

## The Principles of Orff-Schulwerk

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So, what is “Orff-Schulwerk” actually? – It is certainly remarkable that this fundamental question arises even when one has engaged in a long intensive pursuit of the pedagogical ideas of Gunild Keetman and Carl Orff. Does the term Orff-Schulwerk represent only the printed material in the five volumes “Music for Children”<sup>1</sup>? Does it stand for a particular teaching style in music pedagogy, or in general for unconventional, creative activities with children in the area of music, dance and speech?

With such fundamental doubts, it is not surprising that there have always been attempts to search for categories of Orff-Schulwerk in order to present its characteristics in a comprehensive way.<sup>2</sup>

We can assume that even Carl Orff himself was aware that the description of the essentials of his Schulwerk resisted a simple straightforward definition. Thus, he starts his oft-quoted lecture “Das Orff-Schulwerk – Rückblick und Ausblick”<sup>3</sup> (Orff-Schulwerk – Past & Future) in 1963 with this fundamental question, many years after his pedagogical ideas had already found their international recognition. His answer helps only indirectly and leaves room for individual interpretation: He points to the history of its origin (referring to the “prehistory” in the Günther-Schule and the practical implementation as a school radio program in 1948). In this context, he also uses his much-cited picture of the “Wildwuchs”<sup>4</sup> (rank growth). Thus, we learn that the Schulwerk is NOT the result of a clearly thought-out didactic plan and that it can exist and be effective even without systematization.

If we try to use the word “Schulwerk” as an interpretative approach, this does not solve the problem either. “Schulwerk” was a newly coined word that can also be found in Paul Hindemith’s works (“Schulwerk für Instrumentalspiel”, op. 44, 1927) and as the title of violin manuals (Geigen-Schulwerk, 1932-1950) by Erich and Elma Doflein. At the very least, a comparison of these shows a fundamental similarity: Rather than using simple exercises, all three concepts employ authentic compositions that correspond to the learner’s ability.

With this in mind, it would be natural to call “Schulwerk” exclusively the published material in the famous “five volumes” by Orff and Keetman and the supplementary editions. But if we keep in mind that, during an international summer course with well-known experts in Orff-Schulwerk these original pieces may constitute only a fraction of the used material, along with songs and dances of different cultural origins and creations by the teachers and participants, then we realize that this definition attempt would also be too narrow.

Of course, the artistic and aesthetic quality of the short music pieces created as models by Orff and Keetman is beyond any doubt. However, we have to recognize that the musical reality of our time has changed considerably and cannot anymore be represented exclusively by the musical language of Orff and Keetman. Even more important is the fact that a printed representation of dance and movement in general is very difficult. Therefore, in the volumes mentioned, dance, as one of the fundamental aspects of Orff-Schulwerk, is limited to a few notes in the appendix. To summarize all these considerations, we must also recognize that the term Orff-Schulwerk evades a simple definition and that it may lose itself in vagueness and can lead to misinterpretations.

In the course of the preparation and realization of the annual meetings of collaborators and members of the "International Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg", Barbara Haselbach and I have seen the necessity to find a description of the pedagogical concept of Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman, which could serve as a base for the cooperation with and between the national Orff-Schulwerk Associations and Associated Institutions.<sup>5</sup>

The description we propose is based on the characteristic way of teaching and other typical features that are essential to put the artistic and pedagogical spirit of the Orff-Schulwerk into practice. We call these features the "Principles of Orff-Schulwerk". Of course, some of these principles may also apply to other music and dance education concepts. We only speak of a working and teaching style that corresponds to the Orff-Schulwerk if all these characteristics are present and are incorporated in the work process.

### 1. The individual is at the centre

Undoubtedly other music pedagogical concepts will also claim his principle. Therefore, a more detailed explanation must be given: Carl Orff's intention is that the students experience themselves as creative persons and thereby grow in personality. Orff calls it "Menschenbildung" (the development of human character). The objective of the Orff-Schulwerk is not primarily "to learn music and music theory" in order to find one's own musical expression. It is rather that the student can create his own music in order "to understand music". The short music pieces, dances and songs in the five volumes are intended to inspire, to be models and examples for work in the classroom. Of course, the teacher helps in the development process so that the student can identify with "his" music. One can describe it with the following picture: The Orff-Schulwerk does not want to lead the child to ("great") music, but bring music to the child. When a child experiences himself as a "music-maker" in the way described, one can expect that it is motivated to search for "the great world of music in its fascinating variety" over time. The concept of Orff and Keetman is "learning by making music", in contrast to the traditional way of "learning in order to be able to make music."

### 2. The social dimension

Group work is the social form of teaching best suited to the Orff-Schulwerk. Everyone learns from everyone; rivalries and tendencies of competition are to be avoided carefully. This requires corresponding conduct of the teacher, for the teacher should not be the prominent, all-important instance. He points the way and makes suggestions. He gives the students enough room to co-determine and promote forms of cooperation. In the group, the various forms of expression in their interaction (dancing, singing, and speaking) can be experienced very well.

### 3. Music is an integral term

"Elemental music is never music alone but forms a unity with movement, dance and speech. It is music that one makes oneself, in which one takes part not as a listener but as a participant."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, when, in working with the Orff-Schulwerk we speak about (Elemental) music, it is always understood that singing, dancing, playing instruments are equal, complementary and connected forms of expression. Carl Orff found this interplay of the different artistic activities realized in the ancient Greek theatre where all forms of representation were summarized, from singing to declamation, dancing and instrumental playing, under the term "musike techne". This wide-ranging musical concept of the Orff-

Schulwerk also invites stretching the arch further and creates bridges to other artistic forms of expression (for example, to the visual arts or poetry).<sup>7</sup>

“A person sensitive to movement, [...] can also experience movement visually; if we give them a piece of clay [...] they will be able with very little practise to create sculptures that are movement-related and spontaneous. It will be the same if we give them a pencil; the movement pictures that are drawn will relatively quickly acquire life. [...] Above all – a sense of one’s own security awakens an interest in unfamiliar forms, one sees, hears, feels in other areas and there grows a sincere interest for artistic creation that has not been imposed externally.”<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. Creativity in improvisation and composition

In the reception of Western music, creativity is usually only acknowledged in outstanding persons: composers as "music creators" and musicians who improvise in a masterful way. Thus, creativity in the musical development of a person is “admitted” very late, as the perfection of a musician. The overwhelming majority of active musicians (apart from the area of jazz and partly folk music) are consequently "only" in the area of reproducing. In dance, there is a similar development: improvisational collaboration became a recognized way of working in choreography only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Orff wanted to go the opposite way: Music making should emerge from improvising. The students should be able to experience creative activity from the beginning, be it in their own improvisation with three notes on a xylophone, in finding a sequence of steps to a given melody, in a movement improvisation or in a personal arrangement of a text.

#### 5. "Process and product" - the interplay of development and artistic result

If we compare professional activities of musicians and dancers with the work in music education we find a major difference: in the professional field, it is usually only about the preparation for the best possible performance and the rehearsal phase is kept as short and efficient as possible. A music teacher who thinks and works in the same way makes a serious mistake: in the classroom, the developmental process is especially important because it is the phase in which learning happens. There should always be enough time for the students to contribute their own ideas and also to try some of them out in order to gain personal experience. This requires methodical skill of the teacher. The use of the term "method" in connection with the Schulwerk sometimes leads to misunderstandings: though it is correct that the Orff-Schulwerk is not a method<sup>9</sup> - even if so called in some countries<sup>10</sup> - it needs good methodical implementation.

We talk about "process-oriented teaching" in Orff-Schulwerk. This means that the goal is open enough to include the suggestions and creative contributions of the students in the result. A lesson, such as learning a fixed instrumental piece in several parts or a dance form prepared by the teacher, can only be called an "Orff-Schulwerk" lesson if this instructor-led unit is preceded or followed by sessions with relevant creative phases. Teaching that does not aim to engage and further the creative potential of the students can hardly be called Orff-Schulwerk.

Of course, such a teaching process only makes sense if the final result is a presentation of the completed work, whether in the classroom or, on special occasions, in a performance for others (or at least this should be planned). One must understand that creativity is on the one hand the search for solutions; on the other hand, it is also necessary to make decisions to select the final version. Work process and result: The educational path and the artistic results (corresponding to the level and ability of the students) cannot be separated from each other in Orff-Schulwerk.

## 6. The so-called "Orff-Instruments"

The use of small, easy-to-use percussion instruments, including the barred instruments (xylophone, metallophone and glockenspiel) in music lessons brought a completely new approach in music pedagogy. Thus, the xylophone became the visual trademark of Orff-Schulwerk. Unfortunately, some believe that the use of the percussion instruments put together by Carl Orff, is already sufficient to characterize a music educational activity as Orff-Schulwerk. Carl Orff was aware of this danger.<sup>11</sup> In a superficial approach, an essential aspect of this "elemental instrumentarium" is ignored: these are instruments that can be easily experienced by playing due to their simple sound generation. Thus, a creative approach is possible from the beginning and it is not necessary to overcome technical hurdles in order to experience the joy of instrumental music making. On the other hand, the use of these "movement-orientated instruments"<sup>12</sup> represents an ideal connection to movement and dance.

## 7. Orff-Schulwerk can be used in all areas of music and dance education

At the second birth of the Orff-Schulwerk as an educational radio program (first broadcast on September 15, 1948 in "Radio München", now "Bayerischer Rundfunk" (Bavarian Radio) the target group was precisely defined: the Orff-Schulwerk should find its way into the elementary school in Orff's homeland of Bavaria. Today, the aim is no longer exclusively the Primary School. The Schulwerk is firmly established in Early Childhood Music Education as well as in the field of therapeutic work, inclusive pedagogy or activities for seniors.

Of course, each of these areas requires an adequate selection of material and activities. The music presented in the volumes four and five of "Music for Children", as well as the numerous supplements such as "Paralipomena"<sup>13</sup>, show clearly that working in the style of the Schulwerk can continue during the Secondary level. Orff's volumes for piano and violin show the way to the application in instrumental teaching.<sup>14</sup>

## 8. As an educational practice, Orff-Schulwerk can also be implemented in other cultures

Orff's and Keetman's pedagogical concept was not limited to Bavaria. The international dissemination began shortly after the first radio transmission of the Schulwerk. Music pedagogues from other countries (such as Canada, Japan, Great Britain or Argentina) realized that Orff's and Keetman's ideas could also be applied in their countries. However, a prerequisite is that songs, dances and texts have to be taken from the respective cultural area. Orff himself pointed out these necessary modifications.<sup>15</sup>

Orff-Schulwerk is based on change. However, any extensions, modifications and additions must be made in a careful and conscious way. This requires knowledge and deep understanding of Carl Orff's educational work. Only in this way can the fundamental principles presented here be preserved in their entirety. Orff transferred the responsibility for further work to all those who want to include Orff-Schulwerk in their music teaching. Thus, we understand the conclusion of the speech "The Orff-Schulwerk - Past and Future" which is often cited here. Carl Orff concludes with the first line of a quote by Schiller: "I have done my part."<sup>16</sup>

Translation: Verena Maschat

<sup>1</sup> Carl Orff – Gunild Keetman, *Orff-Schulwerk, Musik für Kinder*, Mainz 1950/54  
“Music for Children”, English Adaption by Margaret Murray, Mainz 1957/66

<sup>2</sup> See as an example: Hermann Regner, *Carl Orff's Educational Ideas– Utopia and Reality*. In: *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk*, Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg, Barbara Haselbach (Ed.) Mainz 2011 (condensed by the editor, this article was first published in 1975)

<sup>3</sup> Carl Orff, *Orff-Schulwerk: Past & Future*. In: *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk*, Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg, Barbara Haselbach (Ed.) Mainz 2011

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Murray's translation as „wild flower“ approaches this concept in a very euphemistic way, since the word „Wildwuchs“ also includes weeds and everything that grows near fences and paths.

<sup>5</sup> See the program of the convention „Orff-Schulwerk in der Schule“, Salzburg, July 4 – 7, 2013  
(working material for the participants) Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg

<sup>6</sup> Carl Orff, *Orff-Schulwerk: Past & Future*. In: *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk*, Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg, Barbara Haselbach (Ed.) Mainz 2011, p. 144

<sup>7</sup> In a conversation with Barbara Haselbach on February 8, 2017

<sup>8</sup> Dorothee Günther, *The Rhythmic Person and Their Education (1932)*. In: *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk*, Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg, Barbara Haselbach (Ed.) Mainz 2011, pp. 88/90

<sup>9</sup> There is no official didactic procedure or normalized method for the Orff-Schulwerk. Each teacher is responsible for its practical implementation in the classroom.

<sup>10</sup> “Orff Method” or “Método Orff”

<sup>11</sup> „Nevertheless one cannot remain silent about the disastrous nonsense perpetrated with these primitive instruments.“. In: *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk*, Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg, Barbara Haselbach (Ed.) Mainz 2011, p. 102

<sup>12</sup> idem, p.100

<sup>13</sup> Carl Orff – Gunild Keetman, *Orff-Schulwerk Paralipomena*, Mainz 1977

<sup>14</sup> Carl Orff, *Geigenübung I + II and Klavierübung*, Mainz 1934

<sup>15</sup> “When you work with the Schulwerk abroad, you must start all over again from the experience of the local children. And the experiences of children in Africa are different from those in Hamburg or Stralsund, and again from those in Paris or Tokyo.” (Carl Orff 1975 during a radio interview with Hermann Regner).  
Hermann Regner, *“Musik für Kinder – Music for Children – Musique pour Enfants”*. *Comments on the Adoption and Adaptation of Orff-Schulwerk in other Countries*. In: *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk*, Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg, Barbara Haselbach (Ed.) Mainz 2011, p. 220

<sup>16</sup> Carl Orff, *Orff-Schulwerk: Past & Future*. In: *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk*, Orff-Schulwerk Forum Salzburg, Barbara Haselbach (Ed.) Mainz 2011, p. 156  
(„Now do yours.“ Thus ends Schiller's play “Don Carlos”.)