



Special Issue

The Orff approach to special music education and music therapy:
Practice, theory and research

Editorial

Orff-Schulwerk in the 21st Century: A ‘Wild Flower’?

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“Looking back I should like to describe Schulwerk as a wild flower [...] As in nature plants establish themselves where they are needed and where conditions are favourable, so Schulwerk has grown from ideas that were rife at the time and that found their favourable conditions in my work. Schulwerk did not develop from any pre-considered plan – I could never have imagined such a far-reaching one – but it came from a need that I was able to recognise as such” (C. Orff 1963/2011: 134).

Carl Orff said these words in a lecture in 1963. Today, nearly eighty years since the first Orff-Schulwerk initiatives at the Günther-Schule in Munich, Germany and sixty years since Carl Orff’s and Gunild Keetmann’s *Music for Children* (1950-1954) was first published, Orff’s words still resonate. In the fast changing contemporary world it is surprising to find that elemental music and dance education as conceived by Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman is more relevant than ever.

Orff-Schulwerk was originally developed for work with children in general school settings. However, the potential of the approach for work with other age groups (including the elderly) and in other areas (such as pre-school, special and inclusive education, as well as therapeutic and community settings) was recognised early on. From the 1960s the use of Orff-Schulwerk in these areas was developed and documented by teachers and therapists who adapted its fundamental ideas according to the needs of their particular target groups and settings.

These developments were, and still are, a natural ‘extension’ of the approach since the humanistic orientation and the idea of working with people of all ages and abilities were inherent in Orff’s and Keetman’s work. Also, the development of the *whole* person is core to the approach – something that was described as ‘musica humana’ (referring to the harmony of body and spirit) by Wilhelm Keller

(1920-2008) who was a pioneer of music and movement in inclusive education and community work.

In addition to the wide-reaching nature of the approach and its relevance in diverse educational and therapeutic contexts, Orff-Schulwerk has spread to numerous countries with over forty Orff-Schulwerk Associations in all continents. Of course, Orff-Schulwerk is not a homogeneous practice. The approach has been interpreted, practised and, at times, perhaps misunderstood in various ways. Also, it is constantly influenced by and responds to different educational, artistic, social and political developments in each country. This need for continuing development of the approach was recognised by Orff himself when he stressed the risk of merely ‘copying’ the original models outlined in the *Music for Children* volumes (1950-1954):

“Every phase of Schulwerk will always produce stimulation for new independent growth; therefore it is never conclusive and settled, but always developing, always growing, always flowing. Herein of course lies a great danger, that of development in the wrong direction. Further independent growth presupposes basic specialist training and absolute familiarity with the style, the possibilities and the aims of Schulwerk” (C. Orff 1963/2011: 134).

When it came to adapting the approach for different countries and cultures therefore, instead of translating the original German rhymes and songs, equivalent material from the particular country’s culture was used. Keeping the whole person as the focus of the attention, the Orff approach is always adapted according not only to the cultural framework, but also to the needs and strengths of the people with whom practitioners are working each time.

Presenting a range of papers (from historical reviews, to case studies, project reports, and research studies) this special issue reflects the diversity which is inherent in the Orff approach. Authors come from a range of countries (Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, and USA) and they report on their diverse practices and applications of the approach in different work settings and with different client groups.

In particular, Melanie Voigt gives an overview of the history, principles and further development of Orff Music Therapy. Then, Karin Schumacher's paper (Schumacher 1999) is made available for the first time in both Greek and English. In this influential paper, Schumacher considers the importance of Orff-Schulwerk for musical social-integrative pedagogy and for music therapy. Next, Christine Schönherr describes the artistic and educational potential of elemental music and dance pedagogy (EMDP) for elderly people. Maria Filianou and Andriani Stamatopoulou present a case study of applying Orff-Schulwerk in a special educational setting, and Markku Kaikkonen and Sanna Kivijärvi describe the possibilities of engaging learners with special educational needs through Orff-Schulwerk. Aspasia Fragkouli's research study uses the AQR-instrument (Schumacher & Calvet 2007) for the assessment of the quality of relationship between therapist and child within a special needs school setting. Another research study – this time by Lori Gooding, Michael Hudson and Olivia Yinger – explores the teaching practices and perceptions of music educators who work with students with special needs. In this context, differences among those educators with and without Orff-Schulwerk training are studied. On the other hand, Cynthia Colwell studies the use of children's storybooks in classrooms by Orff-Schulwerk teachers. Kimberly McCord describes the concept of Universal Design for Learning and its relevance for special educators using the Orff approach, while Maria Filianou and Evangelia Galanaki present a music and movement programme for students with hearing impairments. A historical review of the Hellenic Orff-Schulwerk Association (ESMA), as well as its evolution and prospects is presented by Olympia Agalianou and Katerina Alexiadi. The special issue concludes with reviews from Christine Plahl of Gertrud Orff's two books (1974/1980, 1984/1990), as well as a Greek and English review by Lucia Kessler-Kakoulidi and Elisabeth Danuser respectively of the recently published DVD "*I Have Become Young Again*' Music, Language, Movement: Artistic and Pedagogical Opportunities for People in Advanced Age" (Schönherr & Kallos 2012).

The rich material of this special issue shows that Orff-Schulwerk is indeed a 'wild flower'. It is

resistant but flexible, it travels to different places, it adapts and responds to local needs, and it grows even in the most adverse conditions. We hope that the ideas, practices, dilemmas and questions emerging in this issue will be of relevance to a wide readership: the international Orff community, those who wish to be informed about the Orff approach and its developments, as well as those who wish to engage in inter-disciplinary exchange of theories, methods and practices. The Orff approach is a unique example of a model where special music education and music therapy meet and are closely interweaved. The inherent collaborative nature of the approach will hopefully further the dialogue and synergies between different music practices within educational, therapeutic and community contexts.

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