

Spirit

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES



THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

YOUTH ORCHESTRA LA
IS MAKING
BEAUTIFUL MUSIC,
AND FOREVER
CHANGING
THE LIVES OF
CHILDREN IN NEED

If You Know Four Notes



|| Samantha, 15
VIOLIN

Teach Someone Who Knows Three

Photography
by Dave Lauridsen

At Youth Orchestra LA, learning, and rising up, are fundamental.



|| Crystal, 7
VIOLIN



So Notable

At the YOLA at HOLA site, the brass band—Sirilo, 12; Andrew, 11; Macy, 12; and Joselyn, 11—plays on. “El Sistema emphasizes mentorship,” says YOLA manager Dan Berkowitz. “As kids get older, they have mentees: students they’re teaching in the younger groups. The idea is, ‘If you know four notes, teach someone who knows three.’ In that way, they’re learning leadership skills they’ll use the rest of their lives.”

Gustavo Dudamel has been called “the Elvis of the orchestra world,” “the hottest thing to hit classical music since Leonard Bernstein,” and “The Dude.” But when you look around this bustling rec center in Los Angeles’ rugged Rampart District, and see dozens of kids proudly cradling trombones, trumpets, and French horns, it’s impossible not to think of the wild-haired maestro as a modern-day incarnation of the Music Man. Or *el Hombre de la Música*, given his Venezuelan roots and the remarkable number of Latinos who make up Youth Orchestra L.A. Since its inception in 2007, two years before Dudamel officially took the baton as the music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, YOLA has been inspired by the conductor’s intense passion and incredible success story. If Dudamel relates uncommonly well to kids who dream of elevating themselves through music, it’s because he was one. The model for YOLA—a nonprofit initiative that supplies underprivileged children with free instruments, instruction, and profound lessons about pride, community, and commitment—is El Sistema, Venezuela’s national music training program, which, 27 years ago, nurtured the talents of a 5-year-old violin prodigy named Gustavo.

“El Sistema is effective because it does not just focus on the teaching of music,” Dudamel says, “but instead focuses on the full potential of a child. [It] instills the values of community and working together in order to be a better person.” In the past half-dozen years, “the system” has flourished in the U.S., most prominently in L.A.,



home to YOLA at EXPO (situated in South Los Angeles and funded by the L.A. Phil, a like-minded music nonprofit called Harmony Project, and L.A.’s Recreation and Parks Department) and

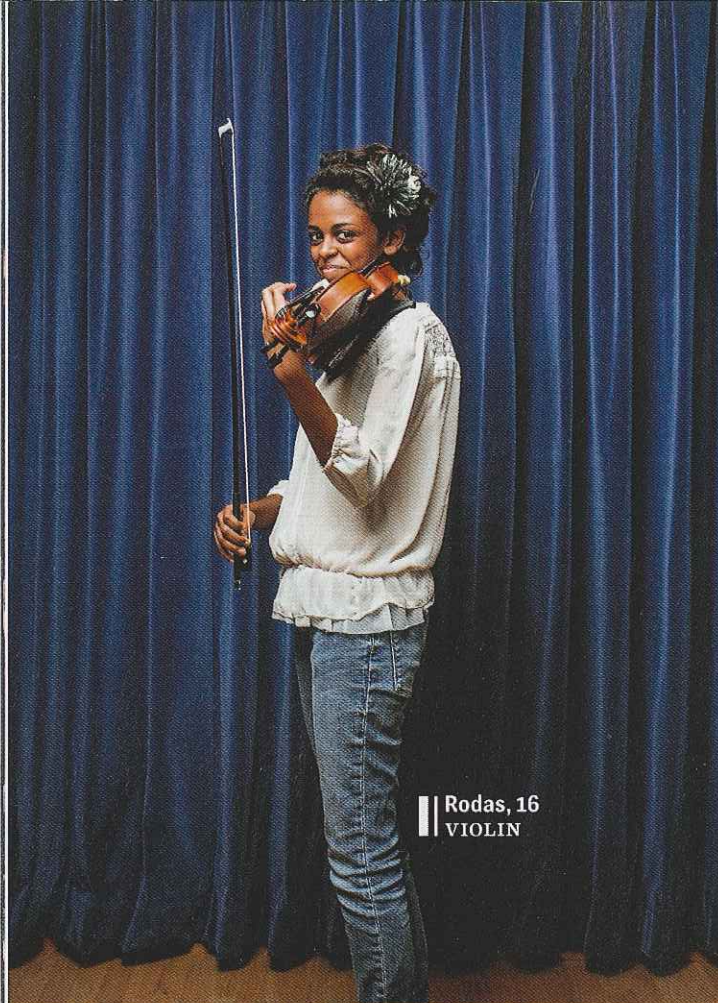
YOLA at HOLA (the Rampart District program funded by the L.A. Phil in partnership with the Heart of Los Angeles community center). In all, 540 Angelenos—a thrillingly diverse assembly of mostly Latino, African-American, Korean, Filipino, and biracial students ages 6 to 18—spend five days a week after school learning to make harmony, in every sense of the word.

In Tune

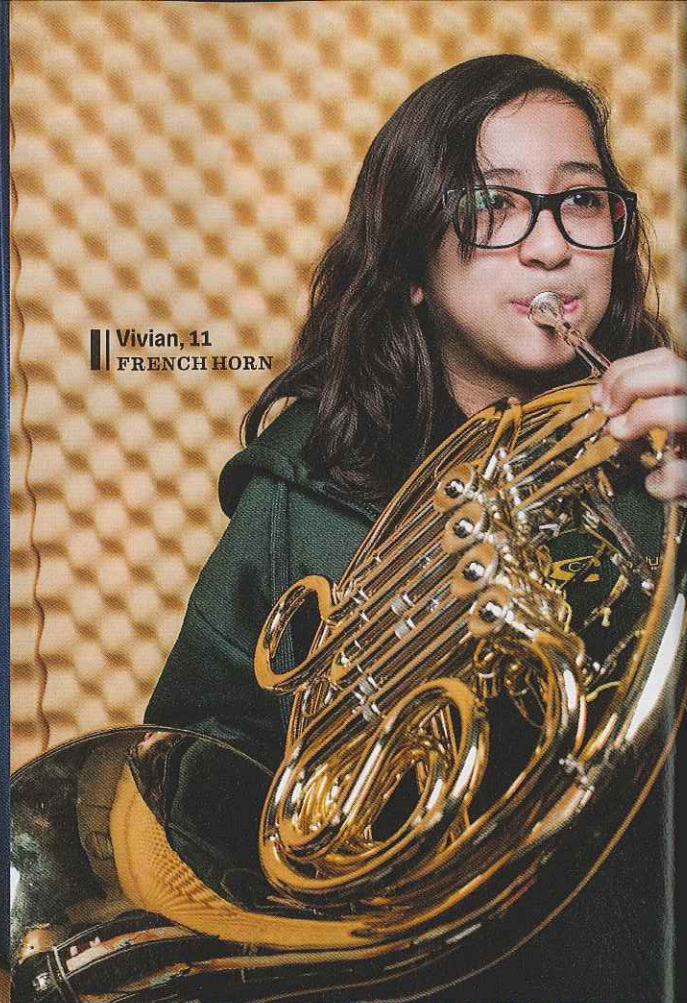
There are almost 100 violists and violinists in training at YOLA at HOLA (right). Each of them is in the care of lead string teacher Nikki Shorts, one of the 20 part-time educators who guide YOLA’s kids. “People ask, ‘What’s the secret?’” says Berkowitz. “It’s the teachers. They’re the lifeblood of the YOLA program.” At left, Dudamel’s childlike joy is infectious.



PHOTOGRAPH (DUDAMEL) BY MATHEW IMAGING



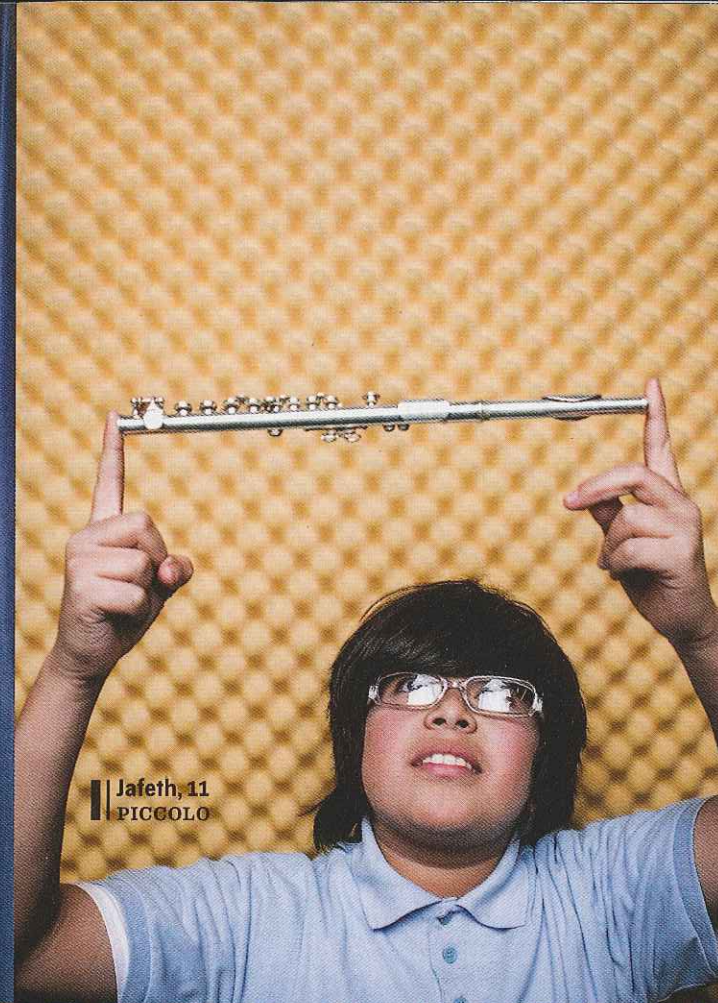
|| Rodas, 16
VIOLIN



|| Vivian, 11
FRENCH HORN



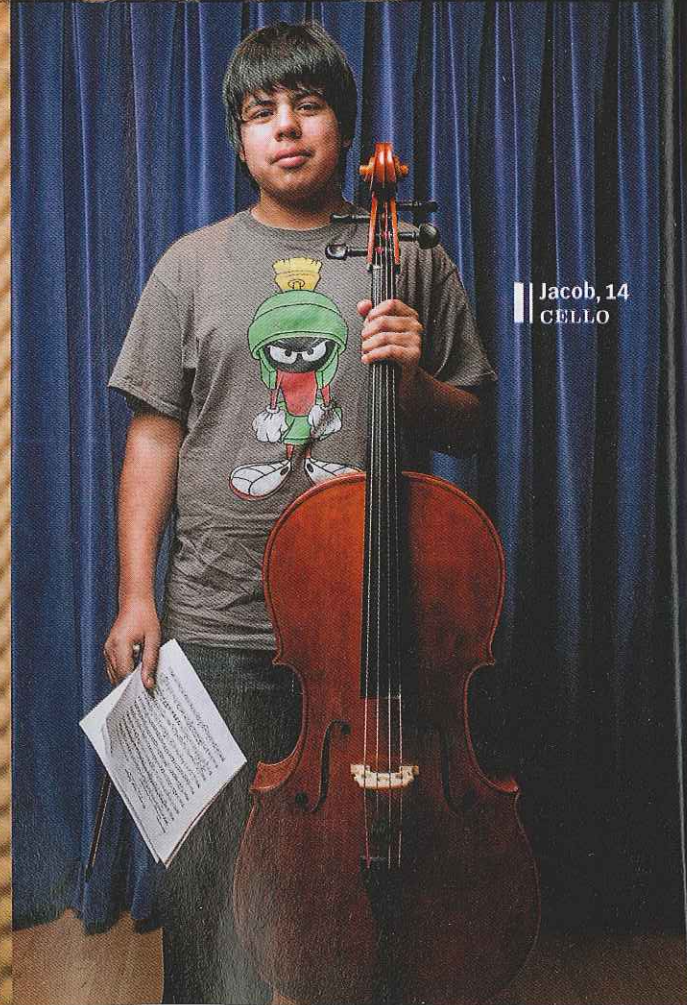
|| Miguel, 16
CLARINET



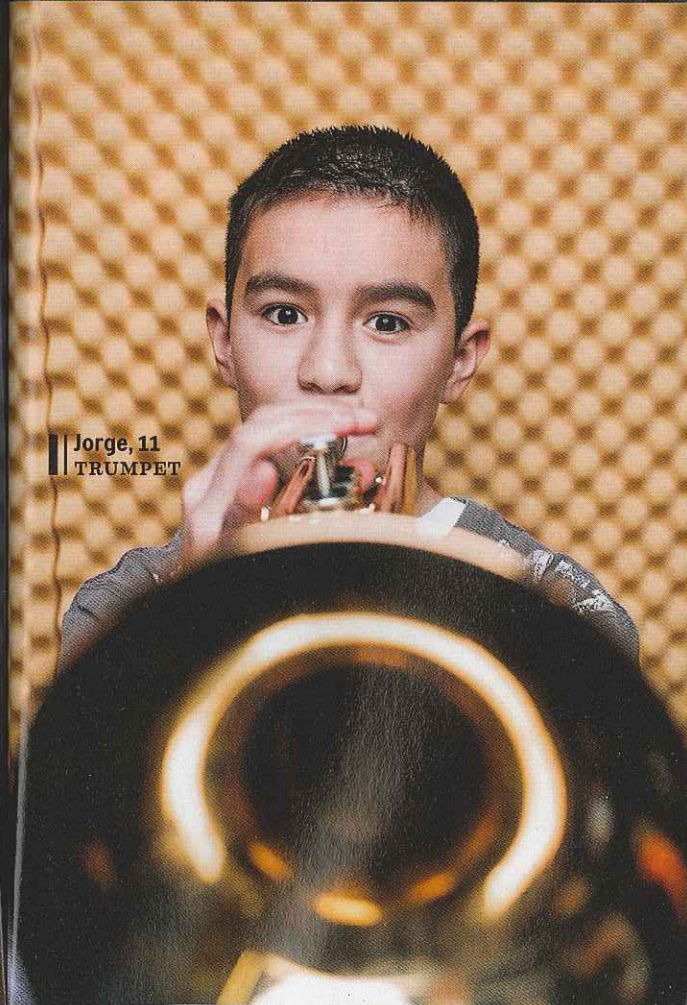
|| Jafeth, 11
PICCOLO



|| Andrea, 9
VIOLA



|| Jacob, 14
CELLO



|| Jorge, 11
TRUMPET



|| Laura, 15
VIOLIN

“There are 540 kids, and there are 540 stories,” says Dan Berkowitz, manager of the two YOLA sites, where on a typical afternoon hundreds of children buzzing with energy gather together in cacophonous and joyful chaos—until a baton is raised. YOLA’s expectations are quite serious, and its commitment long-term. “If you start with us at age 6,” says Berkowitz, “we’ll be with you when you graduate from high school.” The soaring success of the program will be heard overseas this month, when 10 of YOLA’s most accomplished students travel to London to perform under the guidance of the great Dudamel himself. Fifteen-year-old clarinetist Raymond Chavez is one of the kids who made it through the grueling screening process, which included auditions, an interview, and a personal essay. “Music has given me a different perspective of how I view myself and the world around me,” Chavez wrote. “YOLA has shaped me to be a better leader, role model, and made me realize that I could be part of something greater in life.” Dudamel’s definitive message to all of these kids is one the normally robust maestro would deliver sotto voce, and one he spectacularly epitomizes: “Love what you do, do what you love, and share your gift with others.”

Mind the Gap

Enveloped in the lustrous folds of the Walt Disney Concert Hall (where they are rehearsing for their U.K. debut) are the ten London-bound YOLA students. From left: Samantha Rosas, violin, 15; Laura Garcia, violin, 15; Malonie Penn, flute, 15; Isaac Green, bass, 16; Abdiel Lopez, violin, 16; Jacob Esquivel, cello, 14; Miguel Ortega, clarinet, 16; Raymond Chavez, clarinet, 15; Edson Natarano, clarinet, 14; Rodas Hailu, violin, 16.

