

The Impact of Cultural and Citizenship Education on Social Cohesion

**3 – 5 December 2009
Vilnius, Lithuania
European Capital of Culture 2009**

Keynote

The Power of Music – Arts Education and Creativity as Catalysts for Social Change

by

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I am going to talk about how musicians address inclusion problems with four examples of using music to bring people together.

1. In the classroom, a controlled environment
2. Through a leader who tells people to do.
3. In a community where people are encouraged to decide for themselves what they want to do.
4. In special circumstances.

I started professional life as a teacher, then as an orchestral player in the London Philharmonic Orchestra. This is not creative – play the notes in front of you and are told how you should play them.

I left the orchestra to find new ways of involving youngsters to making their own music so that they would better understand music; by creating links between professional musicians and schools, partly as a reaction against dreadful fact-based (not music-based) orchestral schools concerts. For me the key was to set pupils challenges to invent their own music. In junior school the children use Orff instruments or any instruments they happen to be learning.

My first example is a project based on The Song of the Whale (Vox balaenae) by George Crumb. This project took place recently in Duisburg in collaboration with the Lehmbuch Museum of Contemporary Art. The children were encouraged to work together and invent their own whale music, making their own musical decisions. At the end of the project, their parents (people from many different backgrounds – Muslim, Christian, no religion, German and non-German) came to the museum for the performance. The children performed the music they had invented. The children’s music used elements borrowed from Crumb, so that when the children and their parents listened to the performance of Crumb itself, they already had points of reference that helped them to understand Crumb’s music.

EXAMPLE: film of the children’s performance in the Lehmbuch Museum.
www.klavierfestival.de/index.php?id=182&L=0

Primary school children are open, excited and receptive. At puberty things change. Teaching changes too. In the secondary school music teachers all too often decided that the new intake of children, who in primary school had been creative composers, know nothing about music. So they started teaching them things like reading music [why? – what use is it for most citizens to be able to read music? You need to read music if you are learning an instrument; then you learn it as part of your lessons. You don’t need to waste time on it in the classroom.]

In England, seventeen years ago, a National Curriculum for Music was introduced for the first time which said that every child from the age of five to fourteen should learn to compose (creative music-making – inventing music as in the Crumb project), should have experience of performing music (this doesn’t have to be on an orchestral instrument, it can be on a classroom instrument), and should learn to listen to music with understanding. But what has now happened is that our government has become so obsessed with reading, writing and arithmetic and, above all, with things that can be tested, that music has got squeezed out and few schools any longer have time for creative music.

My second example is a project that depends on one person, the leader of the project. A friend and colleague of mine, Gareth Malone, is passionate about choirs. He thinks that every community should have a choir and that every child should sing. He made a TV series called *The Choir* that was watched by millions, in which he went into a secondary school for boys in Leicester where there was no tradition of singing and where many pupils have a non-English ethnic background. In the course of nine months he created a choir which performed in China in the Choir Olympics. It didn't win, but that wasn't the point. The point was that you could create a choir in the most unlikely circumstances. The choir still exists.

Gareth's latest project – again it took nine months – was to go to South Oxhey in Herfordshire, a huge housing estate originally built for people from East London, who had either lived in slums or had been bombed out during the war. The whole estate is working class – there is no middle class. The population is 11,000. Self-esteem is strikingly low. At the beginning of the programme you heard people saying: "We are rubbish". A man said: "They call this place Beirut"; not with pride, but with shame. Gareth set out to create a community choir but at the beginning, nobody wanted to take part.

EXAMPLE: clip from the first episode of *The Choir: Unsung Town* made for BBC 2 by Twenty Twenty Television www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00mk568

At the end I will show you what he achieved. He even got young men in a boxing club to sing by agreeing in return to go into the ring and box with them!

My third example is the choosing of a community and motivating it to make music for itself. In my opinion this is the best model. I was involved in the very first Music Week, in Blandford Forum, in Dorset in 1984. The population of Blandford is 9,000, there are eight primary schools, one secondary school and one special school (for 'handicapped' children). We decided, as an incentive, to offer Blandford a professional orchestra – the Bournemouth Sinfonietta. We said that in a year's time they could have the orchestra for a week, but they could only use it for one concert. The rest of the time they could use the professional musicians as catalysts to help them to make whatever kinds of music they decided they wanted. We suggested that they put a committee together to plan the week. We – the Arts Council of Great Britain and South West Arts – offered to fund the week.

The project was astonishingly effective. An enthusiastic butcher wanted to take out the window of his shop and have non-stop jazz during the whole week. Instrumentalists gave free lessons in the street – ten minutes for anyone. All the schools took part. The following year Blandford Music Week took place again, now expanded to two weeks. It survived for ten years until the vicar, Andrew Babbington, one of the moving spirits of the week, died. Then Blandford Music Week died too.

We did a similar thing with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in Berlin-Buch, in the old Russian sector of Berlin. Buch has a large hospital population housed in many departmental hospital buildings built during the time of the Kaiser. The population is 13,500 – one *Grundschule*, one *Hauptschule*, one *Gymnasium* and one *Förderschule* (for physically handicapped pupils). It also has the Max Delbrueck Centre for Molecular Medicine. The aim of the project was to integrate the different elements of the town. We took 'the Seasons' as our theme, and adults invented their own 'seasons' music and poetry. Artists from the *Künstlerhof* in the old Schloss made sculptures with the community. Musicians from the Berlin Philharmonic performed for patients on hospital wards, and a particularly effective link was created between pupils in ordinary schools and those in special school for the first time.

In Essen, during the *Klavier Festival Ruhr*, Melez and the *Bochumer Symphoniker* mounted a project based on *Petrushka* by Stravinsky. The aim of this project (in the run up to Essen European Capital of Culture 2010) was to involve as many different cultures as possible from the *Ruhrgebiet* in this event. We created a fairground in the gigantic *Jahrhunderthalle* in Bochum. The different nationalities, Turks, Russians, Italians, Romanians etc produced food stalls and music; there were clowns, a huge carousel, puppets, jugglers and everything you have at a fairground. In the middle of all of this, the *Bochumer Symphoniker* suddenly got up on to the stage and performed the first half of *Petrushka* with youth dance and film to help the audience understand the story. Then the fair continued. At the end the *Bochumer Symphoniker* again took the stage for the remainder of *Petrushka*.

EXAMPLE: www.klavierfestival.de/index.php?id=260&L=0#c656

My fourth example is of community music in unusual situations. In Duisburg we did a water project with handicapped youngsters on a riverboat going up the Ruhr river. The public came with us; and youngsters made music on the boat together with the wonderful pianist Tamara Stefanovich, who also performed water music by Ravel. At the end of the river journey the head teacher of the *Foerderschule* said to me: “You know, it has been wonderful for these youngsters and their parents because there are so few chances for the parents to be proud of their children and for the children to show themselves in the best possible light”. Music created that opportunity.

The most difficult occasion and my last example was in Northern Ireland in 1987 at the height of “The Troubles” when we decided, with the Ulster Orchestra (the professional orchestra in the Province) that we would propose a Music Week (like Blandford) in Armagh. A year before the event was to take place, we held a meeting in Armagh and offered the orchestra for a week (in a year’s time) to see what would happen in a deeply divided society. Armagh is built around a huge green area (an eighteenth century horse race track), at one end of which is the Roman Catholic Cathedral and at the other the Protestant Cathedral. Thus the town is divided geographically – Protestants on one side, Catholics on the other, and they don’t mix (or didn’t at that time). The town formed a committee [the crucial thing is to find someone in the town who will be central to that committee]. We engaged a composer who would be in the town for three months to find out what music existed in the town and then to compose a piece, the Armagh Cantata, for the Ulster Orchestra and those musicians from the community. One group in Armagh was the Armagh Pipers’ Club, led by a Sinn Fein councillor (and therefore Catholic), another was the strongly protestant Old Boys’ Silver Band. We worked with handicapped adults to create a performance in the Armagh Planetarium, the Protestant Secondary Boys and Catholic Secondary Girls made music for the first time, all the schools were involved, and the committee developed an extensive programme of music in the community.

When I arrived on Friday, 8th May, ready to start the music week the following day as the Pied Piper of Hamelin leading families around the town in a musical procession, an IRA terrorists unit blew up a local police station and were then all shot by SAS special forces. So on Saturday morning Armagh was full of police, soldiers and armoured vehicles. Nevertheless, we decided to go ahead with the Pied Piper and the Music Week, and the whole thing was a huge success. At the end the Old Boys’ Silver Band invited the Armagh Pipers’ Club to their rehearsal hall to celebrate the success of the week, a hitherto unimaginable coming-together, all through the power of music.

Back in England, here, as promised, is a taste of the final performance of the community choir in South Oxhey.

FINAL EXAMPLE – The grand finale choir performance from the fourth episode of ***The Choir: Unsung Town***

I finish on a depressing note. These initiatives are fragile; orchestral education programmes are fragile; they depend all too often on a small group of enthusiasts. Above all, the problem is continuity of funding. Politicians will fund for one or two years, then they will move on to something else. Throughout my long career I have all too often seen initial ground gained but – because nobody has taken care of what happens next – the ground is lost.

So in England, we no longer in practical terms have a curriculum where everyone becomes a composer. My only hope is that because we have had the recent financial crisis, people may begin to demand that if money is to be spent on such arts events, they must be carefully planned so that continuity is ensured.