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Freedom and Creativity as a Base Prerequisite of Teaching Subject: Music Ensembles

Abstract

The main educated objective of the subject: performance in instrumental and vocal ensembles is to teach pupils and students a fundamental principle of collective music-making, not only in terms of music (playing from notes and scores, technique of instrumental game and singing, interplay, perceptual — analytical hearing ability, flexibility, mental training for concentration etc.), but also in terms of social and ethical work in a team. School environment now replace a deficit of family and socially active music-making, which ceased to exist. Repertoire, ensemble cast, schedule performances and arrangements students create themselves, even when the teacher finally approves all student initiatives. Teacher also helps in arranging of music and organizing performances. Students evaluate each other the artistic performance and dramaturgy program after the performances.

Key words: vocal and instrumental music ensembles, collective music-making in schools, repertoire, dramaturgy, timing, musical a critical evaluation, concert activities at school and outside it

Teaching subject music ensembles

This teaching subject is featured in the curriculum and literature as the music ensembles, instrumental and vocal ensembles or Collegium Musicum. At the present updated with regard to the following factors:

1. On the one hand, the media, including the Internet, mediate the possibility for getting familiar with a wide variety of musical styles through concert performances and studio recordings, on the other hand — generate passivity in any musical-creative field, except perhaps perception.

2. Performing in the school music vocal and instrumental ensembles support music-creative activity, learning process and educates students for hard work, systematic preparation, training, discipline, tolerance and decency.

Let us have a look in brief at the work of students in the school music ensembles at the Department of Culture of the Faculty of Education of Univerzity Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica. Freedom and creativity is a prerequisite for quality teaching. Both didactic principles are the pillars of any teaching, not only in music education, belonging to the campus. Exercise of the freedom in teaching is understood very differently. More freedom for students, more space for their own critical thinking and the own decision-making — it certainly cultivate mind, accelerates their professional growth and the positive results gives own confidence in learning activities. However, leaving the student to rely solely on his own strength leads to his disorientation and wasting energy or time.

Subject: music instrumental and vocal ensembles during its existence in the workplace has undergone its evolution. Initially we understood it so that its main filling is orchestral playing and choral singing, where the students learn the basic principle of collective music-making, not only in terms of pure music (playing from notes and scores, technique of instrumental game and singing, interplay, perceptual-analytical hearing ability, flexibility, mental training for concentration etc.), but also in terms of social and ethical work in a team. Here, students learn tolerance, respect, integrity, objective assessment, humility and modesty, submissiveness, awareness, responsibility, dedication, patience, peace and balance sheet, trust and loyalty, cohesion, solidarity, discipline, and self-criticism in autoreflexion. These basal ethical principles from school in teaching will be used certainly superbly and applied in later life of students. During writing orchestral arrangements we based on those possibilities and abilities of individuals, who played different musical instruments, and how they advanced. Arrangements were thus “tailor-made” according to the individual abilities of players, singers and to the actual cast of musical instruments occurring at the department. Orchestral arrangements require lengthy and laborious transcription and frequent intervention in the instrumental parts. Another problem was that complete instrumental sections were lacked. Although strings were relatively quiet, lacking bass, the tube lacking instruments in the sections of wind and brass instruments and orchestra without bass did not have an adequate sound. Lacked other instruments such as trombones, any horns and trumpets, complete woodwind instruments such as bassoon, oboe and clarinet. It had always to be some reinforcements from other schools. The work was difficult because some students did not participate in the training examination regularly, often lacked key instruments playing solo. Also some players left the orchestra after graduating school and generational change is not always best for orchestra cast, for quality and sound of the orchestra. Therefore, the orchestra over time (after two years) was dissolved. A subject, however, remained. There were based progressively smaller groups of all types of music and occupations, which corresponded given styles of clas-

sical or modern music. Basically it was playing in chamber ensembles, vocal, instrumental, or instrumental-vocal ensembles. For students here they have created appropriate learning and material conditions and have determined the rules and obligations to acquire the necessary credits, points for interim and final evaluation. However, it was not infringed two mentioned principles of freedom and creativity in teaching.

School environment: a creative environment

It is well known that in previous centuries in Europe, particularly in families there was often music production. Musically talented family members or friends had the opportunity to demonstrate their interpretation, improvisation and songwriting talents in the circle of loved ones. Today is a music-making reduced to very rare and random encounters at parties, picnics and birthday parties. It is caused mainly by the passive perception of the media, especially through television and the internet. There is no doubt that school environment compensate the huge deficit and simulate family music making. Making music at home and school is important for future professional musicians and teachers, for their future careers. For many students playing in the music ensembles is the only possible presentation to the public, the only option of self-realization while performing his own songs and arrangement.

Variable instruments, ensemble cast and applications of the singing and playing at the department

The performance quality and ensemble sound depend on the cast of instruments, singers' and players' skills, as well as the collegiate relations and fellowship. Students are free to choose their partner in the ensemble. The cast is limited by musical instruments that are available. Students themselves create a variety of instrumental groupings. They choose mostly smaller groupings such as a duet, trio and quartet, but the philosophy of the department is to create larger chamber ensembles according to school grades focusing on all the major styles of folklore, classical, pop or jazz music. In the first year classical music takes the precedence, in the second year — folklore and jazz, and popular music in the third one. In the upper grades there are ensembles and students in them profiled, specialized. The best ensembles participate annually in competitions: student scientific and artistic activity, which is usually in March. They also have the option of having one or two compositions at the graduation

concert at the end of the study in the college and so to present what they have learned during their studies in front of the teachers, parents and colleagues. Evaluation results of concerts can influence the overall final evaluation of the student's college.

Many ensemble casts are atypical, rather characteristic for improvisation popular music, for example piano and electric guitar; piano and girls singing trio; ensemble of violins, flutes, accordion and electric guitar, and others. Of course, playing also in classical chamber configurations as singing with piano accompaniment, piano-duo, violin-duo, piano and cello, piano with flute or clarinet, string trio and quartet, and others. The "gro" repertoire consists of senior classical works, which are often adapted, arranging. Limiting case is the exception, when a student does not find a suitable partner for making music and playing the solo instrument without accompaniment: alternatively, a singer accompanies himself on guitar or piano. However, this is not the ensemble playing, but teacher always acknowledges the effort of the student. After our experience in working with students the aim is "finding a suitable partner-mate" for the ensemble an independent creative experiment, which gives students a free hand in mate selecting. The outcome can occur already at the very first test and of course also at the presentation, the final graduation concert for public appearances. A suitable choice always surprises listeners in auditorium, colleagues and cantors themselves.

Repertoire: free choice of compositions

Students have retained greater freedom to arrangements compositions of different styles and periods. It is important for students to alternate different styles by the mutual agreement, not limited only to classical and popular music, which is inherent for many of them. Particularly we always recommend them to reach out for the music of 20th century. From this it is popular only neoclassicism, rock-pop-jazz and chanson. Avant-garde and new "serious" or alternative music (including atypical jazz styles) are almost completely absent! Forcing the students to play compositions of unpopular music style is "like a boomerang." However, the respect for the teacher in the selection of music styles with regard to artistic level compositions we consider a natural part of education at all levels, at the university as well. Despite all the efforts to implant modern classical compositions and jazz music minority genres is, unfortunately, quite by few students accepted. They interpret and improvise rather ranging their favorite style, they almost always agree with a repertoire of classical, folk and popular music (*mainstream*). The composition-arrangement is very important. It should be adapted to the individual abilities of students and aesthetics of the

style in which the composition is arranged. The composition can be prepared in advance by a professional arranger or composer himself, also by the teacher or the student himself. It is not rare that popular songs and jazz music are arranged collectively in the ensemble. Each member of the ensemble plays his own part and at the same time he is adapted to the final band-sound.

Timetable (harmonogram)

In determining of the timetable of students' performances and presentations, the discipline and the stricter system which does not impede the continuity of teaching, is required. The exact timetable accurate determination of the date of presentation, interim and final evaluation — forcing students to be active, responsible for the study. If there are more ensembles in the classroom, during one lesson (range 40–45 minutes) two ensembles can be optimally presented. It happens especially at the end of the semester that because of fear of losing opportunities to be assessed, want ensembles performing at one-hour (for example at the last) lesson in the unacceptable number. It may also be the opposite case, that does not prepare any ensemble on the presentation, for some reason breaks timetable and lesson is missed, unused. The irresponsibility of students to work we qualify as a major lack, which is reflected in the overall assessment of the ensemble members. Ensemble artistic performance is evaluated (except of students with unexcused absences) as a whole, not individually. Each member of the group gets the same mark for the artistic performance. This will encourage more students to work together, learn to trust and assist one another in mutual dependence, which is reflected in the overall artistic performance of the group, on the collective behavior in the rehearsal room or on the stage.

Students must be given enough time to prepare compositions for presentation to an audience in the classroom and to prepare themselves for performances of any kind. In the presentation of several music groups throughout the semester in one class there is a disadvantage for those who go first. For this reason, the first few hours in semester are devoted to improvisation, chord-accompaniments etc. Here are presented mainly those students who are good at improvising and promptly to “play from sheet” (from notes).

Presentation of rehearsed repertoire

We have already mentioned that compositions arranged and presented with a high quality should be perfectly rehearsed. The composition is verbally introduced by students immediately before the performance. They inform about

the most important historiographical data, the profile of the author, or even do a short characterization and analysis of the composition. They describe common and their own musical interpretation problems. Subsequently, they play the composition. The presentation of composition should not take more than 5–7 minutes, to be time enough for music-critical discussion and the possibility of other artists performances on the same teaching lesson. But this is not a strict requirement.

Collective appraisal of performance

The idea of collective and individual evaluation both by colleagues in the classroom and teachers arose spontaneously from a practical musical life. It is natural that immediately after the concert or opera performance listeners or viewers leaving the concert hall and assess its level of interpretive sites, they share each other their immediate artistic experience. It is a need to assess the music production immediately, to express their impressions to each other, to exchange critical views on the artists' performance, the dramaturgy, the repertoire, scene, conducting and so on. Playing in the ensembles at the same time becomes a breeding ground for the musical-critical seminar. Here, students often learn for the first time to perform their own critical opinion, to cultivate rhetoric. They learn how to use special terms properly. They become more open to each other, but also learn to be sensitive, restrained and particularly tolerant to artistic performance of their colleagues. They become objective critics and democratic debaters, thus learn to accept and listen to the views of others. Here, the teacher can sensibly be involved in discussions, he expresses his opinions, gently guides the musicians, he can teach students about issues related to the performance or even another area of his own experience, touch the composition analysis. The teacher is often given space for his own ideas, advices, especially in stagnant debates or if performances are too short. We prefer the expression of students' critical opinion, not the teacher, especially if students are more active in the debate.

Overall importance and benefits of the subject: musical ensemble

Concerting in public or in front of teachers and fellow students in the classroom is always beneficial for students. This is often the only mental training required for the concentration of the artistic performance, that eliminate undesirable stage fright. Students have the opportunity to become familiar with quality professional repertoire of various genres of music. Valuable

work experience with others in the music ensemble is gained. Students have the unique opportunity to test their charisma-volume, to get a response from challenging, musically educated and talented students: from his colleagues in the classroom, the teacher or several teachers. They have the opportunity to experience themselves what is stage fright, responsibility for the preparation and implementation of the artistic production, not only artistically, but often materially and organizationally. Simply said: students mature artistically and humanely by this form of study.

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