



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**June 30th, 2021**

## **Juno Award Winning Afro-Cuban Band OKAN Join Sistema Toronto Students for Virtual Performance**

**OKAN hosted workshops with the Sistema Toronto students earlier this year thanks to funding from the SOCAN Foundation.**

**TORONTO, ON** – Sistema Toronto, a non-profit providing free after-school music and social education to underserved kids across Toronto, has launched an at-home music video with Toronto Afro-Cuban band OKAN.

This project offered educational workshops for Sistema Toronto students by introducing them to Afro-Cuban music through a series of online workshops with OKAN. This was part of a unit on Black History Month, showcasing a variety of Black Canadian musicians and repertoire by Black artists and composers. Thanks to generous funding from the SOCAN Foundation, OKAN visited Sistema Toronto online classes where they taught vocal, strings, and body percussion to senior students from all 3 centres – Parkdale, Jane-Finch, and East Scarborough. On top of learning the repertoire and gaining knowledge of different musical styles, the vocal and percussion workshops focused on techniques and the strings workshops highlighted structured improvisation work.

Sistema Toronto teachers then worked with students to practice and record their individual parts to be edited together for the final performance video. The rhythmic Spanish piece, *Oye Como Va*, is originally by musician Tito Puente and arranged by OKAN for this project. Roughly translated, the upbeat song asks “Hey, how’s it going?”, an apt question in the current climate.

“With so many different musical aspects coming together, this was one of our most challenging projects this year,” said Jordana de Bloeme, Director of Development at Sistema Toronto. “The students put their best effort forward, as always, and did a really excellent job. Most importantly, they had a brilliant time working with OKAN and learning the piece. We hope people will watch the video and feel a sense of joy and excitement for the future.”

Sistema Toronto is dedicated to promoting cultural diversity through repertoire and workshops that reflect the diverse communities in Canada and beyond. Sistema would like to thank OKAN for their work with our students and the SOCAN Foundation for funding the project. Thanks to everyone involved, the project was a great success.

Watch the “*Oye Como Va*” video now at: <https://youtu.be/NDEtsGHi1ng>

5 - 96 Vine Avenue  
Toronto, ON M6P 1V7



### **About OKAN**

Taking their name from the word for heart/soul in the Afro Cuban religion Santeria, OKAN co-leaders, composers and multi-instrumentalists Elizabeth Rodriguez and Magdelys Savigne enthusiastically embrace Cuban genres and musical roles that have historically been dominated by men, and create a distinctive and personal world jazz fusion. <https://www.okanmusica.com/>

### **About Sistema Toronto**

Social Change Through Music Education: Sistema Toronto provides musical and intellectual opportunities to children in underserved communities with the goal of transformative social change. We build stronger communities by enabling children to grow and thrive as engaged citizens and future leaders. Sistema Toronto is first and foremost a social development program, using ensemble-based music education to transform the lives of at-risk children. Sistema Toronto students work together for 10 hours of weekly instruction. They learn strings (violin, viola, cello, or double bass), percussion, choir and Music & Movement while developing important life skills like problem solving, empathy, and self-advocacy. <https://www.sistema-toronto.ca/>.

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### **For more information, photos, or to arrange interviews please contact:**

Sarah Ferries  
Marketing & Communications Manager  
416-545-0200 | [sarah.ferries@sistema-toronto.ca](mailto:sarah.ferries@sistema-toronto.ca)

5 - 96 Vine Avenue  
Toronto, ON M6P 1V7