

PLAYING WITH PUPPETS

Playing with Puppets. How to deal with this title - or rather with its content - in the frame of musical education? Our time is an era of projects and this fact is probably reflected in the composition called *Puppet Scenes* (*Loutkové scény*) by a contemporary composer from Brno, Ctirad Kohoutek (*1929). It is a collection of seven short instructive compositions named *A King, a Queen and Court – A Sad Princess – Pretentious and Cowardly Bridegrooms – A Sacrificial Procession to a Dragon – Victorious Honza – Wedding Rejoicings – A Lullaby for a Little Prince*. (*Král, královna a dvořanstvo – Smutná princezna – Domýšliví a zbabělí ženichové – Obětní průvod k drakovi – Vítězný Honza – Svatební veselí – Ukolébavka malému princovi*.)

Kohoutek's *Puppet Scenes* may become a basis for a prospective two-month project for seven pupils of a 1. cycle at music schools, preferably from a class of the same teacher. The project can be split up into three stages – working with the 20th century instructive piano composition and two meetings, which enclose this work.

The first meeting begins with a motivational dialogue with a topic of fairy tales. The collective creation of a tale, in which only the characters - a king, a queen, a princess, court, princes, a dragon and Honza – are given, would surely invigorate a child's imagination.

A child's imagination is endless; therefore perfectly imaginative tales come into being. The scene is very soon occupied by the puppets, together with a short narrative about their history, function and usage. A puppet is prepared for each child, with which the child can familiarize and can try to acquire the basic rules of its manipulating.

This stage is followed by work with the composition as such. Each of the five children gets their composition, depending on their specific technical and interpretive level. Then by using a detailed analysis we stimulate the children to find certain parallels between a compositional technique and the technique of manipulating puppets. This is one of the ways of throwing light on the questions of contemporary compositional methods by using non-musical devices.¹ The consultation of the „pupils' discoveries“ is then a part of a traditional individual lesson.

¹ Cf. SEDLÁČEK, Marek. *K problému komunikace v umělé hudbě 20. století*, p. 130–133.

The compositional material is mostly realised by five-tone groups, drawing from the 1.–5. notes of a diatonic major or minor scale. Kohoutek works with these groups on a principle of various compositional techniques but predominantly on the principle of serialism and its many variations.²

We think that Kohoutek found in the five-finger technique a kind of a parallel to the technique of manipulating marionettes. The puppeteer in this case manipulates the marionette by means of its bond on a so-called control bar. Holding the control bar, we use something like a quasi five-finger technique in which it is not possible to put fingers over each other. Even more obvious comparisons can be made to one of the older ways of manipulating marionettes – the puppeteer manipulated the puppet by strings attached directly to his fingers – a thumb and a little finger led hands, an index finger and a ring finger led legs, and a middle finger led the head (body) of the puppet. A certain stationariness and „limitedness“ of a movement of a puppet is here a parallel to pure finger piano technique.³

In the first composition *A King, a Queen and Court* the author uses the compositional techniques typical for serialism (quaternion). In the first four bars the sixteen-tone theme appears – it characterises the *King*. The next four bars (the theme of the *Queen*) are used as a retrograde inversion of the original theme, transposed from C sharp (RP_{cis}).⁴ The original theme and its horizontal inversion with a following vertical inver-

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Andante maestoso (4/8)". The score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 1-4) introduces a 16-tone theme. The second system (measures 5-8) shows the retrograde inversion of the theme, transposed to C sharp. The third system (measures 9-12) continues the theme and its inversion. The fourth system (measures 13-16) shows the original theme and its horizontal inversion with a following vertical inversion. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *pp*, and *pp*, and articulation markings like *acc* and *acc*. The tempo is marked "Andante maestoso" and the time signature is "4/8".

² About the possibilities of non-dogmatic work with a tone row also in NEDĚLKA, M. *Z odkazu žáků Pavla Bořkovce*. 1. vyd. Praha : Univerzita Karlova – Pedagogická fakulta, 2001. 121 p. ISBN: 80-7290-041-2. By using methods of Jan Klusák the author shows at first the strict serial order and later using constants.

³ this information is based on a consultation with MGA. Jan Vondráček, a puppeteer and a drama player from Divadlo v Dlouhé in Prague

⁴ the terminology is taken from the book *Novodobé skladebné smery v hudbe*

sion appear in the following 9.-17. bars, highlighted by countermovement of fingers of a right and a left hand. Tones *b* and *f sharp* function here as an elliptical bridge⁵ and enrich the tone row at its beginning and end. A principle of countermovement is used in double stops in fourths (perfect and augmented – respecting the material of a scale C major) in a right and a left hand – *Court*. The countermovement and the subsequent double stops represent – in a traditional puppet theatre approach – a movement typical for a couple (coming from opposite parts of the scene in countermovement, joint walk) and a movement of a bigger group („hopping“ of several attached puppets).

Also the next composition *A Sad Princess* is connected to serialism. In the left hand we find a five-tone theme in the first bar which continues in the second bar as its horizontal inversion. A fifth tone of the theme is a link for both variants of the theme which in this case functions again as an elliptical bridge and from which the already mentioned inversion originates.

The same function is then realised also by the last tone of the inversion, which is also at the same time a first tone of a subsequent basic theme. Using this technique the author created a basic eight-tone model which he strictly repeats during the whole composition. The sounding irregularity is then ensured by its integration into five-beat metre which then creates a compact eight-bar block which appears three times in the whole composition. An interesting fact of this „sad composition“ is the choice of the five-tone material from a major key.

The third composition *Pretentious and Cowardly Bridegrooms* offers in its first four bars a free repetition of a nine-tone theme in a classic sense of an antecedent and consequent of a period. In 5.-8. bars the theme is transformed on a principle of vertical dodecaphony.⁶ Also the subsequent devel-

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "A Sad Princess". It consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system (bars 1-2) is marked "Sostenuto grazioso (♩ = 72)". The second system (bars 3-4) shows a continuation of the theme. The third system (bars 5-6) is marked "Vivace a poco cresciuto e moderando al Fine" and includes the instruction "cresc. rit.". The score features various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

⁵ The tone is not repeated and it is the first and the last tone at the same time – more in Kohoutek, C. *Novodobé skladebné sméry v hudbě*, p. 105

⁶ more Kohoutek, C. *Novodobé skladebné sméry v hudbě*, p. 103

opment of the composition shows the use of an antecedent and consequent of a period (bars 9 – 12 and 13 – 16), or countermovement (17– 23). In 23.bar we can encounter an improvisational element, which is in *Puppet Scenes* very rare.⁷

The fourth composition *A Sacrificial Procession to a Dragon* resembles by its nature (tempo Grave, half notes, four-beat metre, minor keys) a funeral march. The left hand plays ostinato in several figures, the right hand adds a melody in one or two voices.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Grave e mesto". The score is written in bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. It consists of four systems of staves, each with a right-hand staff (treble clef) and a left-hand staff (bass clef). The first system starts at bar 1 and ends at bar 5. The second system starts at bar 6 and ends at bar 10. The third system starts at bar 11 and ends at bar 15. The fourth system starts at bar 16 and ends at bar 20. The left hand plays a steady, rhythmic ostinato pattern throughout. The right hand plays a melodic line with various dynamics and articulations. The tempo is marked "Grave e mesto" and the mood is "quasi corale".

In the fifth composition *Victorious Honza* – staccato clusters appear in five-tone ambit in the left hand. The right hand is based on the serial principle again – theme of the note row (1.bar), theme in a shortened form (2.bar), retrograde inversion of the theme (3.bar), inversion and retrograde inversion of the shortened form of the theme (4.-5.bar). 6. and 7.bar is the same as

⁷ A creative (improvisational) broadening of a tone row and modes is covered by courses for teachers-pianists of music schools (ZUŠ) which are a part of the project GAUK 2004 The Piano Improvisation on a basis of Analysis of a Musical Work (the author of the project is Michal Nedělka). The improvisational approach to dealing with a tone row helps deeper and quicker understanding of a studied composition.

1. and 2. bar, 8. bar – inversion and retrograde inversion of the shortened form at the same time as countermovement of both hands.

Vivace duro (♩ = 160)

1 2

14 *ff sempre*
sfz sfz

9 *sfz*

16 3

12 *pizz* *RP fis* 8

4 5

10 *sfz* 11

The sixth composition *Wedding Rejoicings* has a typical rotation of 3/8, 4/8 and 5/8 metre, the right and the left hand in a straight „swinging“ movement of perfect fourths and then in major and minor sixths. The „swinging“ movement again resembles the movement of a traditional puppet choreography.

1 Allegro leggiero, ben ritmico (♩ = 120)

3/8 *p* 4/8 3/8

12

1/8 3/8 *mp* 4/8 5/8

The last composition *A Lullaby for a Little Prince* is based on a principle of using two themes and their vertical inversions.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Adagio affabile (2-3-3-1)". The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of music. The first system begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The tempo and mood are indicated as "Adagio affabile". The first system includes measures 1 through 3, with a first ending bracket over measures 1 and 2, and a second ending bracket over measure 3. The second system continues the piece with measures 4 through 8. The third system includes measures 9 through 10, with a first ending bracket over measures 9 and 10. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *mf* *espress* (mezzo-forte, expressive). The overall structure is based on two themes and their vertical inversions.

After two months, which are an optimal time for a complex study of the individual compositions, we can approach the final part of the project. It can be split up into two parts – a preparatory end and a presentation end. The preparation is again a meeting of the teacher and all seven young interpreters. Each of the pianists informs others about their „discoveries“, which stand now on a theoretical basis thanks to the preceding consultations with the teacher during individual lessons. For the acquisition of the new knowledge we use the presentation part of the project. We prepare a quasi „lecture“ with a ten-minute concert, meant not only for parents, but also for all pupils of music and art at the same school. This meeting may become an impulse for next projects for both music and art students.

Sources

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