Spring semester of senior year is a rollercoaster ride of emotions for high school students. OrchKids student and talented flutist, Asia Palmer, knows this first-hand. Currently attending the Baltimore School for the Arts, Asia has had to keep up with her rigorous studies while balancing nine college auditions, summer program auditions, Peabody Prep classes, OrchKids programming, and a special presentation at the National El Sistema USA Symposium in Detroit, MI - not to mention keeping up socially with friends and family before heading off to college in less than six months. AND, Asia will be the first person in her family to attend college – talk about pressure!

Since Asia is among the very first group of OrchKids seniors (there are four) to audition for college music programs, she offered to share her experience with us. “I was really nervous for most of my auditions,” shared Asia, “I got really anxious when I saw the large number of flute players auditioning for the same thing I was.” To put Asia’s anxiety into perspective, hundreds of flute players from across the country and across the world will send preliminary audition tapes to top music schools. Then, a modest percentage of those applicants will receive an invitation for a live audition. A school like Berklee College of Music admits only 26% of applicants. This level of competition would make anyone anxious.

To help calm her nerves, Asia’s mom, Lynette, traveled with her to every audition. A few auditions called for special cheerleaders including OrchKids Senior Program Manager, Mollie Westbrook. Asia commented on how grateful she was for the added support; “my mom was at every single audition, she is my #1 supporter and her presence made me less nervous. Ms. Mollie was at my Hartt School audition; her energy is the most amazing thing ever and it definitely rubbed off on me in time for my audition. My Aunt Joanne attended my Shenandoah audition with my mom and her presence also made me feel less nervous.”

Looking ahead to a future that is full of possibilities, Asia is excited to study flute more intensely regardless of which school she attends next Fall. She is eager to meet new friends and more musicians who strive to be great performers, just like her. On the topic of younger OrchKids students aspiring to audition one day, Asia offered them the following advice: “practice and make sure you are really prepared for every audition - every audition is going to be different, so you should be open minded and be ready for anything. Also, don’t let the nerves affect your playing!”

Asia has just heard back from 4 of the 9 colleges to which she applied, and we are very excited to announce that one of those acceptance letters is from… the prestigious Berklee College of Music! Stay tuned for all final college decisions from all our seniors, including Asia, in the Summer edition of OrchPress.
What made this particular presentation even more special was that it wasn’t led by OrchKids staff. It was created and led by two OrchKids students: Asia Palmer and Keith Fleming!

Unbeknownst to OrchKids staff at the time, Asia and Keith wrote and submitted their own application for a chance to present at the 2019 Symposium, held in Detroit, Michigan. When their application was accepted by El Sistema USA, it was a massive surprise to OrchKids staff and teachers. When asked why he and Asia wanted to apply, Keith responded, “we applied for the El Sistema presentation because we wanted to present to people and show them students have voices that people need to listen to.”

Youth voice is a critical component of the OrchKids program. Much of OrchKids’ programming is centered around students finding their own unique voice and building the tools to share their voice and opinions with others. Most importantly, students are taught that their voice matters, that it deserves to be heard, and that it should be celebrated! In a world run by adults, youth voices are often lost or left out – especially when those youth are from underserved communities. Keith and Asia are determined to change that! When asked about how the presentation went, Keith responded, “it was fun presenting to people and kind of inspiring for them to go back to their own programs and try the same thing.”

This annual symposium provides a great networking opportunity for people from El Sistema-inspired programs across our country. Keith and Asia are in 11th and 12th grade, so it was phenomenal that they not only had the opportunity to meet and interact with professionals doing the work that inspires them, but they also lead an audience of people who they may even be working alongside with in the future.

The symposium not only provides a glimpse into the future, but it also brings blasts from the past. All around the building, participants gathered with their instruments to play together – communicating and socializing through music. OrchKids staff and students joined in these jam sessions ran into some old friends from The Archipelago Project, where some of our students go each summer. Keith also reunited with an old teacher, Dantes Rameau, who worked with OrchKids nine years ago, when Keith was a young second grader! When asked how it felt to see him, Keith responded “it was kind of weird at first because I didn’t remember him, but when he showed me the picture [of us from 9 years ago] I felt proud of both of us; we had come a long way and it showed and it was all because of the music and the OrchKids program.” Music brings people together, reunites friends and educates eager listeners who want to spread the good news.
GLOBAL STAGE Marin Alsop accepts Crystal Award at World Economic Forum

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Since 2017, Southwest has generously donated vouchers so that our students have the opportunity to experience new places and meet new people that may change the course of their lives.

Thank you to each and every Southwest employee who makes our students’ dreams become reality!

The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland brings together leaders from international organizations, government, culture and media, and this year’s event honored none other than the BSO’s own Music Director, Marin Alsop. On January 21, Alsop was one of three recipients of this year’s Crystal Award, which celebrates the achievements of leading artists and cultural figures whose leadership inspires inclusive and sustainable change. “Attending the World Economic Forum in 2006 inspired me to strive to become a more engaged world citizen, and I am deeply honored to return to accept the Crystal Award and share my journey over these past 13 years,” said Alsop. Alsop accepted the award alongside film director Haifaa Al-Mansour and broadcaster and naturalist Sir David Attenborough. Alsop also led the meeting’s opening performance with the Taki Concordia Orchestra. “We are thrilled that Music Director Marin Alsop received the prestigious Crystal Award at the World Economic Forum,” said BSO President and CEO Peter Kjome. “The outstanding work she has done here in Baltimore to promote access to music education through initiatives like OrchKids and the BSO Academy program demonstrates her commitment to inspiring change in our community.” This year’s World Economic Forum Annual Meeting took place January 22–25 under the theme, “Globalization 4.0: Shaping a Global Architecture in the Age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

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Ready for take off! A group of students traveling to summer programs in 2018. Some of them were flying for the first time!