

Keys of Change

2018 ANNUAL REPORT





Keys of Change came across a group of young musicians living in a children's home outside Accra..

Accra, Ghana

By Panos Karan

The needs of children and young people in Ghana are vast, as a result of poverty, slavery (children are sold for work), domestic violence, drugs, and witchcraft. Ghanaians are some of the warmest hearted people I have ever encountered, yet according to local charities, just in the capital city Accra, hundreds of thousands of children living in the streets.

In December 2018, I visited a children centre outside the capital Accra. I used to think of children's homes as orphanages, but the reality is that the children living here do have families, but the trust between them and the child is so completely broken that they could never safely return to their parents or relatives. The conditions of the centre are excellent, with the housing very much organised and looked after. There is an excellent program of helping children recover from trauma, giving structure to their lives and trust of adults and other children.

Within this centre, a very promising musical programme is already functioning. The local teacher was very keen to discover possibilities of expanding the group and building opportunities for the student. Our proposal to Julius was to find ways to include more instruments in the group and organise a music camp in 2019, with several *Keys of Change* musicians providing one-to-one and sectional lessons, culminating in a public performance.



Oaxaca, Mexico

By Panos Karan

How did the uncompromising sounds and roars of pirates ever find their way into the mountains of Mexico? I was thinking about this last September while conducting the final rehearsal of a group of young musicians in the community of Vincente Guerrero in the outskirts of Oaxaca. The children in front of me playing in the orchestra seemed possessed while playing the theme music from the movie "Pirates of the Caribbean." They had been learning the music for only for a few weeks, but their own emotions through their playing were clear: determination, pride, sincerity.

In September 2018, I spent a week in this community located adjacent to Oaxaca's landfill, teaching music to—and conducting the orchestra made up of—children as young as six all the way to their early 20s. The miraculous musical result of this group started in 2011, when young people facing extreme adversity, such as drugs, violence, and poverty, decided they needed an outlet in their daily lives to help them escape this hard reality of life in their barrio. They chose music, formed the Banda de la Música and, with the help of a local music teacher and an Air France pilot, they set up a music school. Seven years later, *La Banda de la Musica* has



now evolved into a youth symphony orchestra, the *Orquesta Sinfónica Juvenil Santa Cecilia*, which has become a shining example of how music can improve the lives of children coming from some of the toughest backgrounds. Apart from the opportunities and safety this created for young people in Vicente Guerrero, this is a deeply symbolic gesture: while Oaxaca would bring their garbage to this community, the young people from here would give back music.

Every day I saw how hard these young musicians were trying to improve. We learned how to tune better, how to listen to each other, how to create contrasts with sound, how to play together, how a group of fifty can create only one sound. There is something magical, unique, and much underappreciated that takes place in a rehearsal during a joint preparation for a concert. This is a space of safety, without judgment or expectations, where the goals become common, where the weakest player becomes the responsibility of everyone to support and lift up, where the professional and beginner musicians become equal, where listening takes over yelling, where the effort of learning a difficult piece together empowers these

children, gives them hope for tomorrow, and helps them see value in life and human interaction.

The evening before the concert, I was handed a traditional Oaxacan shirt as a present. The following day, before the performance of the "2nd Concert for Peace," which took place within the compounds of the landfill, I put on the shirt carefully, with pride and respect, and felt honoured being together on stage with fifty of the bravest young musicians I have ever met. During the concert, which was attended by almost one thousand people, these young musicians, with fiery eyes and sweaty hands, achieved what they aimed for—success. While on stage they were seen and appreciated as performers, not children from a dusty barrio with all the prejudice that comes with it. The audience cheered for them, stood up, clapped, yelled, and demanded they remain in their places to keep sharing their music. They played "Pirates of the Caribbean" a second time, with a glowing smile on their faces, which showed that they now knew what success feels like, and with a thunderous roar in their sound as if they were the "Pirates of Oaxaca." I could see in their eyes, even for a brief moment, that they realised who they are today does will not define who they will be tomorrow.



Quito, Ecuador

By Panos Karan

Ecuador is a place of great importance to me; this is where I first landed in March 2011 before embarking on my very first musical adventure in the Amazon Basin. The memories of that first visit, the fear and excitement of the unknown and the unexpected, embrace me every time I come here. This is the place that, eight years ago, helped me open a new door, the one with the writing "Music Can Change the World" written on it.

The capital Quito is the place where the first *Keys of Change* (UK) music education programme was formed. In 2012, newly formed *Keys of Change UK* started providing music lessons to children in Quito, a programme which continues today. Since starting, we have had more



Drums and rhythms: our students in Quito, Ecuador, use music as an inspiring opportunity to work together, and leave behind some of the problems they face in their daily lives.

than sixty children learn to play the guitar, the violin, and traditional dances. Following up on the first musical journey in the Amazon, we even brought guitars and provided music classes in a small community called Sani, in the depths of the Ecuadorian rainforest. I recently visited the Quito centre, ran by

Condor Trust, where the music classes take place every weekend. I heard their music and I saw the enthusiasm of our students. One of them told me that music has helped him "open doors," and another one shared that through music she "never feels alone anymore".

Starting in 2016, *Keys of Change* has been supporting another group of children who live in very difficult conditions in the outskirts of Quito. It is really remarkable what children can do to inspire themselves, despite the extreme adversity they are living in. The classes—in this case in Ecuadorian percussion instruments and traditional dancing—take place in a school called Honrar la Vida, which provides emotional, psychological, and educational support to children at risk. I heard that in many cases, the single meal many kids receive during the day is when they are on the school grounds. The cases of violence, abuse, and neglect are too many to enumerate. Then there are the refugees—kids running away from Venezuela, having walked more than 1,500 miles, alone or with their families, through the jungle and mountains, all the way to Quito. These same kids smile, dance, and play music full of joy. One of them took my hand as soon as I arrived and wouldn't let go until it was time for me to leave. We played music for each other, and they were keen to teach me an Ecuadorian song so that I can play music with them. I saw the Amazon only from above this time, flying over the rainforest while leaving Ecuador behind. Like the river that always flows towards the sea, my thoughts ran towards the same direction as they did in 2011: "Music can change the world."



Belgrade, Serbia

By Zach Tarpagos

The music classes in Serbia continue this year at a steady pace and with unimpeded intensity. During 2018 it was a particular success that we were able to hold two celebration concerts (June and December), giving the opportunities to our students to showcase their musical skills.

Also, the activities in the children's home of the programme have been expanded. Apart from the music classes (singing, percussion, piano, and violin), an arts and craft activity has been introduced, where the students engage mainly in constructing improvised musical instruments that are used as instruments.

The results are very encouraging. Despite the fact that there is no compulsory requirement by the



Christmas celebration with songs and theatre at one of the children homes Keys of Change is providing music education, and, starting in 2018, arts and crafts.

institution for the children to take part in our educational activities, attendance in this second year of the programme is becoming more and more regular.

Most importantly, the music programme has gradually created the proper dynamic in the children's

homes where it takes place in order for the children to feel safe and look forward to the classes. As a result, when new children come to these institutions throughout the year, on learning about the musical activities, many of them ask to join and become part of this awesome group.

