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## **STUDENTS' MUSICAL PREFERENCES FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC, 20TH CENTURY MUSIC, AND WORLD MUSIC – THE OPEN-EAREDNESS HYPOTHESIS<sup>1</sup>**

**Summary:** *The paper explores students' preferences for classical music, 20th century music, and world music, as well as the influence of student age, gender, and previous familiarity with the piece of music on the preferences for 20th century music and world music. As a part of the research, a general data questionnaire and an assessment scale for testing preferences for musical fragments were administered to the sample of 183 students in fourth and eighth grades of primary school and senior students attending grammar school. Students generally show greatest preferences for world music. The influence of age on the preferences for 20th century music and world music has been confirmed. Female students, compared to male students, show greater preferences for 20th century music, while in the case of world music, no statistically significant differences were observed with respect to gender. It has been confirmed that students show greater preferences for familiar music, compared to unfamiliar music. The fact that younger students are more open to different musical styles can have significant implications for designing musical activities for children of preschool and early school age.*

**Keywords:** *music classes, musical preferences, musical styles, open-earedness hypothesis.*

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<sup>1</sup> The paper entitled "Students' Musical Preferences towards Classical Music, 20th Century Music and World Music" is a graduate thesis defended at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Department of Teacher Education, under the mentorship of Prof. Snježana Dobrota, PhD.

## INTRODUCTION

The ability to aesthetically evaluate music represents the listener's sensitivity to the artistic quality of the piece of music and its performance. Musical preferences are short-term assessments of liking a musical fragment, while musical taste represents a relatively stable, long-term behavior and evaluation, i.e. more permanent dispositions that represent the totality of an individual's preferences (Mirković-Radoš, 1996).

Music preferences are an extremely complex phenomenon and are formed under the influence of a large number of different factors. Dobrota and Reić Ercegovac classify these factors into several categories: cognitive factors, emotional factors, physiological excitement, cultural and social factors, familiarity of music, characteristics of music and characteristics of the listener (Dobrota & Reić Ercegovac, 2016, pp. 14-15). According to LeBlanc's *Interactive Theory of Music Preferences* (1982) there is the hierarchy of variables affecting music preferences. *The reciprocal feedback model of music processing* (Hargreaves et al., 2005) focuses on music, situations and contexts of listening, reaction to music and listener (Hargreaves et al., 2012), while the authors of the *Revised reciprocal feedback model of music processing* (Hargreaves et al., 2012) add to those influences the imagination as the cognitive foundation of musical perception and production (Hargreaves et al., 2012, according to Habe et al., 2019).

The most frequently explored predictors of music preferences are related to the characteristics of music, such as tempo, dynamics, tonality or familiarity of music, and to the characteristics of the listener, such as gender, age, music education, personality traits, etc.

Dobrota and Reić Ercegovac (2015) examined the relationship between students' music preferences of different mode and tempo and personality traits. The results showed that female in comparison to male had a higher degree of music preferences, regardless of tempo and mode. All students preferred musical fragments in the fast tempo and major key. Emotional stability and optimism were significant predictors of preferences for music in fast tempo and major key, while openness to experiences, introversion and gender were significant predictors of preferences for the slow tempo and music in minor key.

In the context of the study of aesthetic response to music and musical preferences, Hargreaves (1982a; 1982b) conducted a number of studies and came up with the concept *open-earedness* which implies the openness of children, compared to adolescents and adults, to different and unfamiliar musical styles. With age, children increasingly turn to standardized forms of music, such as popular music, thus losing their original openness and curiosity. Such a decline in openness occurs at the age 4/5 to the age of 6/7 (Hargreaves et al., 2006). Many authors also observe a general decline in *open-earedness* in children, but

only around the age of 9 (Gembris & Schellenberg, 2003; Kopiez & Lehmann, 2008).

LeBlanc formulates four hypotheses that characterize the development of musical preferences over a lifetime: (1) younger children are more open to different music; (2) openness decreases with the onset of adolescence; (3) there is a partial reversal of openness as the listener matures from adolescence to younger adulthood; (4) openness declines as the listener matures and enters old age (LeBlanc, 1991, p. 2).

Roulston (2006) examined the musical preferences of children aged 3–8 in conversations and interviews with parents and children and observing music classes. She notes that children show preferences for a series of musical styles from an early age, that they prefer popular and rock music, and that listening to music at home significantly differs from listening to music at school.

If children's *open-earedness* to different musical styles decreases with age, the question arises as to whether it is possible to modify their musical preferences through passive, repeated exposure to unfamiliar music or through active music instruction. Schuckert and MacDonald (1968) used initial tests to ask children aged 4–6 to express their preferences for classical and jazz music. In the following four days, the children passively listened to the music for which they showed the least preference, for five minutes a day, while performing other activities. The children were then re-tested, and half of the children showed a slight increase in the musical preferences for the music they liked the least in the initial study, although the results were not statistically significant.

Carper (2001) incorporated active music instruction into his research and introduced American popular music, children's music, Western classical music, and traditional Japanese music to children aged 3–7. Half of the children listened to music passively, and the other half actively, during thirty minutes of music lessons a day. Children from the group which actively listened to the music significantly increased the preferences for unfamiliar music, especially Japanese music. Children at the age of 7 showed the highest preference for popular music, while children aged 3–6 were open to all four types of music.

Louven (2012) presents an interesting reflection on the incorrect identification of the notions of *musical preference* and *open-earedness*. Namely, he believes that children's preferences for a certain musical style and openness and curiosity towards unknown and unusual musical styles represent two different categories. A person can show low preferences for particular music, but at the same time be open to that music. Therefore, in his view, deriving openness from the evaluation of different musical styles presents an unacceptable simplification. He conducted research on a sample consisting of high school and university students aiming to explore what happens to *open-earedness* in older age. The results confirm that musical preferences change significantly, influenced by age

and music instruction, but that *open-earedness* to different music is a relatively stable category. He concludes that such *open-earedness* can also be viewed as a personality trait, *openness to new experiences* from the Five-Factor Personality Model.

The aim of the research is to examine students' preferences for classical music, 20th century music,<sup>2</sup> and *world music* as well as the influence of age, gender, and music familiarity on preferences for 20th century music and *world music*.

In accordance with the formulated research objective, the following research problems were defined: (1) to examine students' musical preferences for classical music, 20th century music, and *world music*; (2) to examine whether age and gender influence preferences for 20th century music; (3) to examine whether age and gender influence *world music* preferences; (4) to examine the relationship between music familiarity and musical preferences.

Based on the defined research objective and problems, the following hypotheses were set:

- H1:** Students generally show greater preferences for classical music, compared to 20th century music and *world music*.
- H2:** Younger students, compared to older students, show greater preferences for 20th century music.
- H3:** Younger students, compared to older students, show greater preferences for *world music*.
- H4:** Female students, compared to male students, show greater preferences for 20th century music.
- H5:** Female students, compared to male students, show greater preferences for *world music*.
- H6:** Students show greater preferences for familiar music over music that is unfamiliar to them.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted in Kaštel Stari and in Split on a sample of 183 participants (F=106, M=77), including fourth graders (N= 68) and eighth graders (N=57) attending Filip Lukas Primary School from Kaštel Stari and senior students attending Marko Marulić IV Grammar School from Split (N=58) (Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the category of 20th century music is separated from the category of classical music, to which it belongs, because we wanted to examine the openness of the participants precisely to 20th century music and *world music*.

**Table 1** Sample structure (N=183)

Gender	N	Grade	N
M	77	Grade 4	31
		Grade 8	27
		Grade 4 of grammar school	19
F	106	Grade 4	37
		Grade 8	30
		Grade 4 of grammar school	39
Total	183		

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND TESTING PROCEDURE

For the purposes of the research, a two-part questionnaire was constructed. The first part contains questions related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants (gender and grade).

The second part is *The Musical Preferences Questionnaire*, which consists of 15 rating scales ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = I don't like it at all, 5 = I really like it), each rating scale being accompanied by a number and assessment of the familiarity of the musical fragment. For the purposes of the research, a compact disc was made containing 15 musical fragments including five fragments of classical music, 20th century *music*, and *world music* respectively, each lasting 30 seconds. The psychometric features of *The Musical Preferences Questionnaire* are shown in Table 2. The distribution of preferences for classical music and *world music* fragments does not differ significantly from the normal distribution, while in the case of 20th century music it differs significantly from the normal distribution. Since the distribution of the total results of preferences for musical fragments does not differ significantly from the normal distribution (K-S  $d=0.04$ ;  $p>0.05$ ), the procedures of parametric statistics will be applied in further analyses.

Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, and the research was conducted in groups, during regular classes.

**Table 2** Psychometric features of *The Musical Preferences Questionnaire*

No. of musical fragment	Musical fragment		
	Classical music	20th century music	World music
1.	L. van Beethoven: <i>Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Eroica, Op. 55, 1st movement</i>	A. Webern: <i>Concerto for nine instruments, Op. 24</i>	Giorgos Zabetas: <i>Bouzouki fire (Greece)</i>
2.	F. Schubert: <i>Symphony No. 8 in b minor, Unfinished, 1st movement: Allegro moderato</i>	I. Stravinsky: <i>The Consecration of Spring (Introduction)</i>	<i>Madhyalaya (India)</i>
3.	F. Mendelsssohn: <i>Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in e minor, Op. 64, 1st movement: Allegro, molto appassionato</i>	A. Schönberg: <i>Piano Concerto, Op. 42</i>	<i>Sakura (Japan)</i>
4.	P. I. Tchaikovsky: <i>Symphony No. 4 in f minor, 4th movement: Finale, Allegro con fuoco</i>	A. Berg: <i>Lyric suite</i>	<i>The music of Ireland: Jigsandreeks (Ireland)</i>
5.	W. A. Mozart: <i>Symphony No. 25 in g minor, 1st paragraph</i>	E. Satie: <i>Gymnopédies</i>	Ernest Ranglin: <i>Below the Bassline (Jamaica)</i>
Cronbach $\alpha$	0.79	0.77	0.78
M (sd)	17.57 (4.20)	15.48 (4.56)	18.13 (4.47)
range	5-25	5-25	7-25
average r among particles	0.44	0.41	0.43
K-S d	0.07, p> 0.05	0.12, p <0.05	0.09, p>0.05

Table 3 shows the average degree of preferences for musical fragments. Participants assessed the composition by Ernest Ranglin *Below the Bassline* (Jamaica) with highest grades, and the composition by A. Webern *Concerto for Nine Instruments, Op. 24* with lowest.

**Table 3** The average degree of preferences for musical fragments

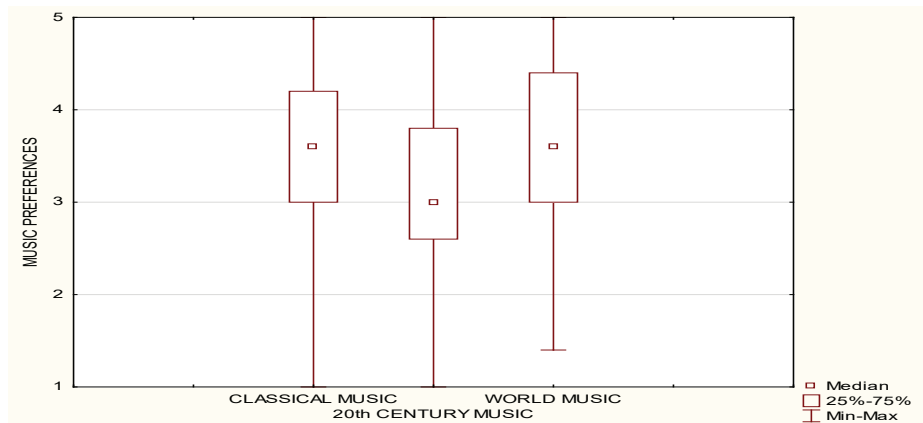
<b>Musical fragment</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>min</b>	<b>max</b>	<b>SD</b>
L. van Beethoven: <i>Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Eroica, Op. 55, first movement</i>	3.34	1.00	5.00	1.01
Giorgos Zabetas: <i>Bouzouki fire</i> (Greece)	3.73	1.00	5.00	1.13
A. Webern: <i>Concerto for nine instruments, Op. 24</i>	2.64	1.00	5.00	1.30
<i>Madhyalaya</i> (India)	3.21	1.00	5.00	1.50
F. Schubert: <i>Symphony No. 8 in b minor, Unfinished, 1st movement: Allegro moderato</i>	3.55	1.00	5.00	1.22
I. Stravinsky: <i>The Consecration of Spring (Introduction)</i>	3.27	1.00	5.00	1.23
F. Mendelssohn: <i>Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in e minor, Op. 64, 1st movement: Allegro, molto appassionato</i>	3.56	1.00	5.00	1.09
<i>Sakura</i> (Japan)	3.02	1.00	5.00	1.24
A. Schönberg: <i>Piano Concerto, Op. 42</i>	2.89	1.00	5.00	1.28
<i>The music of Ireland: Jigsandreeels</i> (Ireland)	4.02	2.00	5.00	1.11
P. I. Tchaikovsky: <i>Symphony No. 4 in f minor, 4th movement: Finale, Allegro con fuoco</i>	3.33	1.00	5.00	1.14
A. Berg: <i>Lyric suite</i>	2.85	1.00	5.00	1.18
Ernest Ranglin: <i>Below the Bassline</i> (Jamaica)	4.15	1.00	5.00	1.10
E. Satie: <i>Gymnopédies</i>	3.83	1.00	5.00	1.30
WA Mozart: <i>Symphony No.25. g minor, 1st movement</i>	3.78	1.00	5.00	1.23

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*H1: Students generally show greater preferences for classical music, compared to 20th century music and world music.*

In order to determine whether students differ in their preferences for individual musical style periods, Friedman's analysis of variance (Friedman ANOVA=72.89; df=2.00; p=0.000) was performed, which indicated the existence of significant differences in student preferences. We can see the students prefer *world music*, followed by classical music, while they showed lowest preference for 20th century music (Figure 1). This made us reject the hypothesis.

Music classes in the entire educational vertical are directed toward Western classical music, which Small (1998) considers to be an intellectual and spiritual achievement that is unique in world cultures. Some authors point out that one of the most important goals of music education is to introduce students to the world of Western classical music (Rheingans, 2005; Woody & Burns, 2001). Consequently, we expected that students would show the greatest preferences for classical music, which they most often encounter in class. Yet, the students showed the greatest preferences for *world music*.



**Figure 1** Differences in student preferences with regard to musical style periods



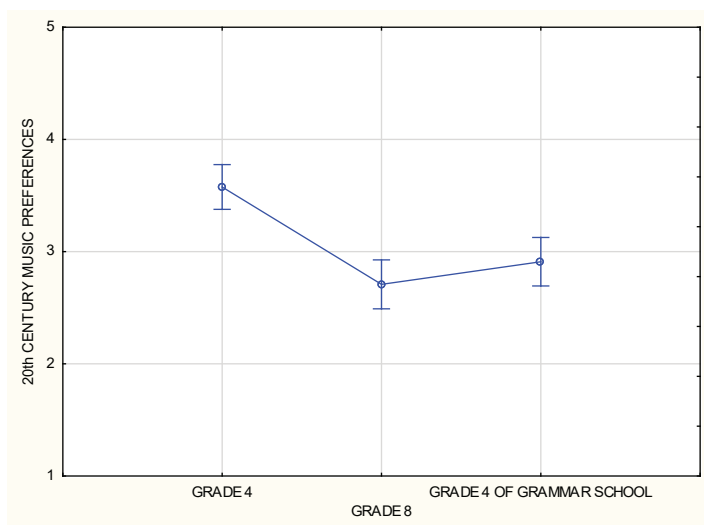
*H2: Younger students, compared to older students, show greater preferences for 20th century music.*

In order to examine the influence of age on student preferences for 20th century music, variance analysis was performed (Table 4, Figure 2). The results indicate the existence of differences between younger and older students, with students in grade 4 of primary school showing the greatest preferences for 20th century music. This confirmed the hypothesis.

The results obtained are consistent with those of Fung et al., (1999/2000), who studied the influence of age, gender, and musical style on the preferences of primary and secondary school students from Hong Kong. The results show that younger students are more receptive to different and unfamiliar musical styles and that they generally show higher preferences for all styles compared to older students. This confirms the idea of *open-earedness* proposed by Hargreaves (1982b). LeBlanc (1991) defines *open-earedness* as the listener’s tolerance of different musical styles and he operationalized this concept in terms of preference.

**Table 4** Differences in preferences for 20th century music with regard to student age

	Age	N	M	SD	F (2.1 80 )
<b>20th century music preferences</b>	grade 4	68	3.58	0.87	18.844; p=0.000
	grade 8	57	2.71	0.85	
	grade 4 of grammar school	58	2.91	0.78	



**Figure 2** Differences in preferences for 20th century music with regard to student age

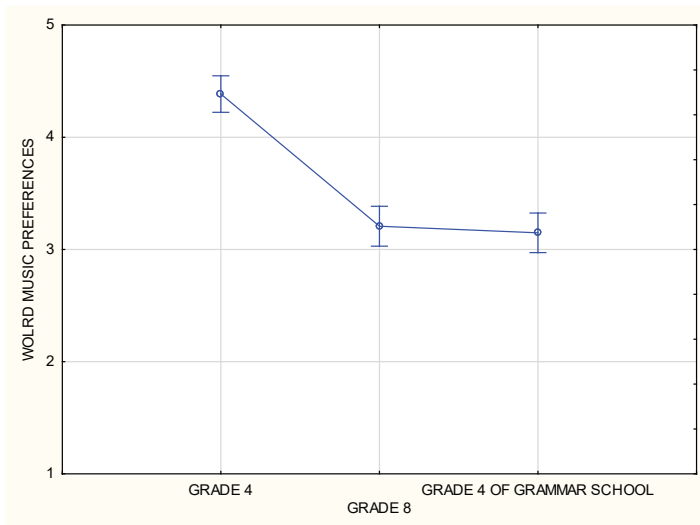
H3: Younger students, compared to older students, show greater preferences for world music.

To examine the influence of age on *world music* preferences, variance analysis was again performed (Table 5, Figure 3). The results indicate the existence of differences between younger and older students, with students in grade 4 of primary school showing the greatest preferences for *world music*. This confirmed the hypothesis.

The results are consistent with Hargreaves' idea of *open-earedness*, but also with the results of Kopiez and Lehmann (2008) who tested Hargreaves' idea on a sample of 186 early school age students. Although the results confirm a decline in openness to unconventional musical styles (classical, ethnic, and avant-garde music) when students pass from first to second grade, this effect disappeared when classical music was excluded from further analysis.

**Table 5** Differences in *world music* preferences with regard to student age

	Age	N	M	Sd	F (2,180)
<b>World music preferences</b>	grade 4	68	4.39	0.60	67.56; p=0.000
	grade 8	57	3.21	0.70	
	grade 4 of grammar school	58	3.15	0.74	



**Figure 3** Differences in world music preferences with regard to student age

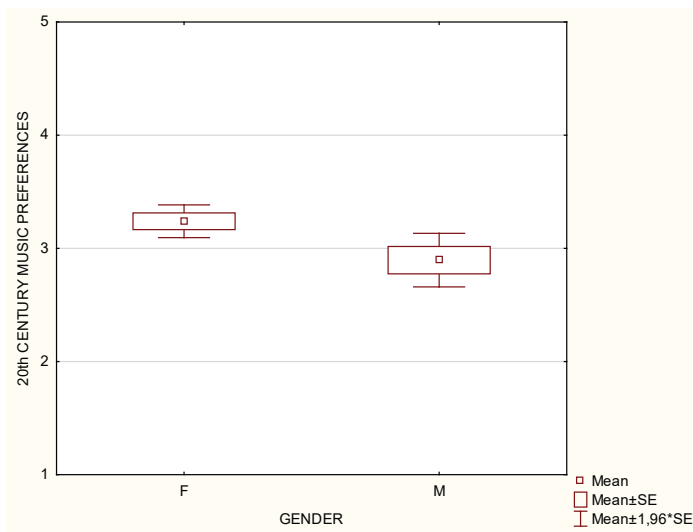
*H4: Female students, compared to male students, show greater preferences for 20th century music.*

To examine the influence of gender on student preferences for 20th century music, the t-test was performed (Table 6, Figure 4). The results indicate the existence of differences between male and female students in 20th century music preferences, with female students preferring this musical style to a greater extent. Thus, the set hypothesis was accepted.

The results are consistent with those of Hargreaves et al. (1995) who studied the musical preferences of English high school students and noticed that female students expressed preferences for more styles than male students. The authors explain this by the fact that female students had better musical instruction than male students. It has also been noticed that younger students are more open to different musical styles.

**Table 6** Differences in 20th century music preferences with regard to student gender

	M <sub>female students</sub>	M <sub>male students</sub>	t	df	p
<b>20th century music preferences</b>	3.24	2.90	2.55	181	0.01



**Figure 4** Differences in 20<sup>th</sup> century music preferences with regard to student gender

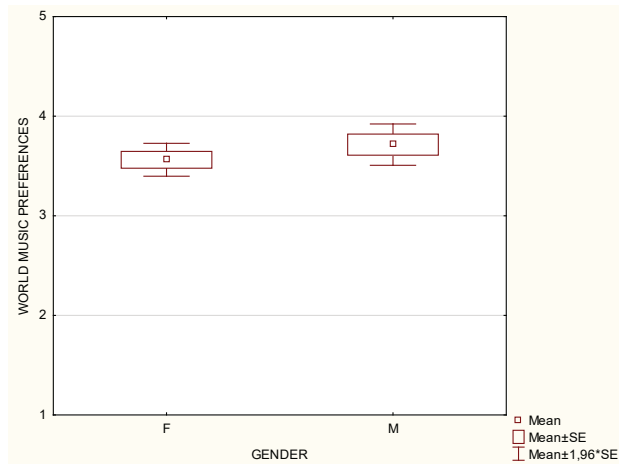
*H5: Female students, compared to male students, show greater preferences for world music.*

To examine the impact of student gender on their *world music* preferences, the t-test was performed again (Table 7, Figure 5). The results indicate no differences between male and female students in *world music* preferences. This made us reject the hypothesis.

The results obtained are inconsistent with the results of many studies (Crowther & Durkin, 1982; Hargreaves et al., 1995), which confirm that female students prefer a larger number of musical styles, including *world music*, than male students.

**Table 7** Differences in *world music* preferences with regard to student gender

	M <sub>female students</sub>	M <sub>male students</sub>	t	df	p
<b>World music preferences</b>	3.56	3.71	-1.14	181	0.26



**Figure 5** Differences in *world music* preferences with regard to student gender

*H6: Students show greater preferences for familiar music over music that is unfamiliar to them.*

To determine whether being familiar with a piece of music affects students' preferences, correlations between familiarity and musical preferences were calculated (Table 8). The existence of such correlations was observed for all musical fragments, thus confirming the final hypothesis.

The obtained results are in line with the results of many studies confirming that participants show higher preferences for familiar music, i.e. that music familiarity is a significant predictor of musical preferences (Tan & Super, 2012; Teo et al., 2008).

**Table 8** Relationship between music familiarity and musical preferences

Musical fragment	Unfamiliar (f)	Familiar (f)	Correlation between preferences and familiarity
L. van Beethoven: <i>Symphony No. 3 in E flat major; Eroica, Op. 55, 1st movement</i>	118	65	0.25*
Giorgos Zabetas: <i>Bouzouki fire</i> (Greece)	114	69	0.37*
A. Webern: <i>Concerto for nine instruments, Op. 24</i>	118	65	0.30*
<i>Madhyalaya</i> (India)	132	51	0.49*
F. Schubert: <i>Symphony No. 8 in b minor; Unfinished, 1st movement: Allegro moderato</i>	83	100	0.33*
I. Stravinsky: <i>The Consecration of Spring (Introduction)</i>	96	87	0.42*
F. Mendelssohn: <i>Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in e minor, Op. 64, 1st movement: Allegro, molto appassionato</i>	74	109	0.28*
Sakura (Japan)	148	35	0.38*
A. Schönberg: <i>Piano Concerto, Op. 42</i>	158	25	0.31*
<i>The music of Ireland: Jigsandreeels</i> (Ireland)	116	67	0.33*
P. I. Tchaikovsky: <i>Symphony No. 4 in f minor; 4th movement: Finale, Allegro con fuoco</i>	102	81	0.33*
A. Berg: <i>Lyric suite</i>	123	60	0.38*
Ernest Ranglin: <i>Below the Bassline</i> (Jamaica)	121	62	0.33*
E. Satie: <i>Gymnopédies</i>	90	92	0.34*
WA Mozart: <i>Symphony No. 25. g minor; 1st movement</i>	100	83	0.35*

\* p &lt; 0.05

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research confirmed that students generally show greatest preferences for *world music*. The influence of student age on the preferences for 20th century music and *world music* has also been confirmed, with both types of music being preferred by younger students. Female students, compared to male students, show greater preferences for 20th century music, while in the case of *world music* no statistically significant differences were observed. Finally, it was confirmed that students show greater preferences for familiar music over music that is unfamiliar to them.

Music lessons in our schools are mainly based on the Western art tradition that music pedagogues accept as a universal of music. Musicologists, music pedagogues, and even some ethnomusicologists often point out that such music is superior to all other types of music, and such an opinion rests on the idea that Western art music is intrinsically interesting and complex, while understanding other types of music requires gaining knowledge on their respective social contexts (Dobrota, 2012).

However, the fact that children are open to unfamiliar musical styles and flexible in that regard has significant implications for the organization of music classes. Namely, in addition to Western classical music, children need to be surrounded from an early age by various types of music, including *world music*, which significantly enriches their musical experiences and artistic sensibility.

Possibilities for such a concept of music teaching are also provided by the *Curriculum of Music Education for Primary Schools and for Grammar Schools in the Republic of Croatia* (2019). The document defines the purpose and description of the subject, educational objectives of learning and teaching, the structure – the domains of the subject curriculum, educational outcomes, content, and levels of adoption by grades and domains, connections with other subjects and cross-curricular topics, learning and teaching the subject, and evaluation of adoption of educational outcomes. The recommended list of songs, nursery rhymes and musical works includes musical examples that go beyond the classical music tradition and enable the acquisition of sophisticated musical experiences and the development of students' artistic sensibility.

In order to gain a more comprehensive insight into the issue of musical preferences and *open-earedness* to different types of music, it is possible to conduct similar research on a sample of students of music and those enrolled in other study programs. This could enable a better insight into the various factors influencing the formation of the complex phenomenon of musical preferences.

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