

Bringing back classical music in the students' preferences and the challenges that a teacher faces during this process

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Abstract: *The 21st century represents for both teachers and students a period when imagination and adaptability must work at high levels. Due to the continuous flow of information children are no longer as interested in art as they were in the past and classical music is not in the top of their preferences. It is the duty of a music education teacher to slow down this trend and adapt the teaching methods so that students rediscover the qualities of this musical genre without feeling constrained by the circumstances. The methods that the teacher adopts to achieve this result are very important, interdisciplinarity being one of them. An approach between them and classical music can be done through cartoons, the music used in these productions being thus associated with elements that are already familiar to children.*

Key-words: *attentive listening; music education; classical music; cartoons.*

1. Introduction

Education in schools in the 21st century has become a challenge for teachers who must constantly adapt to a number of factors such as globalization and technology. The challenges encountered in class by teachers are everywhere, regardless of the subject they teach. In this article we will focus on music education on secondary school classes and the obstacles that need to be overcome in the process of knowledge transfer. According to the curriculum adopted in 2017, the general skills that students should develop by the end of the high school cycle within one hour per week are the following: 1. the expression of ideas, feelings, attitudes, through the interpretation of musical works; 2. operation with elements of writing-reading and musical language; 3. appreciation of musical works, including their affective, attitudinal and ideational content². Addressing all these areas of competence in a small study is impossible precisely that is why we will continue to discuss the third point of the curriculum - the musical audition - from the point of view of the finished product that the teacher must obtain together with students and all external factors that endanger performance achievement.

A major problem is the children's lack of interest in classical music, their preferences being at the opposite pole to the songs provided in the curriculum. It is therefore very important the way in which the teacher manages to bring to the attention of the students a genre of cult music without developing an immediate repulsion towards the arts of the past centuries. To be able to overcome all the obstacles of this process first of all a teacher must possess certain qualities one of them being the ability to communicate effectively³ with his students without creating a communication gap between him and his class. The observations that I will make below are based on both specialized studies conducted internationally and on the didactic activity that I carried out during the time with groups of students whose variables

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² Programa școlară pentru disciplina Educație Muzicală, clasele a V-a – a VIII-a, Anexa nr. 2 la ordinul educației naționale nr. 3393 / 28.02.2017, Ministerul Educației Naționale.

³ Dawn Elizabeth Bennett. 2008. *Understanding the classical music profession: the past, the present and strategies for the Future*. Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing Limited, p. 94.

such as age or social status differ, being able to do so the difference on the influences that these variables have on the group.

2. Objectives

The challenges faced by a teacher in creating a conducive environment for conducting music listening are many: disinterest in the art of the past centuries and management of a class of students where behavioral problems predominate. These are only two of the challenges and they will be presented in turn in the content of this study. The lack of interest in classical music has not appeared now, the decline of art and culture⁴ starting up after the Second World War. Although the quality of today's music is significantly lower than the one from the past composed by personalities such as Bach, Mozart, Brahms, etc, the artists who approach the classical genre today face financial difficulties, the inconsistency of the society and its inclination to scientific fields amplifying the difficulties that a musician is experiencing⁵. Under these conditions, how seriously can a school subject be considered which, in the opinion of many people, does not offer a stable future to the child who will be the future adult? Globalization and the age of technology have not only negative sides, however. They have offered young people endless possibilities of communication and through online platforms such as YouTube or iTunes they can come in contact with new information about the music culture of other people. Thus, students have unlimited possibilities to perform music auditions alone without the help of a teacher to guide them in this process.

However, all these facilities come with certain hidden dangers that can affect the harmonious development of the child. Indeed, it plays an important role in the social life of young people by facilitating communication between them, but the danger lies in the lyrics of many songs they listen to. There is no need for any specialized study to be able to see what occupies the first places in the preferences of the students and beyond. Take YouTube for example: if we access the option that shows the trends of the most visited videos, we will find that they contain lyrics and images that are inappropriate for a student's age. Unfortunately, in the absence of parental supervision over the activity his or her child carries out online, they get to listen to songs with explicit lyrics as they refer to violence, drugs or sex. This unrestricted exposure to inappropriate messages can cause behavioral changes⁶. Many studies show that music is a way in which young people face their own feelings in various emotional stages and their musical preferences reveal how tumultuous this stage is. In a study conducted in 2005 in the United States of America, it was found that 85% of young people between the ages of 8 - 18 years old listen on average for 2.5 hours a day to music. Since 2005 and so far, technology has advanced at an alarming rate and pop music is present everywhere including as background music in major shopping centers. Under these conditions, the risk of their exposure to a harmful environment of harmonious psychic and physical development has increased, even in cases where they use these songs strictly for fun.

I also got in touch within my professional activity as a music education teacher with the phenomenon of the lack of mass musical culture. Musical listening is an important part of music education in the secondary school and it is the teacher's duty to cultivate the aesthetic sense of the children especially in the conditions in which the collective of a class presents the characteristics mentioned above. The problem is, however, the way in which the teacher manages to cultivate children's interest in a musical genre that is not on the list of young

⁴ Joshua Fineberg. 2006. *Classical music, why bother? : hearing the world of contemporary culture through a composer's ears*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 2.

⁵ *Idem*, p. 14.

⁶ Council on Communications and Media. 2009. "Policy Statement - Impact of Music, Music Lyrics, and Music Videos on Children and Youth". *Pediatrics*. Volume 124, Number 5, p. 1488.

people's preferences. Faced with a repulsive attitude on the part of the students when I was beginning to listen to the songs belonging to the classical genre, I decided to stop this process for a short time and to devote more to building a trusting relationship between the teacher and the students in order to be able to better understand their musical preferences. In this way, based on a reciprocity relationship⁷, I became a receiver of the information transmitted to me by the students and would use the new things learned in the future. I should mention that what I wanted to do was not a specialized study, but a way that I considered appropriate to use to get to know the children better and to adapt my teaching techniques according to their answers.

So in an institution with about 700 students enrolled in secondary school I applied the following procedure: I told everyone to write at least five favorite songs or artists that they usually listen to. Although it seems simple, I had a reluctance on their part when I asked them to be honest and to write exactly what songs they were listening to, even if their title or content included words and topics that were inappropriate for their age. However, I managed to get their full cooperation when I assured them that no one would read their answers except me. The biggest fear of the students was that their parents would read it, most of them not knowing what songs children access in their free time. The prayers were more intense on the part of those between the ages of 10-12 years, those who were between the ages of 12 - 14 acknowledging that their parents know what their musical preferences are. I can not fail to mention a result that I have had after the completion of this action, namely the higher level of confidence that the students have gained from me. After analyzing the answers I found that out of about 700 children, only four of them offered some titles of compositions belonging to the classical genre. The genres of music they enjoy are pop, hip-hop, rap, trance or house from local or international music and the lyrics of the songs contain words that constantly refer to topics such as drugs, alcohol and sex.

Following the discussions with them trying to find out what attracts them to the respective songs, the answer offered mainly by everyone was that they are found in those lyrics. Given their age, it is hard to believe that a child of 10-14 years could find a common line with such harmful topics that also require the accumulation of a life experience in order to be able to debate them in an informed way. However, their exposure in the online environment makes it possible to have these preferences even if they have not had any experience related to any of these topics. Another answer that about one third of the students gave was that their parents listen to this kind of music at home and they in turn grew up with it. So this is the starting point of a music education teacher who has to perform during his hours musical auditions that include compositions of famous musicians such as Mozart or Bach but which for a child of the 21st century generation is an outdated topic with which his interests is not identified.

3. Material and Methods

Theoretically, music auditions should be done in classes because they are a constituent part of the curriculum and the achievement of the objectives set within it is a teacher's job. Practically, however, a musician must demonstrate his skills in order to be able to present to the children a more friendly face of classical music so that they do not reject this genre or accept this subject out of pure obligation. The interest of a teacher must be first and foremost to establish a bond of trust and respect between himself and his students so that he can then create a friendly framework for the information to be transmitted and perceived as valuable

⁷ Bister, Anna Backman. 2013. "Cultural Tools in the Classroom - A Tool to Develop the Musician?". In *Developing the Musician Contemporary Perspectives on Teaching and Learning*, ed. by Mary Stakelum, 231-247. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited. p. 231.

and not just a loss of time. Therefore, inventiveness and adaptability to different situations are essential qualities⁸ that a teacher must have and use them with all the formal and informal means and methods that he considers necessary for the fulfillment of the final goal.⁹ In these conditions, following the steps of conscious listening of a song will not be possible until a partnership link between teacher and students can be established. This is all the more important when the cultural values of the children do not even include the songs in the local folklore. We find, therefore, that the culture of their own origins presents low interest to students, being more attracted in current entertainment trends than in folklore. Starting from a similar observation on Hungarian folklore, Kodaly even implemented a pedagogical method of teaching music for the long-term maintenance of the local musical tradition. He identified the danger of the Hungarian peasant tradition and implemented a method of being reintroduced to schools in a way that is as accessible and enjoyable to children as possible.¹⁰

Another thing that a teacher must take into account in order for the musical listening to take place under optimal conditions is the correct management of the group of students. He must know them very well, have data on the social and family situation of the children identifying the possible problems that may affect their behavior during school activities. This is why it is very important for a teacher to relate to the behavior of the students and the causes of it trigger when developing a strategy to capture attention. Also, many children have a busy schedule, parents being most often those who put pressure on them by enrolling them in various extracurricular activities. There is, however, the opposite pole too: some of them may waste too much time on TV, computer, gaming. Therefore, a teacher must find a common denominator for the two categories of students so that it does not become a burden for those with already-loaded schedule and succeed in offering them beneficial alternatives of spending their free time to those who do not know how to handle their free time properly¹¹. We can also help them discover new passions and develop their talents, while nurturing their thirst for knowledge. Not all children can be gifted in one area: some may develop a fear of singing and others manage to draw more beautifully. However, everyone can have a high musical culture because this is the part of the music education curriculum that does not require talent but interest for knowledge.

Also, the facilities in today schools are far superior to those of the last century, supporting quality education. The way in which a work task is presented to the students is very important and their attention should not be focused on performing it just to get a high grade. It is more important for them to be aware that what they have to do adds value to their development and they can be brave researchers who are discovering new horizons full of knowledge. Only after understanding these aspects can other cultural activities be carried out outside of class time - for example watching a symphonic or live opera concert, in a theater without getting bored during the viewing or checking their phones to see what's new in the social environment.

Although we are in the 21st century, the approach of children to classical music through cartoons is not a new method, the growth of entire generations of young people being influenced in the 20th century by this practice. Various characters such as Bugs Bunny, Tom & Jerry, Mickey Mouse or the Disney Fantasia protagonists played musicians, pianists, dancers, singers or conductor roles: Woody Woodpecker sang Chopin; Tom & Jerry at Metropolitan Opera played a part of Carmen's opera by Georges Bizet. Between 1930-1950 was an explosion of this practice in cartoon studios like Disney or Warner Bros that had

⁸ Angeliki Triantafyllaki and Christina Anagnostopoulou. 2013. "Undergraduate Music Students' Experiences in Community Settings: Developing the Musician within a University Module ?". In *Developing the Musician Contemporary Perspectives on Teaching and Learning*, ed. by Mary Stakelum, 63-83. Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited. p. 66.

⁹ Bister, Anna Backman. *op. cit.* p. 242.

¹⁰ Evan Feldman. 2016. *Teaching with the Musical and Practical in Harmony*. New York: Routledge, p. 7.

¹¹ Estelle Ruth Jorgensen. 2008. *The art of teaching music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 228.

countless productions in which the classical repertoire abounds. The use of a theme from a classical music work in an animation combined with fun and entertainment is the key to the success of these productions. First of all, the comic scenes manage to attract the attention of the children and the sound accompaniment completes the message transmitted to the public. In the 1950s, with the development of the rock genre, classical music began to lose ground in front of it, its use in animation being made less rarely. In the 2000s it again started to play an important role in drawing thanks to the Disney *Fantasia 2000* premiere in 1999, which uses the same format as the 1940 version with improvements given by the evolution of science of course. Songs like Beethoven's 5th or Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, *Rhapsody in Blue* by Gershwin or *The Carnival of the Animals* by Saint-Saëns can be heard on the soundtrack.

In none of the animated productions does the whole work be heard, but only parts of it or characteristic themes that can be synchronized with the visual action and the gestures made by the characters.¹² In this case, the problem of degrading the quality of the melody can be posed. However, there is no deterioration of them because through these drawings a step is made in creating a connection between children and classical music without them perceiving it as boring and complicated. The teacher's intervention is primary after the completion of this first stage, his role then being to show the students what other qualities the whole musical work includes, what story is behind the original composition and what features it has. Thus a new universe will be created starting from the present work in the cartoons in which the children will discover the usefulness of the cult genre and its history. Everything must be demonstrated to the children through a user-friendly interface that preserves the atmosphere already created by the cartoons. Thus they will realize that classical music was already part of their life without them noticing.

One condition of the repertory of animated productions is that the audience must already be accustomed in one way or another with the respective works so that the final result to be successful. This is why we will see that passages from works that have become famous over time are used and already have a great sympathy behind them. One of the most beloved characters, Bugs Bunny is in many of his episodes accompanied by classical music¹³: *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, Op. 325 by Johann Strauss II (1868) and *The Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss II (1866) in *A Corny Concerto* (1943); *Dance of the Comedians from The Bartered Bride* by Bedrich Smetana (1866) in *Zoom and Bored* (1957); *Minute Waltz in D-Flat* by Frédéric Chopin (1847) in *Hyde and Hare* (1955); *Morning, Noon, and Night in Vienna* by Franz von Suppé (1844) in *Baton Bunny* (1959); *The Barber of Seville Overture* by Gioachino Rossini (1816) in *The Rabbit of Seville* (1950); *Beethoven's 7th* by Ludwig van Beethoven (1811-12) *A Ham in a Role* (1949); *Träumerei ("Dreaming")* by Robert Schumann (1838) in *Hare Ribbin'* (1944); *Largo al Factotum from The Barber of Seville* by Gioachino Rossini (1816) in *The Long-Haired Hare* (1949); Johannes Brahms' *Hungarian Dances* (1869) in *Pigs in a Polka* (1943); *The William Tell Overture* by Gioachino Rossini (1829) in *Bugs Bunny Rides Again* (1948); *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* by Franz Liszt (1847) in *Rhapsody Rabbit* (1946); *The Overture from The Flying Dutchman* by Richard Wagner (1843) in *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957); *Pilgrim's Chorus from Tannhäuser* by Richard Wagner (1845) in *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957); *Ride of the Valkyries* from *Die Walküre* by Richard Wagner (1870) in *What's Opera, Doc?* (1957); Mozart - *Die Zauberflöte*, K. 620: *Overture* in *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944)¹⁴.

Also we find famous classical compositions in other cartoons: Bizet - *Carmen Suite No. 1: VI. Les Toréadors in Carmen Get it – Tom & Jerry*; Beethoven - *Symphony No. 5 in C*

¹² Daniel Goldmark. 2005. *Tunes for 'toons: music and the Hollywood cartoon*. London: University of California Press. p. 110.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 111.

¹⁴ *Idem*, p. 107.

Minor, Op. 67: IV. Allegro in Pink Panther – Pink, Plunk, Plink; Mussorgsky - Night on a Bare Mountain in Disney Fantasia; Bach - Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D Major, BWV 1068: II. Air on the G String heard in The Looney Tunes Show; Liszt - Liebesträume, S. 541: No. 3 in A-Flat Major in Pizzicato Pussycat; Beethoven - Piano Sonata No. 14, Op. 27 No. 2 “Moonlight Sonata”: I. Adagio sostenuto in Peanuts (You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown); Chopin - Waltzes, Op. 34: No. 2 in A Minor, Grande valse brillante heard in The Flying Cat – Tom & Jerry; Chopin - Fantaisie impromptu in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 66 in Snowbody Loves Me – Tom & Jerry; Beethoven - Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 “Pastoral”: I. Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside heard in Disney Fantasia; Mozart - Piano Sonata in C Major, K.545: I. Allegro in Looney Tunes; Chopin - Études, Op. 10: No. 12 in C Minor, “Revolutionary” in Snowbody Loves Me – Tom & Jerry; Schubert - Symphony No. 8 in B Minor, D. 759 “Unfinished”: I. Allegro moderato in The Smurfs (Gargamel’s Theme); Mussorgsky - Pictures at an Exhibition: No. 1, Gnomus also in The Smurfs; Rimsky-Korsakov - The Tale of Tsar Saltan, Act III, Scene 1: “Flight of the Bumblebee” in Maestro Minnie; Strauss - On the Beautiful Blue Danube, Op. 314 in Silly Symphonies; Strauss - Die Fledermaus: Overture in Tom and Jerry at the Hollywood Bowl.

So the cartoons that teachers can use for teaching purposes are countless. Often there is the possibility for students to come up with suggestions regarding classical music they have heard in various older or even current animations. In this situation, it means that the attention has already been obtained successfully and their proposals can be taken into account, while increasing the confidence they have towards the teacher. The stages of performing an attentive listening can also be done if a video is viewed. Many times the gestures of the characters are synchronized with the melodic line, they are in fact an extension of it. Thus, after completing the watching, the teacher can ask questions regarding terms of shades, movement, accents, rhythm, tempo changes, what musical instruments are heard, what mood induces that melodic line¹⁵, etc. After the children have been acquainted with the respective melodic line, the passage to the original work can be made only on audio medium where the whole work or a larger part of it will be listened to. Following this hearing, comparisons will be made between the two hypotheses in which the respective piece belonging to the classical genre was presented.

4. Conclusions

Classical music has a growing interest among young people. Preserving its cultural values can be done in schools during the music education classes, but it is very important the way in which it will be achieved. A major objective to be fulfilled within the curriculum is to carry out attentive listening, following some steps in its correct execution. Performing these steps without them being made of pleasure can generate an even greater gap between students and classical music, the main actor who can stop this being the teacher who must show authenticity and inventiveness. The use of interdisciplinarity can be the saving solution and the one that makes this process easier to follow is paradoxically the technology that has led to a degradation of art among students and beyond. Therefore, this two-edged weapon, technology, can become indispensable when handled by a teacher who understands the values, creed and essence of quality education focused primarily on the needs of children. The main purpose of this study was not to analyze the classical music present in various animation productions but to identify certain methods and means that the music education teacher can use to obtain the cooperation of the group of students and to reach a result in order to change the perception. students on classical music.

¹⁵ Patricia Shehan Campbell. 2016. “World Music Pedagogy: Where Music Meets Culture in Classroom Practice”. In *Teaching General Music*, ed. by Carlos R. Abril and Brent M. Gault, 89-112. New York, Oxford University Press. p. 97.

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