

Music Education as a Mean of Developing Musicality and Preserving Latvian Identity

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Abstract

This paper is intended to reflect the present situation of Latvian music education in general, since the level of music education has diminished in Latvia, as a result of the uncertain conditions of present day life. It provides information about Latvian music methodists; achievements and judgements.

The contemporary musical education is to be taken seriously, because children who have experienced music in this way will listen to it with more understanding and a true appreciation and knowledge of its significance. All efforts to organize fundamental music education nowadays are being undermined by the fact that music is now considered a minor subject. Our present patterns in education tend to stress the intellectual and neglect the emotional.

In spite of everything, music should be considered not only as a separate subject but also as a very important component of the pedagogical process, because music-making is an irreplaceable mean in the development of many fundamental abilities.

Introduction

A child's musical ability can be cultivated both in the family circle and also in special-purpose establishments. The development of musicality is closely linked with intellectual growth. For this reason, teaching music must be regarded as a simultaneous overall intellectual development. It is common knowledge that the major source of didactic material is a large variety of Latvian folk — and original songs that enable the best and most appropriate choice of sounding material for teaching children of different age groups and quality of voice. Additionally the teaching music has proven to be favourable, if not a remedy, towards eliminating various problems of speech therapy, among them, inability to pronounce separate sounds, like “r”, “l” in particular, stuttering, disordered motoric coordination etc.

The Origins of Latvian Music Education

Theoretical music education in Latvia has its origins in Western Europe largely owing to Jānis Cimze (1814–1881), who was one of the first and the most significant figures in Latvian culture.

Cimze studied at the Teacher-training institute in Weissenfelz, Germany years 1836–1838, spent one more year as an external student at Berlin University, taking courses in philosophy, pedagogics and theology. He was deeply engaged in special studies with E. Henchel in Weissenfelz, learning to play such instruments as the violin, the organ, the piano and harmony, and studying music with professor Ludvig Erke. Cimze developed his interest and love of folk traditions, later contributing so much to the development of Latvian folk songs.

In 1839 Cimze took up the post of Teachers' Seminary organizer first in Valmiera and then in Valka (1849–1881). Cimze is noted for having drawn up “The Pedagogical Training Plan for Latvians in Vidzeme”, largely concentrating on music. Alongside other subjects it also provided for singing and learning to play such instruments as the violin and the organ and even the teaching of harmony [Vitolinš,1972]. In other words a gift for music was essential to be accepted as a teacher in those days.

A substantial musical education was a prerequisite for Seminary graduates towards their potential career not only as teachers but also as musicians. The enormous scope of work effected by Cimze, his followers and other musicians resulted in the Latvian Song festival in 1873 which has created a world-wide resonance among musicians and audiences in terms of high artistic quality especially in the summer of 1998, when the musical “happening” was based solely on the enthusiasm of the musicians involved.

In early 20th century, methodists engaged in the field of teaching music, who had obtained their knowledge both in pedagogics and music in Western Europe, singled out the role of music in the overall development of a single human as a personality. Juris Bebris, the author of the first methodological aid for Latvian teachers of singing, maintained that singing adds to a number of other subjects, such as history, native tongue and expressive reading in terms of significance. He placed singing right after **mother tongue** — one of the basic subjects at school in those days [Bebris, 1922]. Latvian folk-song along with “**art song**” proved to be the first and foremost means of musical development .

Jūlijs Rozītis, another music methodologist focussed the attention of teachers on the Latvian folk song as a primary means of virtuous upbringing and education of the younger generation and girls as would-be mothers in particular [1929].

At the dawn of the 20th century similar views had been voiced by a number of other music teachers as well, among them such celebrity as Jēkabs Graubīnš [1935]. In the middle of the century this opinion was supported by Jēkabs Medinš and Ilga Jākobsone [1958] as well as Jēkabs Vitoliņš in his works written during the period 1931–1977. Alfrēds Eidinš wrote that “**folk-song is a sounding manifestation of one's mother tongue**” [Eidinš, 1974].

Latvian music teaching methodology should by no means be viewed as stiff and formal or even useless nowadays. On the contrary, it is being constantly improved and perfected by a number of music teachers in Latvia, among them Irēna Nelsone and Mirdza Paipare [1992], who are focussing not only on cultivating the musicality of the young, but also on the introduction of new music teaching methods.

Musical development nowadays

The late 20th century is characterized by a low level of musical development and reduced intellectual interest among the majority of children, attending both pre-schools as well as primary schools. Moreover, a considerable number of children, non-singers, so-called “grunTERS” and “out-of-tune” singers, prove to be suffering from an inferiority complex, later resulting in an aversion to music and a complete lack of desire to sing. Such a situation has arisen from the inadequate potential for the musical development of children, attending both pre-schools and primary schools. It is no wonder that children simply lack knowledge and worse, even an interest in music appropriate for their age, be it classical, folk or original one. This is mostly due to national and private-owned TV channels, radio and other mass media, performing the primary function of “entertaining” the audience, concentrating almost exclusively on manifestations of popular culture, and thus ignoring music appropriate to the children's age group which, in turn, exerts a negative influence on their intellectual skills.

The observation shows, that such competitions as “TV Cālis”, “Saules zakis” and “Popskanas mark a strong tendency towards popularizing music for the purpose of entertainment, thus providing a solely unilateral approach to the understanding of music and interfering with the holistic potential development of the human soul. The rather low prestige of music at school as well as in the community is resultant of the following: parents are mostly incompetent as to the overall and educational effect of music on both the intellectual and emotional development of their children; the acquisition of intellectual knowledge is isolated from emotional knowledge. The time allotted to music education at school is only 9 years (forms 1–9); choir singing is

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an "optional" subject, thus providing for extra problems for music teachers; musicianship is a very difficult psycho-physiological process of learning but people are not always eager to work from morning till night; people, generally, are not attracted by things they are not familiar with; music teachers having long been trained in the traditional manner resulted in a marked discrepancy between musical training as such and the expectations of schoolchildren; a considerable number of pre-school children lack almost any spiritual apprehension ability, having been deprived of substantial development potential within the period of their sensitive growth as in family discussions, lullabies and other forms of activity impacting both emotions and the mind.

Facing a continuous shortage of printed material in the field of music with a subsequent lack of teaching aids for schools, pre-school in particular, has led to a reduced impact of music on the development of the individual as a personality. Such an interference is supported by talking to children's parents, colleagues and music teachers, working in Pre-school.

Regardless of this negative attitude, the outcome of the practical work of music teachers at school has established that the development of a child's musical talent is beneficial for its general growth. For this reason music teaching at school should be viewed not only as a single subject to be taught, but as an extremely essential constituent part of the pedagogical process as such. Even more so, as musicianship is indispensable towards such skills as forecasting or anticipation, i.e. simultaneous occurrence within two layers of time, simultaneity, i.e. a contracted form of human psycho-activity, manifesting itself in the ability to conceive all its elements at a time, extension of one's short-lived memory, non-traditional thinking as well as emotional perception [Birzkops,1999].

Psychological research during the late 20th century has attempted to clarify whether the human intellect should be regarded as an in-born brain capacity, gradually acquired skills or as an external quality [Tarasova,1988]. Since every single mental activity involves a considerable mental strain, one of the basic trends of developing human intellect proves to be stimulation of a person's psycho self-control.

Discoveries by medical researchers have proven that every single spoken word finds a unilateral reflection in the human mind, whereas in the case of music this reflection is bilateral (Sir Charles McDonald, Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Australia, 1965). Both the visual and audial centres of sense perception, located in the left cerebral hemisphere, which are responsible for logical and reason-based approach to the arrangement of things, are basically linked with one's mathematical thinking. However, those centers responsible for emotions and human speech, are to be found in the right cerebral hemisphere [ISME,1974,57-58].

Thus, any sign of irritation in the process of learning reaches the left hemisphere of the human brain. It is pertinent to note that the balance between the hemispheres may be largely preserved through musicianship. Melody belongs to the right hemisphere, whereas rhythm to the left one. Musicianship is by no means an easy kind of psycho-activity. However, it results in a growing mass of brain and an accelerated channelling of nerve impulses. That is perhaps the primary reason why every child should be taught to play the piano [Birzkops, 1999].

Evidence provided by schools specializing in music, has shown an improvement of children's mathematical skills alongside such elements as enhanced imagination, the acquisition of languages and a creative spending of one's spare time. For this reason, every single music teacher should be provided with the appropriate conditions and pre-requisites, which enable her/him: to teach singing to every child; to create the most favourable atmosphere for a successful development of this child's musicianship; to prove by personal experience that the teaching of music is literally indispensable towards the formation of feelings, emotions and appropriate education; to cultivate the desire for music, helping children not only love and understand it but also to extend their knowledge and to acquire the skills to be able to record it in written form.

Possibilities and Tasks of Music Teaching in Pre-school

To effect the above goals it is essential to change the present negligent approach to music education on the part of the community. Since every single melody is a musical version of one's mother tongue, music lessons should be considered as an important component in the school curriculum. As the professional mastery of music teachers constantly develops, every interference on the part of incompetent people within the process of its study and planning should be avoided. In order to effect this principle it could be worthwhile to resume the tradition of teaching music that was existent during the 1930-40s in the Teachers' training institutes of Latvia, where both music and methods of teaching were compulsory for potential school teachers. Therefore, all school teachers should be at least able to sing, whereas music should be included in the curriculum as one of the basic subjects from forms 1 to 12.

Music teaching in pre-schools could prove successful only on the basis of the 3-stage programme of pre-school teaching (education) adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science [1998], which is focussed on encouraging the children's psycho-activity through playing and games as a principal means of children's potential creative development.

Research data pertaining to the field of **psychology** [N. Leitess, 1996] and that of music teaching and psychology [C. Seashore, 1967; M.L. Mark, 1986; F. Higgins, 1964; K. Tarasova, 1988; O. Radinova, 1994; A. Legaspi de Arismendi, 1989; I. Deliege, 1996 etc] suggest that musicality is one of the indices of one's young age development, emotional and intellectual in particular.

Musicality develops parallel to the child's activity from the very moment of his/her coming into this world and is an inherent element of his/her musical gift, essential for being engaged in every single kind of musical activity [Gordon,1990].

It is considered to be a certain parameter of an individual's psychological personality, in other words, a manifestation of a particular framework of one's abilities. As to musical faculties, they should not be regarded as hereditary, but rather ones that develop within the process of teaching and upbringing as a direct consequence of one's in-born makings, namely, anatomical and physiological features. Overall musical aptitude includes the following: emotional responsiveness as the primary parameter of one's musicality; a good ear for music and a feeling for rhythm as the principal cognitive and sensoric ability; musically — tended thinking, comprising both reproductive as well as productive elements; musical memory [Tarasova, 1988].

The development of one's individual overall musical aptitude in ontogenesis is never steady and regular. The process of compensating for missing features with others seems to be a unique and significant feature of human life. The importance of musicality towards a really creative personality is most essential for our time and cannot be underestimated. The most critical and sensitive period for cultivating one's musicality being within early childhood (0-3, 3-7), we must not be late with this task concerning children's development, but must also focus on observing successiveness (or sequence of development).

Conclusion

Music teachers should be real professionals capable of establishing the conditions for a child developing on a low, medium or high level of musicality. They have to direct their effort towards preparing for school of such children, who could join collective singing with a good amount of self-assurance, which is decisive for their further potential development. The above method is more successful, provided that musical training from early childhood is effected in a progressive way. While cultivating children's musicality, the element of successiveness and systematic work is vital for putting the principle of continuity into practice during the transition from pre-school to the primary school and afterwards from primary school to elementary school. As