

Welcome to El Sistema – the musical revolution on both sides of the Atlantic

In Venezuela in 1970, José Antonio Abreu started giving music lessons to a few local children in his garage. In 1975, he set up El Sistema to provide music classes for disadvantaged children. Abreu was passionate about wanting to change people's lives through music. There are now more than half a million Latin American children who have benefitted from El Sistema and since then it has produced 125 youth orchestras, including the famous Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra.

In 2008, in the small Scottish town of Raploch, a charity called Sistema Scotland set up an orchestra programme called *Big Noise* that is based on El Sistema. Raploch is in an area of Scotland where people have low wages, not many proper educational qualifications and there is high unemployment. It seemed the ideal place to set up the Scottish programme.

It's hard work for those who are part of the *Big Noise* orchestra. At first, the children work in smaller groups where they learn to play their chosen instruments and the best young musicians in the orchestra then go to classes after school four times a week. A lot of the children have to work hard to be quiet. Before each practice, the conductor tells the children to stop talking and they have to sit in complete silence before they begin.

One of the most important things about the orchestra is that it teaches children about co-operation, it nurtures their talent and creativity and it build their confidence: all invaluable life skills. In order to play in the orchestra, the children have to learn to get on with each other and work as a team. *Big Noise* is not only changing the lives of the children in the orchestra, it is also changing the lives and the outlook of their families and the community they live in. Some of their parents and grandparents have joined an adult music group called *The Noise*. These are all people whose lives have changed because of the discipline of the orchestra.

Big Noise performed live with the Simón Bolívar orchestra at the start of the London 2012 Festival, which was the countdown to the London 2012 Olympics. The concert was a huge open-air event and the children played in front of an audience of 8,000. In 2014, 52 musicians, who were aged between 9 and 15 from *Big Noise*, went on tour in Venezuela and worked with the Simón Bolívar Orchestra there.

So, is classical music the key to changing the lives of under-privileged children? In Venezuela, the answer is clear to see, but in Scotland no one will know until the 450 children who joined the Raploch orchestra in 2008 grow up and make choices about their future. Perhaps one day *Big Noise* will follow in the footsteps of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra and release their own classical album or maybe they'll have a number one hit in the classical album charts. We won't be singing along to the lyrics (there aren't any!), but we'll certainly be applauding their achievements.

1. Read the article from a music magazine. Choose the correct ending (a–c).
Lee el artículo de una revista de música. Elige el final correcto (a -c).

1. El Sistema began in ...

- a) 1970
- b) 1975
- c) 2008

2. People in Raploch ...

- a) are wealthy and well-educated.
- b) don't have much money, but there are lots of job opportunities.
- c) don't have a lot of money and there aren't many jobs.

3. The children in *Big Noise* learn to play their instruments ...

- a) in small groups at first.
- b) with a big orchestra from the start.
- c) on their own at first.

4. Children who join *Big Noise* learn ...

- a) to teach music.
- b) important life skills.
- c) skills that they might never use again.

5. The London 2012 Festival took place ...

- a) in a concert hall.
- b) in a school hall.
- c) outside.

2. Read the article again. Write which sentences are true or false.

Lee el artículo de nuevo. Escribe qué frases son verdaderas o falsas.

- 1 José Antonio Abreu started teaching children music in his garage:
- 2 The more talented musicians in Raploch have music classes four days a week when they finish school.
- 3 The children in *Big Noise* sometimes find it difficult to be quiet.
- 4 *Big Noise* played at the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics.
- 5 *Big Noise* released an album in 2012.

