

## CULTURE MONSTER

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

### Dudamels in the making? L.A. Phil names conducting fellows



Even before [Gustavo Dudamel](#) officially takes the podium this fall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic's new maestro is making it clear that music education is a priority.

Tomorrow the orchestra is announcing a fellowship program proposed by Dudamel that will offer promising conductors the chance to work with one of the hottest figures in classical music.

The 28-year-old Venezuelan is already a superstar -- critically acclaimed and publicly adored -- and yet he's never forgotten that he got his start through El Sistema, the musician training program famed for transforming the lives of hundreds of thousands of children in his homeland.

"I am very lucky to have been given so many amazing opportunities throughout my career," Dudamel said in an e-mail from Europe. "I now hope to provide opportunities for young conductors by inviting them to be part of the artistic and education programs at the Philharmonic."

Deborah Borda, the Philharmonic's president, says that "what distinguishes our program from others is that it goes beyond the concert hall and into the community."

"We are offering the chance to work with an orchestra that wants to be a leader in musical excellence and innovation while serving as a center of culture and education for the *entire* city," she says. "And with a music director who is reshaping the idea of what a music director should be."

This is just one of Dudamel's efforts to encourage young talent with his new orchestra. In between preparing for his first season and maintaining a rigorous touring schedule, Dudamel has established close ties with the Philharmonic's youth initiatives, especially the [EXPO Center Youth Orchestra](#) -- the first of a

hoped-for network of student ensembles in under-served neighborhoods.



The first four Dudamel Fellows each will spend six weeks in Los Angeles, working with Dudamel, the Philharmonic and guest conductors. They will assume responsibilities traditionally given to an assistant conductor, including serving as cover conductor -- ready, for instance, to sub for Dudamel should he fall ill before a concert. (Lionel Bringuier, the Philharmonic's assistant conductor, has been named associate conductor.) They will conduct the orchestra's Toyota Symphonies for Youth and, possibly, its community concerts.

The fellows also may help with the Philharmonic's burgeoning array of music education classes, its high school composer fellowship program, partnerships with schools and area youth orchestras and the EXPO Center Youth Orchestra.

Dudamel has rehearsed with the EXPO musicians and will conduct them at the Hollywood Bowl as part of a free Oct. 3 festival that will welcome Dudamel to L.A. by celebrating the city's musical traditions.

Like Dudamel, the fellows are in their 20s. Two, also like Dudamel, are products of El Sistema.

-- Diego Mathuez began to study conducting four years ago with El Sistema's founder, Jose Antonio Abreu, who is Dudamel's mentor as well. Mathuez is a concertmaster of the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela and has served as an assistant conductor for Dudamel, who is that orchestra's music director. He also has worked with Simon Rattle and Claudio Abbado.

-- Christian Vasquez is music director of Venezuela's Aragua Juvenile Symphony Orchestra Jose Felix Ribas. Last year, he made his conducting debuts with the Simon Bolivar orchestra and the Orchestra Philharmonique de Radio France.

-- David Afkham is the assistant conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, a position he received after winning the 2008 Donatella Flick Conducting Competition in London. Afkham, who was born in Germany, has conducted the Simon Bolivar orchestra and assisted his mentor, Bernard Haitink, and the Chicago Symphony and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras. He is the artistic director and chief conductor of the KHG-Symphony-Orchestra Freiburg and won first prize as a soloist in the 2002 Jugend Musiziert, the German national piano competition.

-- Perry So, the assistant conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, received the first prize in symphony conducting at the Fifth International Prokofiev Competition in St. Petersburg in 2008. The Hong Kong resident is the founder and music director of YUE, a summer festival in China that is built around an orchestra of young Chinese and American artists.

The program has no age, experience or other admission requirements. "We're looking for one thing," says Borda. "Talent."

Given his predilections, it's no surprise that Dudamel adds two other qualities: "I would say a love and a passion for the music -- and for learning -- are very important."

-- Karen Wada

*Photos, clockwise from top left: Diego Matheuz, David Afkham, Perry So and Christian Vasquez. Credit: Los Angeles Philharmonic.*