

Vice-Chancellor, Chair of the Board of Governors, graduates, and honoured guests.

Today is a significant moment to celebrate all you have learned, achieved, and become during your time in this remarkable University. Congratulations! And it's not just a celebration for you alone, because when *you* thrive, *communities* thrive!

It is a huge honour to be here with you, and a privilege to give the Convocation Address. Thank you!

Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that I would experience such an honour for bringing an idea to life, fueled by our passion for equity and the unending belief, work, and inspiration of so many – many of whom are in this room today. In 2007, with co-founders Gary McMillen and Margaret Maria, we created OrKidstra – a social development program with the mission to empower kids and build community through the universal language of music.

Today's honor is further magnified because in 2012, I was invited by Carleton University to accept an Honorary Degree for Dr. Antonio Abreu, the Founder of Venezuela's El Sistema, our inspiration. Maestro Abreu, a musician, economist, and politician, looked at the rampant poverty in Venezuela, and back in 1975, believed that if he could put an instrument into the hands of children and youth it would transform their lives. El Sistema went on to become the world's most inspiring example of how and why music can be a powerful agent for social change.

So why music? As Dr. Abreu said, "teach children the beauty of music, and music will teach them the beauty of life". The joys and challenges of playing an instrument require grit – passion, perseverance, and creativity – and singing and playing together teaches all of us how to create a community out of very diverse parts, how to listen with your heart as well as your head, how to collaborate and build something bigger and more beautiful than our individual selves. These lessons, we believe, will serve not only our students, but our community, and, in turn, our world.

It has been awe-inspiring to stand on the shoulders of Maestro Abreu and I know he would be proud of how our kids are flourishing and how OrKidstra has evolved and become an integral part of Ottawa. I am sharing this with you because, at this significant moment in your lives, I invite you to think about whose shoulders each one of you is standing on – professors in this room, composers or authors in the library, mentors, family, friends?

One of my mentors suggested that I share my experience of how important it is to being open to opportunities and then having the courage to act on them. Looking back, I have always believed that synchronicity played a tremendous role in the story of OrKidstra – yet synchronicity, often interpreted as luck, can only result in a metaphorical home run if you

keep your eyes on the ball and then be prepared to hit it with passion, commitment, sweat, *and* tears! As we say in OrKidstra, if it was easy, everyone would do it! Perseverance is the key, illustrated so perfectly when one of our five-year-olds shared that the most important part of her body was her feet because they kept her moving forward :)

Moving forward is essential, and just as important is starting with the end in mind. As the quote from Alice in Wonderland says, “If you don't know where you want to go, then it doesn't matter which path you take.”

Looking at projects or even your entire life from the end inspires, actually forces, you to ask, *what really matters?*

Seventeen years ago, starting at the end didn't mean we had a clear pathway on how OrKidstra would evolve, far from it! The convoluted path of our learning curve could have crashed Google Maps, but we knew in our bones we had to break down barriers so all children could have the chance to find their voice through the transformative power of making music together. *That* is what mattered to us, and *that* is what gave us the courage of our convictions to trust ourselves and keep moving forward. So, while we may never arrive, we have always known where we are going!

In closing, with OrKidstra's values of Love, Courage, Excellence, and Belonging, our goal is not to create virtuoso musicians, but rather nurture virtuoso human beings. I wish for each of you to become the virtuoso human being that rings true to you, and, starting at the end, think of who *you* want to be for those who will be standing on *your* shoulders.