

Thematic Article



Music Education in Romania

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Abstract

In the present essay we present the actual musical education in Romania with reference to the history of the musical education of the post World War II period of the 1950s, which is important because, as we will see, no essential changes have been made since then. As regarding the professional musical education, the 1950s model of the institutional system is still functioning, except that in a large number and with more institutions. Due to the local initiatives, opportunities for musical studies are remarkable, but they are not institutionalized and do not offer a certificate. The prestige of the music lessons in the public education has changed for the worse, though there are more, better trained music teachers that are working now, as compared to the period before the change of the social system (1990). We will also present the reasons of this paradoxical phenomenon.

Keywords: teaching music, institutional system public education, professional teaching of music, levels of training, music teacher training

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Singing and music in public education

The origins of teaching music in public education date back to the Educational Law number 1948/5. This law nationalizes the religious and private schools and states the new school levels and their goals. Article VI of the 1948/1751 order of the Great National Assembly enumerates the core subject matters including physical education but it does not mention music, foreign languages and drawing. Nevertheless, these subjects were included in the educational plan but the judgement of their importance is obvious if we consider the above mentioned facts. In the past seven decades this point of view has become acceptable, moreover, the new educational laws that followed with the ever decreasing number of lessons only made the situation worse.

Nowadays the subject singing and music is included in the educational plan of every level-from nursery school to high school- of the public education. In nursery schools children are taught songs connected to everyday issues, this happens usually within two musical activities a week.

In the elementary (1st to 4th) and secondary (5th to 8th) grades pupils study music one lesson a week. In high schools they study music in the 9th and 10th grades in half a lesson per week, but in the 11th and 12th grades only pupils on humanities study music in half a lesson per week.²

In the following part we will present the expectations stipulated by the Ministry of Education for the different levels. In this presentation the strongly questionable conception about musical education can be outlined. In the Romanian musical education only absolute solmization is used, the relative one is not familiar with the teachers either, although, considering the low number of lessons, the use of relative solmization could lead to a more effective teaching. The alternative teaching methods are completely absent from the national teaching conception and this is no wonder, because in the higher education they started being used only ten years ago. The use of these methods is also prevented by the lack of music rooms and instruments in schools (for example pianos), as well as the fact that there are few music teachers who can improvise on the piano, which, for instance, represents the basis of the Dalcroze method, but we could go on mentioning the lack of equipment for other methods, too. Practically, the conception about musical education has not changed at all in the past seven decades, except that the number of lessons have decreased. In the 1970s there still were two or three choir lessons at the disposal of the music teacher, but there are none anymore. There is no effective musical education without choirs, but this is not included in the pupils' timetable and teachers are not paid for it either. If there still are choirs, those are only the result of the teacher's enthusiasm and dedication. Although the educational plan mentions the teaching of musical instruments too, there is no special lesson for it, only

² As there is only half a lesson a week for teaching visual arts too, they usually solve the problem by having one music respectively visual arts lesson every second week.

the one lesson a week or every second week. On those occasions everything should be taught and learned.

During the nursery school³ years the goal of teaching music is to make children able to distinguish between musical sound and noise, to identify the length, strength, height of different notes, thus to learn to consciously identify the characteristics of the sound perceived. The teaching plan focuses on singing of songs for children, which is suggested to be done accompanied by their own rhythm and movement, and with the instrumental accompaniment of the teacher. Part of the program consists of two voice singing, as well as expressing the atmosphere of the tune by movements, and also tune-movement improvisation. Music audition is also included in the teaching plan: selections from the musical literature adequate for the children's age are recommended to be listened to and recognized.

The teaching plan for musical education in nursery schools could serve as a good base for the musical education at school, but unfortunately even at this level the idea that music is not a "core subject", therefore it is not important, has deeply struck roots. It is not only this idea that prevents accomplishment, but rather the low training level of the nursery school teachers. The nursery and elementary school teacher training at universities provides only one semester of music courses, respectively a one-semester-long course and seminar in methodology. Students do not even know the score, they have no knowledge in music and they will not be able to acquire any in such a short period of time. This will turn into a very serious shortcoming, as they will not be able to read and learn songs, so they will teach their own poor repertoire of songs for children with no chance of development or innovation. According to the recommendations of the teaching plan, the nursery school teachers should grant instrumental accompaniment to the children's singing but this cannot be done considering the above mentioned facts. They do not study musical literature, so they are not able to select the appropriate pieces. Although the teaching plan and the bibliography contain many recommendations concerning what should be auditioned at nursery schools, it is not enough for the teachers to find them and make the children listen and understand, as they are unqualified in musical literature. Thus, not even the constantly enriched musical pedagogy literature (Zavela, 2004, Dolgoşev and Marinescu, 2004, Florea, 2006, Palade and Palade, 2008 stb.) can help them, and it is the same case with nursery school song collections (Selmeczi, 1971, Selmeczi, 1972, Inescu-Motora, 1980, Lupu and Staneci, 1999).

The teaching plan expects the nursery school teachers to use musical instruments but the problem is not only that they cannot play any, but also that there are no instruments in most schools and nursery schools. Practice shows that not only the content of the teaching plan is not fulfilled but also the joy of clear singing, whose main cause is the

³ <http://edums.ro/invpresc/Curriculum-pentru-invatamantul-prescolar.pdf>

inadequate choice of songs, is missing. Therefore the professional preparation for teaching singing and music does not take place.

When starting school at the age of six or seven, and during the following four years there still could be a chance to compensate the lacks of nursery school. At the end of elementary school, that is at the end of the 4th grade⁴ children should know the basis of reading and writing music (the line system, the notes la, sol, mi, re, do, the value of musical notes, the 1/4 rest, the 2/4 and 3/4 beat) to sing with correct breathing, clearly, with appropriate diction. They have to be able to recognize the sound of some instruments (piano, violin, and trumpet). They have to know folk songs. Music audition is also part of the teaching plan. It recommends fragments from the musical literature and also the minuet from among the musical genres. By the end of the 4th grade the ability of solo and group singing has to be acquired too with the correct dynamics and tempo.

The 5th-8th grades teaching plan is based on the above mentioned knowledge, in fact it should be based on it but except some rare cases the elementary school music teaching does not fulfill its task either. Most of the elementary school teachers teach songs (more or less), but it is still common to teach maths during the music lessons because the pupils are nationally tested in maths and other “core subjects” and their teachers are evaluated according to the pupils` results in these tests. On the other hand the situation of the elementary school teachers is the same as that of the nursery school teachers regarding their knowledge in music Thus, musical pedagogy literature (Scornea and Dragan, 1998, Munteanu, 2001, Florea, 2006, Palade and Palade 2008) does not increase the effectiveness of music classes.

Children go in the 5th grade at the age of ten, where they are finally taught by professional music teachers. What do music teachers face then? Children do not like to sing because if they have not learned to sing clearly and beautifully, they haven't experienced the joy of music either (the cloudy, unclear singing couldn't have brought about joy for them), so music lessons have become boring and uninteresting. It is known that, just like in the development of speaking, in building up the basis of interest in music there is a “critical age” in development of skills. If this age is over, it is very hard to develop these. In the case of music this age is between 8 and 11 (Hamori, 2002). Pupils have a professional music teacher in fact only at the upper limit of the critical age. The music teacher, even if well trained musically, may not be a teacher who can overcome the disinterest in music and the problems that have occurred regarding singing, changing this way the negative process. Practice shows that few teachers can do this and because most of them cannot, disinterest in music, the refusal of singing, indifference regarding classical music, (or even the refusal of it) and in many cases the lack of results in teaching music at public schools still increase.

⁴ <http://www.isjcta.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/IV-Programa-ed-muzicala.pdf>

Teaching reading and writing music is not the goal of the 5th-8th grades teaching plan⁵ although it contains all the necessary knowledge for that, except that the number of lessons is scarce. Because of the lack of time for developing the necessary skills for reading, the development of solmization skills is not an expectation. There are no textbooks or exercise books. What can then be a real expectation in this situation? The main goal must be singing and making children like music!

The knowledge to be taught is complex and offers rich information until the end of the 8th grade. Rhythmical elements: simple and complex beats dotted rhythm, special value division. They get acquainted with the pentatonic scales as well as with the major and minor scales until two key signatures, the notion and the characteristics of major and minor, the trichords, the ornamentations, the notion of transposition, repetition, progression, and variation. The teaching plan also contains knowledge about musical genres and literature and even contemporary popular music. It is obvious that there is a conception about what knowledge should be conveyed, but in spite of this an 8th grade graduate definitely cannot read the simplest tune, he can at most sing a few folk songs. The changing of the teaching plans (now from September 1st, 2017 a new one is to be introduced) means only the increase of the requirements not that of the lessons. The biggest problem is the lack of a well outlined conception for teaching music (not even the music teachers think about this, they teach "lessons") and modern methods.

The teaching plan (or curriculum) of high schools⁶ follows a concentric conception that is to say it re-discusses the previously acquired knowledge (which is boring for the students) starting from the musical notes, beats, scales, then some history of music knowledge follows in a chronological order focusing only on one genre, though there have been published newer, more appropriate methodological suggestions (Hausmann, 2016). The half a lesson a week stipulated for musical education cannot grant that students can be made to like music and listen to it, especially if they get acquainted with classical music only during the music lessons at school, because neither the environment nor the media stimulates them in this respect.

The activity of some outstanding music teachers is a really pleasant spot in the musical education of children, which certainly needs a lot of extra work. Interestingly this extracurricular musical education works mostly in smaller localities (little towns, villages). These teachers work helped by sponsors and if they produce good results, the local authorities may help them, too. There are several children choirs and orchestras all over the country with outstanding performances. The most impressive example is the Children's Philharmonic of Szentegyhaza⁷, the "*Fili*" which has a 100 member children choir and a 40 member children orchestra. This is a unique group which started its

⁵ <http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Educatie-muzicala.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.isjcta.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Educatie-muzicala-clasa-a-IX-a.pdf>

<http://www.isjcta.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Educatie-muzicala-clasa-a-X-a.pdf>

⁷ https://www.google.ro/search?q=szentegyhazi+gyermekfilharmonia&rlz=1C1AVNE_enRO667RO667&aq= Szentegyhazi+&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.33193j0j7&am

activity thirty-five years ago and tours both in the country and abroad (in Canada this year).

Music schools

In the music schools of Romania -as opposed to the public schools- musical education is at a high level and it is very effective. The art schools comprise grades 1 to 12. The educational institutions granting vocational training in several branches of art like music, fine arts, ballet, acting, also give general knowledge education. The most frequent ones are music and fine arts high schools. There is an art school in every county seat, but there are some in smaller municipalities too. In the latter these can be only secondary schools (grades 1st to 8th). Students studying different arts attend the same class for general education. These types of schools started also at the end of the 1940s and they have been working successfully ever since. In the music departments of the art high schools the teaching is of high level, professional and has very good results. Generally, there are two profiles: musical instruments and singing (folk and classical). The instrument and canto lessons in grades 9-12 can be taught only by artist teachers who graduated from the Academy of Music's departments of musical instrument and canto. They follow the program of teaching musical instruments, though there may be differences in this because, development is highly dependent on the abilities and diligence of students. Still, the subject matter has to be taught and learned by the school leaving exams. There is an entrance examination for the 1st grade of the music schools that checks musical abilities. Children get to the end of the 8th grade according to their annual performances but they have to sit for an entrance examination before the 9th grade. Musical training takes place after the lessons. Each pupil has two lessons of musical instrument per week, two sol-fa lessons, choir lesson, and history of music, harmony study, and chamber music orchestra later in high school. The development of students is checked every semester. Schools consider it very important to give their students the opportunity to perform in public right from the 1st grade. This is the reason for organizing class concerts, department concerts and recitals each semester. Beside all these, the artistic board of the school can organize other events to motivate the students. Such is, for instance, the scale competition. Every year there are several national competitions for music school students which are preceded by strict selections in schools. In addition to singing and instrumental competitions there are national "Olympic games" with high standards⁸. The prize winners of the national competitions can take part in international ones.

Art schools

The conservatoires started to be set up in the first decade of the 20th century. They offered musical training not necessarily for children but regardless age, to everybody who wanted such training. The conservatoires worked even after the 1948 reform of

⁸ <http://www.isjcta.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Educatie-muzicala-clasa-a-X-a.pdf>

education, then in 1954 the sixteen conservatoires of the country were turned into Popular Art Schools. These schools worked under the trusteeship and guidance of the Ministry of Culture and not that of the Ministry of Education and they still do nowadays, although the teachers' program, number of lessons and wages are the same as those of the public school teachers.

The Popular Art Schools preserved the traditions of the conservatoires, that anyone can study there who would like to do so and whose abilities make it possible, regardless age and education. What makes them different from the conservatoires is that not only music is taught, but they offer training in all branches of art: music, fine arts, ballet, and acting. Not only has the range of offers widened but also the network of schools because, as compared to the initial sixteen conservatoires, nowadays there is one such school in every county seat, but also in smaller towns.

The type of art and the training specializations these schools offer mainly depend on local requests. The duration of the training depends on the specialization: e.g. folk canto gives a certificate after two years, those who choose piano or violin can graduate after five years. These certificates do not grant professional qualification. Since 1989 this form of artistic education works as Art Schools.

The musical education at art schools is very diverse. They try to meet everybody's expectations from children to adults. Therefore their offer includes classical music, folk music, jazz, popular music within the canto and musical instrument section. Although this type of training tries to meet the needs of the amateurs, teachers and artists are professionals and thanks to this they have outstanding results in national competitions. Teaching is the same and in the same number of lessons as in music schools, namely two instrument lessons a week, one lesson of sol-fa, of theory of music and history of music a week. The training at art schools is not for free, you have to pay for it every semester but the tuition fee is not much, as the average financial background of the population is taken into consideration.

Higher education

After the 1948 reform of education, the university level musical education took place in three institutions of great tradition: Bucharest, Cluj and Iași. The predecessors of each of these institutions started their activity in the 19th century: Cluj-1813, Bucharest and Iași-1864, when institutionalized musical training started, but only in the first half of the 20th century did they become of university level: from 1933 in Cluj, 1931 in Bucharest and 1948 in Iași. Although these institutions preserved their denomination of "*conservatoires*",⁹ since 1990 they have functioned as "academy of music" and later, since 1998 as "University of Musical Art". At the beginning the training was five years long, then, since 1969, it has become four years long. In all the three institutions there were

⁹ Cluj: Conservatorul de Muzică „Gheorghe Dima”, București: Conservatorul de Muzică „Ciprian Porumbescu”, Iași: Conservatorul de muzică „George Enescu”

specializations in musical instruments, canto, composition, musicology, pedagogy of music and in Bucharest there was also conductor training. The three institutions trained great instrumentalists, and singers who performed with great success on the stage all over the world graduated from the canto department. After the change of the social system the range of offers of the music academies widened with training of opera directors, religious music, jazz and folk instruments.

After World War II there was a shortage of music teachers in the increased number of schools and although in the three “conservatoires” there was teacher training of university level, the need for music teachers all over the country could not be met, just like in the case of the other subjects. Therefore in the 1960s the pedagogical institutes with three years training were set up, which entitled graduates to teach in grades 5th to 8th. This is how pedagogy of music departments in Târgu Mureș, Brașov and Timișoara were set up. These institutes provided music teachers for rural schools, but in 1979 because of economic reasons, the government stopped the pedagogy of music departments not only within the institutes, but within universities, too (the other departments - instrument, canto, composition, musicology-worked with a reduced number of students). This means that there was no music teacher training for ten years.

The 1989 social system change brought about big changes in the musical higher education, too. The one-decade-long drastically reduced musical higher education got stronger again: the number of students increased, new specializations started and, most importantly, new institutions were established. Nowadays in most university centers there is a musical art department with different specializations. In some places only music teachers are trained, in others the range is wider (canto, instrument, religious music).

The introduction of the Bologna system influenced the musical training, too. The basic training in canto, instruments and musicology is of four years, followed by a two-year-long master course, while at the musical pedagogy department the basic training is three years long, the master course is two years long, but the latter does not exist everywhere. There are places where only the basic training is accredited.

When speaking about the Romanian musical education, we believe that we have to talk about the training of music teachers, too. Within universities the Teacher Training Institutes function as sub-units. The students of different specializations if they want (even the instrumentalists if they want to teach), can get teacher training, too. A tuition fee for all students is required for teacher training and is made up of two steps: basic training and master course. The former entitles for teaching in grades 5th to 8th, the latter for high school teaching and getting the PhD entitles for teaching at university. Throughout the teacher training period, regardless of specialization, students study pedagogy, psychology, didactics, class management and in addition to all these, the subjects specific of the specialization. In the case of music teacher trainees this means methodology and teaching practice.

The problems of teaching music are also due to the low number of lessons dedicated to the actual teaching. They study methodology for one semester (two courses and one seminar) and do teaching practice in the third year three lessons a week. This means that each student can teach three lessons and gets his graduation certificate as a professional teacher with only this much practice. The preparation for the lessons and their analysis are included neither in the students' timetable nor in the teacher's. So the student has to face and manage teaching music having only a three-lesson teaching experience which can be done only by really talented teachers.

Summary

Musical education in Romania has a good institutional background and teaching plan, the number of trained music teachers has increased in the past two decades, the literature has significantly expanded, but the effectiveness of the musical education (and we are not referring to art schools and universities) in public schools is not as it should be. There are two causes that can be defined for this situation: one is the low number of lessons, the other is the extremely short time dedicated to the training of the music teachers, not to speak about the very deficient musical training of the nursery and elementary school teachers. The outstandingly trained teacher can produce good results even in spite of the low number of lessons; therefore, the training of the trainers should be dealt with. If the professional training of the teachers teaching music in public education would get a stronger accent and they would graduate after at least a one-semester-long intensive, daily teaching practice, the whole well built up network of institutions could be more successful, and musical education could fulfill its socially necessary and declared goals.

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