Clicking to the Rhythm of Peace in Argentina’s Hidden City
Argentina
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SECTION I
The initial goal of this project was to teach music to young children from Ciudad Oculta, a slum in Buenos Aires, with the final goal of having a concert showcasing what they have learned. Music classes were going to be supplemented with excursions in addition to photography classes, where students would document each other in their musical efforts.

My project changed substantially due to the health-scare in the country and the ensuing measures for control outlined by the government. As a result, I had to suspend my activities one week after they began, and re-formulate the project so that it would fit within the parameters of my original intention yet still be feasible under the health-scare circumstances. This proved difficult at first, as children were asked to stay home by the government and many public concerts had been suspended. After sitting down with the director of the organization I was working with, we decided to organize a larger concert with adolescents from the slum with previous musical training. The concert would take place at a well-known theatre in Buenos Aires, after schools had re-opened. Although I was not able to instruct children as much I had planned, I was able to focus my time on planning the concert and ensuring that it would be unique, prolific, and memorable. Ciudad Oculta is known primarily for its dilapidated conditions and rough adolescents. I had seen the talent of these kids and wanted to ensure that their talent could be celebrated and recognized in the city by regular “portenos” (people of Buenos Aires) and local musicians, alike. To help, we involved a well-known opera singer, who used her experience and connections to secure an important theatre in Buenos Aires. She had also previously worked with some adolescents from Ciudad Oculta and was instrumental in the entire process. We also informed local authorities and political departments about the event, which in turn stimulated interest from the press. By the end of July, everyone was looking forward to a large concert and the children were very excited to perform. I think it was important to make this event as grand as possible, not only to arouse interest in the broader community of Buenos Aires, but to also give to the youth a platform upon which to showcase and celebrate their talents.

At first, a major difficulty was dealing with the initial disappointment that I would not be able to go through with my project as planned and quickly coming up with an equally meaningful alternative. However, after committing to the concert and working with incredibly passionate and inspiring individuals, I knew that we could put together a very important event. The next difficulty was dealing with payments for everything relating to the concert. In Buenos Aires, people like to be paid in cash, do not like to produce receipts, and forget very easily previous conversations about price agreements, even if things are written down. The concert required many different expenses and price quotes changed daily; I had to negotiate and re-negotiate at length with everyone involved from the theatre director to the person who was printing the fliers for the concerts to the bus driver.

I was inspired by everyone I worked with, from the organizers to the performers. The organizers, who included musicians and the director of the center, were thrilled to be involved in such a project and the adolescents were eager to perform; I was surrounded by positive energy virtually everywhere I went. In terms of making decisions, I found that creating a comfortable, non-hierarchical, respectful space for open discussion always worked the best.

40 adolescents from Ciudad Oculta benefited from this project and 20 local musicians benefited from the project, as they were able to perform at a widely-publicized event that would be covered by the Argentinean press and perform with the adolescents. Approximately 200 people benefited from the project as audience members of the concert. Audience members included family
members of the youth, the diplomatic community, and other citizens of Buenos Aires. Family members were proud of the performers and some had never seen their respective family members perform. Besides benefiting the community of Ciudad Oculta, I believe the project also benefited citizens outside of Ciudad Oculta, who are quick to judge individuals who come from this neighbourhood and treat them like criminals before being certain of anything. Because the project took place at a very accessible and well-known venue, adolescents who are known for their misfortunes were able to shine under a different light, bringing a sense of understanding to a misunderstood community. The project brought together all sectors of society - those who lived outside of the city were transported via buses we rented. The sustainability of this project is in part tied to the resources available. While it is unlikely that the opportunity for these children to perform at one of the best theaters in Buenos Aires will arise again anytime soon, the momentum for such a concert has been established. Now that the enthusiasm is there and the results have been generated, it will be possible to hold similar concerts on a smaller scale. In fact, there is already talk about organizing such concerts in the future.

SECTION II
I define peace as the result of a common vision that produces positive change. My project contributed to peace by virtue of the fact that it involved people from different backgrounds who worked together on a project that initiated not only a change in the dominating perceptions that most people have of adolescents from the slum, but also spread a vision for change among adolescents who come from Ciudad Oculta. The young performers wrote much of their own music - singing about the need for change from above (politically) in addition to change from within (going to school, respecting oneself, honesty). For that night, adolescents had the platform and were heard by a diverse group of individuals. This not only created more understanding and awareness, but also opened up a space for everyone in the theatre to reflect upon the current situation of children in the slum and the importance of creating equal opportunities for them. After speaking with various attendees of the concert, I was pleased and even surprised by their reactions. Many of the attendees who did not come from Ciudad Oculta did not realise that the young performers were so passionate about changing their socio-economic conditions and others were impressed at how articulate they were at voicing their aspirations and concerns. Attendees from Ciudad Oculta were inspired by their peers to be involved in similar initiatives, and asked if they could be involved in something similar in the future. To me, this signaled hope and momentum for positive change.

My project has affected me profoundly and has very much impacted the way I see the world. I would say the most fundamental way the project changed the way I see the world is that it illustrated how anything can be possible with determination, faith, and enthusiasm. There was relatively little time to put together this concert and it involved people from all types of backgrounds, yet everyone believed it could happen and worked until the last minute to ensure its success. The project also showed me that if children are given a chance to be appreciated, they will work tirelessly to produce results. The children in my project go to schools where teachers do not show up, they are routinely mistreated by the police, and their broader society has little to no faith in them. This summer, they were given the opportunity to express their hopes and aspirations to over two hundred people from their country, and they were heard. Working with these children and organizing the concert was truly a life-changing experience for me and I believe for the adolescents. As we stood together on the stage to sing the final song at the concert and as I exchanged smiles with the young performers, I could see a sense of pride, achievement, and gratitude on their faces and before the final bow, I knew that this concert would be remembered for a long, long time.
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