

Men, Methods, and Music – an Analysis of 20th Century Music Pedagogy

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Abstract: *While there are many different schools of thought and approaches related to teaching music to young children, there is an ever-present need to adapt instructional theory to keep up with changing times. Not all methods of music education have kept pace with time, and it is important to analyse various countries' and traditions' approach to education to develop a truly international method of education. This article is a comparative study of the two best-known approaches to education – the Suzuki Method and the Orff Approach. It examines the founders' philosophy behind the teaching method, its implementation style, interviews with instructors following the method, and an analysis of each approach's successes and shortcomings.*

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I. Introduction

There a number of theories, which have been expounded over time, on how and why children can learn music. Many have been developed into methods, which are followed widely in different parts of the globe. This article closely examines two of the biggest systems of music education – Suzuki Method and Orff Approach – and offers an analysis of their individual frameworks, as a foundation on which new methodologies and systems can be built. There are, in some sense, as many approaches to learning music, as there are music educators. While there are broader schools of learning, it is important to understand that every style of teaching music has a philosophy which influences what is taught and how.

II. Methodology

This study was conducted through qualitative research, analysing available reports, presenting different perspectives on education, and interviewing stakeholders. Quantitatively, it presents available statistics on the successes and shortcomings of each method.

III. Findings

The Suzuki Method – An Introduction

The Suzuki Method is arguably the most popular private method of instrumental instruction in North America ("Expands Throughout the World", 2019). Founded by Shinichi Suzuki who started it in Japan, it has been rooted in the United States since the mid 20th century.

Founder's Philosophy

"Talent is no accident of birth... We are born with a natural ability to learn. What is mean's ultimate direction in life? It is to look for love, truth, virtue, and beauty." – Shinichi Suzuki, Preface, *Nurtured By Love* (Suzuki, 2015). Shinichi Suzuki, the founder of the Suzuki Method, also known as the "Mother Tongue Approach" or the "Classic Approach to Talent Education" is arguably the most influential string pedagogue of the 20th century. He believed that talent was innate in every child, and only had to be developed. Just as any child can learn his mother tongue, no matter how complex, he can learn music. His philosophy was designed around total development of the child, and building the character and the heart of the student. In the words of Suzuki, "The purpose of Talent Education is to train children, not to be professional musicians, but to be fine musicians, and to show high ability in any other field they enter." ("The Approach: Shinichi Suzuki's Talent Education – Piano Performer Magazine", 2019)

His father owned a violin factory, but he himself started playing the instrument only when an adult. Although the method started with violin, it has later been applied to piano and other instruments as well.

The Suzuki Method – Implementation

The Suzuki method relies on listening, playing and repeating. There is a focus on 'tonalization' or producing a clear, beautiful, ringing tone. Students rely on song recordings to help them learn phrasing,

dynamics and other nuances of music. Children also have smaller instruments, which are appropriate. Suzuki is taught through specialized institutes, because building a community is an important part of the program. Students have individual lessons, group lessons, recitals, master classes, seminars and discussion sessions. There are ten books in the violin program, and all other instruments have similar repertoire. Students are expected to continually practice older repertoire so that they can play any piece at any time. Many students are able to memorise pieces without sight-reading.

Teacher Training Methodology

Suzuki associations around the world offer training programs. Courses are always in person, not online, and comprise of numerous parts, including an Every Child Can! orientation, completing an audition, attending training sessions, and observation hours.

Interview with Samuel Rudy

Samuel Rudy is a Suzuki certified Music Educator and performer based in Minneapolis, MN, USA. (Interview conducted via email on August 16, 2018)

1. Have you learnt the Suzuki Method as a child? If yes, what was your experience? If no, what drew you to the Suzuki Method as an educator?

Yes, I was a quasi-Suzuki student. I say quasi because either the method has changed since then to become very core-repertoire oriented, or my teacher supplemented the repertoire with lots of outside pieces and reading exercises. I used the Doflein method books concurrently with my progress through Suzuki to improve reading skills and immersion in a (Germanic-heavy) western art-music culture. I did attend a few Suzuki group classes on the core repertoire, but it was not a core part of the experience. I did experience group playing, however, via public school orchestra (which performed at a high level due to an influx of other violin students at the same time) and even more formatively in the Colorado Springs Youth Symphony. It was my Suzuki roots, and the love and joy of playing that Suzuki represents to me, that drew me to the Suzuki method as I transitioned into an educator.

2. Do you teach any non-Suzuki methodology? If yes, how do you decide what to use when? For example, how would you decide whether to teach a student Suzuki or another methodology? Do you ever teach a hybrid methodology involving elements from more than one system?

Yes, a few of my older students look with disdain on the Suzuki repertoire as "too easy" and they are more interested in all the 500 other concertos that Vivaldi wrote, or the entire world of classical and romantic and contemporary classical music that exists outside the core repertoire, and I am happy to work with them on that literature. What is difficult, for me as a professional that can sight-read at a high level, is determining what is correct level of challenge for a given student at a given time. There exist few resources for that problem beyond personal experience; the Suzuki order of pieces is the clearest solution for me; Dorothy Delay has a published teaching sequence; and I know the progressive order of etude books that is traditional in the "traditional" method, but for the moment it is also a bit of trial and error. I am certainly moving toward a greater emphasis on reading skills than was initially encouraged of me in Suzuki teacher training, and for that I do love the set of Doflein volumes, with all their duets and inclusion of (at the time) contemporary composers.

In answer to your final question, yes, and so does every teacher. The only true Suzuki teacher was Shinichi himself, and he was constantly inventing new ideas and borrowing others, in service of the ultimate goal of instilling joy in children so that they may become wonderful people. I have taken ideas from every corner of my musical experience when teaching a lesson, and I am excited to see what works and what doesn't for every individual circumstance.

3. In your opinion, what are the most important pillars or features of the Suzuki Method?

The idea that talent is not innate, but grows through proper nurturing of the child's love for music. The title of the prerequisite course for Suzuki teacher-training course is titled "Every Child Can [Learn]" for good reason - it puts the onus on the teacher to find the way that will best allow the student to grow their skills, eschewing a cookie-cutter approach in favor of a creative and joyful one.

Other important pillars include the development of the ear for pitch, rhythm, and tone; the inclusion of group lessons where students can learn from peers as well as teachers; and the development of the teacher-student-parent relationship.

4. Do you have any anecdotes of students who weren't doing well in the traditional system, but did better using Suzuki Methodology?

It's hard to define any one traditional method as "the" traditional method, in the same way that Suzuki's vision is filtered through the teachers that teach it. I am thinking of my work with one advanced student, who grew up in the public school music education environment, whose musical knowledge and reading background did not prepare them for the level of mastery and commitment to memory of Suzuki repertoire that I observed at Suzuki institutes. But the same student exhibits skill in reading say, a Dvořák symphony that would be far beyond the

capability of even a book 8 Suzuki student. It is hard to convince a talented student of any method that constant attention needs to be paid to fundamentals, but perhaps harder for the traditional student with an attitude that the harder the music, the better. So, in answer to the question, I've secretly used Suzuki ideas with this student (nurturing of skills, development of the ear and practice habits) to be a more effective teacher even if the repertoire is not Suzuki's.

5. What is your assessment of traditional vs Suzuki Methods?

Again, there are many traditional methods, and many interpreters of Suzuki. So it's a very difficult question to answer with any degree of certainty. Suzuki has taken the world by storm for a lot of reasons, not least of which is it works! The idea of taking many small steps toward a lofty goal is not unique to Suzuki, but it is emphasized pretty heavily in my training as opposed to the faster pace of some traditional methods.

And I think Suzuki's idea that music can save the world and create beautiful human beings is incredibly important. I think the danger with any one method is that it creates a false sense of narrowness of the sheer size of the musical world, which is enormous, and creating insular, tribal-minded people does not interest me in the least these days.

6. In your opinion, are there any drawbacks of the pure Suzuki methodology?

No, because the "pure" Suzuki methodology is one that fosters love of music, development not just of the ear but of the heart as well, and serves the purpose of creating joy for children. It's pretty good at laying out skills in a logical order, and if the teacher is competent, students have no trouble learning to read (early history of Suzuki in the Americas has led to the unfortunate stereotype of lack of reading skills).

If however one's goal is to produce professional adult musicians with crippling self-doubt and complexes from traumatic competitive experiences while growing up, Suzuki's vision is not very good at that.

7. What are the best age groups for the Suzuki method in your opinion?

Young (3~12), when the early songs sound still age appropriate, and older (18+) when adult beginners are mature enough to accept that easy music is a necessary stepping stone. I have a hunch that teenagers have a desire to distance themselves from "childish" sounding music and movies and art forms, so it is most difficult to convince a 14-year old to practice diligently songs like Twinkle. But this is only based on my limited experience of my own mind growing up and the students I've encountered as a teacher.

8. If you haven't already answered earlier, what in your opinion are the greatest merits of the Suzuki system?

Creating beautiful hearts. (Suzuki wanted to create good people, not just good musicians)

9. Is there anything else you would like to add about the Suzuki method or your own teaching style?

Ask me the same questions in a year and I might answer differently. I've observed my own journey as a teacher is constantly learning and adapting, in the same way I did as a child. I've never taught the same lesson twice for this reason, but there are of course running themes in lessons. I hope someday to know much more.

Analysis of the Suzuki Method

The contribution of the Suzuki Method to modern music education is undeniable. Over decades, hundreds of thousands of children have benefitted from the method, learning to love and play music. The method has also produced a number of professional musicians.

There have, from time to time, been critics of the Suzuki Method, either that it focuses on rote learning, doesn't teach children to read music, or that it is a string pedagogy that has been adapted to other instruments. However, the results speak for themselves, and Suzuki remains one of the most popular and beloved styles of music education.

The Orff Approach – An Introduction

Carl Orff said the ideal kind of music for children is "never music alone, but music connected with the movement, dance, and speech – not to be listened to, meaningful only in active participation." He also advocated "spontaneous, personal musical experiences". The Orff Schulwerk is based on folk and traditional music of the countries in which it is used. Orff was a conductor and composer, which directly impacted his views on music education. He believed in what he referred to as 'elemental music' (Shamrock, 1997), natural, physical and achievable by every child to learn and experience, and where every child could participate, not just observe. It is a system where there is no judgment by the teacher or peers. His philosophy was "Experience first, then intellectualize." Orff is considered more an approach than a method, because there is no systematic procedure to be followed. It is more a set of fundamental principles and models, for teachers to use to guide their musical ideas. schools, there are a number of issues which result in the quality of education imparted (in most cases) to be substandard. The moment that people can afford or have access to private schools, they opt for them. There is also a very strong urban-rural divide.

Implementation

Orff Schulwerk engages mind and body through singing, dancing, acting, and the use simple instruments, often simply called Orff instruments (Frazee & Kreuter, 1997). These instruments include un-pitched percussion like the metal triangle, finger cymbal and cowbell, wooden instruments like the woodblock, claves and guiro, bar instruments like xylophones, metallophones, glockenspiels, and percussion instruments like the hand drums, bongo, timpani, gong and hanging cymbal, and the recorder (Orff & Keetman, 1980). It has been noted that children love experimenting with instruments, and are fascinated by the different sounds they can create individually and together. Presented as play, children learn at their own level, and there are integrations with poetry, movement, drama and stories. Orff describes the four stages of musical engagement as imitation, exploration, improvisation and composition. Students begin by singing, then by using body percussion, and then instruments. All children learn by doing. Music happens in a non-competitive environment, and one of the rewards is the joy of making music itself. Students learn to make music both as individuals and in groups. Listening activities are also useful for music they cannot yet play – they analyse meter, form, texture, dynamics, colour and tempo. Reading music is seen as an important step towards improvisation and the creation of original work. Orff uses small forms like ostinato and rondo, and builds on them using improvisation. Each activity is broken down into its simplest form and then presented as steps until it is eventually built into a complete performance again. Orff is conducted through group classes and begins by using the pentatonic scale (Orff & Keetman, 1980).

Popularity

Currently over 10,000 music educators in the US follow Orff in their classrooms, and it has also found popularity in Europe and Canada.

Teacher Training Methodology

Orff is not considered a method. There are principles, models and procedures. Orff and Keetman created texts, which could be used as training material for teachers. These texts have been translated into eighteen languages.

The American Orff-Schulwerk association offers teacher training at three different levels. Each level involves sixty hours of training. Level 1 is designed to empower educators with the skills to plan and implement Orff music and movement activities in a classroom. Levels 2 and 3 are more focused on the conceptual understanding of the components of Schulwerk, and the skills needed to properly implement Orff Approach.

Analysis of the Orff Approach

Orff's great contributions include the use of classroom instruments, and an emphasis on improvisation and spontaneity. Orff is often a term used lightly, without an actual understanding of the framework it entails. Some educators just by using triangles and barred instruments believe they are teaching Orff. Additionally, many tend to use Orff in addition to other curriculums. Although emphasized by Orff, in practice, the focus on improvisation is often lost. It has also been argued that Orff doesn't place enough emphasis on quality singing, and tends to be more instrumental in approach. Many prominent Orff teachers are instrumentalists, not vocalists, which may further deemphasize the role of singing in Orff. Orff believed in the superiority of western art music and the move from the more "primitive styles of music" to higher music, which is both incorrect, and racist. The theory of recapitulation has been strongly discredited. The songs often chosen as part of Orff Schulwerk are oversimplified and function on an assumption of what music is appropriate and engaging for children.

IV. Conclusion

There are many things to be learnt from the different methods of music education that have been developed over time and exist today. Some remain as relevant as they originally were, while others haven't kept pace with time.

It can be seen that many creators of music education theories felt that music, movement, exploration and improvisation are integral to a young child's learn, and they music be allowed creative expression. Music education must be age appropriate and suitable for classes with mixed-ability levels. We now know that music-education need not be linear, as some felt, but rather authentic, and relatable. In today's context, it music be globally representative, and not just one style of music. The time of western art music being hailed as the most superior style of music, or even the most important frame of reference is gone, as western classical music is insufficient to explain many styles of music from around the world.

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