

Peter Röbbke, Vienna

New perspectives in music education – a note about music schools in Austria

I think we have to make a decision! Reflecting on “new perspectives in music education” - what is our starting point? Is it the world of music as an art, the world of the masterworks, the world of “sheet music”, written compositions with every musical detail under control of the author (“created by few, performed by many”)? If we relate above all to oeuvre music, then the training of musicians means the acquisition of motor schemes, the automatization of proper movements on one hand, and the analysis and understanding of the composition on the other – in order to fulfill the technical demands of the composition as well as to meet composer’s will in the process of interpretation.

Or: Do we focus on the “drivers”, the motives of the musik making individual, the needs and interests of the “musicking” (to use a term of Christopher Small) human being. The question is: Is our reference point not the world of music as an art but the musical action itself – as an action of communicating emotion musically, an action of creating and moulding affective states in sound, an action which transforms everyday gestures into musical gestures¹?

If we concentrate on the inner life of “music making”² people it becomes evident that expressing oneself musically not only gives a feeling of self-efficacy, of producing something important, of gaining the respect and love of others (sports would do the same), it also reveals the singularity, the exclusivity of musical expression: there is probably no other way in the human repertoire of expressive actions which is so intensive and direct and so formed, cultivated, yes: beautiful at the same time! And that’s why I do say: Music making really matters!

The idea that the musician himself is the archimedic point of music education leads me towards a total musical openmindedness: Fundamentally, there is no difference between somebody who expresses himself by rapping rhymes or playing heavy metal and somebody who wants to talk in sounds on the basis of a Schubert piece. And please allow me to quote a passage of the new Austrian curriculum for music schools:

The focus of music education at music school lies on making music in a competent and vivid way, and above all on making music together: elementary music making, improvisation, conducting and performing

¹ Helmuth Figdor / Peter Röbbke: Das Musizieren und die Gefühle. Instrumentalpädagogik und Psychoanalyse im Dialog („Music making and the emotions. A dialogue between instrumental education and psycho-analysis“), Mainz (D) 2008, Schott Music

² It’s a pity that there is no English word for the German “Musizieren” which focusses on the musician!

classical works, playing in the styles of rock, pop and jazz or folk music, multimedia performing and so on. Without ignoring the importance of musical works in the development of music in Europe and without forgetting that dealing with music as an art is part of our educational targets: a broad understanding of what making music is all about goes beyond the performance of musical works.³

And let me now talk about the consequences for the structures of music schools: If we put the most emphasis on the training of the professional aftergrowth (those people whose job will be to reproduce and interpret “sheet music” for an audience) music schools follow the idea of a pyramid: At the end, in the age of 16 or 18, you need a certain amount of highly motivated and talented and well trained kids who pass the final exam at the music school and succeed in the audition of the conservatoire. Of course, you start with a broader basis and find out – by systematic evaluation and selection – those who are able to fulfill the needs of a professional life as a musician (you feel the Darwin touch: survival of the musical fittest – those who failed are allowed later on to listen to the successful, they then form up the audience...).

But without denying or ignoring that the professional training is an important purpose for music schools: In Austria – in a country of only 8 million inhabitants – we got 170.000 students at public music schools and we know by research, that less than one percent goes the professional way (and looking at the numbers of participants in our university auditions I have to say: That’s truly enough!). So, it would be absurd to look upon the other 168.000 students, who don’t ever reach the university, as a mass of drop outs! So we have to exchange the picture of the pyramide for a picture of a peculiar Y: one branch very small for the young professionals and the other very broad and with no limitation for the amateurs. Nobody is excluded, neither the handicapped student, nor the adult beginner, neither the rock singer, nor the folk musician!⁴

The work with amateurs in the best sense of the word (the Latin word amare means to love someone or something!) has its own pride and dignity, its own sense and meaning, although these people never reach the top (and they don’t even want to!) and although all what they can reach is to enjoy music making and playing on an individually appropriate level, and that means reaching excellence in individual measures. And if somebody stops his instrumental lesson f.i. in the age of 14, my hope would be that he is not a drop out, but he

³ *Im Mittelpunkt der Musikschararbeit steht das qualifizierte und lebendige Musizieren... – vor allem jenes in der Gemeinschaft: elementares Musizieren, Improvisation, das Dirigieren oder Spielen von klassischen Werken, Musizieren in den verschiedenen Stilistiken von Rock, Pop und Jazz, ... volksmusikalische Praktiken, multimediale Musizierformen. So wichtig in der europäischen Musikentwicklung auch die musikalischen Kunstwerke sein mögen und so sehr die Auseinandersetzung mit der Kunstmusik auch Teil einer Bildungsaufgabe sein mag: Ein weit gespannter Begriff des ... Musizierens geht nicht allein in der Wiedergabe von Werken auf. www.komu.at*

⁴ And why not reaching really everybody as the German project „Jedem Kind ein Instrument“ (www.jedemkind.de) - „An instrument to every child“ claims...

only interrupted, my hope is that he comes back to practical music when he is an adult, my hope is that making music keeps on being an important and necessary part of his life. So: no drop outs, just interrupters! And therefore music schools need a lifelong perspective, should develop – beyond the regular curriculum – a lot of easy accessible offerings, should f.i. provide vocal coaching for adult choir member and instrumental “clinics” for the violin player in the amateur symphony orchestra. A music school should be a school which inspires formal and informal learning and provides formal and non-formal teaching, a school which transforms itself more and more into a center of music education competence for all generations, all styles, all levels of excellence.

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Sehr geehrter Herr Röbbke,
mit dieser Email möchte ich Ihnen gerne weitere Informationen zur Diskussionsrunde im Rahmen der EMC Jahreskonferenz in Brno geben.
Bitte erlauben Sie mir, dass ich die wesentlichen Informationen auf Englisch weiterleite, da Sie dadurch die gleichen Informationen erhalten wie Ihre Mitdiskutanten.
Bei der Runde handelt es sich um einen sog. "interactive round table", der von EMC-Vorstandsmitglied Harald Huber geleitet wird. Außer Ihnen nehmen noch Dame Janet Ritterman und Aage Hagen an der Runde teil.

Und nun weiter auf Englisch:
The concept of the "interactive round table":

- you are invited to give a short statement on "new perspectives in music education" - this statement should be approx. 5 minutes
- your statement as well as the statements of the other experts will serve as a basis for the discussion
- after the experts' statements the conference participants will gather in small groups to start a more in-depth discussion on "new perspectives in music education"
- you, as an expert, are invited to join one of these discussion groups
- the group discussion will take 45 minutes
- at the end of the group discussion the moderator will collect the most important results and open questions from the groups through asking them directly via microphone

In your short statement I would like to suggest that you focus on new perspectives in music education at music schools. Dame Janet Ritterman will probably focus on new perspectives of music education with regards to lifelong learning. Aage Hagen will probably focus on music universities and the challenges of starting a professional career after graduation.

For our programme brochure we would like to include a short biography (10 lines) as well as a picture of all experts, therefore, I would like to ask you if you could provide us with these documents.

Falls Sie noch weitere Fragen haben können Sie sich jederzeit gerne an mich wenden,
ich freue mich schon Sie persönlich in Brno kennen zu lernen,
mit freundlichen Grüßen

Simone Dudt

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