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## **Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts launches in Austin**

*To help underserved youth, new nonprofit debuts with creation of free orchestral music program in collaboration with UT's College of Fine Arts*

**AUSTIN. October 18, 2011.** Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts launched today, with the announcement that it is starting Austin Soundwaves, a free orchestral music program for school-aged children in East Austin. The new nonprofit's mission is to build participation in the performing arts in Austin's growing Hispanic community, focusing primarily on underserved youth and their families.

The Alliance's first endeavor is to form a youth orchestra by creating a local version of the world-renowned music program known as El Sistema. Over the past three decades El Sistema has helped more than 400,000 underprivileged children in more than 25 countries not only learn the joy of music, but also acquire focus and creative thinking skills needed to help them succeed in school and into adulthood.

"Nearly 70 percent of students who dropped out of Austin's schools last year were Hispanic. Research shows the exposure to music and the performing arts at a young age enables greater cognitive ability, increased global perspective, higher academic achievement and ultimately lowers dropout rates in high school," said Teresa Lozano Long, president of the Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts. "We are delighted to announce our commitment to help involve Austin's underserved students and their families in the arts as a way to promote long-term educational and social benefits, cultural awareness and vital community involvement."

Austin Soundwaves, which the Alliance is developing in collaboration with the College of Fine Arts at the University of Texas at Austin, is offering free music lessons starting this week to sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders at East Austin College Prep, a charter school located in a heavily Hispanic area of Austin, where more than 27 percent of families live in poverty and more than half of the residents over 25 years old do not have a high school diploma.

In addition to intensive music instruction and performance, the curriculum aims to give students the skills they need to help complete high school, go on to college, and become lifelong enthusiasts and participants in the arts. The first group of 42 students has already been enrolled, and due to immediate interest, a second group will be added to Austin Soundwaves at East Austin College Prep in early 2012 to form a complete orchestra.

"Hispanics have the lowest participation rate in classical music, opera and musical theater in the U.S. Right out of the gate, this effort is offering children in Austin a way to get closer to the arts, improve academic performance and enrich our community using the collective practice of music as a catalyst," said Dr. Juan Sánchez, board chair and founder of East Austin College Prep. "We are delighted to host this program that will give our students the opportunity to develop into world-class orchestra performers."

There are more than 30 El Sistema-inspired programs in the U.S., but Austin is one of the few cities with a program led by a teacher formally trained on El Sistema. Austin Soundwaves' program director Patrick Slevin is overseeing instruction in orchestra, music theory and composition. He will initially supervise five instructors, and he will work closely with the College of Fine Arts at UT, which is lending its experience and expertise in music education as well as consulting, and administrative support to help further its mission of bringing the arts to various local communities as a means of individual betterment.

"Beyond the intrinsic cultural enrichment, engaging students in the performing arts has proven to help with school attendance rates, classroom concentration and college preparedness," said Douglas Dempster, UT's College Fine Arts dean. "This ambitious and worthy music initiative is a much-needed investment in the future of children in Austin who deserve every opportunity to succeed in school and life."

Slevin was trained on El Sistema at the New England Conservatory of Music, where he was one of 10 Abreu Fellows in 2010-2011. The program is named for José Antonio Abreu, an economist and musician who founded El Sistema in Venezuela in 1975.

Having studied and worked with El Sistema programs in Venezuela and the U.S., Slevin said, "That experience has shown me first hand that long-term social and musical impacts are achievable when dedicated students, passionate teachers, and a supportive community come together to create and share music. I look forward to helping make a lasting impact in Austin."

All Alliance board members and other friends of the arts donated the startup funds needed to bring Slevin to Austin to create and run the new music program in East Austin this school year. To further fund Austin Soundwaves in its first location and eventually expand it to other underserved communities around Austin, **the Alliance is kicking off a fundraising campaign today with the goal of raising \$250,000 by early 2012. It is also organizing new instrument drives targeting music stores, corporations and friends of the arts.** Donations can be made and more information can be found at [www.hispanicallianceaustin.org](http://www.hispanicallianceaustin.org).

In addition to the student music program, the new Austin nonprofit intends to:

- create a mentoring program connected to the performing arts for underserved students;
- provide opportunities for lower-income students to attend arts performances; and
- organize performing arts events for the Hispanic community and other communities that have limited access to such activities.

The Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts has formed relationships so far with the following organizations in Austin to ensure Hispanic involvement in their programs: Austin Classical Guitar Society, Austin Lyric Opera, Austin Symphony Orchestra, Ballet Austin, The Long Center and Zach Theatre. It also is collaborating with the College of Fine Arts and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute for Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

*Hispanic Alliance for the Performing Arts is a Texas 501(c) (3) non-profit organization founded in 2011 to encourage and support the participation in and enjoyment of the performing arts by children and their families in the Hispanic community, in underserved areas in particular. Its mission is to collaborate with local performing arts organizations to bring performing arts to the Hispanic community, and to promote long-term educational and social benefits, cultural awareness and vital community involvement. The Alliance's first endeavor is the creation of a youth orchestra by launching a free program for school-age children in East Austin. It also plans to create programs for mentorship and attendance of performances for economically-disadvantaged students. The Alliance is made up of a group of leaders who are committed to building participation in the arts by Austin's growing Hispanic community members, enriching their lives and assuring that the performing arts will have the support needed to thrive for generations to come.*