitive perspectives.

Hess (2021, 63), for example, suggests that if social relations are the priority, “we might consider the types of musicking that facilitate relational engagement,” which points to formats such as chamber music or drum circles rather than large conducted ensembles in which musicians are focused mainly on their written music and the conductor. At Boston’s CLCS, most ensembles function as chamber music groups. As Barrett (2018, 26) notes: “many ensembles are constructed to promote a more democratic practice than traditional orchestral instruction. Resident artists seek to undermine the authoritarian tendencies of the orchestral construct to give students more voice and control in their musical experience.”

Shieh and Allsup (2016) propose an approach that is suggestive for the Red’s schools and SATM more broadly: reframing the large ensemble as a collective. This is a flexible, hybrid paradigm in which “multiple projects exist simultaneously and are loosely connected in a community of support” (33). Collectives may coalesce as large ensembles, but also as small groups, individual work, online and offline musicking, composing, making podcasts or radio shows, or any number of other music-related activities. A collective is not large *or* small but rather *both/and*; with groupings and activities shifting according to circumstances, it is a promising model for uncertain times. Shieh and Allsup also imply that frequently breaking down into smaller ensembles is likely to increase student autonomy and independence.

Crooke and McFerran (2014) argue that groups of four to ten students are best for programs focused on psychosocial wellbeing, an assertion backed up by Bolger (2015). After Ilari, Fesjian, and Habibi (2018) found that three years’ musical training in an El Sistema-inspired program produced no significant effect on prosociality, confirming the results of the IDB’s study of the Venezuelan program, they concluded that “it is probably more difficult to develop and engage in mind reading and prosocial behaviors in large ensembles than in smaller ones” (8). Cobo Dorado (2015) argues that a horizontal learning dynamic (which is easier in smaller groups) produces greater cognitive benefits than a more vertical one (characteristic of

large ensembles). Heinemeyer (2018) argues: “To thrive emotionally, young people need their own time and space, that is not explicitly directed at particular outcomes.” Good mental health is associated with “exploratory, informal, and pupil directed activity.” These are not obvious features of conventional large ensembles. If the priority is the psychosocial wellbeing of students, SATM might well look away from orchestral or band training and toward fields such as music therapy and CM (Crooke et al. 2016).

As for activities, a recent collection of essays makes a strong case for improvisation as a particularly promising tool for social inclusion.¹⁵ It also takes full account of the complexity and risks of the concept of social inclusion—something that has been rare in SATM. Another recent study found evidence to suggest that learning improvisation may have a greater effect on cognitive function than non-improvisatory music instruction (Norgaard, Stambaugh, and McCranie 2019). It supplements Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves’s (2009) experimental study, which demonstrated that learning improvisation promotes the development of creative thinking to a greater extent than didactic teaching and may therefore be particularly promising for children’s cognitive and emotional development.

A fundamental rethink of SATM’s model also makes good sense if we bear in mind the history of the field. El Sistema focused on the orchestra because Abreu was a conductor and he wanted to lead his own orchestra and train young musicians up for this profession. The SATM model is thus driven by Abreu’s ambitions, personal preferences, and ideology, not demonstrable advantages with regard to social outcomes. His initial goals were explicitly musical. The social only entered the picture two decades later, as a means of justifying and expanding what El Sistema already did. Nearly fifty years on from El Sistema’s beginnings, and with a wealth of research now to draw on, it makes little sense to follow Abreu’s route as though it had been designed with social action in mind.¹⁶

15 Special issue of *Contemporary Music Review* (38:5, 2019).

16 It is possible that Abreu might have stumbled accidentally on a perfect formula for social action while pursuing El Sistema’s original aim of training orchestral musicians, stated in its founding constitution (see Baker 2014), but, as we have seen, the evidence suggests otherwise.

A SATM program that put social action first would logically start from an analysis of local social problems and build up from there to possible musical solutions. SATM began the other way round: Abreu created an orchestral training scheme, and then two decades later presented (speculative) statements about how it was also an ideal solution to certain social issues. Discipline was his watchword, but it was never clear what societal problem discipline was supposed to solve. No serious social scientist would regard societal poverty, violence, or crime as a consequence of a lack of discipline. As Freire (1974; 2005) argued, transformation starts with critical questioning of norms. Teaching young people to be more ordered and disciplined will only lead to the existing order functioning in a more efficient and pleasant way. The global proliferation of ESI programs has generally been led by the perceived solution (admiration for the Venezuelan model) rather than a mapping and analysis of local social contexts, problems, and opinions (see e.g. Allan et al 2010). Such an approach would be anathema to the development field today, yet it remains quite commonplace in music.

One of Abreu's favourite aphorisms, much quoted by his admirers, was "culture for the poor must never be poor culture." It was used to justify the centrality of classical music in SATM and also the vast expenditure of social funds on El Sistema's headquarters and top-of-the-range instruments for its touring ensembles. A more productive line for the 2020s would be "education for the poor must not be poor education." Rather than perpetuating much-questioned practices, SATM should strive to provide a socially-focused, research-informed music education.¹⁷

Recolonizing or Decolonizing the Ear?

An important development that relates to both the social and musical sides of SATM is the growth of decolonial thinking in Latin American

17 The charity Aesop (<https://ae-sop.org/>) provides an example. Its program, Dance to Health, started from identification of a social problem. It consulted with leading researchers about the best ways to address this problem and engaged seriously with academic critiques of commonplace claims about the impacts of arts activities. It recognized that the organization needed to do things differently in order to achieve its desired outcomes: it needed to develop a specialized curriculum.

music education in recent years. Coloniality and decoloniality are major concepts developed in South America specifically for reflecting critically on the transplantation of European knowledge to the continent, so they are eminently suitable for examining a field centred in Latin America and founded on European classical music. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that this is a conversation that SATM needs to have. Decoloniality is a perspective and so it is perfectly legitimate to propose counter-arguments; but simply to ignore or summarily dismiss the questions that it raises over SATM's orthodox model is less justifiable.

Decoloniality was never fully articulated as an approach in the Red, but it informed the thinking of the program's leaders and other key figures during my fieldwork. A fuller expression within SATM can be found in Argentina's Chazarreta program. Outside this field, interest in decolonial approaches to music education has blossomed in recent years and is evident in both practice and research spheres. Guillermo Rosabal-Coto has been an important figure, creating the Observatorio del Musicar at the University of Costa Rica, the Network of Critical and Decolonial Pedagogies in Music and the Arts, and editing journal special issues in Spanish and English.¹⁸ Decolonial thinking has also established itself in North American music education, exemplified by the organization Decolonizing the Music Room, and it moved up the agenda in the wake of the resurgence of Black Lives Matter in 2020.¹⁹

Shifres and Gonnet (2015) trace the influence of two European models, the mission and the conservatoire, on music education in Latin America, and they imagine alternatives that are more closely aligned with indigenous culture and values. El Sistema has been widely presented as a step forwards from the conservatoire model, but seen through the lens of this article, it looks more like a step backwards towards the mission model (see also Baker 2014). If Denning (2015) encapsulates the connection between new, vernacular popular musics and the decolonial movement of the early to mid-twentieth century as "decolonizing the ear," the efforts of Abreu—a member of Venezuela's white elite—to massify classical music education might be perceived as a subsequent re-colonization. Work by decolonial music education

18 *Revista Internacional de Educación Musical* (5:1, 2017) and *Action, Theory, and Criticism for Music Education* (18:3, 2019).

19 <https://decolonizingthemusicroom.com/>.

scholars encourages us to imagine and explore what a genuine step forwards might look like: a second decolonization of the ear, fully cognizant of the continent's history and cultural richness.

While decolonial approaches can be highly critical of classical music, there are reasons to focus on de-centring and refiguring Eurocentric knowledge production in SATM programs in postcolonial contexts, rather than abandoning classical music education. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018, 3) argue, a decolonial perspective “does not mean a rejection or negation of Western thought”; rather, their target is “blind acceptance” and “surrendering to North Atlantic fictions.” Mignolo does not preach avoidance of European culture, which he has studied in depth:

The choice is not whether to read works by authors who are European, Eurocentric, or critical of Eurocentrism, but how to read them. The question is from where you start. When I read works by European authors of all kind, I do not start from them. I arrive to them. I start from thinkers and events that were disturbed by European invasions. (229)

The classicist Edith Hall (2019) argues: “Classical education need not be intrinsically elitist or reactionary; it has been the curriculum of empire, but it can be the curriculum of liberation. The ‘legacy’ of Greece and Rome has been instrumental in progressive and enlightened causes.” Such sources are a useful starting point for shifting the music education conversation beyond what can sometimes become rather simplistic, sterile, or polarized debates about genre, beyond a dichotomy of devotion and dismissal, and towards the question of rethinking classical music and its pedagogy.

Mignolo's position is suggestive when it comes to reimagining classical music in SATM and Latin American music education more broadly. What if the question became not *whether* to play European classical music but rather *how* to play it (and listen to it, arrange it, discuss it, and so on)? What if young musicians did not *start from* classical music but rather *arrived to* it—if they approached this music after acquiring a grounding in local and national genres and playing styles?

Cobo Dorado (2015), Henley (2018), and Arenas (2020) argue that it is pedagogy rather than repertoire or instruments that is key to social impact. Similarly, a World Bank report underlined how teachers' practices (rather than content) determined whether they had a positive or negative

effect on students' socio-emotional development (Villaseñor 2017). The implications of such stances for SATM are profound. If pedagogy is the problem, then neither switching nor mixing genres is the solution in itself.

Nora from the Red's social team made a similar point, as mentioned in Chapter 3. The problem for her was not that the Red focused on classical music; it was that it provided a narrow, technical classical training and contributed to professional saturation in the city, rather than using classical music as a means to provide a rounded humanistic education to young people and as a tool to reflect on their surroundings and their role within it. Her dichotomy was not classical versus popular; it was rounded classical education versus narrow classical training.

One of her colleagues discussed the importance of shifting to PBL. Learning via projects helps students to reason, work in teams, and resolve problems, she said—all important skills for social life. But projects were not genre-specific. In her view, too, it was the method of SATM that was the crucial factor, not the genre.

There may be lessons to be learnt from other contexts. Critical discussions of large ensemble education in North America have led to experiments in promoting democracy and critical reflection (e.g. Scruggs 2009; Davis 2011). In other words, the critical focus has been on the process as well as the music itself. Shieh and Allsup's (2016) reimagining of the large ensemble as a flexible collective has implications for genre, but it does not exclude anything. Govias's orchestral work entails rethinking the roles of the conductor and the musicians, not switching genres. Leech-Wilkinson's recent research on performance suggests that boosting creativity can take place within classical music education.²⁰ Movements in Canada show that it is possible for symphony orchestras to take the issue of decolonization seriously.²¹ With imagination and the right partners, the orchestra can become a critical and educational tool and not just a training ground for performers (Horowitz 2018). While there are good arguments for classical music to cede its dominant role, it could play a valuable part in a rethought SATM.

20 Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, "Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them", <https://challengingperformance.com/the-book/>.

21 Orchestras/Orchestres Canada, "Trust, transparency and truth", <https://oc.ca/en/trust-transparency-truth/>.

Considering pedagogical reform raises larger questions about classical music itself, ones that go beyond the scope of this book. The main features of orthodox SATM were not dreamt up by Abreu; they reflect norms of the classical music tradition in the twentieth century: for example, the high status accorded to conductors and orchestras, a focus on canonical European repertoire, and an emphasis on arduous training to achieve a high level of technical skill. Classical music pedagogy is bound up with aspirations to musical excellence of a particular kind. Transforming SATM to give more value to small ensembles, musical creation, and rounded education therefore involves more than rethinking the route; it also means reconsidering the destination.

One productive step might be to broaden the definition of “classical music” beyond the Classical, Romantic, and post-Romantic repertoire that dominates SATM programming and include fields such as contemporary music and early music, where a different ethos has sometimes been found. For example, in Holland around 1970, radical musicians critiqued the hidebound practices and ideologies of the classical music sphere, leading to a “flourishing of numerous small groups in the fields of contemporary music, early music, jazz, and improvisation. In conscious opposition to the perceived authoritarianism of the symphony orchestra, new ensembles [...] aspired to a more democratic model of musical practice” (Adlington 2007, 540). Born (2010, 235) takes the example of the Dutch “Movement for the Renewal of Musical Practice” of the 1970s and its “idea of musical practice as a crucible in which could be incubated challenges—and a space of exception—to larger structures of social power.” Similar developments were afoot in Germany, where musicians associated with the New Left rebelled against the conventions of classical music culture, particularly the orchestra, and grasped that social change had to go hand in hand with challenges to authoritarian structures and musical practices. There, “[t]he New Leftist spirit manifested itself particularly clearly in the new enthusiasm for improvisation and musical creativity. Both were seen as pedagogical instruments that served to performatively change social behavioral modes in the musical field, and were believed to be transferable to the practices of everyday West German society” (Kutschke 2010, 561). Both avant-garde and early musicians rethought ensemble structures and performance practices in order to minimize

hierarchical relationships. What stands out from studies of this period is the variety of the “classical” field, the potential of classical music as a critical culture, even a counter-culture, and the connections made between musical and social change.

Fifty years on, the musicologist and performer David Irving is exploring the connections between early music and decoloniality.²² Early music has a long history of social activism, with musicians involved in peace, environmental, and social justice movements. This counter-cultural or activist ethos in the field’s past makes early music an auspicious site for decolonizing moves, argues Irving. From this perspective, early music appears very suggestive for SATM: it offers a promising model for aligning “classical” music with social change and for squaring the circle—retaining a place for classical music within SATM while also questioning and countering coloniality.

The problem in SATM may not be classical music, then, but rather the limited conception of this music that the most famous programs adopted, focused on European formats and repertoire of the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. Bull (2019) suggests that classical music education could be refigured to focus on its critical potential rather than its disciplinary practices. One response might be not only to include other genres and pedagogies, but also to take inspiration from more counter-cultural strands of classical music in order to reimagine the genre within SATM. This approach holds promise as a route beyond stark dichotomies and polarized debates of classical versus popular music.

There are parallels to be found within a recent journal special issue defending the value of classical music education.²³ For example, Varkøy and Rinholm (2020, 173) propose the continued inclusion of classical music as one option within “a genuine pluralist position, an open and tolerant approach,” and they draw attention to the value of qualities of slowness and resistance in classical music “that are counter-cultural to modern society characterized by consumerism.” Drawing on Adorno’s ideas of the critical function of art, and in marked contrast to Abreu’s discourses of order and discipline, they reimagine music educators and researchers as figures of resistance and argue that slowness in classical

22 David Irving, “Decolonising Historical Performance Practice”, Royal Holloway University of London, 2 February 2021.

23 *Philosophy of Music Education Review* Vol. 28, No. 2, Fall 2020.

musical experience may serve as “the stone in the shoe, the pea under the mattress, the break in the rhythm” of consumer society (180).

Whale (2020, 200), meanwhile, offers a caution against reacting too hard against classical music:

Too often, in educational reform, what should be a dialectical process of growth resembles more a pendulum. The pendulum of enlightened opinion swings from old, outdated practices of teaching and learning, to new, progressive, practices. It then swings back again, apparently unaware that what it now rejects is what it formerly espoused and what it now espouses it had previously rejected. The result is that dogmatic practices are replaced by equally dogmatic reforms; new theories repeat the failings of the original theories until they, too, are countered by a return of the original.

As Whale argues, classical music may stand in a critical relationship to the values of its surrounding society, rather than simply reproducing them, and any music has the potential to provoke (self-)critical reflection—this is not a feature of particular genres. He believes that “Western art music, at its most profound, enables people to question their values and assumptions, in the way that a philosophical or sociological text, a novel, a film, or a piece of journalism can, at its best, challenge people to reflect upon their lives and to grow as they see the world in a new light” (203). In learning to think critically about Bach’s music (as opposed to rejecting it), students may also learn “to choose music that will broaden their capacity to meet and to recognize injustice and nurture their ongoing growth and development as human beings” (215).

Whale’s words shed further light on SATM. The problem, again, appears to be not classical music itself but rather the culture of classical music education within orthodox SATM, which tends to elide this critical angle and replace it with obedience and reverence. If (self-)criticality, rather than excellence in performance, were to become the central goal of classical music education within SATM, matters would look very different.

A feature of both articles is a focus on attentive listening—a very marginal practice in orthodox SATM. For Whale, listening seems to be key to finding a place for Bach in an age of social justice. Having “the opportunity to attend to his music with empathy” may allow students “to discover, for themselves, that it practices the true reality of their

lives, a reality constituted in continual, empathetic, self-evaluation” (215). Varkøy and Rinholm (2020, 169), meanwhile, “argue that how we listen to music is as crucial as what we listen to.” These words underline that a combination of adopting a pluralist position and expanding the objects and methods of classical music education may be a productive route for SATM.

Such scholarship provides leads for rethinking social action through classical music, but they also suggest that a conceptually coherent and progressive classical music SATM would look very different from the orthodox version. The challenge for progressive supporters of classical SATM is to bridge the gap between the vision of classical music’s most articulate defenders—that it is a critical and potentially emancipatory practice—and the reality of many music classrooms, where it is often no such thing. A model that closed that gap would be worthy of the label SATM.

In short, I point towards rethinking and transforming the role and character of classical music education in SATM, not banishing it—just as the Red’s leaders sought a diversification of content, a horizontal relationship between genres, and a new pedagogical approach, not the extirpation of classical music. My question here is not whether young people should have the opportunity to learn classical music, but rather whether, as currently configured, conventional classical training should be the primary model for musical social-action programs; whether it should play such a dominant role in music education in former European colonies, reproducing the cultural hierarchy of the colonial period; and whether it is the best preparation for young musicians in such contexts, who may have more opportunities later in life to play other genres. My concern is not Beethoven; it is the appropriateness of classical music’s educational and performance culture to the pursuit of social action; it is when SATM resembles a “visit from the ghost of public-school orchestra rooms past” (Fink 2016, 34); it is the “epistemic totalitarianism” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 195) of assuming the superior value of European culture and devaluing other forms of knowledge. The most interesting question for me is not “classical or popular music?” but rather “how can learning music *of any kind* foster reflection, creativity, voice, and freedom rather than social control?”

Inaction is not a justifiable option. The pedagogical conventions of classical music are geared around the performance rather than the performer, around excellence rather than social action. It makes no sense to think that they can be transferred across wholesale to a social program in which the experience of the musicians is supposed to be paramount. Conventional symphonic training works well for acquiring certain skills and habits, but its “pedagogy of correction” (Bull 2019) is a poor fit with goals such as political empowerment, citizenship formation, or the cultivation of autonomy and critical thinking.

Chapter 4 revealed distinct echoes in Latin American SATM of two themes that are prominent in Bull’s study of youth classical music in the UK: intensive parenting and boundary-drawing. The classes involved are quite different—in Latin America, it is a fraction of the popular class that is the protagonist rather than the middle class—but the processes are remarkably similar. The common denominators are youth classical music, exclusion, and hierarchization. Unless the educational provision is rethought, SATM risks exacerbating the very problems that it is supposed to solve.

As Peerbaye and Attariwala (2019) make abundantly clear in their study of the Canadian sector, it is symphony orchestras that need to become more like the world around them, rather than society that needs to become more like a symphony orchestra (as El Sistema’s leaders have endlessly proclaimed), since “aspects of orchestral music-making are in dissonance with contemporary Canadian social values” (4). They argue:

the narratives of orchestral leaders, Indigenous artists and artists of colour reveal, time and time again, the colonial characteristics of orchestras that inhibit and even harm relationships—even in the midst of vital initiatives. Orchestras are hierarchical and rigidly structured in terms of creation and production processes and protocols of decision-making, and need to develop flexibility for new and more complex approaches. (ibid.)

In a critique that goes to the heart of orthodox SATM, they state: “‘access’ and ‘inclusion’ are insufficient as a context for conversation or a strategy for action for the sector.” What is needed, rather, is “engagement with issues of racial equity, Indigenous sovereignty, and the dismantlement of Eurocentricity” (5). They cite the conductor Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser, who argues that despite including more people of colour and Indigenous people, the underlying logic of inclusion is essentially a

relic of the nineteenth century. Inclusion is not the same as shifting the balance of power. Similarly, thinking beyond diversity, the authors ask: “Is there a willingness for orchestral culture to be moved, changed by these encounters?” (27).

This report’s message is clear: society is changing and orchestras are lagging behind. Its demand for sectoral change is equally relevant to SATM, which has been widely proclaimed by advocates and the media as a vanguard movement but actually lags behind much socio-cultural activism. Many activists have abandoned discourses of inclusion and diversity in favour of those of equity, decolonization, and sovereignty.²⁴ This is a move that even the more progressive end of SATM has been slow to make. What is needed is not adding repertoire or faces to a model that remains the same underneath, not inclusion into an established system, but rather root and branch reform of the system itself. Until such a time, the much-touted idea that the field is revolutionary will continue to look deeply questionable.

Unless classical music education is substantially rethought, other musics will offer greater advantages to the pursuit of social action. As Denning (2015) argues, social change in the early twentieth century, not least in Latin America, was articulated to the emergence of new, vernacular popular musics, and his study serves to underline the musical and social conservatism of orthodox SATM. While an increased focus on neglected national and regional repertoire is a step in the right direction, a more significant development would be a revamped curriculum and pedagogy that provided heightened social benefits, broader musical skills, and critical engagement with questions of colonization, decolonization, and recolonization.

The Politics of SATM

Also important, if less obvious, is the need to take more seriously the matter of politics. Abreu and Dudamel’s denial of this question has seriously impeded a political analysis of SATM; by proclaiming *El Sistema*

24 In the words of Madam Dr. Fleming, diversity and inclusion is the equivalent of “thoughts and prayers” (@alwaystheself, tweet, 5 June 2020, <https://twitter.com/alwaystheself/status/1268768893289533441>), while for Takeo Rivera, “diverse curriculum isn’t justice—it’s an alibi” (as reported by Gareth Dylan Smith from a panel on decolonizing the curriculum at Boston University in June 2020).

to be apolitical at every turn, they have thrown many people off the scent and confused the issue. However, such analysis is essential if the field is to act as a catalyst of social change. For social change is political; it rests on critique of the social order. If the field is to speak of social change, let alone social justice, pursuing SATM requires thinking politically as well as socially. Abstracting politics from music education is more likely to lead to social reproduction and control.

The Red, in contrast, has understood that attempting to shape society through music is a political act. Since 2005, leading figures have argued for a political conception of the program. The two heads of the social team since that time have placed empowerment and political subjectivity at the heart of their vision of the Red's potential, and successive general directors have engaged with the political dimensions of SATM in varying ways. There is a world of difference between the politics-denying politician Abreu and the Red's social-team leader Jiménez, for whom the potential of SATM lay in the socio-political processes that it could catalyze. Behind these contrasting examples lies a fundamental dichotomy of correction and empowerment in SATM, which is yet to be properly grasped.

One pending task is to think macro-politically. For example, in order to understand this phenomenon more fully, we need to ask: why has orchestral training been favoured by politicians in contexts like Venezuela, Colombia, or Mexico in comparison to other arts and even other musics? How has SATM served politicians and to what ends? What political agendas does it support, whether explicitly or implicitly? During my year in Medellín, the Red featured prominently in publicity campaigns by the city government. The text focused on the number of participants (an advantage that SATM has over other forms of arts education). However, as a communications employee revealed, the government had also decided that images of the Red conveyed messages that it wished to project: they evoked social concern, inspiring a more emotional connection between the citizenry and the mayor's office than billboards trumpeting infrastructure projects.

For all the utopian rhetoric and the imagery of the poor and vulnerable, El Sistema is a model by and for the powerful, created by a member of Venezuela's social and political elite, and instantly legible to and adopted enthusiastically by politicians, banks, corporations, major cultural institutions, and instrument manufacturers. The creation and persistence of El Sistema's illusory miracle story in the face of years of mounting

critiques and counter-evidence illustrates the power of the program and its influential allies to control the public narrative. It is rooted in and seeks to reproduce the culture and ideology of society's dominant actors. It is a world away from a grassroots movement like CM, and it contrasts vividly with the kinds of socially engaged or applied arts practices studied by the likes of Thompson (2009) and Sachs Olsen (2019), which attempt to position themselves in a critical relation to dominant forces. Orchestras are particularly suited to serving as ceremonial and propaganda tools, wheeled out to adorn political events or boost the image of leaders. SATM promises quick and spectacular results—just what politicians concerned with optics and budgets would like to hear; its concerts are a simple way for them to perform their concern with social and cultural issues. It presents an amenable picture of social problems as located among the disadvantaged and therefore susceptible to charity, and as caused by poor people's failings rather than structural factors. It also presents a vision of young people that appeals to the powerful: disciplined, obedient, and productive. As a professional musician and university professor in Medellín put it, politicians like SATM because it enables them to transfer obligations of the state to musicians and look good in the process. We cannot understand SATM without engaging with the ways and reasons that it has been articulated to political parties, programs, and ideologies.

In contrast, there were several orchestral protests as part of social uprisings in Chile and Colombia in late 2019. Orchestral musicians and singers performed a concert entitled "Requiem for Chile," dedicated to the victims of the recent state repression, and a mass open-air rendition of the protest song "El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido!" [The people united will never be defeated] ("Músicos" 2019). In Bogotá, more than 300 orchestral musicians came together to play classical and popular music in support of street protests ("Más de 300" 2019). The contrast with Venezuela was striking: there, social protests had been ongoing for over five years but without any involvement from orchestras. El Sistema had turned Venezuela into the centre of Latin America's orchestral world, yet ironically, despite its slogan of SATM, it had no connection with the grassroots politics that drives social change. On the contrary, it served as a tool of government propaganda. While orchestras in Chile and Colombia took defiant action out on the streets, El Sistema's leaders joined official marches and pressurized employees to vote for the government in elections.

After 400 Russian musicians, led by the pianist Evgeny Kissin, protested publicly against the Putin government's imprisonment of Alexei Navalny in February 2021, Gabriela Montero lamented that Venezuelan musicians had done nothing similar during major demonstrations in 2014 (or any time since), and she contrasted Kissin with Dudamel.²⁵ Some musicians took part in protests on an individual basis, but the most celebrated, Wuilly Arteaga, criticized El Sistema publicly for trying to force students to support the regime and play at official events.²⁶ An El Sistema musician who was arrested during the protests of 2017, making himself something of a cause célèbre, made it clear he was not in fact participating but rather was simply on his way to a rehearsal. "I'm a musician, OK!," he shouted at police—as though that ought to identify him immediately as having nothing to do with street politics (Baker 2017b).

Some scholars argue that music or the arts alone may generally have limited influence on society, and that it is in their articulation with social and political movements that their catalytic effect may be most felt—communicating, inspiring, building solidarity, and helping to foster the dispositions for social change (e.g. Henderson 1996; Mouffe 2013). Kuttner (2015, 85) writes: "The arts alone are not enough"; they are most effective "as a form of collective cultural work embedded in larger processes of cultural and political change." The arts and civic education project that he studies "does not see itself as a lone organization with full control over a social change process. Rather, it sees itself as bringing a particular artistic and cultural strength to a larger movement for social justice" (ibid.). Accordingly, if SATM is to play a role in social change in future, rather than serving as an attractive ornament, it needs more connection with political movements: more streets of Colombia, less concert halls of Venezuela.

The Dream Unfinished (mentioned in Chapter 3) provides an example of mixing large-ensemble artistic practice with political activism to forge orchestral "artivism" (Diverlus 2016; Bradley 2018).²⁷ It points a way forward for SATM programs seeking to prioritize

25 "PUTIN POWER: musicians sound their outrage (a statement of support)", Facebook, 11 February 2021.

26 See my blog post "Eric Booth and Wuilly Arteaga, the Sistema icon who isn't", <https://geoffbakermusic.wordpress.com/el-sistema-the-system/el-sistema-blog/eric-booth-and-wuilly-arteaga-the-sistema-icon-who-isnt/>.

27 <http://thedreamunfinished.org/>.

democratic citizenship and social change. To return to founder Eun Lee's analogy, orchestral activism means shifting to Level 3, when the car actually moves: "So that it's not just a concert *about* something, but you can actually *do* the something at the concert."

While SATM's connection to formal politics is an important topic for analysis, so too is its micro-politics. Music education is inherently political, as discussed in Chapter 3. Kanellopoulos (2015) argues for the inseparability of politics and musical creativity. As recent debates over decolonizing music curricula underline, placing classical music at the centre of music education is not a politically neutral act. Privileging the music of European men in a multiracial, postcolonial society is not apolitical, whatever its advocates may claim. Meanwhile, discourses such as social inclusion and social justice have political histories, whether or not those who employ them recognize this. SATM raises political and ideological questions, and they do not go away simply because they are ignored or denied. As Mouffe (2013, 91) notes, "artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order, or in its challenging, and this is why they *necessarily* have a political dimension" (emphasis added). The question is not then to be political or apolitical; it is, what *kind* of politics does SATM embody?

It is not just El Sistema's leaders who have sought to marginalize the topic of politics in SATM; much research has contributed to the problem by narrowing its focus towards technocratic questions or disavowing ideology (as though such a thing were possible). Attempting to evaluate the impact of SATM programs is a potentially valuable exercise, even if one more fraught with problems than is generally recognized, but not if it comes at the expense of political (or cultural, ethical, and philosophical) questions. An issue like coloniality cannot be tackled from a technocratic perspective. SATM might be thought of as akin to social mobility or private education in the sense that whether it works or not for individuals does not resolve the question of its value to society as a whole, which is largely a political one.

During my fieldwork in Medellín, it was cultural politics—issues such as identity, diversity, participation, agency, and citizenship—that drove self-critique and change, underlining the importance of qualitative research and debate. In the global North, the public conversation on SATM has been dominated by evaluations and quantitative research,

meaning that political, cultural, and philosophical debates have been overshadowed by cognitive, psychological, and health ones. But such research sheds little light on key debates in Medellín and it can easily miss what is most important to arts practitioners—a point driven home by Grayson Perry’s ironically entitled vase “This pot will reduce crime by 29%.”²⁸

Reimagining SATM as a space for empowering students and developing their political subjectivity entails engaging with cultural-political debates and rethinking the orthodox model. It implies changes in organizational dynamics and the music education itself. Students are cast not as passive subjects, waiting to be saved by the power of music, but as active, as actors. SATM then relies on the pedagogical and political choices of leaders and staff, not on music working invisible magic. Students and teachers carry the responsibility for social action; this is not a burden that music can bear. To paraphrase Gaztambide-Fernández (2013), music does not do anything; music is something people do. Similarly, social action is not something that happens to music students but rather something that they make happen. This requires creating spaces for reflection and action within lessons and rehearsals, schools and ensembles, and surrounding society.

Hess (2019)’s model for music education and social change starts from the opposite pole to El Sistema. She recognizes that music is inherently political and therein lies its potential. Her model is built on the experience of activist musicians and examples of protest music. It offers not slogans, magical thinking, and sleights of hand (Fink 2016), but rather a fully articulated and explained program, based in practice and research. Built around contemporary concerns and methods, it contrasts strikingly with the practices and anti-politics of orthodox SATM. As such, it offers considerable food for thought to the field’s reformers.

Citizenship

Closely connected with politics is the issue of citizenship, another topic that is ripe for further exploration within SATM. Citizenship might be considered a more ambitious goal than social action or coexistence, but

28 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/marcwathieu/2722935007>.

also a key battleground: carrying both potential and risks, it exemplifies the ambiguity of SATM. It is a word that is often invoked in the field, yet less common is deep consideration of its implications or the question: what kind of citizen?

In orthodox SATM, as discussed in Chapter 3, the ideal is usually close to Westheimer and Kane's (2004) category of the Personally Responsible Citizen. A more progressive route would be to focus on the Participatory Citizen and the Justice Oriented Citizen. At stake here is the very purpose of SATM: whether it is to be a force for social normalization and reproduction, or for political participation and change. It is worth taking the same conceptual step as above and putting citizenship first: starting with some basic tenets and practices of citizenship education and then thinking about how best to realize them through music, rather than taking conventional music education and framing it in a discourse of citizenship. It is hard to imagine this approach leading to the orthodox model.

Orthodox SATM mimics the tendency towards normalization and control in many top-down, state-sponsored citizenship education programs. Yet there are other, more heterodox kinds of citizenship—cultural, creative, critical, reflective, insurgent, subversive—and where better than arts education for such alternative visions to flourish? The arts are a privileged space for exploring issues like the paradox that being a good citizen sometimes requires being a bad citizen. The arts potentially offer much more to citizenship than just correcting behaviour and inculcating norms: for example, imagining alternatives, projecting voices in public, connecting politics and emotions, and reinforcing or transforming identities by imbuing them with affective power. Citizenship, meanwhile, offers a valuable lens to arts education for considering its ideological basis and potential impact on society.

The vision of artistic citizenship presented in Chapter 3 might be proposed as one approach to these various issues. It targets four areas of weakness in orthodox SATM, which was built on principles of playing rather than reflecting, performing rather than creating, following instructions rather than participating in decision-making,

and changing unconsciously rather than acting.²⁹ These four categories of activity might seem unremarkable to some readers, yet they are strikingly absent from El Sistema and from the 2005 evaluation of the Red.

This proposal grew at the interface of the Red's own development and the work of music educators and researchers around the world. It thus seems to hold at least some potential for generalizability. It also dovetails nicely with other educational proposals. For example, there are parallels between a vision of artistic citizenship founded on reflection, creation, participation, and action, and the "4Cs" (critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, and communication) that have been proposed as essential skills for learners in the twenty-first century ("Preparing 21st Century Students" n.d.). Indeed, Kim (2017) connects developing the 4Cs, transforming music education, and fostering citizenship. There are also clear similarities with Hess's (2019) model, which proposes a triple pedagogy of community (i.e. participation), expression (i.e. creation), and noticing (i.e. reflection), founded on the experience of activist-musicians (i.e. action). There seems to be a critical mass of similar ideas emerging here.

Taking artistic citizenship seriously holds out promise for SATM. It points a way beyond music education as social control. It moves beyond discredited ideas of deficits and correction and understands societal problems as having predominantly structural rather than individual roots. It potentially overcomes the problems of fostering tribalism and social divisions. Tempering the focus on discipline and technical training, and working more on citizenly capacities and the potential to act on society, would be conducive to playing a larger role in social change. Citizenship, when approached as a political concept and a catalyst for reflection rather than a publicity discourse, offers more clarity and focus than social action or coexistence.

The lens of citizenship also underlines the importance of pedagogical change. Much of the tension over the musical and the social in the Red derived from a poor fit between large-ensemble training and progressive visions of citizenship. Attempts to promote citizenly capacities such as

29 There is a large literature on performance as creative practice, but the extent to which it applies to a disciplinary youth orchestral system is questionable.

autonomy and critical thinking bumped up against responses like “we don’t have time for that now, we have a big concert coming up and we need to rehearse.” Conventional orchestral training is not an obvious vehicle for citizen formation, if what is sought is democratic, critical citizenship. Without changes to symphonic practices and ideologies, SATM will continue to appear deficient in comparison to projects that focus on cultural forms that dovetail more easily with progressive notions of citizenship, such as hip-hop (Acosta Valencia and Garcés Montoya 2013; Ladson-Billings 2015; Kuttner 2015).

Nonetheless, large ensembles still hold potential in imaginative hands. On Black Awareness Day in November 2018, I attended a concert focusing on female black role models, presented by the Liberdade school of NEOJIBA, the SATM program in Salvador, Brazil. Outside the hall were posters about a number of prominent black women, both Brazilian and international, with a photo and short text about their achievements. During the concert, there were frequent references to these figures and positive messages about black women, and relevant images and texts were projected onto the walls. The repertoire was a mixture of Afro-Brazilian, African, and African American music, and the performers (an orchestra, a choir, some percussionists, and an invited female Afro-Brazilian singer) appeared in Afro-diasporic clothing and hairstyles.



Fig. 29. Concert by Liberdade school, NEOJIBA. Photo by the author (2018).
CC BY.



Fig. 30. Projection during the concert. Photo by the author (2018). CC BY.

After the concert, I spoke to a teacher who had been much involved in the project. There was a lot of low self-esteem in Liberdade over the issue of race, she said, and she had experienced this herself: only quite recently had she started to wear her hair in a more natural way, rather than straightening it. As a result, she felt strongly that race was an issue that they needed to work on in the school.

Sitting in the audience, I was struck by the emotional impact of the performance. The audience—many of them black women—cried to some songs and responded enthusiastically to others, singing and swaying along to local carnival hits. There was also a musical, visual, and conceptual coherence that made the concert convincing on a more intellectual level. The messages of black pride and female pride were crystal clear, but the concert felt like a celebration, not a lecture, and its success in connecting with the audience was obvious.

I had already chosen artistic citizenship as the topic of my invited talk to the program later that day, and as I told the audience, they had unexpectedly provided me with an example. The concert illustrated ethical and political action; it connected music education to significant social issues; and it directed a message of hope and social change outwards towards society. It did so in a way that was enjoyable, moving, and informative, creating a strong connection between performers, audience, and message and between politics, identities, and emotions. It exemplified the contribution of the arts to citizenship.

Nevertheless, since citizenship is a concept with its own contradictions, its application to music education requires caution, reflection, and further development. The ambiguity of many of the terms evoked in discussions of artistic citizenship means that we may find a “perverse confluence” (Dagnino 2007) as contrasting political and educational perspectives converge on a shared language. Words can easily become domesticated and lose their potential to catalyze change. Even the most unthinking, repetitive music education is regularly held up in public discourse as an example of creativity; even the most top-down dynamics are proclaimed as fostering teamwork; even the most powerless students are celebrated as an example of participation and citizenship. It is easy to appropriate such terms and pay them lip service; it is vital, therefore, to go beyond the words and engage with what lies beneath them.

The word “participatory” serves as an example. “Participation” can be harnessed to both challenging and reinforcing existing power relations (Brough 2014). As Hart’s ladder suggests, there are many forms of participation that entail playing a part but not having a voice. “Participatory music-making” sounds appealing but it may be totally autocratic. A distinction needs to be drawn between musical and political senses of “participatory”—between making music and making decisions. As with politics and citizenship, we must ask: what *kind* of participation?

As argued previously, citizenship discourse has been mobilized in support of both conservative and progressive agendas. It matters considerably whether artistic citizenship is approached from a deficit- or assets-based perspective. If children and young people are regarded as deficient in relation to the various components of artistic citizenship—as faulty or incomplete citizens in need of disciplining and correction—then it does not represent much of an advance. However, if they are regarded as citizens *already*—as reflective and creative individuals with social and cultural assets, capable of and responsible for participating in and acting on society—then matters look very different.

As currently expressed, this proposal for artistic citizenship takes no account of decolonial thinking. There might be tensions between the two; but they might also combine well. Again, the issue of deficits versus assets is crucial. Bringing a decolonial perspective to artistic citizenship might bring greater clarity, supporting efforts to educate a more

active, engaged, critical citizenry. In their study of music in Australian indigenous communities, Bartleet and Carfoot (2016) tread carefully, showing critical awareness of the potential pitfalls of artistic citizenship in such contexts, but they ultimately embrace the notion.

Thinking seriously about artistic citizenship is an important first step, but a logical second step would be to ask what a Latin American version might look like, one inflected or transformed by indigenous and/or Afro-diasporic conceptions of culture, coexistence, and citizenship. For example, there has been a resurgence of interest in the 2000s in the ancestral Andean principle of *sumak kawsay* (in Quechua) or *buen vivir* (in Spanish), which might be translated as “living well.” Ecuador’s 2008 constitution gives a prominent place to this concept. Its preamble states: “We have decided to construct a new form of *citizen coexistence*, in diversity and harmony with nature to reach *el buen vivir*, *el sumak kawsay*” (cited in Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 64; emphasis added). Mignolo and Walsh (ibid.) gloss *sumak kawsay/buen vivir* as “the harmonious interrelation or correlation of and among all beings (human and otherwise) and with their surroundings. Included in this relation are water and food, culture and science, education, housing and habitat, health, work, community, nature, territory and land, economy, and individual and collective rights, among other areas of interrelation.” This principle thus encapsulates a notion of *coexistence*, that key word in the Red’s lexicon, yet one that is quite distinct from, and far broader than, its understanding in Medellín’s public programs. In traditional Andean thought, these authors argue, coexistence rests on a cosmology of complementary dualities (and/and) rather than contradictory ones (either/or)—on the acknowledgment that there cannot be A without its opposite B. Coexistence implies seeking harmony and balance and weaving relations with the natural and spiritual as well as human worlds. In other words, coexistence is not a universal and transparent concept; it has a much more holistic connotation in indigenous thought. What might the search for coexistence look like in a SATM program if it embraced a broader conception of the term, closer to traditional South American ones?

There are good reasons to take such a step. The anthropologist Xabier Abo translates *suma qamaña*, the Bolivian equivalent of *sumak kawsay*, as “convivir bien” [living well together], illustrating its pertinence to

SATM (cited in Houtart 2011).³⁰ Furthermore, it might be argued that colonial logic will struggle to provide the solution to the problems engendered by modernity or coloniality. “The alienation that Western knowledge created by conceptualizing and celebrating competition and individualism (which destroys the social fabric), has to be overcome by visions and conceptions of communal praxis of living that puts love and care as the final destiny of the human species and our relations with the living universe (including planet earth),” argue Mignolo and Walsh (2018, 228). Indigenous philosophy, concepts, and practices may therefore have much to offer the search for coexistence and citizenship through music.

There is potential for artistic citizenship to be brought into dialogue with the fields of Latin American citizenship studies and decolonizing music education to imagine a decolonial Latin American artistic citizenship—for example, one combining concepts of indigeneity and citizenship (giving “indigenship”) and based on principles of equality and colonial difference (Rojas 2013), or one built around dignity, “diversality,” and epistemological plurality (Taylor 2013). Deep engagement with traditional musics and dances might allow particular kinds of artistic citizenship to become apparent (e.g. Montgomery 2016). The Brazilian program AfroReggae’s notion of *batidania*, combining *batida* (beat) and *cidadania* (citizenship), offers one example of a grassroots, Afro-diasporic conception of artistic citizenship (Moehn 2011); Candusso’s (2008) exploration of Afro-Brazilian capoeira and citizenship provides another. Keil (n.d.) presents a vision of cultural education and active citizenship based on Afro-Latin dance music: “Paideia Con Salsa.”

Galeano and Zapata’s (2006) work on citizenship in Colombia points another way forward. These authors argue against a vision of citizenship founded on notions of individual deficits and Western ideals, and propose one stemming from actual practices of civic activism in Colombia, such as social movements and community initiatives to resist and repair the damage wrought by the country’s long armed conflict. In this view, citizenship education should be connected to social and political movements if it is to be more than just a symbolic gesture or,

30 *Convivir* [to coexist] is the verbal form of *convivencia* [coexistence].

worse, a displacement of real action. It should provide a space for the generation of new, locally derived citizenship knowledge, rather than the imposition of existing theories and values from outside. In short, these authors urge us to stop thinking about ideals of citizenship and measuring students in relation to them, and to start focusing on real-life good citizens, the movements in which they are embedded, and the ways that they have responded to civic problems. Transferred to SATM, this would mean starting and connecting with exemplary (artistic) citizens, not abstract behavioural ideals like discipline and respect. These examples might be national or international—the Santa Fé school of the Red focused on Nina Simone, while the Liberdade school of NEOJIBA chose exemplary black women from both Brazil and overseas—but the best figures to teach young Colombians about citizenship, according to Galeano and Zapata, are Colombian civic activists, some of whom might be living just round the corner. Hess's (2019) vision of music education for social change takes this kind of approach, beginning not with abstract notions but rather with specific activist musicians and building up an educational model from there.

This second step of localizing artistic citizenship and/or combining it with decolonization or indigenization goes beyond the scope of this book, but it is one that I very much hope others will pursue. Such ideas require and deserve much further development. I am limited here to gesturing in this direction.

Demographics and Targeting

Research on an afterschool education program in a Montevideo shantytown found a strong correlation between the program's impact on children and the commitment, aspiration, and cultural capital of their parents (Cid 2014; Bernatzky and Cid 2018). It thus illustrated and explained how the same education program could have varying effects. These findings support the argument in Chapter 4 that afterschool programs may serve as a mechanism of social differentiation, heightening inequality rather than producing inclusion: since the Montevideo program was effective only for children with committed parents, it exacerbated the difference between them and the more disadvantaged students.

This study illustrates the difficulty of providing a single answer to the question of an education program's efficacy, since it depends on the social and cultural characteristics of the beneficiaries' families. This is also a central point of Rimmer's (2018; 2020) studies of In Harmony Sistema England. Having arrived at the same conclusion in relation to SATM in France, Picaud (2018) warns against simplistic accounts of "the effect" of *Démos* on children. The answer to "does SATM work?" appears to be "for some people," meaning that it is impossible to generalize about its effects. Such research raises questions about the "power of music" literature, since it suggests that the effects of an educational intervention may not be explicable only in psychological or neuroscientific terms. Also, as Ramalingam (2013) argues, attributing social results to any single development intervention is very problematic; impacts are more likely to be achieved by networks or coalitions of actors working in concert. The limited effect on the least advantaged students suggests that we should talk of the impact of music education *in combination with* parental commitment, aspiration, and cultural capital. It underlines the problems of accounts of SATM that homogenize beneficiaries (as "poor," "at-risk," "disadvantaged," and so on), and the need for much more detailed analyses of which segment of a given community participates in a given SATM program and whether benefits vary across participants.

However, it is also possible to see sociological and scientific explanations in a more harmonious relationship. After all, the key question raised here does not concern *whether* music has the capacity to produce benefits in individuals but rather *who* receives those benefits. Orthodox SATM provides a channel for children who initially have a marginal educational advantage to receive an educational boost.³¹ Even leaving aside all the political and philosophical questions, then, and taking music's effects as given, SATM may still be ineffective or even counter-productive at a societal level because it does not benefit those

31 Similarly, Purves (2019), in a UK study, argues that public extra-curricular music education can potentially bring further advantages to children who already experience more favourable conditions, since such children are more likely to take up opportunities and persist in their engagement over time. Studies of SATM suggest that this argument holds even when economic differences are small or non-existent and more favourable conditions take non-material form, complicating Purves's suggestion that Sistema-style programs are a solution to the problem that he identifies.

most in need but rather serves to widen the divide between haves and have-nots. In this sense, the individual advantages it provides are somewhat irrelevant: if SATM does not work for the most vulnerable or marginalized, then it is not a model of social inclusion. An approach that misses its main target and appeals most to children who enjoy schooling and have supportive families is a poor choice for pursuing educational equity.

At present, SATM's social impact is limited by its design for and monopolization by a self-selecting group with prior advantages that is already largely in tune with the values of the program. This design makes perfect sense from a musical perspective: such students are more likely to arrive with the program's values in place, adapt to its ways of working, and produce good artistic results, and the program can thus depend on them. Appealing to a social fraction with few economic resources but more educational commitment, aspiration, and cultural capital makes perfect sense if the aim is to democratize classical music and secure its future. But social change would require a different approach, one that effectively targeted students from other kinds of families—those with less educational commitment, aspiration, and cultural capital—who tend to fall through the cracks. Indeed, such targeting is precisely what some researchers recommend (e.g. Cid 2014; Bernatzky and Cid 2018; Purves 2019). The challenge, then, is to create a version of SATM that would be more accessible and appealing to those with the fewest advantages—the most excluded rather than the most includible.

Such moves would be a big step towards educational justice and genuine inclusion, but the goal of social transformation also implies targeting a very different group: those who are most likely to grow up to hold the levers of power. Nixon (2019) provides a suggestive example by examining public health through an anti-oppressive lens. She argues that discussions of health inequities and attempts to address them are marred by a near-exclusive focus on effects and those who suffer them (disadvantaged, vulnerable, marginalized, or at-risk groups). Largely absent is half of the picture—the advantaged or privileged—who figure only as supposed experts on social issues and saviours of the first group. Yet ignoring half the picture limits the possibilities for decisive action to disrupt enduring patterns: "If inequity is framed exclusively

as a problem facing people who are marginalized, then responses will only attempt to address the needs of these groups, without redressing the social structures causing this disadvantage." Indeed, a presumed equivalence between privilege and expertise can actually strengthen the status quo, reinforcing an unequal relationship between "saviours" and "saved" and encouraging a flow of material resources to privileged people for designing and delivering programs for disadvantaged populations.

Nixon proposes reframing this picture so that the experiences of the under-privileged group are understood as a consequence of the choices of the privileged one; the latter should therefore be considered complicit in the production and maintenance of structural inequities, from which it benefits. If the *causes* of inequities are to be seriously addressed, and not just the *effects* softened, greater attention must focus on the privileged group and on shifting its self-perception from saviours to critical allies. This implies privileged actors unlearning old assumptions and abandoning an urge (however altruistic) to fix others in favour of working in solidarity with disadvantaged groups and taking action on systems of inequality. It also implies acknowledging their complicity with such systems and recognizing that the disadvantaged group is likely to know more about inequities than they do and have more experience and expertise in tackling them. The ultimate goal is not to move people from one place to another within an unfair structure (social mobility); rather, it is to counter the systems that cause these inequities (social change).

The implications of this critique for SATM are profound. It shines a harsh, if indirect, light on the field's orthodox model and philosophy. Nixon dismantles the idea that the best way to address inequities is for social elites to use their "expertise" to help marginalized groups with their problems, and that such problems are caused by individual or group behaviours. She questions the response of privileged actors "going into communities (locally and overseas) to bring their expertise and solutions to needy individuals." Her message is unequivocal: "Stop trying to save or fix people on the bottom of the coin" (her metaphor for the social hierarchy). She proposes that privileged actors reorient their motivation from "I wish to help the less fortunate" or "I use my expertise to reduce inequities for marginalized populations" to the following commitments:

I seek to understand my own role in upholding systems of oppression that create health inequities.

I learn from the expertise of, and work in solidarity with, historically marginalized groups to help me understand and take action on systems of inequality.

This includes working to build insight among others in positions of privilege, and *mobilizing in collective action* under the leadership of people on the bottom on the coin. [emphasis in original]

Providing free music education to poor and disadvantaged children is a noble aim—but it may not sit easily with the goal of social change, at least if that change is to be significant and lasting. As Spruce (2017, 724) notes, the distributive social justice paradigm (widening access to cultural resources) “is now acknowledged within the literature of social justice to be insufficient, both in the understanding of social justice that it offers, and as a framework for identifying and addressing issues of social injustice.” An access focus “address[es] only the consequences of the social and power structures which produce inequalities and injustices, whilst leaving those structures untouched and unchallenged.” Tackling causes requires a different approach: for example, one that fosters critical allyship between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. Widening access to music education appeals more—and it may look and feel better—but it is likely to be less effective as a motor of social change.

More disruptively still for SATM, an anti-oppressive approach also implies a shift from seeing the dominant culture and its bearers as a solution to social problems to seeing them as part of the problem: no longer treating them as those who know and have come to save or rescue those who do not, but rather as those who need to listen to and learn from the expertise of historically marginalized groups. It is the latter groups who, drawing on centuries of using music to resist oppression and pursue social healing and cohesion, are the real experts in social action through music; it is their musics, above all, that embody such a concept. As Nixon argues, real change requires privileged actors to de-centre themselves: “to demonstrate humility regarding the assumed rightness of certain ways of doing, communicating, and thinking, and stepping back to make room for alternatives.” This picture could not be

further from El Sistema's veneration of the all-knowing conductor and its self-imagination as an organization of musical missionaries taking classical music into cultural deserts to rescue disorientated youth (see Baker 2014). Adopting social change as the primary goal and an anti-oppressive approach to achieving it implies turning SATM on its head.

Hess (2018; 2021) provides a pointer, examining music education through an anti-oppression lens. She holds up the example of teachers of predominantly affluent, white students in Canada who not only offer instruction in Afro-diasporic musics but also promote critical conversations about structural issues such as privilege and oppression, illuminating the relationships between music and slavery, colonialism, and resistance. "Facilitating this understanding perhaps opens up a wider conversation about the need for systemic redress. Music then provides the basis for a conversation that historicises present inequality and points to systemic implications" (2021, 66). Here we may see the seeds of an inversion of SATM, in pursuit of the objective of social change: rather than targeting European classical music at poor BIPOC students, aiming Afro-diasporic music at rich white ones.

In short, SATM would logically produce the greatest societal benefits if it focused on the top and bottom of the socio-economic spectrum—those who determine the status quo and those who are most disadvantaged by it. At present, though, its main constituency appears to be somewhere in the middle. A program to widen access to classical music is perfectly legitimate—but it should be recognized for what it is, rather than labelled music for social change. There is nothing wrong with attracting predominantly an aspirational, committed fraction of the popular class interested in free music lessons—but again, it should be recognized for what it is, which is not a social program for the most vulnerable or excluded young people. If the latter aims are real and paramount, then SATM needs to rethink its approach, focusing more attention on other constituencies and the question of how to reach them.