

SISTEMA Australia



a music program to change the lives of Australian children and young people, particularly those within communities experiencing disadvantage and disassociation

About *Crashendo*

Crashendo—Derivative of 'Crescendo': a gradual increase in force or noise

Thirty primary school children at Laverton P-12 College in the western suburbs of Melbourne are learning music together, and in fact, playing as an orchestra, thanks to a program titled *Crashendo*, the local name given to the musical education program run by Sistema Australia.

Crashendo is designed to make a difference in children's lives. It is modelled on a phenomenal music program from Venezuela titled El Sistema, or 'The System'.

The children at Laverton are investing a huge amount of time — two hours after school, three days each week — to stay on at school, learning to sing and to play musical instruments from dedicated teaching artists and supported and lauded by their families and school community.

The Laverton program is entirely free for the children enrolled.

Sistema Australia is working with Laverton P-12 College, in partnership with Hobsons Bay City Council and Victoria Police Hobsons Bay.

Funding is confirmed for the first year of operation (until May 2012), with the goal being to extend the program to the rest of the school. This will require the expansion of the current funding program, and the introduction of new funding partners, from private and public sources.

El Sistema-based programs

The El Sistema-based program is an intensive after hours, orchestra and instrument music program. It provides a free instrument for each child. It is non selective, and works on the basis that the best way to become a musician is to be a musician, to learn on the job, to learn by doing, and refining as you go. It has no auditions, no examinations, and is about positive encouragement in music making.

It is inclusive, available for any child who wants to join it, another factor that sets it apart. Most music programs offered outside of school in Australia are exclusive and focus on those who can either afford expensive membership, lessons and instruments, or who have scholarships. Other unique characteristics include that:

- it is community based;
- it is an after school activity;
- it includes multiple days, up to six hours each week ;
- it includes a healthy snack before each session;
- it focuses on the children not solely on the process; and
- it is performance based.

El Sistema is definitively about classical music, the orchestra and choir. It is not about hip hop, rock or jazz, as important as these genres are.

It pursues excellence in music making and performance and promotes the creation of a diverse and harmonious community who meet to agree with each other in the creation of music.

As the creator of El Sistema states "*an orchestra is a community where the essential and exclusive feature is that it is the only community that comes together with the fundamental objective of agreeing with itself. Therefore the person who plays in an orchestra begins to live the experience of agreement.*"



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Sistema Australia

Sistema Australia was created by its current director Christopher Nicholls in August 2008.

Inspired by experiences within his own family, and his experience in community music in Canberra, Chris researched the role of music and how it could help children develop and flourish, and was struck by El Sistema, a program which evolved into an enduring (36 year long) social action phenomenon, from its beginnings in Venezuela, to many parts around the world.

Sistema Australia was founded with El Sistema principles in mind, to create a music program to change the lives of Australian children and young people, particularly those within communities experiencing disadvantage and disassociation.

In May 2011 its first Australian program *Crashendo* began at Laverton P-12 College, in the western suburbs of Melbourne, Victoria with 30 primary school children.

Crashendo at Laverton P-12 is a national pilot for El Sistema-based programs.



El Sistema and its roots in South America

El Sistema was established by Jose Antonio Abreu, an economist and classical pianist, who sought to bring his love of beautiful classical music to children in Venezuela, especially those from the 'barrios' of the major cities there. The slums of the Venezuelan capital Caracas were some of the most violent and impoverished in the world.

It grew from the creation of a small youth orchestra back in 1975 to a program that supports over 250 orchestras and choirs comprising approximately 350,000 children and young people, and is now in the process, with significant financial backing, to scale this up to more than one million children.

El Sistema has challenged the music education world with its extraordinary program, teaching instrument-based music to children from all backgrounds but especially those in areas experiencing disadvantage. Developed as a music-based social-action program for children and youth, it not only produces joy and harmony in children, assisting in building self esteem and confidence, but develops remarkable fine musicians in the process.

Case in point: Edicson Ruiz, Double Bassist Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

Ruiz started his musical career at age 11 when he joined El Sistema. Ruiz was from a very poor community and family in Caracas. In 2001 he was awarded the first prize in an international youth solo competition. After his first concert in Germany, he was offered a place in the Berlin Philharmonic, becoming at 17, the youngest player ever to be inducted into that orchestra.

Case in point: Gustavo Dudamel, music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor and violinist:

The wunderkind of El Sistema, Dudamel entered the program in Venezuela as a precocious 10 year old. He has become one of the most exciting people involved in the international classical music scene.

Social action, economic sense: The Inter America Development Bank (IADB) established that for every dollar invested in the program, it yields \$1.68 back in social dividends, staving off future social problems including drug and alcohol abuse and violent crime prevalent in the poorer parts of Venezuela.

The first Australian program has commenced, presented by Sistema Australia as *Crashendo*, in Laverton.



International — what's happening around the world ?

From its beginnings in Venezuela, El Sistema is now active in many other parts of the world, with programs in the USA (where there are over 40 separate projects alone), several South American countries, Canada, Spain, Austria, England, Scotland, New Zealand and now Laverton in the western suburbs of Melbourne in Australia.

The program is generally funded by partnerships of government, education, arts sector and philanthropy.

Examples of El Sistema programs

Scotland: Big Noise is the title of the program of Sistema Scotland. It is based in Raploch, Stirling, where it works with a number of local primary schools. Assistance was provided by the Scottish Arts Council, Drake Music, BBC Scotland, Stirling Council. It operates as a charity accepting donations.

New Zealand: Sistema Aotearoa recently launched in New Zealand. It is fully funded as a pilot by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage (Creative New Zealand) for two years, while private funding is solicited. It is in partnership with the Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra and works from the Otara Music Arts Centre in South Auckland.

In **Australia**, Sistema has privately funded 80% of the costs of the pilot, with the remainder contributed by Hobsons Bay City Council and Laverton P-12 College with in-kind assistance from Victoria Police.



Close to home — About Laverton

While Australia has quite different conditions from Venezuela, issues arising from disadvantage also impact here; poverty, social inequity and youth disassociation are increasing, particularly in our ever expanding urban environments. Laverton is located at the western boundary of Hobsons Bay. It's borders are formed by the Old Geelong Road to the north and the Princes Freeway to the south and east. There were 4,286 people living in Laverton at the 2006 Census. Approximately 31 per cent of Laverton residents were born overseas, and around 20 per cent arrives in the neighbourhood in the past six years. 58% speak of Laverton's residents speak languages other than English.

Laverton Community Renewal

In 2006 a Community Renewal Project was established to address community development in Laverton. This place based project is a partnership between the Laverton Community Association, the State Government and Hobsons Bay City Council and is based upon the jointly developed Laverton Community Action Plan 2006-2015. The Community Action Plan has identified actions to improve local amenity, health and well being, social connection, pride and opportunity for the community.

There have been great achievements. The built environment is much improved with better local shopping strips, a new train station and greener and safer streets and parks. Building has started on a new community hub which will support health and social services, training and recreational activities and Laverton P-12 has been developed into a new and greatly expanded school facility. Supporting Laverton's children is a high priority with an Early Years Project underway to support young families and link them with services, paving the way for the best entry to school and then pathways to employment opportunities. *Crashendo* supports this by providing young students with a creative and focused environment in which to build confidence in themselves and their skills.

Involving local people in decision making about the future of the community is the crucial element in community renewal. Residents have been involved in bringing about positive community change by participating in groups such as the Laverton Community Association and the Laverton Arts and Culture Forum. Such activities are building a stronger sense of belonging and pride in Laverton and a more positive image of Laverton is being presented to the wider community. Residents are saying that Laverton is a great place to be these days.

Closer to home — Laverton P-12 College

Laverton College P-12 is a Prep to Year 12 College that offers its students a seamless transition from the start of their schooling through to the completion. The school is divided into three learning communities comprising of: Prep-4, Grades 5-8 and Years 9-12. In addition to the learning communities the College has a Hospitality and Performing Arts facility and a Science and Manufacturing Centre. There are 32 different languages represented within the school community. A large ESL group includes new arrivals from the Burmese/Karen community.



Prior to the commencement of the *Crashendo* program, students and their families were invited to attend a performance presented by the tutors, as an introduction to Sistema. Approximately 90 people accepted the invitation to attend, with 60 families expressing interest to join the program, for which 30 places were available. A group of 30 Grade 2-4 students were selected from a diverse range of backgrounds to participate in the program. Virtually all of the students who were selected had very limited musical backgrounds with none receiving music tuition outside school hours. These students gave an undertaking to attend three afternoons each week after school, for two hours each session. The enthusiasm and commitment of these students has been astounding with the attrition rate being extremely small. The school affirms that the students are grasping the opportunity to experience the joy of learning to read music, play and become proficient in a musical instrument who would, in the past, have never aspired to such things.

The engagement of the students and their families is a tremendously encouraging start to the project and testament to how important it is seen by the community.

The College provides a familiar environment for the children, and excellent facilities for the program.

SISTEMA AUSTRALIA... **IN THE MEDIA**

Limelight ABC National Arts Magazine August 2011 • The Age November 2011 • Channel Ten

What people are saying...

El Sistema has meant everything to me because it was the program which provided me with every significant opportunity that came my way.

Gustavo Dudamel,
Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra

Kids are the same everywhere. They come naturally to music.

Chris Nicholls, Sistema Australia

Recently I taught the orchestra a new song and as I played each section for them (much of our rehearsal is based on call-and-response), they busily helped each other write out fingerings and note names! I recently read that studies show that doing a favour for another person actually makes you like them better. So, aside from the obvious benefits of teamwork, having the kids help each other may make them get along better as well.

Laura Horn, principal teaching artist, *Crashendo* — Sistema at Laverton.

In western society, I think we have an over emphasis on the three R's and outcomes, which is gradually sanitising our society. I've always believed the building blocks for a good education are to get the children engaged first and then the three R's will follow, whether it be music or sport or something else, following the child's interest is always the best way to go. Children who become disengaged are often the ones who just can't function well in this environment, and our system sets them up to fail and then they get punished when they can't cope.

Senior Constable Sharon Radau,
Hobsons Bay Community Liaison Officer

The real truth of the matter is that all children are inherently musical; if anyone doesn't believe that, tell them to come to Laverton and see for themselves!

Chris Nicholls, Sistema Australia

An orchestra is a community where the essential and exclusive feature is that it is the only community that comes together with the fundamental objective of agreeing with itself. Agree on what? To create beauty...

Jose Antonio Abreu,
founder of El Sistema

Crashendo, Sistema, and its community partnerships

Sistema Australia is working with Laverton P-12 College in partnership with Victoria Police from Hobsons Bay Police Service Area and Hobsons Bay City Council to deliver *Crashendo*. Funding is confirmed for the first year of operation only as a pilot stage, until May 2012.



About Hobsons Bay

Located at the northern end of Port Phillip Bay, Hobsons Bay is home to such diverse and vibrant communities as Altona, Altona Meadows, Altona North, Brooklyn, Laverton, Newport, Seabrook, Seaholme, South Kingsville, Spotswood, Williamstown and Williamstown North. Hobsons Bay is currently home to 85,500 residents. Diversity is represented in many forms in Hobsons Bay. It can be seen in the array of industries and businesses, its open spaces and its people. At first glance the community characteristics seem much on a par with the average experienced by Melbourne as a whole; however this hides a more complex picture. There is a higher degree of variation in income levels within the municipality than between the city as a whole and metropolitan Melbourne. For example, in Laverton only 15.2 per cent of households had weekly incomes over \$1,400 (2006) while the average in Hobsons Bay and metropolitan Melbourne was 30.3 per cent and 32.5 per cent respectively.

About Hobsons Bay City Council

The support to *Crashendo* is provided through the Arts and Culture unit of Hobsons Bay City Council, as well as its Laverton Community Renewal program. The Council's commitment to cultural development is noted in the Hobsons Bay City Council Plan 2009-2015 as stated objectives:

- to promote and enhance community pride and sense of belonging;
- to promote the artistic and cultural life of the city; and
- to promote and foster health and wellbeing in its community.

Crashendo is also consistent with the themes of the Hobsons Bay Arts and Culture Plan 2011-2015

About Victoria Police Hobsons Bay

The partnership was brought about initially at the instigation of Senior Constable Sharon Radau, Community Liaison Officer Victoria Police Hobsons Bay, who had seen a documentary about El Sistema in Venezuela, and was struck by its power and potential, wondering why something similar might not work here in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Sharon contacted Jonathan Welch formerly of the *Choir Of Hard Knocks* to find out how he engaged with the most disadvantaged of people. Jonathan made the introduction to Chris Nicholls and Sistema.

From the perspective of Victoria Police, *Crashendo* demonstrates many benefits in that it:

- promotes engagement and social connectedness;
- builds connections between community and police;
- fosters social development of young people, building their self esteem and helping them connect better with their local community; and
- develops responsibility for community safety amongst police and community members.

It has stuck with me how children will gravitate towards good opportunities, if they are given the chance too. Most children will opt for a challenging and non-destructive pathway if only we as adults could get it right and give them the right opportunities and/or tools. But the world and living in general is a messy, unpredictable, crazy experience — there's no instruction book, you just have to follow the people ahead of you and do your best, everyone is trying to work their own stuff out!!

Senior Constable Sharon Radau,
Hobsons Bay Community Liaison Officer

CONTACT DETAILS

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