

Valeri Brainin

**“MUSIC CULTURE” AS A SUBJECT IN SCHOOL CURRICULA  
(GRADES 1 THROUGH 12)<sup>1</sup>**

1.

The program proposed in this paper targets children 6 years of age and up. Any new program for music lessons in a regular school has to answer the following questions: Why this or that program is necessary? What purpose has not been achieved by means of the available programs? A school tries to give a child a minimum of the necessary knowledge. So-called systematic education reproduces a structure of ready knowledge in the educational process. However, the process of knowledge acquisition and knowledge proper are two different things. Teachers have acquired knowledge through trial and error. It is impossible to impart knowledge mechanically; it is, on the other hand, possible to acquire knowledge. One seeks out and absorbs knowledge only if one is interested. Awakening that interest and giving direction to the search is the task of the teacher.

C. 49

2.

Contemporary music education has various aims, including equipping pupils with knowledge of musical culture. Various information from the field of music history

---

<sup>1</sup> Published in: Conference Proceedings of the International Conference “Problems of the modern musical culture in the educational context”, Kaliningrad, Russia, 25-27 of October 2002. – C. 48-51.

is systematized chronologically or by genres. This is accompanied with some general information about music theory. However, pupils usually have no overview of the subject as a whole, i.e. they do not understand why they have to learn music, and they have no interest in receiving abstract knowledge. All this can be interesting only if the music itself will be internalized, “passed through one’s self”, heard by the ear within.

### 3.

The author of this paper suggests an integrating course that includes ear training, music theory, and music literature. In this course, music literature should be the main part, with ear training and theory serving as its aids. By “music literature”, the author means first of all acquaintance with pieces of classical music – from Renaissance to Classic Modern Age including some of Jazz. Why not Pop and Rock? To avoid a long discussion, I will merely point out that children and youth have enough motivation for this kind of music and so it is not necessary to spend time in the classroom on things children discover on their own. The suggested program is in the western (European, American etc.) tradition of music education. As for non-European music (e.g. Indian, Japanese, African etc.), acquaintance with it calls for quite a developed ear for music and is planned for a later stage of studies.

### 4.

Singing (solfeccio) of fragments from musical pieces is the basis of the program. Pupils have to learn the fragments by heart. Then they have to recognize the fragments in the piece as a whole, which they listen to on recordings (special CD-samplers). In addition to hearing these recordings at school, pupils also listen to them at home. The author can, after a long-standing educational experience, confidently say that children listen to these records repeatedly and with pleasure. Children are actually faced with a big though completely feasible task of singing

along and letting the music "affect" them, thus internalizing our great cultural heritage. This is accompanied by information about the composer, the epoch, the style, the country, and the piece, as well as by expositions of opera and ballet librettos revised by the author of this paper: everything in popularized form. However, these "literary tools" can only play an auxiliary role. It is evident that it does not lead to learning and thinking about music in terms of music, perceiving music as an "intoned process", not translatable into any other language. Here we are referring to direct aural perception that leads to the understanding of a musical piece.

C. 50

5.

The perception of music can be viewed as the reception of a series of signals. These signals appear with some probability, which depends on the previous knowledge of the listener. The discovery of something that others have not previously come across but that nonetheless is a possibility, given the existing music language system, results in an "artistic discovery". It is clear, however, that a beginner does not have a large reserve of musical information, and for him, every musical phenomenon becomes a discovery and only with the continuation of study, do these discoveries become part of his experience and thus his expectations. The author is interested in developing the ability to "predict" how a musical text may unfold. This means that every "intonational piece of knowledge" is formed into a stereotype, which is then slowly destroyed with the help of a new piece of information (discovery), which gradually becomes the new stereotype to be destroyed, and so on.

6.

The didactic repertoire is not systematized chronologically or in genres. A chronological systematization starts after the accumulation of a corresponding

thesaurus – in approximately the fifth-to-seventh year of instruction. Nevertheless, the material is systematized. The principle of this systematization is a gradual augmentation of the “intonation dictionary”.

7.

The author’s teaching method is based both on the ideas of semiotics and information theory, and on the known effective methods of the development of musical ear. Perception is regarded as a homeostatic system reacting on the disturbances, which come from a musical text. The original form of a relative solmisation with a “fixed tonic” is used as an aid for learning the musical fragments and as ear training.

8.

The author also proposes a graphical model of the musical scale, expressing the reciprocal relationship of “attraction and repulsion” between the degrees of the musical scale (according to the theory of Alexey Ogolevec, not only is there attraction between two degrees at the distance of a diatonic half-tone, but also, as in physics, repulsion between two degrees at the distance of the chromatic half-tone). Based on the interdependence of the degrees of the scale and colours, the author developed a special colour scheme, which is used as didactic material during lessons. The model comprises 5, 7, and 12 different notes for every key, identical to the European, as well as a number of Non-European, musical system of pitches. There are 17 different notes for every key, identical to the Arab-Iranian system and 22 different notes, identical to the Indian system "sruti" (this model is patented).

## 9.

From the start a sense of rhythm is developed. This is maybe the most original part of the system, but it is a topic for a separate paper. However, the pupils have an overview of the whole in advance. They are acquainted with the "intonation dictionary" through a visual representation of the musical tone system one degree at a time, awaiting being introduced to the rest of the scale. They know in advance what collection of musical pieces they will learn in the course of the year and await them with impatience. Every musical fragment makes "an information field" around itself. After a few years of contact with many "fields", empty spaces will be filled and the whole picture will be restructured like the "aha" experience of Gestalt psychology.

## 10.

The pupils are motivated to seek out additional information both in the field of music itself, and in the field of literature about music. The chief driving force becomes the information's emotional content, as opposed to it being purely intellectual. The more our emotions are influenced, the better we can retain information. Only emotional participation in the process of studying can motivate the child to enlarge and to systematize his or her knowledge.