



Embassy of the Bolivarian  
Republic of Venezuela



# FACT SHEET FUEL FOR THE SOUL

## The Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela

For 32 years, the **Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela** has brought music and culture into the lives of Venezuelan children, including thousands of underprivileged and at-risk youth in all regions of that South American country, and offered them a way out of poverty and despair through training, scholarships, and support and musical careers.

Founded in 1975 by José Antonio Abreu, the Venezuelan youth orchestra system was created to help "the fight of a poor and abandoned child against everything that opposes his full realization as a human being." It has now grown from a few private students to over 240,000 today. The government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is an enthusiastic supporter of the orchestra program and has been its most generous patron to date. The current administration funds nearly all of its \$29 million annual operating budget, provides support for additional capital projects and has committed to deepening the program's reach into rural and impoverished areas with the goal of engaging one million young people in meaningful music projects in the coming years.

The orchestra has toured its home continent, South America, Europe, North America and Asia and has received rave reviews wherever it has performed.

- Sir Simon Rattle of the Berlin Philharmonic has said that it was "doing the most important work in classical music anywhere in the world."
- Plácido Domingo, the tenor, cried, confessing that the concert "evoked the strongest emotions he had ever felt."
- Former Berlin Philharmonic director Claudio Abbado invited the orchestra to perform in Germany after seeing only one performance.

In the U.S. comments have been particularly welcoming. "The sound quality, vivid and detailed, befits the exotic, colorful contents... The youth orchestra plays with all the style and precision of a professional institution. And "Mambo," the closing track, remains a barnburner; just close your eyes and imagine the spinning trumpets," said music critic Steve Smith in reviewing *Fiesta* an album featuring the orchestra (New York Times – November 9, 2008).

The orchestra has recently made recordings for Deutsche Grammophon, playing symphonies by Ludwig van Beethoven and Gustav Mahler.

Many graduates of the orchestra have gone on to impressive careers, most notably Gustavo Dudamel, an accomplished conductor who has appeared with some of the world's best known orchestras and joined the Los Angeles Philharmonic as music director in 2009. In November 2008, the L.A. Times pointed out the impact of the genius director with the headline "Gustavo Dudamel rides a wave of Dudamania" (LA Times – November 23, 2008).

It is the children themselves who are the real stars. Music has in some cases literally saved their lives and given them undreamt of opportunities and hope. They are welcomed throughout the country as heroes. According to Abreu, who still directs the orchestra today, "these children are the emblem of a Venezuela which is raising itself up through art."

In 2009, the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra will once again tour the most important venues of the United States, thanks to the support of the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and to the sponsorship of CITGO Petroleum Corporation, a subsidiary of Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA), the national oil company of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

### **For more information about the orchestra, please contact**

Patricia Abdelnour, Cultural Attaché,  
Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela  
T: 202.342.6847  
E: [cultura@embavenez-us.org](mailto:cultura@embavenez-us.org)

## US Tour - April 2009

