



Special Issue

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

The Importance of Orff-Schulwerk for Musical Social-Integrative Pedagogy and Music Therapy

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English translation: Gloria Litwin

Abstract

Which features of Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman's ideas are relevant for work in the community and therapy? A child who is mentally or physically handicapped, emotionally or sensorially disabled or on the autistic spectrum, is never just only that. The characteristics of a person that are not expressed in these terms, however, are precisely the ones that make musical communication and thus a connection with so-called 'normal' people possible. A historical review will demonstrate the sources from which the adaptation of the Schulwerk for work with handicapped and disturbed children and young people was made possible and meaningful. A brief section will define the fields of "Music Education", "Music in Special Needs and Community" and "Music Therapy" in order to distinguish them and highlight the contents they have in common.

The author uses quotes by Carl Orff in order to document the basis of her ideas for therapeutic work and describes how pedagogues and therapists, from the early sixties until today, have developed them for and together with different groups with special needs:

- The multi-sensorial approach through speech, free and bound rhythm, movement, singing and playing instruments provides possibilities for spontaneous creative play in a social context, even if one important sensorial area is severely damaged.
- Every member of an integrative music and movement group is participating actively in a creative process.
- The instrumentarium allows participants to play together in a spontaneous way.
- Relationships developed through musical expression and play as an encounter between two people forms the basis for emotional development.

- *Musical reception and expression is independent of intellectual capacity, age and previous musical experience.*

Keywords: elemental music; social-integrative pedagogy; music therapy; differences in methodology

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*“The only freedom of man is his imagination”*¹

With this sentence I first encountered Carl Orff in the 1970s at the Orff-Institute where he always greeted students personally since the founding of this training institute for Music and Dance Education. On this day Carl Orff recited his "Christmas Story" in Bavarian dialect, and his musical relationship to language has remained in my memory unforgettably.

Speech as music – music as speech

Carl Orff's concept of music uses that of the ancient Greek concept of "musiké", referring to the following musical activities: "singing", "singing and dancing" and "playing on the kithara". While music and dance were closely related in early times, there was no concept of only 'music'. Speech, music and movement, connected through the "unifying force" of rhythm is considered by Orff to be the original form of human expression. Elemental musical exercises as they were published later in the Orff-Schulwerk volumes should, according to Orff, introduce the concept of "primal force and ancient forms of music" (Orff 1963/2011: 15).

Carl Orff's well-known definition of "elemental music" contains the main reasons that make the use of elemental music for social, integrative pedagogy and therapeutic purposes possible and meaningful:

"The call, the rhyme, the word, the singing are the crucial starting point [...] 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 only as a listener but as a participant. It is unsophisticated, uses no big forms, is near the earth, natural, physical, within the range of everyone to learn and to experience it, and suitable for the child" (Orff 1963/2011: 144).

1. "Elemental music is never music alone but forms a unity with movement, dance, and speech"

Enabling various possibilities of expression of people increases the possibility of responsiveness. This is especially important where possibility of expression is lacking due to a disorder or disability. Carl Orff himself did not think of an application of the Orff-Schulwerk for therapeutic purposes or in special education, but Karl Hofmarksrichter, a remedial teacher from Munich, brought his attention to his work, already in the 1960s, with

deaf and hearing-impaired people. Because of the pronounced sense of vibration and the visually and physically clearly evident creation of rhythms and sounds on Orff-instruments, it was also possible for these people with disabilities to play together, even to dance. The ability to distinguish between pitch levels through a trained sense of vibration, also improved their way of speaking. Claus Bang (1971) and Shirley Salmon (1992) have continued this work intensively.

Gertrud Orff's pioneering work in the 1970s at the children's centre for developmental disorders in Munich was groundbreaking. "Orff Music Therapy", so named by Theodor Hellbrügge, the then head of the children's centre, shows how children with multiple disabilities, especially sensory impaired and autistic children can benefit from music therapy. Gertrud Orff defined the so-called "*Orff Music Therapy*" as a multi-sensory therapy:

"Orff Music Therapy is a multi-sensory therapy. The use of musical material - phonetic-rhythmic speech, free and metric rhythm, movement, melos in speech and singing, the handling of instruments - is organised in such a way that it addresses itself to all the senses. Through these multi-sensory impulses it is also possible to start just where an important sense organ is weak or damaged. In spontaneous creative activity the child should express himself freely, give form to his expression and use it in social relationships" (G. Orff 1974/1980: 9).

From my experience with autistic children with a pervasive developmental disorder- and therewith extreme relationship disorder - the ability to connect audible, visual and sensory stimuli as presented by music and movement, enables the regaining of the ability for a relationship to one's self and to the environment. If we add for example, a further sensory modality to the child's offered form of expression, such as movement, by adding music, we can help the child to hear what he would otherwise only sense. If he combines these two sensory experiences, the result is a more conscious sense of himself. This is the basis of interpersonal relationships (Schumacher 1994). It is crucial for pervasively disturbed children to regain the experience: "I hear myself", "I hear you" and "I hear us" that is made through the musical (instrumental and vocal) expression, "I sense and see me and you", as in the movement, dance experience. Gertrud Orff's idea to consider music as a multi-sensory phenomenon is not only useful for therapeutic work, but necessary. The interpersonal experience that feelings, sensations and emotions can be shared is especially encouraging for building relationships. Singing, playing and dancing together present a special possibility of

¹ This and all subsequent headings are quotes of Carl Orff (1963/2011).

experiencing this sense of “togetherness” (Schumacher 2004: 89).

2. “Elemental music means music that one plays oneself”

The importance of self-activity, the effect of people’s own actions on their sense of self and their creative potential, is more relevant than ever in our current time. Over-stimulated by technical media, intimidated by perfect rendition, the modest result seen and heard from one’s own first activity, here the self-expression through music and movement, is often discouraging. If the sense of self is not strong enough, and the social environment, i.e. at least one other person does not show appropriate pleasure and appreciation of one’s own expressions, it is soon lost. Many people can tell you a thing or two about the sensitivity of one’s own musical expression because it is non-verbal and determined by one’s emotional and psychological state. They don’t sing or play any more if they have been laughed at or ignored.

Music therapy as psychotherapy is a form of treatment that – like any psychotherapy – can only be effective through the mobilisation of the own self-activating forces of the patient.

Crucial to the Orff idea is the rediscovery of the value of self-activity and the necessary motivating play-room for improvisation, music, movement and speech, invented on the spur of the moment. A playful, improvisational attitude as Carl Orff repeatedly demanded, is not necessarily learnable in education. Thus there were frequently teachers who brought Orff-Schulwerk into disrepute by adhering too strictly to the written music: One associates xylophone factories and groups of children who sit lined up and reproduce slavishly what is prescribed by the conductor and the notes. The collection of Orff-Schulwerk models developed from the practice of sound experiments and music inventions at the “Güntherschule” is a transcript of successful events, “transcripts of set improvisations” (Orff 1932/2011: 66). They should appeal to the imagination and the finding of one’s own sound fantasy and invention. Although the recording and publication of his work and structural models helped to disseminate Orff’s music pedagogic ideas, this carried within the seed of misunderstanding. So Orff already wrote in the first edition: “I knew that the publication and the attendant fixing in notation form did not correspond to the nature of improvisation, but it was unavoidable for the development and expansion of the work” (Jungmair 1992: 115). And later, even more precisely: “it is not the playing from notation but the free making improvisation that is meant and demanded, for which the printed examples give

information and stimulus” (Jungmair 1992: 131).

3. “Elemental Music is music in which one takes part not only as a listener but as a participant”

Not only does Orff emphasise being self-active, but also playing, the spontaneous playing together as it is possible by the developed instrumentarium. In a newspaper article from 1932 Orff says:

“Musical instruction for a child does not begin in the music lesson. Playtime is the starting point. One should not come to music – it should arise of itself. What is important is that the child be allowed to play, undisturbed, expressing the internal externally” (Orff 1932/2011: 68).

Playing and improvisation have a functional character for Orff, and he says: “[...] the drive to play initiates the satisfying activity, and following from this the practise and out of these the achievement”. Orff-Schulwerk provides impetus to play with music, movement and speech and through this to practise and learn” (Jungmair 1992: 108-109).

For music therapy, which is today regarded as psychotherapy, i.e. mainly as a mental - emotional influence, the definition of psychotherapy by the English psychoanalyst and child therapist D. W. Winnicott recounts:

“Psychotherapy takes place where two areas of playing overlap: that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy means two people playing together. This leads to the conclusion that the work of the therapist is focussed on where playing is not possible, in order to bring the patient out of a state in which he can’t play into a state in which he is able to play” (Winnicott 1971: 49).

If Winnicott has used the help of ‘squiggle drawings’ (Kritzeldzeichnungen) among other things, in his encounters with his patients, and has sought to capture their mental state, the music therapist offers musical expression as a means of encouraging relationships. As infant research has again confirmed in the last decades, mental - emotional development and change is based on the encounter of two people while playing. Music and dance can enable an interpersonal encounter in a special way.

In order to make musical expression possible for the layman, Orff developed together with Kurt Maendler the so-called “Orff instruments”. “The player can simultaneously feel, see and hear which kind and intensity of movement leads to which sound result. Through the direct physical relationship, the inner relationship to the instrument, to the self-produced sound, to music,

should develop” (Regner 1988: 97). However, this inner relationship often needs to be acquired, in order to use the self-produced sound as a means of dealing with one's own psychological and group-dynamic problems. Since elemental instruments have the following characteristics, they are also suitable for social-pedagogic and therapeutic work. These instruments:

- appeal to all senses;
- are technically relatively easy to play;
- are physically close (do not separate the players too far from the instruments and from each other);
- are suitable as solo- and group instruments;
- are suitable for improvisation.

The functions of elemental instruments, as they are used within pedagogic as well as therapeutic frameworks enable the possibility of:

- immediately communicating and expressing;
- playing together with others;
- developing sound fantasies.

4. “Elemental music is unsophisticated, uses no big forms, is near the earth, natural, physical, within the range of everyone to learn and to experience it, and suitable for the child”

Musical responsiveness is independent of the intellectual level of a person, which makes its use for the disabled as for non-disabled people possible. A common musical experience is possible, independent of age and previous musical experience. The now much-cited research on the pre- and postnatal development of the human senses (Schumacher 1994, 2004) shows that the elements of music (intensity, rhythm and form), are perceived at birth. Also, at the same time, the mother's voice can be differentiated from others.

William Keller, composer and music pedagogue, one of Orff's first colleagues, worked since the 1960s with handicapped children and adolescents. Keller says, “Elemental Music can therefore be called the realisation of the original, central musical power that is inherent in every human being” (Keller 1980: 17-19). He developed a form of elemental musical theatre, as Carl Orff had realised in his artistic work, a musical and scenic group playing in which each player receives his role according to his abilities and disabilities. Elemental Music Theatre is a form of playing and performance in which both handicapped and non-handicapped, young and old people can play together (Keller 1980). Keller's exemplary work and his deep conviction, that disabilities can be temporarily suspended through musical activity,

lives on in his students. Karin Schumacher (1970-1973), Manuela Widmer (1974-1978), Julia Schäfer (1984), Michel Widmer (1987-1988), Ruth and Bjorn Tischler (1990) and Shirley Salmon (1992), among others, have applied and further developed this idea, especially for work with mentally ill children and in integrated groups.

I summarise

The differences between the pedagogically intended Orff Schulwerk, the approach in the musical social-integrative pedagogy and music therapy lie in the indications and goals. The degree of the intensity of the disorders determines which methodology is meaningful (Tischler 1983: 93).

The differences are the target group, objectives and methodology

Orff Schulwerk wants to address and develop the “musical-dance” potential present in every person. This method of approach is based on the inherent abilities of normally developed human beings, who can join in and imitate, who can “resonate” and let themselves be encouraged to make their own creative activities. The usual context for this work is as a class or group. Music is used as a medium for building personality and as a field of knowledge.

The musical and social-integrative pedagogy takes into account the disability and disorder and is directed to the undisturbed or less disturbed musical-dance possibility of mental and physical-emotional disturbance.

Music therapy ‘uses’ this language to enable people suffering from extreme lack of expression, emotional disturbance and with this associated contact and relationship disturbance, to gain expression and build contact. Music therapy as psychotherapy understands this musical - nonverbal contact as an expression of the emotional state and ‘uses’ it to enable the patient to access his emotional health problems. Like no other medium, music is able to make audible relationships, separation, transitions and problems such as balancing closeness and distance in interpersonal relationships, and therefore arouse awareness of them. Methodologically, in active music therapy there is instrumental and vocal improvisation, whereby the experience is followed by “bringing to word”. The scope of this work depends on the patient and the severity of his disorder. This work can be either as in- or out-patient, in groups or individually. The focus of evaluation is not the musical-dance progress, but the improvement of symptoms, observed and described through diagnosis and indication, during the music therapy.

The following basic ideas and means may be used to connect the different fields:

1. The combination of music, movement and speech through the rhythmical element and the associated experience with several senses.
2. The playful and improvisational principle that encourages the child to act expressively on his own initiative thereby creating the appropriate playroom for active self-expression.
3. The assumption that every person is responsive to a musical-physical language and that this is of great importance for the emotional development of human beings.
4. A technically relatively easily playable and rich tonal range of instruments.

The experience with all one's senses of playful learning and forming, characterise the well-understood approach to Orff-Schulwerk. For the treatment of the disturbed ability for perception, experience and relationships, especially with loss of skill for playing that we regard as fundamental to learning to adapt to the world, Orff's ideas are of vital and contemporary relevance. A clear example of how the ability to play relates to making contact and relationships is most evident in dealing with such pervasively disturbed people such as autistic children. But also for our healthy children in a world of ready-made and stimulating, even over stimulating opportunities, the individual ability to process this stimulation, i.e. perception, selection and self-activity is endangered. The room for one's own actions and their appreciation is therefore to be maintained by using all means. If we define "The Elemental" as something of its own that is "brought to expression [...] coming from a present need" (Jungmair 1992: 244), this should correspond to the therapeutic approach when working with the emotionally-mentally ill. Then, only if we succeed in motivating the patient to express his mental suffering, can this be communicated and therefore accessible to helpful accompanying and treatment of the patient.

The essential idea of Orff-Schulwerk formulated by Barbara Haselbach (1990: 187) "the immanent principle of rhythm, and the holistic involvement with one's own creativity that encourages as well as challenges every human being in its spiritual, physical and mental capacities" corresponds to the picture of humanity which is the basis of social and integrative pedagogy and music therapy that is oriented on humanistic psychology.

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