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Educational-artistic project on presenting contemporary Polish music to children

Summary

Developing pupils' ability to listen to music with attention and pleasure is one of the main goals of music lessons. This aim is achieved through various activities such as active listening to music and through attending concerts. One of many challenges facing music educators is to find ways to bring children closer to contemporary music. This paper focuses on an educational-artistic project dedicated to primary school students. The concept was to familiarise the pupils with the selection of works by Polish composers of the 20th and 21st century. The project was based on the assumption that innovative presentations of the musical works will make listening more understandable for children. Five contemporary pieces of Polish composers were presented at the concert and recorded on a DVD. Four of the pieces were composed in the 1970s-80s. The last one, the fifth, was composed specially for the project. During the performance, elements of dance, multimedia, narration and visual art produced in real time were utilized. The project had already been presented to children at several primary schools in the north of Poland. The research focused on the children's perception of contemporary Polish music. The presentation of each piece with the accompanying stimulation of musical and non-musical imagination in children can attract them to the New Music compositions. The observations could aid in formulating curricula and suggested classroom activities for general music lessons.

Keywords: contemporary Polish music, creativity, art integration, music education project

Introduction

For many years, music perception as one of the forms of musical activity has been implemented in music lessons and it has been the focus of interest of methodologists and music teachers. Learning to listen to music is demanding not only for students but, above all, for teachers, whose task is to be competent guides for young people in the extraordinary world of musical and aesthetic sensations. The conscious perception of music enables the listeners to discover its emotional nature. It is of equal importance to convey the knowledge of music culture, both their native as well as those of other nations. Moreover, through listening to music, students learn musical concepts, terms and styles, and what can be used in performing or composing. It should be emphasized that: "(...) listening to music goes beyond simple forms of musical expression: singing, playing instruments, dancing

and other forms of movement, and improvisational games. The value of direct expression is partially replaced by cognition – experiencing music that is richer in form, expression and value than that practiced by children and young people.” (Lipska & Przychodzińska, 1999: 242).

This paper describes the author’s own educational-artistic project entitled “The World of New Music – Artists Well-Known and Unknown”. The project based on the compositions by Kazimierz Serocki, Witold Szalonek, Zbigniew Barygielski and Maksym Kalinowski was dedicated to the primary school children aged 11-12. The project artistic director was Gabriela Karin Konkol (Konkol, 2022).

Project description

The artistic part of this project is connected with a DVD which contains the recording of a concert. The aim of the event was to familiarise students with a selection of works by 20th and 21st century Polish composers, to encourage them to listen to the compositions again, as well as to discover other musical pieces, which were created in contemporary times, referred to as New Music. The idea of the concert, its scenario, the choice and arrangement of the repertoire, incorporating the musical and non-musical content and the organization of the event was the project artistic director’s own concept. She also hosted the event. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the concert was recorded without the participation of the audience. Restrictions regarding the number of persons present in the same space at the same time meant that the concert had to be recorded, successively, in several stages. The first recording was made in Gdansk on September 29th 2020 in the Concert Hall of Stanislaw Moniuszko Academy of Music. In subsequent stages the recordings of pupils’ presentation were made in Primary School No. 5 in Gdansk-Zaspa and of the performance (in the form of a happening) featuring the visual artist from Academy of Fine Arts in Gdansk and the students, graduates and pedagogues of the Academy of Music in Gdansk.

In turn, the educational part of the project in question is about the scientific study as well (Pilch & Bauman, 2010). The subject of research is the reception of New Music by the primary school pupils of 5th and 6th grade based on the selection of works by Polish composers in the light of diversified didactic activities. The online study commenced in the school year 2020/2021 at online music lessons in general education primary schools in the north of Poland. The reception of music is closely linked to the recipients’ particular historical and cultural background. The underlying assumption is that didactic activities combining musical activities with non-musical associations enhance the level of the pupils’ knowledge and musical competence, stimulating their interest in New Music and in the achievements of Polish composers. The additional aim of the project was to verify

whether and to what extent there is a possibility of conducting teaching of listening to music during online classes in connection with various didactic activities.

The concept of introducing children and adolescents to contemporary music has for many years been one of the priorities for the artistic director, for her activities as a teacher and pedagogue. The fundamental concept in planning the programme of the concert was to find such pieces in the Polish music literature of the 20th and the 21st century which would be suitable for young listeners in terms of reception, but which would not be composed specifically for their age group. The leader of the project also did the best to ensure that the choice of performers (often specializing in performing New Music) would guarantee a performance of the highest possible artistic standard.

Another idea was to include original, unique pieces for various instruments (the common ones and the rarely heard ones) and various configurations (solo, duet, ensemble). In the final version of the recording one can hear the following instruments: piano, clarinet, trombone, double bass, harp, accordion and drums. Since the concert was dedicated for the audience consisting of primary school 5th and 6th grade pupils, it was assumed that they are already familiar with instruments, their construction, the way the sounds are produced and with the selected music literature. However, the students attending the event were able to get to know new sounds and innovative methods of playing those instruments. The analysis of the core curriculum of music as a school subject and the syllabus reveals that the pieces by 20th and 21st century Polish composers are not mentioned until the final grades of primary school (in the 6th and, more frequently, in the 7th grade). The subject matter of the concert was therefore intentionally planned to go beyond the scope of the core curriculum and to precede the content discussed during music lessons in schools.

The project artistic director's original idea was to commission a musical piece especially for that occasion, in which professional instrumentalists would perform along with primary school children (at the same age as the concert attendees). It was also decided to find such pieces, which – discussed with the use of means and associations the children are familiar with – would make this demanding repertoire more accessible for them. It was crucial to use the language of art which is already known to children, such as: dance, painting, literature and multimedia. The idea of the presentation of each piece was the stimulation of the children's musical and non-musical imagination. The "tools" with which students are familiar, such as movement, drawing, poetry or multimedia presentations are meant to avail for them a totally new universe – the universe of New Music. The factors taken into account in selecting the pieces for the concert were not only the musical content and the artistic value, but also their didactic adequacy. The specific objectives thus included familiarising pupils with proper terminology of contemporary music pieces, regarding the trends, styles and composition techniques.

The concert programme consists of five pieces representing the New Music category, such as: *Swinging Music* for clarinet, trombone, cello (or double bass) and piano by Kazimierz Serocki, 1st and 2nd Sketch from *Three sketches for harp solo* by Witold Szalonek, *Bird from a Dream* for accordion and percussion by Zbigniew Bargielski, and *Interactions for musicians and children* by Maksym Kalinowski.

After discussing the concept of each piece presented on the DVD, a short description on how this content was introduced by teachers during music lessons at general school will be described.

Author's research

The subject of the author's research was the reception of New Music, based on the example of selected works by Polish composers, by fourth and fifth grade elementary school students in the light of teaching activities related to the idea of art integration. It was preliminarily assumed that there were no statistically significant differences between students of grade 4 and 5 in musical competencies, such as knowledge of musical instruments, musical terms, composers, formative elements.

The aim of the experimental research discussed in the article was to demonstrate whether and to what extent planned didactic activities related to the idea of art integration (involving: visual arts, such as painting, performance, literary creation, for instance storytelling, dance, improvisation with school instruments) deepen students' reception of New Music in terms of: means (simplicity, inspiration), idea/form (improvisation, graphic music) and compositional techniques (sonoristics, aleatorism).

The analysis of the study results proved that the introduction of different types of activities related to the idea of art integration, matching them with the ideas/forms present in the selected works and the compositional techniques used, significantly influenced the reception of New Music by the students. Intensive creative didactic activities conducted in music lessons as part of the study, as well as the methodically planned deepening of knowledge of New Music works, were significant in the reception of music while listening to the DVD-recorded concert. The online study included 181 students (in both experimental and control group) from five elementary schools in the Pomorskie voivodship. The research involved a deep analysis of students' works in literary, musical and visual arts. Rich study results are still under analysis. A description of the students' activities follows.

Kazimierz Serocki – *Swinging Music* for clarinet, trombone, cello (or double bass) and piano (1970)

Learning goals

The presentation of this piece was aimed at drawing the pupils' attention to the original rhythmic schemes of swing and to the search of new musical timbres by New Music composers. This pursuit leads them to the application of innovative ways of playing musical instruments and their preparation. The composer left the choice of which string instrument would be a part of the ensemble to the performers' discretion – in this particular performance the double bass was used.

The performance of this piece was preceded by a swing rhythm presentation, played solo on drums. It was meant as a form of preparation of the pupils for the perception of the piece. The rhythm was combined with a choreography arrangement performed by three dancers – students of the Musical Department at the Academy of Music in Gdańsk. The project artistic director's concept here was to enable pupils to further explore the rhythm of swing. That is why the young audience, while sitting, was encouraged to move their bodies to the rhythm of the swing music they heard.

Project implementation

The main task related to this piece was for the students to learn about swing music. The teacher explained that as an introduction to this topic, movement was used on the basis of the swing presented by the dancers, who performed it to the rhythm played on drums. According to the author's assumptions, the goals of presenting the *Swinging Music* piece in the music lesson were twofold: developing movement skills (seated): movement coordination, movement with music, expression, emotions, creativity, and searching for new sound colours by using innovative ways of playing instruments. The term "instrument preparation" was introduced, as it was often used by New Music composers. They searched for new sounds and therefore encouraged performers to try unconventional ways of playing instruments (e.g., knocking on the sound box with their hand, inserting paper in between the strings, blowing into the mouthpiece of the instrument itself). The students were also asked to search for new ways to play the instruments they had made with their own hands and to pay attention to the variety of produced sounds. After these exercises, the teacher instructed the students to pay attention to new and often surprising ways of playing familiar instruments in the piece they listened to, and to the importance of emotion and mood in these compositions.

Witold Szalonek – 1st Sketch from *Three sketches for harp solo* (1972)

Learning goals

Just like in the previous piece, the musical instrument was used here in an innovative way. The composer experiments with traditional instruments, searching for new sounds material. The instrument preparation changed the timbre of sounds and revealed new sound of the harp in this composition. The notation of New Music pieces often requires the creation of a special system of signs. On the multimedia presentation, shown during the performance of the piece, pupils may get to know a non-typical manner of notation for this composition, namely, utilizing the graphic score. The project artistic director's concept was to highlight the numerous possibilities such a score offers for the interpretation of the piece.

Project implementation

Working on this composition was intended to draw students' attention to musical notation (Image 1). The goal of the lesson was to learn about the graphic score and consolidate the concepts of articulation, dynamics. The teacher explained to the students that composers first hear different sounds in their imagination, and then record them on sheet music or in special music programs. After the presentation of the sample piece and its notation, the teacher asked the students to listen to the 1st Sketch for harp and represent it using dashes, dots, continuous or dotted lines (without drawing figures or instruments), paying attention to their thickness. It is important to show the articulation and dynamics that occur in the piece. Materials used for this activity are: a white A4 or A5 sheet of paper, pastels/ crayons/ markers/ or Paint program (only one colour can be used).

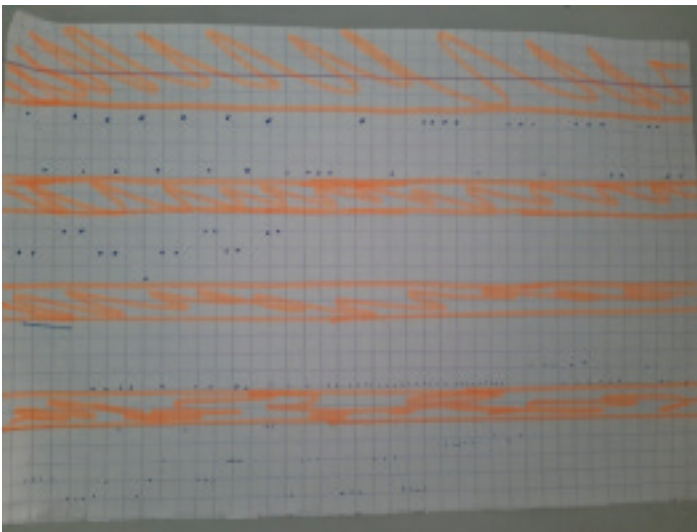


Image 1. Graphic score made by the student.

Witold Szalonek – 2nd Sketch from *Three sketches for harp solo* (1972)

Learning goals

The inspiration for the New Music creators was the timbre and its qualities, defined as sonorism. In another sketch the composer demonstrated the new sonorous possibilities of the harp, as the tuning key for the harp was used to play the instrument here. The aim of including this composition into the programme was to raise pupils' awareness of the timbre in a musical piece. In order to ensure pupils' better understanding of the project and its subject matter it was decided to refer to their non-musical associations, namely, to their own visual art creativity. While listening to the musical piece a pupil observed the creation of a visual art work, and, in turn, can "sense" the art integration: the colours in a musical piece and the sounds derived from the visual artwork. As requested by the author of the project, the show was performed in the form of a "happening". The object and the subject of the situation on stage was the presence of the visual artist throughout the entire harp solo performance. In this way he became a creator and, at the same time, a subject of artistic matter. The emotions which accompany the artist in his work play an important role here.

Project implementation

The task, entitled "Colours of Music", was designed to sensitize children to colours in music. The teacher encouraged the students to imagine themselves as painters. In this task, they had to "paint" the sounds. The students were asked to listen to a piece of music and depict the sounds with colours that best reflected the mood of the piece. The task was to paint the piece using colourful patches (without figures or instruments) across the surface of a sheet of paper (Image 2 and 3). The painting utensils used in the work were arbitrary and were defined in general terms: A4/A5 white sheet of paper, poster paints/watercolours or possibly pastels or crayons.



Image 2. "Colours of Music" painting by Lena, age 12.

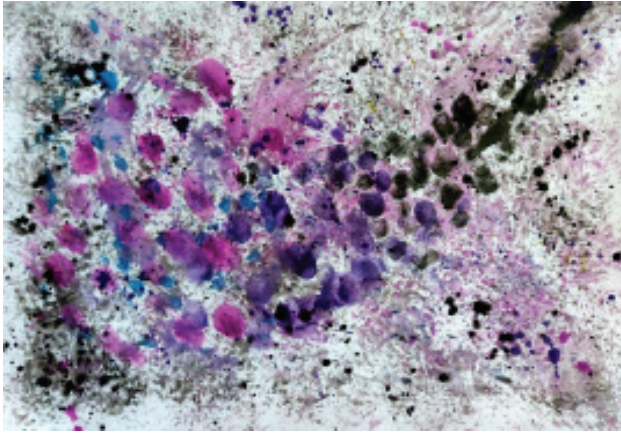


Image 3. “Colours of Music” painting by Kasper, age 12.

Zbigniew Bargielski – *Bird from a Dream* for accordion and percussion (1980)

Learning goals

This was the only composition in the concert’s repertoire, which had a mysterious title. It elicits associations with a fable, unique and full of emotions. A poem, written by the author of this project, is recited, before the musical piece is performed, being a sort of introduction to listening to the composition. The recitation of the poem without any image allows the listeners to fully concentrate on what they hear. The text is the description of a bird from a dream, full of contradictory features, as well as the multi-threaded story of its adventures. The goal of such a concept is to allow the audience to form free associations, in order for the music and musical events in the composition, emphasised by its diversified dynamics, to evoke various associations and specific mood in the children’s imagination. The text becomes a pretext for constructing one’s own version of the story, based on the musical and non-musical experiences of the listeners. The poem is thus not an aim in itself, merely a tool, which, by referring to activities with which children are familiar, such as story writing or poem writing, is meant to help them understand the musical piece. During the presentation of the composition the listeners learn about the sound-generating possibilities of the accordion and about the extended instrumental potential of percussion: a whip, acoustic box, hanging toms, drums, gong, vibraphone, bamboo chimes, tom drum, flexatone. The technique referred to as aleatorism was applied in the composition. The author of the project used the analogy between the element of randomness and surprise in this technique known to children from board games (from Latin word *alea* – dice). In both cases there are various random acts.

Project implementation

The task entitled “Musical Storytelling” involved children’s literary creativity. Its purpose was to stimulate and develop the student’s creative dispositions in handling words and creating narratives to the music they were listening to. The teacher pointed out that while listening to music, various images and associations appear in one’s imagination. Music tells different stories and evokes emotions in the listener. The teacher asked the students to imagine the events under the influence of the music they heard and create their story. The children were to go on a journey to an enchanted world of imagination, to which they were invited by the composer himself by giving this piece the title: *Bird from a Dream*. They could start writing right away or wait until the piece was finished. The teacher pointed out that a short story in written form can have any structure and can describe fantastic (unrealistic) events.

Here is a story written by a pupil: *One night I dreamed about a bird that was a duck. I threw this duck some grain, and it began to chase me. I ran and ran, and this duck began to double and triple until there was a whole flock of them. The ducks circled me, then I woke up, it was a nightmare* (Karol, age 12).

Maksym Kalinowski – *Interactions for musicians and children* (2020)

Learning goals

Moods and emotions are important in the piece composed specially for this project. The composer is Maksym Kalinowski¹ – a former student of the Gdansk Music Academy from Paweł Mykietyn’s composition class. It is then this piece’s first performance and the first recording of the composition. The author of the project, upon commissioning it, made two requests to the composer: to include in the score all the instruments which feature in the concert and to invite the children – peers of the listeners – to take part in the performance of the composition. The presentation of this work was aimed at stimulating the pupils’ sensitivity to the moods and emotions as well as drawing their attention to improvisation and its role in New Music compositions. Young performers tried to resonate with

¹ Maksym Kalinowski is a composer, arranger, organist, and creator of electroacoustic music. He is a graduate of the Stanisław Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdańsk, where he studied composition under Andrzej Dziadek (Bachelor’s degree with distinction) and Paweł Mykietyn (Master’s degree). He was awarded a scholarship by the Rector of the Academy of Music in Gdańsk for outstanding students. His compositions have been performed at national and international festivals and composer concerts by renowned ensembles and orchestras, and have been recorded on two albums. He has participated in numerous masterclasses. Currently, he studies musicology at the University of Wrocław and he is a teacher of harmony, musical forms, and history of music at the Primary and Secondary Music School in Gdańsk.

nature and the mood of the piece and while improvising, using school instruments and other objects, to integrate with the musical piece within the framework designed by the composer. The composition resulting from such collective work has a wide range of performing resources. Moreover, the pupils, while listening to this composition, can learn to better recognize rhythmic *ostinato* and to pay closer attention to the role of the conductor and the purpose of using the baton.

Project implementation

The task entitled “Become a Creator” involved experimenting with instruments. The goal of this activity was to develop the students’ creative talents. The children were asked to listen to an excerpt from Kalinowski’s piece and to get into its character and mood. The teacher told them more about the dynamics present in the piece and about the different ways of producing sound, i.e. articulation. After listening to the piece, a creative task followed: children were asked to record a video (e.g. on a cellphone) of their musical suggestions. Upon hearing the piece once again, from a laptop or some audio-player, after about 20 seconds, they had to join in by playing self-made instruments and try to reflect the mood of the piece (Image 4). The children’s imagination helped them find the emotions that the composer included in the piece. In this way, they joined forces and created a composition – the result of this collaboration.



Image 4. Self-made instrument.

Conclusion

The activities described in the author's own concept were aimed at preparing pupils for the reception of artistic music, particularly the pieces by 20th and 21st century Polish composers. The study results confirmed that appropriately selected didactic activities related to the art integration, such as: visual arts (painting, performance), literary creativity (storytelling), dance, improvisation with school instruments deepen students' reception of New Music in terms of: means (simplicity, inspiration), ideas and form (improvisation, graphic music) and compositional techniques (sonoristics, aleatorism). Creative didactic activities (musical, artistic, literary) play a significant role in awakening students' interest in New Music repertoire. The whole project, scheduled for spring 2020, had to be postponed until autumn and was organized online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The hints for the future are to conduct the study and prepare students for the concert during classroom lessons at school and to organize a live concert with audience participation.

It cannot be denied that from the early stages of children's development it is vital to stimulate their music listening abilities. In order to understand music it is crucial to get to know it – not merely to acquire musical knowledge, but also to experience its emotional content. The incentive for promoting listening to music in the music education of children and adolescents should be based on the idea that it is the only form of activity enabling them to be directly in touch with artistic music, which they are not yet able to perform themselves.

As well-known Polish music pedagogue Maria Przychodzińska mentioned already many years ago: "(...) experimentally conducted classes of integrated aesthetic education, which include music, visual arts, literature, musical theater, and which are organized in the form of perception of the art or in the form of integrated artistic expression of children, spontaneously open the imagination." (Przychodzińska, 1989: 72).

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ПЕДАГОШКО-УМЕТНИЧКИ ПРОЈЕКАТ ПРЕДСТАВЉАЊА САВРЕМЕНЕ ПОЉСКЕ МУЗИКЕ ДЕЦИ

У раду је представљен педагошко-уметнички пројекат под називом „Свет нове музике – познати и непознати уметници“, који је састављен из концерта и истраживања у општеобразовној школи. Пројекат је настао на основу идеје и уверења ауторке овог рада да свако дете, без обзира на узраст, треба да се упозна с уметничком музиком. План и задаци на часовима музике, који су коришћени у пројекту, имали су за циљ да припреме ученике да доживе, заволе и разумеју одабрана дела пољских композитора из 20. и 21. века. Резултати истраживања дали су одговоре на главна питања постављена у методологији истраживања. Ауторка пројекта сматра да креативне и оригиналне презентације уметничке интеграције утичу на то да деца заволе савремену пољску музику.

Кључне речи: савремена пољска музика, креативност, уметничка интеграција, музичко-педагошки пројекат