

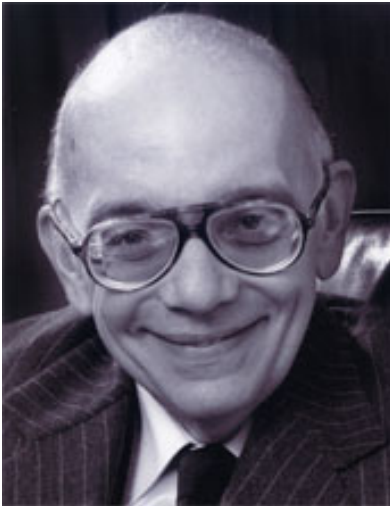


The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

José Antonio Abreu (Venezuela)

(2001)



José Antonio Abreu

" for achieving a unique cultural renaissance, bringing the joys of music to countless disadvantaged children and communities."

José Antonio Abreu was born in Venezuela in 1939. His education pursued two tracks: he obtained a Ph.D. in petroleum economics in 1961, and in 1964 graduated as a composer and organist from Venezuela's national conservatory of music. By 1969 he was a Professor of Economics and Professor of Planning at different universities, and was also a Deputy in the Venezuelan Congress. In 1975 he began the work for which he has been awarded, founding the Symphony Orchestra Simon Bolivar and the National Symphony Youth Orchestra (NSYO).

The success of the NSYO under Abreu's direction led to the establishment of youth orchestras in other Venezuelan States, which has grown into the National System of Children and Youth Orchestras of Venezuela, under the auspices of a State Foundation, FESNOJIV. This now involves 110,000 Venezuelans, grouped in 120 youth orchestras, 60 children's orchestras and a network of choirs, with musical training starting from the age of two. The orchestras are based on 75 'orchestral cells' around the country, each with at least one orchestra, and the System also includes workshops in which children learn to build and repair instruments, special programmes for children with disabilities or learning difficulties, and specialist centres or institutes for phonology, audiovisuals and higher musical education.

Perhaps the most remarkable element about this orchestral System is that it is explicitly oriented towards lower-income social strata. It has been described as "a social movement of massive dimensions, that works using music as the instrument that makes the social integration of different Venezuelan population groups possible and supports the strata with low income." The orchestras have had a substantial social impact in the communities in which they are active, legitimising and promoting music throughout the community and leading to something of a musical and cultural renaissance. Studies have also shown that the young people involved in the orchestras also perform better in other areas of academic and social life.

This unique programme of musical education and awakening has attracted much international notice and acclaim. UNESCO awarded FESNOJIV its International Music Award in 1993-94 and in 1998 UNDP commended it as an outstanding example

of poverty reduction. Inspired by this example similar initiatives have been started in other Latin American and Caribbean countries. The Venezuelan National Symphony Children's Orchestra also excited much admiration in Europe in 1998, with a tour through France and Italy, and again in 2000, when it played in many celebrated venues in Germany.

FESNOJIV is a substantial organisation with nearly 1,000 staff spread through the 75 'orchestral cells'. Abreu has been the Director of the Foundation since its establishment in 1994, before which he was for five years Venezuela's Minister for Culture and President of its National Council for Culture. In 1998 he received UNESCO's title 'Ambassador for Peace'. He has also a recipient of several awards, most recent the 2008 Prince of Asturias Arts Award, the 2009 Polar Music Prize and the Légion d'honneur of France.

Quotation

"The majority of the children and juveniles belong to the groups that are most vulnerable and excluded in all of Venezuelan society. Participating in the orchestral movement has made it possible for them to set up new goals, plans, projects and dreams, and at the same time it is a way of creating meaning and helping them in their day-to-day struggle for better conditions of life through the variety of opportunities that the orchestral movement offers them."

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