

# An opportunity to provoke students' interest in "serious" music

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**Abstract:** I present my pedagogical experience in optimizing the activity of perceiving the music in class by demonstrating variants of basic thematic material in a musical work (for the goals of the experiment there were developed variants of the main themes in Part I of Piano concerto d moll by W. A. Mozart), aiming at better understanding of its emotional content. The results of the experiment were confirmed through a test directed to check the recognition of the themes and the pupils' interest in the musical piece.

**Keywords:** Education, Music, Large-Scale Musical Education, Musical Work, Methods of Musical Education

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## 1. Introduction

I am a teacher in music at a secondary school. I have been occupied with music since early childhood. I became a professional musician while studying at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in the town of Plovdiv. There I had the opportunity to gain broad musical culture, to study thoroughly musical theory, and also to get the methodological training which is necessary for my career as a music teacher.

After my Master Degree I started work as a teacher and I have been doing this for 23 years. I work enthusiastically and ambitiously. I organized vocal groups with various musical repertoires. Together we were very successful. My career as a leader of vocal groups includes different formations:

In 1997 I was the leader of the vocal group "Sing with us" at the Teachers' Center.

From 1998 to 2003 – a conductor of "Rhodopsko Echo" Choir (The Echo of the Rhodopi Mountains).

In 2000 I created and led the French vocal group of Alliance Francais – Plovdiv at the Bulgarian – French Association "Alphonse de Lamartine".

Since 2010 I have been working with Bonne Min – Maria Luisa at the Center for Children without Parents "Maria Luisa".

Since 1994 I have been working with the vocal group Evergreen.

With "Evergreen" group and the French vocal group of

Alliance Francais I took part in the Francophone Celebrations, The Music Feast and other activities organized by Alliance Francais. With my vocal formations I have taken part in concerts and concert programs (I have diplomas and certificates) in Bulgaria, and also abroad, in TV programs and reportages.

Our soloists were winners in the TV programs "Like the Lions" and The French Song Competition.

Prominent Bulgarian composers have given us their songs. I also compose songs which are included in the repertoire of the group.

In 2004 the vocal group Evergreen participated in shooting the film of the French director *Jean-Luc Mage* – "From *Makon* to Plovdiv – Art beyond Time". The premiere of the film was also the opening of the "Golden Chest" Festival in Plovdiv. The film was released on DVD in France by "Zoom-Zoom Productions" (the award for journalism in the "Historical Towns and Places" series), and is broadcast by 60 channels round the world, and also during the long-distance flights of Air France.

In 2004 – 2005 the group "Evergreen" recorded the "Maritsa" CD, dedicated to our favourite singer Silvi Vartan (popular in France, she was born in Bulgaria). In May 2006 there was a presentation of the video to the song recorded by *Jean-Luc Mage*, fitted by Associate Professor Krasimira Fileva.

The repertoire of the group includes songs in French, English, Italian and Bulgarian.

The vocal group Evergreen has also taken part in international projects.

In April 2008 a successful tour was held in Torino – Italy; in Paris by invitation of the Association “Bonne Mine” – France; in June 2009 participation in the Festival of the French song “The Golden Key” in Plovdiv under the patronage of Alliance Francais (recorded by the French TV5 and TVart). Next followed concerts in Austria, Italy, Hungary. In April 2014 we got an honorary diploma for excellent performance concert in Budapest (Hungary).

Our concerts are very well accepted and reported in popular Bulgarian newspapers.

Among my projects are:

2003 – 2005 “Seeking Our European Identity” – European Education Program Socrates, sub – program Comenius.

2007 – 2008 – “Histore et recits” – joint work with colleagues from Italy, England, France.

2007 – 2008 – Music and Foreign language Education – the path to United Europe.

2012, 2013, 2014 – project “Uspeh” (“Success”).

2014 – While working on “Uspeh” project we recorded our CD “We are the World”.

I have been teaching music at “St. Patriarch Evtimii” School of General Education in my hometown Plovdiv (the second largest in Bulgaria, and famous for its ancient heritage and the legend for the Thracian singer Orpheus). I also work with Bachelor and Master Degree students at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts.

In 2013 at the IV National Academic Competition for young teachers, organized by the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts, my Academy students won II, III and stimulating awards, and my high school students got diplomas for their excellent performance and knowledge during the music lesson.

I have also worked with Master students from Greece, Finland (in 2003 the rock opera composer of “Nostradamus” Nicolo Kotsev sit his state exam with my students), and Romania (the students’ practice was held in English and French).

It was my idea to organize concerts with the participation of the students in Pedagogy of Music Education and the students from “St. Patriarch Evtimii” school (I have published my observations).

I have taken part in conferences and I have publications on musical pedagogy subjects.

In 2009 I was a member of the jury of the French song Festival “The Golden Key”.

I am a member of the Bulgarian Musical and Dance Workers Union.

I have First Professional Qualification Degree, I am the chairperson of the school Methodoly Group – music and art, and I am also a Senior teacher.

In 2004 I was awarded with honorary diploma for my dedicated teaching and creative activity by the Rector of the

Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts.

Of course that was satisfying as far as my professional career goes. And still...

I love music, I have a big personal collection, I have favorite composers and musical pieces, which I listen to. They help me feel something very intimate, avoid all negative thoughts and emotions, and go into a world of my own. That is why I was often thinking over the important question how to make my students love my music, the so called “classic” or “serious” music.

In my music lessons students get familiar with a new musical piece almost every lesson – the syllabus is very busy, and the duration of the lesson is not usually enough.

The short time to perceive a new musical piece is often accompanied by the students’ reluctance and lack of interest, which prevent the actual knowing of the musical piece. That motivated me to look for new pedagogical approaches in order to provoke my students’ interest in what is happening during the lesson.

## 2. Subject, Aim and Tasks

### 2.1. Subject, Object, Aim, Tasks, Instruments

The subject of the research is the opportunity to improve the quality of classic music perception by the high school students.

The aim of this work is to prove the efficiency of a pedagogical approach in order to stimulate the interest of the students in the art of music.

The main instrument of the research is a pedagogical experiment held with VII grade students at “St. Patriarch Evtimii” School, Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

The main tasks in realization of this aim are:

Developing variations of the main themes in Part I of Piano concerto d moll by W. A. Mozart.

Making up a test to check the recognition of the themes and the interest in the musical piece.

### 2.2. Working Hypothesis

While listening to the musical themes the students:

- a/ will remember them permanently, which will allow to follow the process of developing the music piece; [1]
- b/ will make it clear for themselves how important are the means of expression of music, as well as the way they are combined in order to achieve a specific emotional state;
- c/ will become aware of the meaning and importance of the details, as they have especially big expressive meaning;
- d/ will be made to think in different aspects – comparison, confronting, and most importantly, achieving the result – defining the immanent essence of the musical themes;
- e/ will feel more deeply the emotional content of the theme while comparing the new variant with the original.

### 3. The Essence of the Pedagogical Approach

The idea originated during a lesson in VIII grade [3] while teaching an extract of Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons".

There is a short text in the textbook referring to the topic of "Improvisation and free forms in contemporary music": "There are performers who, while improvising, present the modern variants of popular classic works. This is the case with the exceptional English violinist Nigel Kennedy" („Има изпълнители, които импровизирайки представят осъвременени варианти на известни класически творби. Такъв е изключителният английски цигулар Найджъл Кенеди"). There is also a quotation by the famous musician: "Only the most extreme puritans will deny the fact that I am building a bridge between the big music and the big audience" („Само най-големият пуритан ще отрече, че аз правя мост между голямата музика и голямата публика").

It was then that I decided to try to present the main themes of a musical work in different variants.

### 4. Pedagogical Experiments

#### 4.1. The Content of the Experiment

The pedagogical experiment was held at "St. Patriarch Evtimii" School, Plovdiv, with VII grade students, during 2013/2014 school year.

In VII grade textbook [2] one of the musical pieces to listen to is Part I of Piano concerto d Minor by W. A. Mozart. There is a note transcript of the three main "musical subjects" – introduction, I theme, II theme. The idea of the authors of the textbook is that the students should listen to the themes in advance so that they are better prepared for the active perception of the work.



Figure 1. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Introduction.



Figure 2. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Theme I.



Figure 3. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Theme II.

I played the three themes and set the task for the students to define the mood of each of them. The students were not

very active. In the end they concluded that the Introduction has a kind of contrast, while Theme I and II sound in a similar calm way. It is obvious that the characteristics of the main "musical personages" in the musical work were superficial, formal, not engaging.

I played the Introduction in variant 1 – quietly, unlike the original, i.e. I changed the dynamic coloring. I asked the students how that change in the dynamics affected the emotional character of the musical theme. They answered that in calm and quiet dynamics the melody sounds timid and unsure. (Of course I played the theme in the new dynamics for several times in order to facilitate the conclusion).

The second variant had a rhythmic correction:



Figure 4. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Introduction altered.

Here the class became agitated. In their reactions what predominated was the conclusion that "the melody sounds dancing, simple" but "it can't be an introduction any more".

Then, with my assistance, a conclusion was made that in its original state, the introduction of the concerto sounds lively, appealing, and it draws the attention. I added my personal opinion – "It sounds a little tense, with inner tension, it takes your attention, and that is an introduction".

We listened to Theme I. The students described it as being pleasant and nice melody. However, they didn't mention any emotional characteristic. I suggested the following variants:



Figure 5. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Theme I, I variant.

The students pointed out that the theme was transformed into a waltz, i.e. it already has a characteristic of a dance, but at the same time it has become more careless, more gracious. When we compared it with the original again, I emphasized that the theme in Mozart's concerto is not presented as a careless and frivolous waltz, but has lyric character, as if the composer is sharing his thoughts and dreams, his quiet and humble experiences of the heart. The new variant sounded like that:



Figure 6. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Theme I, II variant.

The class decided that, in this case, the theme sounds like a march, but this is in complete contrast, i.e. it changes the basic character of the melody, depriving it of its tenderness, warmth and inner beauty.

I offered the students the next variation using the sound of a flute on the synthesizer. The students were unanimous that this variant not only keeps the general character of the melody, but also underlines and reinforces it. The sound of the flute the theme is gentler, the lyric impression is stronger. That helped us conclude that in Theme I, Piano Concerto d Minor by Mozart there is a lot of tenderness, warmth, honesty and a little nostalgia.

After we listened to II Theme and we defined the mood as livelier than in I Theme, I added the information: Theme I is in minor mode (I played the original, then I presented it in major mode) explaining that the minor also contributes to the lighter sound of the melody. Of course, these theoretical facts are unnecessary in the general school, but they direct the students' thinking and help them realize that there is nothing accidental in music, that every detail contributes to formation of the total impression. The second theme I presented in the following variations:



Figure 7. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Theme II, Variant I.

This march – variation was rejected by the students because they decided that it was too far in character from the original.

The next variation (figure 8) was also rejected.



Figure 8. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I, Theme II, Variant I.

The II theme in trumpet performance was commented as “utterly inappropriate”. I added that, although it is lighter, the tone quality of the wind instrument deprives the melody of its tenderness and ethereality.

Together with this I became more encouraged that my students started to join the ideas of beauty, tenderness, and warmth of Mozart's lyrics, which streams from each of his melody.

Now it is time to summarize the characteristic features of the emotional content of each of the three musical personages in the work. We listened to the whole Part I of the Concerto. The active participation of the students has already been supported by the detail knowledge of the melodies and the character of the “musical characters”.

Before we listened to the complete part I of the Concerto, I played the other important fragment:



Figure 9. W. A. Mozart, Piano concerto d moll, Part I.

Its appearance precedes a more lively development which prepares the entry of an important element of the musical work.

In advance I explain that the musical piece begins with an introduction performed by the whole orchestra. The entry theme comes naturally – first in quiet dynamics with an exciting orchestra accompaniment, it sounds a little mysterious, but after a continuous intensification of the sonority, the Forte dynamics is reached. This bright sonority is calmed down, and the episode performed by the wood wind instruments – oboes and flutes comes next.

After the gradual ascending development comes the main theme of the solo instrument – the piano. Once again sounds the insistent development of this moment, which, by creating the tension and the effect of expectation, leads to the advent theme II. Thus, while listening to the complete piece for the first time I lead, explain, direct the attention. In further hearings I rely more on computer presentation of the previously written key moments in the development of the piece. In accordance with the syllabus requirements for VII grade, the students are acquainted with the structure of the sonata. Using that knowledge I demonstrate the elements of the form – entry, exposition, development, reprise. That is how my students got familiar in details and in its completeness with a classic musical piece.

To make a summary of the results and to make sure in the efficiency of my idea – effort to incorporate my students to classic music, I made up the following tests at the end of the school year.

#### 4.2. Test Results

What is your favorite piece of music you have listened to during the school year?

Of 61 pieces altogether, among which popular, folk and classic music, Mozart's Piano Concerto came first in the list for about 70% of the students, and in top three list for 15 %.

All students have included that piece in their list.

While doing a listening test of excerpts from 10 musical pieces included in the textbook, all the students managed to recognize Mozart's Piano Concerto.

One of the questions in the musical test was to name the presumable composer of unfamiliar excerpts from Beethoven, Bach, Mendelson and Tchaikovsky – 85% recognized Mozart's style.

### 5. Conclusion

This pedagogical approach helped the students to realize the fact that, in order to feel the musical piece, they have to listen to it attentively and many times, so that it becomes familiar, stimulating and enjoyable.

Personally developing this idea has brought satisfaction realizing that this is my contribution for the spiritual growth of my students, and also provides opportunities for new projects and ideas to be practically performed.

I am encouraged with the successful experiment and I plan to enrich and expand the basic idea in my future

activities by composing more variations of the themes with the creative contribution of my students.

In accordance with the syllabus for school subject Music in general schools, the lessons are absolutely insufficient for detailed work like that. That is why I will form groups sharing common interest.

I wish myself success.

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