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Cross-curricular learning in higher music education: entrepreneurial bootcamp for music students “Music – here and now”

Summary

The changing nature of job market for academically trained musicians in last decades requires development of cross-curricular skills, such as capability to integrate and synthesize the acquired knowledge from different areas, ability to work in a team, high interpersonal sensitivity, ability to suggest improvements based on a critical appraisal, etc. The entrepreneurial bootcamp for music students of three higher music institutions in Serbia, in cooperation with one conservatory from the Netherlands, under the title “Music – Here and Now” held in May 2021 in hybrid (online and live) form, is one of the examples how cross curricular approach can enhance the learning practice of music students. The bootcamp for music entrepreneurship is an activity within the Erasmus+ CBHE project – DEMUSIS. The aim of this study is to present the “Music – Here and Now” bootcamp, and to describe one of the projects – *Zvezdara Forest Invaders* – as the case study for the purpose of understanding the whole concept of the bootcamp. Our objective is to draw conclusions regarding key skills important for the professional musician in Serbia in the third decade of the 21st century.

Keywords: cross-curricular learning, music entrepreneurship, DEMUSIS project, “Music – Here and Now” bootcamp, *Zvezdara Forest Invaders*

Introduction

The strong sense of an uncertain future for many music students, amplified by constantly changing job profiles and even the COVID-19 crisis, is one of the huge challenges for contemporary higher music education. As many authors argue, in today's economy it is preferable to be open towards a portfolio career, instead of focusing solely on fulltime positions (Bartleet et al., 2019; Novo & Murga-Menoyo, 2015; Thomson, 2013). As Liertz points out, “a widening gap exists between what is happening inside music institutions and what is happening in society” (Liertz & Macedon, 2007: 2), because the curricula at conservatories and music faculties often disregard employment demands (Munnelly, 2020).

Models of study at many higher music education institutions are still characterized by traditional teaching methods and forms of instructions. According to Reizabal and Gomez, conservatories “use a model of study based on a 1000-year-old system characterized mainly by seminars, lectures and the imitation of teachers. Music teaching professionals claim that this educational system could also benefit from new ideas and working with an entrepreneurial mindset in the hands of the whole educational community and teams of directors” (de Reizabal & Benito Gómez, 2020: 13). Although this conclusion is too rigid and not in line with the real situation (regarding one millennium old system), it is more than obvious that introduction of some new ideas and entrepreneurial mindset is important for curricular innovation and modernization of higher music education institutions.

Portfolio and career management proficiency includes a broad set of skills, including so-called “soft” and “hard” skills. According to the discussions related to the RENEW project,¹ soft skills include research skills, flexibility and adaptability, sense of responsibility, artistic maturity, etc. while hard skills include communication skills (oral and written communication, languages), knowledge of market analysis methodology, advanced technical skills, etc. (de Reizabal & Benito Gómez, 2020: 13). These skills are central for the entrepreneurial approach to music. Even if the dichotomy between soft and hard skills may seem misleading (Chell & Athayde, 2011), obtained skills from this field are significant for musician’s career portfolio (de Reizabal & Benito Gómez, 2020).

Regarding cross-curricular learning in Higher Education, we rely on a set and the classification of key competences developed by European Union. These competencies are, according to Rico et al. “considered essential in an information society in order to guarantee a more flexible labour force and allow quicker adaptation to constant changes in an increasingly interconnected world” (Rico et al., 2013: 139). EU systematization of competences covers two groups:

- 1) technical or specific competences, known as conceptual or professional, and
- 2) cross-curricular competences, that are required to apply technical skills to a variety of roles and contexts (Rico et al., 2013: 140).

The second group is closely connected with the project-based learning model and student-cantered teaching process. In this context, as Calvao et al. point out, students “depart from concrete, real-world problems that assume the form of projects, and develop of all their learning around efforts to solve these problems. The learning processes are thus autonomous, different from student to student and from any route pre-defined by teachers” (Calvão et al., 2019: 5761). It is important

¹ RENEW – Reflective Entrepreneurship Music Education Wordclass – was the two-year project funded under the European Commission programme *Erasmus+ for Strategic Partnership*. For more details see: <https://renewprojectaec.wordpress.com/>.

that students reflect on their own learning preferences to understand and further develop their approach to studying. The diversity of learning styles inside and outside the classroom is influenced by students' different background knowledge and skills, and both are useful in the process of engaging critical thinking, critical action and critical feeling, as Abrahams points out (Abrahams, 2007). Some effects of the cross-curricular competences are, as Westwood noted: greater motivation for learners, meaningful learning, "connecting new learning to students' past experience and prior knowledge", students' own responsibility for their learning, various modes of communication and representation, encouragement of self-assessment, team-working and cooperative learning skills, deeper knowledge, etc. (Westwood, 2006: 35–36).

Entrepreneurship, has until now only played a minor role in higher education in music in Serbia, despite the recent growth and development of courses and programs devoted to entrepreneurship in the world.

The Capacity Building project in the field of Higher Education (CBHE) project, funded by Erasmus+ programme and coordinated by the University of Arts in Belgrade, "Enhancing the digital competencies and entrepreneurship skills of academic musicians in Serbia for culturally more engaged society" (DEMUSIS) aims at enhancing entrepreneurial abilities of academic musicians to use gained knowledge artistically, creatively, knowledgeably, critically and responsibly (both toward self and others) in general and cultural context.² The objective of this Erasmus+ project is to introduce forward-looking curricula that will offer sustainable career for musicians and provide them with knowledge, skills and understanding how to work alone and manage their own careers.

Entrepreneurial bootcamp for music students "Music – here and now", May 2021³

In the academic year 2020/21 the first bootcamp for music entrepreneurship entitled "Music – here and now" was held, as part of the project DEMUSIS,⁴ in a hybrid form. It included the Faculty of Music in Belgrade, Academy of Arts in Novi Sad and the Faculty of Philology and Arts in Kragujevac, in active cooperation with the Royal Conservatoire The Hague.

² ERASMUS+ project 598825-EPP-1-2018-1-RS-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP.

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⁴ DEMUSIS website: <http://www.demusis.ac.rs/>

The initial plan was to bring two teachers from the Royal Conservatoire the Hague – Rene Jonker and Ramon Verberne, experts in music entrepreneurship projects, to work in person with students in Serbia. Due to the pandemic of COVID-19, the camp was realized in a hybrid form: two online sessions per day with students and coaches were held on the 10th and 11th May 2021, then the students and coaches had some time to realize the projects and make short videos about their own contribution and personal impressions, which were presented in two online sessions on the 24th May. The sessions were opened for all participants.

In total, 39 students from three cities and three academic institutions, completed the camp “Music – here and now”, under the supervision of 10 teachers / coaches: Professor MMus Maja Smiljanić-Radić, Asst. Prof. Dr. Ivana Vuksanović, Asst. Prof. Dr. Marija Karan, Asst. Prof. Dr. Sanela Nikolić (Belgrade), Prof. Dr. Ira Prodanov, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nataša Crnjanski and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Milan Milojković (Novi Sad), Assoc. Prof. DMA Katarina Erić, Asst. Prof. DMA Miodrag Đorđević and Assoc. Prof. Jovana Radovanović (Kragujevac).

The concept of the camp “Music – here and now”, included online presentations (such as Product Based Planning), breakout rooms for students in mish-mash groups to familiarize with the Template project form. Foreign teachers pointed out some important administrative and practical issues that can occur, such as the responsibilities when working with vulnerable groups (homeless children, children in kindergarten, elderly people, etc.) and unpleasant surprises that weather, such as the rain, can arrange. They discussed each proposal before the realization, and after, when the final product has been made.

The projects were held in kindergarten (Belgrade, Novi Sad), nursing home (Belgrade), shelter for homeless children (Novi Sad), public places parks and woods (Belgrade, Kragujevac), cultural and scientific institutions (Belgrade and Kragujevac). The students had to resolve many problems, such as learning how to work in a relatively new team. Even though, this time, we didn't have mixed groups from different faculties, many students didn't necessarily know colleagues in their groups. There were students from different levels: bachelor, master, including two master programs founded in the framework of DEMUSIS project,⁵ and doctoral studies, and also from performing and research departments.

Projects were also realized in a hybrid form: some students were not in the same city as their peers and coaches, and some were not even in the country. But, thanks to digital technologies, they managed to work simultaneously at the same time and at different places. They learned some soft and hard skills: to verbally summarize their ideas, from finding the right and creative name of the project

⁵ Muzička režija / Music Direction: http://www.demusis.ac.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58&Itemid=101

Primenjena istraživanja muzike – PRIMA / Applied Research in Music: http://www.demusis.ac.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=68&Itemid=101

that is the best representation of their idea such are *Musical Bond*, *Children of the Woods*, *No Silence in the Library*, *Paint Life with Music*, *Zvezdara Forest Invaders*, to name just a few, to concretize the short (quantify) and long (qualify) term goals, to define economic, artistic, social, educational value, to describe the final product of the project and micro- and macrostructure, to learn how to divide the roles in the group, to utilize each other's competences, and finally, to find out that there is always space for personal growth.

To better understand the concept of the bootcamp, the case study of one of the projects will be presented. It's *Zvezdara Forest Invaders* project.

1) *Case study: Zvezdara Forest Invaders project.* The ultimate goal of the *Zvezdara Forest Invaders* project (ZFI) was to design special musical performances which will draw attention to the unspoiled green areas and institutions of social and cultural significance situated in Zvezdara, one of the Belgrade's fourteen municipalities. The whole municipality was named for the Astronomical Observatory ("Zvezdara" means "the home of the stars") which is located in Zvezdara forest, at the highest point of Belgrade, just above the Danube river. Other important institutions, like Science Technology Park, Sports Centre Olympus, Zvezdara Theatre, elementary school Marija Bursać, are situated on the woodland edge. Collaboration with all these institutions were set as long-term goals of the ZFI project.

A short-term goal, achievable within seven days, was to make two performances: one in the open space, in Zvezdara forest picnic area, and the other one in the imposing glass building of Science Technology Park Belgrade (STP). Due to severe weather conditions, the concert in Zvezdara forest was cancelled, and the team members were forced to switch to an alternative plan. Thus, the final product of the ZFI project was two-part indoor concert, of which the first part took place in the entrance hall of the STP Belgrade (image 1) and the second part was held in the STP Belgrade canteen. Since the musical preferences of STP Belgrade workers described by the management team include ambient sounds and sci-fi movies soundtracks, the final product of ZFI project was designed as a mixture of classical, film, and traditional music with the aim to provide the audience with a unique experience of live performances in the break areas.

The ZFI project gathered 12 students under the guidance of prof. Ivana Vuksanović. The ad-hoc team consisted of students studying in different departments: five performers (three violinists, two harpists), one composer, three music theorists, one musicologist and two ethnomusicologists. Due to the unusual circumstances related to the pandemic, four students participated "remotely". During the first three days of the project online sessions of the team and coach were held, Viber group was activated, concert program determined, team members' roles defined, rehearsals scheduled and the date of the concert confirmed.



Image 1. Concert in the Entrance Hall of the Science Technology Park Belgrade.

For the program in the entrance hall, the team chose five pieces of a lyrical-pastoral character, of which three were movie soundtracks and the other two were traditional songs from Kosovo and Metohija. The team selected music of a lyrical-pastoral character in accordance with the surrounding nature as the best way to make first contact with the audience. The concert in the canteen consisted of 5 instrumental tracks based on popular tunes and film music performed by the two violins and the harp. The product was meant to engage the audience by giving them the opportunity to experience live performances during the lunchtime (image 2).

Although the team members' roles and responsibilities were defined according to their individual specialties, it was mutual sharing of ideas, data and experiences that made the project successful. In the preparation and realisation of the concert programme, students had to integrate their knowledge from different fields, which includes not only the knowledge of practical musical skills (harmony, counterpoint, music form, instrumental techniques, musical arrangement), but also the historical and theoretical knowledge of popular genres, classical and applied music, dialects of traditional music, acoustics, perception, psychology and sociology of music etc. In the process of making the new arrangements for the chosen pieces of music, students especially enhanced their knowledge about the techniques of traditional Serbian singing, harmonization of traditional songs, reduction of symphonic scores and technical possibilities of harp and violin.

In addition, students were able to develop their digital skills (designing the poster and concert program, video editing), social skills (communication, team working) and storytelling skills (announcements and articles about the concert

and the project). Finally, practicing entrepreneurship and bonding through music with people of different interests, ages, lifestyles and origin were beneficial for all the parts included in the project and provided new social, educational and artistic values.

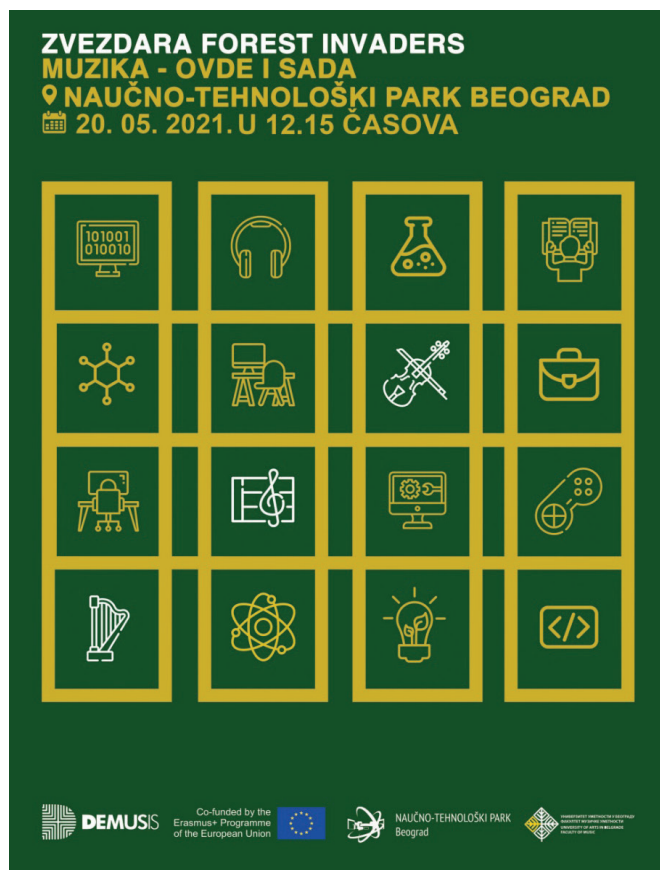


Image 2. Poster for the Zvezdara Forest Invaders project.

The importance of cross-curricular learning for the entrepreneurial approach

Back to the wider picture, one can see that, because of the cross-curricular concept of the workshop, participants expressed their creativity in what they do best: being artistic and excellent in performing music. Students also learned how to go outside of their safe zones: they learned that public performance is much more than just playing at a concert. Finding the right location, administrative issues, acoustical problems, nature of the targeted audience (age, musical knowledge, and education) were some of the lessons learnt.

The final evaluation of the camp “Music – here and now” included breakout rooms to discuss and sum up the experience, emotions and to determine the future improvements. Both students and professors had the assignment to answer five questions:

1. What elements in the instruction were useful for your project?
2. What was missing in the instruction?
3. What did you learn about yourself in this project?
4. What will you do differently in a future project?
5. What did you pick up as a response to your audience?

It should be noted that both students and professors concluded that students are more capable than they were previously aware of, and also very innovative. Their comments are consistent with conclusions of other researchers dealing with issues of entrepreneurship education in music conservatories (de Reizabal & Benito Gómez, 2020). Students were full of positive energy and good impressions about the idea that was unfamiliar to them when they started. The great response of the audience was something that both students and coaches discussed. One of many long-term goals of the project is realized: connections for new spaces for performances of students of artistic faculties in Serbia have been made, and first steps have been taken. It is important to emphasize that students proposed this course for compulsory part of their curricula!

Following the online teacher training in music entrepreneurship and social engagement of academic musicians, organized in April 2021 in the framework of DEMUSIS project,⁶ 10 teachers participated in the entrepreneurial bootcamp in the role of coaches. In their interviews, teachers answered questions on their attitude toward the bootcamp prior to its beginning, the role of training in their preparation for the role of coaches in the bootcamp, the challenges they and the students faced, the type and nature of the competencies, skills and knowledge most valuable for the successful participation in the bootcamp, personal experience and value gained from the participation in the bootcamp, as well as whether it should be made part of the music studies curriculum.

The interviewed teachers particularly emphasized the novelty of the whole concept of bootcamp for music students to their teaching practice, even in cases of some prior experience in the field of music entrepreneurship. All stated curiosity as part of the motivation for joining the bootcamp, together with recognizing the importance of introducing the idea of entrepreneurship and related skills to music students in an appealing manner. Moreover, the respondents remarked that from the beginning and the first look of the bootcamp's structure and aims, it was clear that participation in it, for both students and teachers, would require skills

⁶ http://www.demusis.ac.rs/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82&Itemid=101

and knowledge overcoming the traditional manner of relying exclusively on primary professional and artistic competencies; rather, successful participation in the bootcamp called for a specific rounding-off individual's personal-social-professional engagement. In addition, they singled out team work, resourcefulness, good planning and time management, creative thinking and problem-solving skills, setting practical aims with methods of reaching them, as some of the most valuable extra-curricular skills students had to combine to implement projects within the bootcamp.

However, the teachers – coaches in the bootcamp “Music – here and now” were clear in their opinion that apart from students’ primary professional training in music performance, all other required skills and knowledge had to come outside of the curriculum.⁷

The responders’ personal experience and gain from taking part in the entrepreneurial bootcamp include insights in their own pedagogical task as teachers to give more freedom to students to explore their creative potentials outside of traditional settings, to trust them more and let them work more independently. The grasp of the role of teachers as coaches and mentors that guide the students, rather than instruct or do the students’ work, was also much appreciated. In addition, the importance of team work, unity in the common goal while recognizing individual contributions and the value of feedback, were highly rated as well.

One of the main aspects of the bootcamp the teachers recognized as vital for the careers of academic musicians was the emphasis it put on the role of music and musicians in society. More precisely, the participation in the bootcamp made students more aware of music’s ability to communicate with diverse social categories, to “fulfil emotional needs of wider society” in various environments. In an inventive and inspiring way, through realisation of their project outside their educational institutions, students were encouraged to explore, understand and acknowledge their role in shaping social response to music and musicians.

All teachers who participated in the entrepreneurial bootcamp for music students and the previous online training were adamant that the bootcamp in this or similar form should become part of the curriculum, even as obligatory course, because it would prepare the students for their careers after graduation as “nowadays all (performing) artists have to be entrepreneurs as well, but are not trained for it through their education”. The same teacher concluded that only upon completing the training within the bootcamp, students realized how important and even necessary the skills and knowledge used and gained during the bootcamp are for their future successful careers as academic musicians in society.

⁷ With a small exception of some elements of Music in Media study program at the Faculty of Philology and Arts in Kragujevac, stated by one interviewee.

Conclusion

The new and original concept of the Entrepreneurial Bootcamp for Music Students “Music – Here and Now” has brought multiple benefits, in terms of cross curricular learning: motivation, involvement in the learning process, confidence in students’ own abilities, self-consciousness of individual potential, understanding of the team work, communication skills, realizing “real life” situations requirements etc. Students and teachers involved in the workshop described this approach as acquiring of the entrepreneurship approach and the conglomeration of competences, while at the same time working in an easier, more playful and interactive manner with their selected audiences as well as team members. There is no doubt that this educational option, even if in its initial phase in Serbian higher music education, supports the preparation of professionals better prepared for future jobs, “artistpreneurs” who will constantly explore intersections of music and civil society. Some projects have already proven interest of academic musicians for more rightful civil society, encouraging students to view themselves as agents of change.

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КРОСКУРИКУЛАРНО УЧЕЊЕ У ВИСОКОМ МУЗИЧКОМ ОБРАЗОВАЊУ: ПРЕДУЗЕТНИЧКИ КАМП ЗА СТУДЕНТЕ МУЗИКЕ МУЗИКА – ОВДЕ И САДА

Променљива природа тржишта за академске музичаре током неколико протеклих деценија условљава развој кроскурикуларних вештина, попут способности интеграције знања из различитих области, тимског рада, добрих комуникацијских вештина, способности да се на основу критичких увида оствари напредак и слично. Предузетнички камп за студенте три високошколске музичке институције из Србије, реализован у сарадњи са једним конзерваторијумом из Холандије под називом *Музика – овде и сада* у мају 2021. године у хибридној (уживо и онлајн) форми, добар је пример како кроскурикуларни приступ може да допринесе квалитету праксе учења студената музике. Предузетнички камп је реализован као део пројекта ДЕМУСИС Еразмус+ програма Изградње капацитета у високом образовању. Циљ студије јесте да се представи камп *Музика – овде и сада*, уз приказ једног од пројеката реализованих том приликом – *Zvezdara Forest Invaders* – као студије случаја, на основу чега су формиран закључци у вези са вештинама кључним за професију музичара који се академски образују у Србији у трећој деценији 21. века.

Кључне речи: кроскурикуларно учење, музичко предузетништво, ДЕМУСИС пројекат, предузетнички камп *Музика – овде и сада*, *Zvezdara Forest Invaders*