**Something very special is happening between London and Los Angeles at the moment.** Future Play: Music Systems in the 21st Century, presented by the Barbican Centre and LA Phil, as part of their Barbican International Associate Residency with Gustavo Dudamel, has just taken place. There were concerts, masterclasses, an open rehearsal with Dudamel and an orchestra of young people from across London, pre -concert talks and films!

With members from Youth Orchestra Los Angeles and Heart of Los Angeles presenting as well as a keynotes from the inspirational John Adams, Peter Sellars and Richard Holloway of Sistema Scotland it is not surprising that references to El Sistema were never far away – indeed, I was attending myself as one of the Directors/Trustees of In Harmony ∙ Sistema England. The openness, generosity of spirit and preparedness of people to give as much time as it takes to young people and to each other that is so much a trademark of El Sistema was evident for all to see with delegates from as far afield as Israel, Germany and Holland as well as the USA.

I can’t begin to do justice to the content of three days of thought provoking presentations and discussions but I was asked to sum up at the end so here, for a wider audience, are what I felt to be some of the key messages.

**There is more that unites than divides us.** Dare we hope that we can build on our common agendas and put our differences behind us – or at least celebrate those differences in a constructive way?

**We are all care about sharing with and passing on our passion for music to young people.** Dare we hope that the more we work in collaboration and partnership with others, the more, between us we can reach all young people?

**There is a rich and diverse range of musical pathways that young people may wish to follow.** None of us can provide all of those opportunities alone. Sistema is about more than orchestras and choirs. It is a social action programme achieved through the pursuit of excellence through music making in ensembles, as part of one big musical family. Dare we hope that working in genuine partnership we can provide so much more than the sum of our individual parts? In those countries where there is already a music education programme in schools and a vibrant after school tradition, can we find better ways of working together in the interests of the child - the highest common factor rather than dumbing down to the lowest common denominator?

**Creativity at the core.**  This includes young people’s own creativity and re-creativity. Dare we hope that we can also be creative enough to find ways of collaborating and providing young people with a coherent whole, rather than competing with each other to the potential detriment of young people?

**Managing expectations.** In England we have a [National Plan for Music Education](https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/AllPublications/Page1/DFE-00086-2011), which is a vision for 2020. Yes, we do need to demonstrate effective change quickly. But effective change takes time and often requires delicate negotiations behind the scenes. What we see now is the result of nearly 40 years’ work in Venezuela – many of us should be able to see results much more quickly, but each local context brings its own challenges. The cohesion and unity of purpose is one of El Sistema’s strengths.

**Young people at the centre.**

By keeping young people firmly at the centre of our thinking and actions we CAN find a successful way forward together. With collaborations like this one happening at the Barbican at the moment there is definitely reason for optimism. Whether it does or not will depend on the decisions each and every one of us makes as we go back to our ‘day jobs’. Can we hang on to and be part of the bigger vision as well as dealing with the day to day challenges?