

Read the text.

Music is changing their lives

Inside the **concert hall** a top **orchestra** is playing brilliantly. Their young **conductor**, Gustavo Dudamel, is one of the best in the world. But we are not in New York, London, or Vienna. We are in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela. The orchestra is the Simón Bolívar Youth orchestra, and its conductor and young musicians come from the poorest families in the country. They are a product of *El Sistema* ('the system' in Spanish), a project started in 1975 to save poor children from crime and drug addiction through classical music.



Today more than 270,000 young Venezuelans from the *barrios* (poor areas in Caracas) are learning to play instruments. They **practise** Beethoven and Brahms instead of learning to steal and shoot. Gisella, aged 11, says 'I am learning the **viola** because I want to escape from the *barrio*. In Venezuela now it's cooler to like Strauss than salsa.' Edgar, 22, who plays in the orchestra, says 'sometimes when we finish late I stay in town – it's dangerous to go home at that time. But now most of my friends are here. We are a family as well as an orchestra.'

Dudamel is now also the Musical Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, one of the USA's top orchestras. But he returns frequently to Caracas to conduct. 'I miss my orchestra, but I will never leave them. They're family,' he says.

