

Music Teacher Training in Hungary: Problems and Possible Solutions

One year after Zoltán Kodály's death (1967) great economical and changes began in Hungary. Those changes proved necessarily useful for the living standard of Hungarian people and for the political-economical connections of the non-liberalized country. But (what a strange and thankless situation!) they proved really harmful in the officially and world-wide accepted musical education, based on the Kodály Concept. The "good" crisis of the society caused a "bad" crisis in the system of teaching

The musical education in Hungary was based on the folk music and relative solmization ("sol-fa teaching"). Kodály's most important plan was that the children had to learn Hungarian folk music as their "musical mother tongue". This Asian origin music was totally different from the world of Slavish and German folk songs, especially the so-called "old-style" tunes. These kinds of melodies had pentatonic scales without semitones and descending melodic lines. The children were able to learn easily the songs using the sol-fa syllables invented by Guido d'Arezzo. These sol-fa letters were not used in the absolute sense; the names indicated only the functional position of the notes, which is identical and relative in all keys – so the teachers could accommodate to the children's condition of voice. The bases of the education were the numerous pedagogical works of Kodály.

The foundations of the musical education were laid at the kindergarten. Music played a very important role during the eight years of primary school and also in the four years of secondary school. In the first years of primary school children had "singing and music" (as the still existing, but not too successful terminology said) two or three times a week; and nearly every day in the so-called musical primary school. In these schools children were taught by qualified music teachers educated usually at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music. These institutions became the strongest basis of the Concept, with excellent children's choirs conducted by well-educated and "committed" teachers. A great number of foreign experts visited these schools even in the late seventies and admired the children's perfect knowledge of relative solmization, solfège, Hungarian folk songs and the works of Hungarian composers (mainly those of Kodály).

Children made gradual process in writing and reading music as well; they learned how to classify and analyse Hungarian folk songs, according to key, mode,

structure, rhythm, metre, style, and even region and historic-social background. They listened and sang also classic music; songs, canons, chorals, homophonic and polyphonic pieces. The main purpose of the music primary school was to give opportunities for learning music to the greatest possible number of children. Lots of pupils could attend a six-year course at state music school even in their primary school years. In these schools, in addition to the main (instrumental) subjects, there were compulsory lessons of solfège too. Those who didn't intend to make a musical career were able to continue their learning in the music school, but those who finished the lower grades, could choose music as a profession too, making an entrance examination to a musical secondary school.

On the highest level, music education was organized by the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest alone. The training of choir conductors and singing teachers has been combined into a single department. This branch of study was centred on teaching singing and music in school and a thorough grounding in the work of a choir conductor. At the final exam every student was required to give a singing lesson in a primary or secondary school class before the exam committee and to conduct several works at a concert with a choir. Every student studied music theory, solfège and piano to the level required for teaching in school. The Academy had six faculties for instrumental teachers in the bigger cities of Hungary. For all the teachers, solfège was a compulsory and emphasized subject.

But this well-organized, good-looking and officially supported method fell down in the eighties showing its shortages – because of the changes in the society, behaviour and way of thinking.

The unfavourable influences mentioned above did not appear immediately of course; all the characteristic elements of the Kodály Method subsisted in school and especially in the musical primary school for a few years. But the enthusiastic music teachers encountered more and more obstacles when they wanted to organize a journey or an appearance for the pupils, financial and social difficulties as well (e. g. “we have not enough money to do it”, or “the children have other more important programs than singing”). In the eighties – when Hungary began to open to the market world – foreign languages, mathematics and computer skills became the most important subjects at school. “Singing and music” immediately lost its prestige completely.

That was a very sad thing for Hungarian education and was really a great shock for musicians educated on the basis of the Kodály Concept. A lot of musical primary school changed their profile and at the so-called “normal” (non-music) school the directors degraded singing, reducing the number of music lessons as much as they could. The society revenged itself on the earlier favourite (it was an ungrateful reaction again!) and the reputation of singing teachers became “equal to that of receptionists” (as the gossip said). The new “enemies”, pop and rock music also appeared in those days and they immediately gained all the power in

Hungarian musical life. Unfortunately the very rigid and arrogant reaction of the so-called “serious musicians” alienated “light music” fans – mainly young men, so the cultural circle of classical and folk music suddenly became an isolated phenomenon in Hungary, with little support and social prestige.

The music school, which former was strongly supported by the state (the pupils had to pay only a symbolic amount for high quality service), needed more and more money from the parents but, despite that, the teachers had to make more and more sacrifice to save their job. The society began to loose step by step the interest which it had taken in classical music – and in the music teachers who worked for the public education. Naturally, music teacher training reflected these negative processes (which, by the way, have not finished yet...); the students produced less and less at the entrance exam, so the universities must have reduced their requirements.

Looking this catastrophe, musical experts began to make operation plans in the second half of the 1980s (at last). That started at the same time when another important political and economical change happened; in Hungary we call it “change of regime”, which meant the liberalization of the country. The most important step was the start of a new concept in teacher training. The situation was not only qualitatively but also quantitatively very bad. Musicians could realize that the policy of the “ancient regime” was useful only for the “shop-window”; while some musical primary and secondary school in the bigger towns worked excellently, schools of the unfrequented regions and districts was full of singing teachers who taught children without any or convenient degree.

Suddenly became clear that there were far not enough universities or colleges in Hungary where good experts of music and methodology could instruct good singing teachers.

The first institute that started the process of renewing was the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest (in Hungarian: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem “ELTE”, where the Music Department, the first institution for music teacher and choir leader students at a teacher training level, founded in 1984, qualifying music teachers for primary and music school. In the beginning, the area of teacher training had been divided in two parts; that was the Choir Conducting Department of the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, which instructed the secondary school teachers (its exact name was “training of choir conductors and singing teachers for secondary school”), while primary school teachers was trained in the Music Department of the Teacher Training College of ELTE. Later this situation has been changed, together with the changes of the Hungarian educational system. The Music Department offered three different branches of study; Music and Choir conducting (a four year training for full-time and part-time students), Music Teacher (three years for part-time students) and Solfège (three years for full-time or part-time students). A few years after, the training started in other towns

of Hungary which took place in different regions of the country. Artistically and methodologically the Music Department of ELTE controlled of the other Hungarian teacher training colleges, so the students getting a degree in these institutes could substitute step by step their colleagues, who sometimes did not even have degrees, in the primary and secondary school.

Later, in consequence of the reorganisation at the Eötvös Loránd University, the Music Department – for the ceasing of the Teacher Training College Faculty – became the part of the Faculty of Humanities. There was a great occasion for the instructors (who were performing musicians at the same time) to utilize the influences of three different branches of study, the training of music teachers, artists and human intellectuals.

The Music Department of ELTE has 17 full-time and (occasionally) 3-6 part-time instructors who teach more than hundred students in the different forms of trainings. In the next school-term we start our 3 years Music Bachelor (BA) undergraduate degree program, according to the standards of the European Union; it means that these branches of trainings mentioned above will have been contracted into one unified program for the training of so-called “musical experts”. From 2009, music teachers will be trained in a Master (MA) program of 2 years – this program will be presented in this term of education. For the time being there is no organised form of studies abroad, however, students take a study trip abroad (international choir competitions, festivals, conferences) at least once a year, usually as a member of the two choirs of the Music Department. The Department organises yearly its international musical course, where famous European choir leaders give lectures and conduct the student choirs. The festivals and educational training programs for teachers and conductors are usually based on special topics of vocal music, such as the former „Festival of the Choirs of Teacher Training Colleges in Hungary”, the generally organized festivals for the honour of Bartók and Kodály, or the Ancient Music Days. Besides the concerts the program always includes a professional symposium, where well-known lecturers speak and hold round-table discussions about actual problems associated with the theme.

The research area of the Department, as some cited examples show, also connects to the tasks and problems of music teacher training. Our main research themes in the former years have been the followings: “New ways of teaching Methodology – introducing the Kodály–Ádám music textbook in primary school”; “Ways of teaching polyphonic choirs, interpreting 20th century choir works in school” “Our »musical foreign language«, the teaching of music” (and so on). The training program of the Music Department of Eötvös Loránd University is based on the well-known Kodály Method but it is able to respond to the new challenges as well. It suits the European higher education program and it has connections with other music-education systems. There are still existing common projects with European universities.

Though the main difficulties were solved by the new program of the Hungarian music teacher training, other problems have occurred because of the changed situation in the higher education and in the whole society.

The most important problem of travelling abroad both for research or musical performance (even for students as choir-members) is a typically Eastern-European phenomenon; that is the shortage of money and the lack of well-instructed administrative staff who have enough time to fill the complicated and long application forms of the European Union projects and to organize the heavy bureaucratic tasks. The Music Department is continuously looking for new sources for financial support. Our festivals and educational training programs are supported permanently by the National Cultural Found and sometimes by the Self-Government of Budapest – and the Self-Government of the Students of ELTE also often helps our students in their study-tours. Since the Department has become the member of the Faculty of Humanities, the Centre of Arts-Organization, Proposal and Innovation of the university frequently gives advices to find the best sources of available proposals. Nevertheless, the satisfying solution for continuous watching of the possibilities of proposals and an educated staff to manage them is still missing – though it would be essential for a branch of study, where travelling is needed permanently.

After the connection of the European Higher Education Area, those Hungarian qualified instructors (mainly associate professors but lecturers as well) who worked for any branches of art have been obliged to enter DLA education – previously that was not necessary even for a college or sometimes a university professor. For musicians the only possibility to carry out this task was to take an entrance exam of the adequate course of Liszt Ferenc University of Music (the former Music Academy) in Budapest. Unfortunately, mainly from financial reason, most of the DLA educations could start only 3-5 years after this declaration, so a great number of instructors would have absolved the program very urgently. It's questionable if music faculties of other Hungarian universities would be able to start DLA education, so the requirement might be accomplished by graduating doctoral courses either in abroad – perhaps in Hungarian speaking areas of the neighbour countries – or from another branch of arts, e.g. pedagogy.

In Hungary the education of arts, including music, have only got the possibility to start the Bachelor – Master form of education for the term of 2006/2007. This type of training would make the mobility of the students easier towards European universities, but could cause special difficulties in the training of musicians and music teachers. First of all, a student who wouldn't be able to start MA course could gain only a degree nominated as “musical expert”. Because this kind of degree will not be enough for teaching in any type of school, a detailed and continuous market research will be necessary for the students to find a job after graduation – possibly in cultural institutes operated by the state, local councils

or churches. Another difficulty of the Bologna-type project is the grouping of the former 4 year curriculum to a 3+2 year system. In the Bachelor program students have to carry out the requirements of so-called ability subjects (e.g. piano, singing or solfège) far more quicker than before, to get through to the level requested for the final exam. But, on the other hand, those who can get into the Master have one plus year to improve this abilities further. To sign the “BA-frontiers” of a subject have to be instructed according to a chronological system is also an important question; the staff must choose, either the curriculum could contain the 20th century (e.g. from music history) or, at the end of the third year, the program would “stop in the 19th century” – trying to avoid overdoing or to cause a smattering of knowledge. Therefore the revision of the curriculum and the methodology of teaching of each subject are necessary from year to year.

The Faculty of Humanities of ELTE wants to start a unified teacher training Master program in 2009, which can give – according to its modular system – different qualifications for the students. It means that there are no separate teacher training degree programs (e.g. history or music teacher), but one can gain the special qualification within this Master program.

The teacher training degree program of ELTE is modularly structured and consists of 4 modules; the first and the second one give the two qualifications of teacher training (e.g. history teacher and music teacher – this kind of training system qualifies always for two degree programs in Hungary), while the third and the fourth one are the modules of pedagogy-psychology and practical training. The curricula of modules of the professional area are processed by the department or institute responsible for the given subjects. But, because of the transferability among the higher education institutes and the associability of the modular structure, a unified scheme has become necessary for each professional area. This solution might cause some problems in the field of music teacher training, in consequence of its special methodical claims and tasks (e.g. the great number of the practice teaching in school, which is indispensable for the teaching of an ability subject).

With reducing of the number of singing lessons in the school the possibilities of music teaching in Hungary have also changed. So, the methodology of classroom music teacher training must have accommodated to the circumstances indicating new purposes with new ways of approaching. On the basis of the above mentioned researching theme “Our »musical foreign language«, the teaching of music” the Music Department worked out the main principles of these new ways, and a summary of the most important directives have been published in the previous year in the form of an essay. The higher education schoolbook, which contented this study, was a common work of the methodology instructors of each departments of the formerly existed Teacher Training College Faculty of ELTE, under the title of “Let’s learn, but how?” (published by the Hungarian School-

book Edition).¹ This essay tried to summarize the main things to be done for the pupils, parents and teachers in connection with the singing lesson and homework – which were the following:

The “phantom” of the homework – what do I have to learn from singing and music? (How is it possible to learn this subject? What kind of tasks have I got to do that? What kind of help could I got to do that?)

Operation plan– a remembering summary of the previous lesson, before doing the homework

(What was the process of the learning in the school? What was the recapitulation exercise we made before the new lesson? What kind of practicing exercises we did? What kind of help I’ve got to do that? [E.g. the 5 lines, chironomic signs, measuring beat.] What kind of melodic phrase or turn of melodic phrase I was able to observe?)

A concert at home – ideas for practicing at home

(The contents and relations of the text; emphasizing of rhymes and repeated text – connecting the other parts to these memorized lines; learning a song by heart; learning a song as in a “final rehearsal” and in a “concert”.)

Music history and music theory in the school

Composers and simple people

(What can be similar between a great artist and us? Learn history as a “boulevard-story”.)

Impressing of the musical terminologies

(What can be similar between a difficult word of a foreign language and a phonetic character of a simple Hungarian word?)

Musical “crosswords

(Creative exercises; making compositions and texts.)

The freedom of learning

(How can I learn without homework?)

These are the main elements of the teacher training concept of the Music Department of ELTE. We think that the music teachers trained according to this new concept have the task to find again the place of folk, classical and contemporary music in Hungarian musical life. The most important thing is to make the subject of music “live”; the students (and the instructors) need to know various musical styles and they also have to be able to perform different kind of pieces. Their duty is to maintain the special Hungarian choir culture and folk music tradition, the useful method of relative solmization and solfège-learning, but to connect these traditions with the new educational trends as well.

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¹ Bodnár Gábor et al., „Zenei idegen nyelvünk” – az ének-zene tanulása,” in *Tanuljunk, de hogyan?*, szerk. Katona András, (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 2005), 270-279.