

PENSIVENESS OF US: WHAT SHOULD WE SING?

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SUMMARY. The idea of “everyday singing”, has been announced in Hungary a few years ago. The task, however, as a *task type* – regardless of any idea based on the similar principle – is a big professional challenge, because if we want to achieve the optimal fulfilment of the idea, we must answer simultaneously the requirements of significant number of criteria with different aspects. This writing is about these problems and possibilities. The genre of this article can be determined as pedagogical reflexion.

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“Tradition should not be nurtured, because it is not ill. Not to be guarded because it is not a prisoner. Our traditions can only survive if we live in them!”

(Ferenc Sebő)

These are words of the most known pioneer of the Hungarian instrumental folk music and folkdance movement, by Kossuth Prize awarded singer-musician, folk-music-musicologist, the leader of the Sebő Ensemble, known and acknowledged by his name and work as the ‘Nation's Artist’.

We might say; *“It's easy for him”*, but if we were fair, we would add; *“... now!”* Because the work he began in his field and the achievement he accomplished, we ought to similarly start and accomplish our work, instead of the socially not fulfilled world of ‘folksong tradition movement’ of the past, but the contrary; in today's social reality, because this job certainly cannot be spared.

As its title, it is only half-full. It would be truer: *‘What should we sing at school, in a wide, broad community?’*

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Usually as a request or on commission singing teachers or choirmasters get the task of making participants sing at major school celebrations, so that “everyone sings”.

This really appraisable, nice idea and desideratum, which is descended in general from the head of the institution / school, is also in complete harmony with the spirit of “everyday singing”, announced in Hungary a few years ago. [Considering the importance of the subject, in another aspect, I have described my thoughts in the *Parlando Music Pedagogical Journal* in 2015 as “*To the Margin of Everyday Singing*”.]

The task, however, as a *task type* – regardless of any idea based on the similar principle – is a very big professional challenge, because if we want to achieve the optimal fulfilment of the idea, we must answer simultaneously the requirements of significant numbers of criteria with different aspects.

However, since we are music-pedagogues and we know; the most important things are at schools, especially in each ‘individual’ classes, and because success depends on the colleagues at the ‘border forts’, it seems practical to share the multiplicity and weight of the problem of by limits given professional requirements, so, for all of these, repeatedly, quasi in the margins on the pages of our pensiveness; “what should we sing together in school?”, I’d like remind for the following:

The question of the age group

With regard to the ‘great average’ of Hungarian music public education, may be it is probably to be declared: in the lower level-section of primary schools it seems maybe things are going well: the children still carry to the play (dramatic children games) naturally, organically belonging singing, inherited from kindergarten. Here they still preserve this naturalness, and as such, they live it as well.

The problems are mainly raised in the upper classes and in the high school age group.

There are several reasons for this, for which some of them have been repeatedly performed; furthermore, there is constant discourse and discourse within the profession, so they are not here and now. What is certain, that if we want to turn the case of everyday singing into a genuinely productive way, then we need to focus on this range, or rather on age groups.

Here appears our first great problem. If we want to any quasi ‘wide crowd’ (assuming realism, say, at least a whole upper school) to find and teach a suitable song for common singing, mostly a folksong, we must face the fact, that children’s psychological and psycho-social attitudes are significantly different in case of the lower class just leaving or to a secondary school immediately entering student.

That is to say, when choosing a song, we have to be very careful so that every 'little range'/age group should feel the theme and lyrics of the folk song.

The difficulty of song selection increases considerably if, as in many cases, both primary school and secondary school work in the school, and for example, for a common, joint celebration, we should choose to meet this requirement. If this does not happen and the singing song cannot be heard by any age group (i.e., e.g. with the text we 'shoot' either over or under or next to it in the air), so with nonverbal signals accompanied by well-known behavioural appearances of children, singing becomes counterproductive rather than approaching, and rather removing children from it. So – for example, say, with a folk song – both at the intellectual and emotional level at the same time in several age groups, respectively resonate in the same way... well, this is an extraordinary challenge for the music educators involved in this task.

Regarding the age group is also important when the range (ambitus) of the individual folk songs is (would have) to be kept in mind. It is important to remember, a small child will only be capable of singing melodies with growing ambituses with the progress of age. In order not to ruin the child's vocal organs (vocal chords), let us take into consideration the fact that, when singing together in different age groups, attention and priority should be given to the vocal gifts of the younger ones.

Due to some kind of 'break' in the upper section from the lower school, in which the step in the 'tween-age' plays a similar role, like the very different learning outcomes than the experiences it has been experiencing, besides the dominance of the new teacher's attitude instead of its former teachers, given the issue of our subject, we should pay particular attention to strengthening the fourth-class classroom's positive attitude to singing or rather preservation. I would add that if the transition to school is 'smooth', though, going similar to the 'higher' school, for other reasons, vocal music teachers are faced with a very sensitive process by again.

With the fulfilment of the adolescent, furthermore in the new and unknown mental and physical environments, in new class-communion (which can still only be called 'human-medium' yet), the 'soul-expression' during singing does not go easily, and principally boys are disturbed by their spectacular, mutate-close clumsy sound/voice, most of all, of course, for girls, who, in essence – on their adolescent age –, they want to impose on.

However, this problem-conglomeration has another, not negligible side as well.

The question of music material and the ‘soul factor’

Looking at the basic mood and atmosphere of Hungarian folk songs, we can say that they are very often saddened; about love, loneliness, wistfulness, longing far away etc.

They are beautiful, but – I think – in the supposed average (mostly in primary school) environment, the ‘average mood’ of the ‘average child’ they are perhaps less suited than the habits of this targeted age, with their dynamism, more closely aligned both musical and textually. At the same time, the parlando, rubato folksongs, which require often greater inner depth, for example on school trips to the evening conversations can be harmonized much more and more naturally. Moreover, of course, to strive not only to get to know, but to love them, beyond the above, let us remember: these folk songs are the world of adult emotions and adult experiences in an adult world. Especially young children do not yet have such experiences, so they do not yet feel or cannot feel these as their own.

To feel beyond the beauty of the sounds, years must pass by.

This ‘maturity time’ – besides being individually different as well – cannot be speeded up.

Some of the typical themes of folk songs, such as the joy of love and the bitterness of disappointment, will only be really able to ‘discover’ in singing through high school experiences, and through folk music to again live, experience, relive or just ‘talk about it’.

I do note not in parentheses: the situation is very similar to the singing of some choir-pieces.

For example, some choirmasters choose to sing the masterpiece ‘False spring’ by Kodály, from the collection of Children's and Female Choruses, and children are capable of singing it correctly and nicely. ‘Only’ the true meaning and ‘soul-existence’ of János Arany’s poem cannot be perceived by them in its depth:

*“Little bush, do not shoot yet,
It's winter, not spring;
Little girl, do not sigh yet;
You do not know what it is.*

*New ratoon of bush
abraded by freeze;
Early blooming of girl
is followed by quite a dolour.*

*I would feel pity the little bush,
naked and flowerless:
And yearn to the stray girl,
that she is already broke.”*

(Loan translation)

In common singing for several age groups, which are (from each of their more or less common and therefore of certain classrooms atmosphere providing security) very different, so there should always be the utmost of importance and attention to the above.

Belonging to this, another very important segment of this topic cannot be circumvented.

At a lecture at the end of 1940 (special attention in the light of the date), Kodály drew attention to the patriotic-role of education in pre-school music education. At the same time, he warned in the ‘shaping’ public morale of the time (the end of 1940!) that instead of the emotional and the textual ‘sonority’ of certain songs, rather the appearance of the subconscious (!) elements of the Magyars/Hungarians would be desirable.

From Kodály's work and public manifestations, it is clear and convincing; with not only pre-school, but school education and the education of the public he thought of similarly as well.

Based on this, and on the grounds of my previous experiences, I think and suggest at selection of folk songs that the feeling of belief-world of ‘old people’ and the patriotism of the songs do not be suggested a direct ‘crawl’, a ‘cross-talk’ into the daily life.

In these regards, we have certainly been far more many-coloured than our ancestry 100 or even 70 years ago. The structure of the then society, the peasant life, the village school with its ‘undivided’ classes (where small and big, younger and older learners studied together), besides the village amusements where they sang together, danced, danced smaller and bigger and adults, or the harvest where they worked together (and sometimes sang men and women), while the children were often beside them, and last but not least, going to church where the whole community was sang together – well, this world, with its attitudes has completely disappeared and turned into an unrecognizable one.

In this context closely related to our topic, the family upbringing of children has become much more diverse/many coloured. The parents’ perceptions/approach of the world orient in very different ways or in many cases: determine the world of children.

While we, music educators, of course, want to beam/broadcast the value of our conviction, so, therefore, let us also consider these above, be in favour of everyone.

Questions about further approach to the music world

As for me, I think; it is not practical to think in the somewhat outdated, structural-based terminology with the so-called 'old-' and 'new style' folklore categories, as some do, still nowadays. Instead, perhaps some type of blocks, with/as musical and/or content explainable units can be starting units, for example, around a celebrated day, a feast, a folk custom or just about harvesting, perhaps clustered to Rákóczi, or around the struggle for freedom of 1848, etc.

A special music world – which Kodály speaks about in his basic work, entitled 'Hungarian folk music' – opens wide a special beauty and opportunity for us on the grounds of relationship due to the Hungarian folk music and Gregorian music.

In the pages of the book 'The Book of the Hungarian Song', about a similar world speaks Dobszay as well, in which, in a similarly specific, double-faced world, a folk song belonging to a folk custom with Christian message and a sacred chant in church could interact with one another. (Such as '*Csordapásztorok*', or just '*A pünkösznek jeles napján*'.) The thesaurus of these facilities is very rich. We can bravely drag for music treasures in it, accordance with our musical and pedagogical goals.

However, if the 'everyday/daily singing' of the children's internal motivation as a result of having we want to make (this is actually be the goal), we have/ought to be aware of one more aspect besides those outlined above. All of us have the experience that we treat the totally unknown with reservations.

In that human/social atmosphere we do not really feel well, we are cautious and far to being degage, but sometimes even somewhat suspicious. This is one of our evolutionary heritages. So, let us consider this as a guideline!

This is why we have to put children into a little bit of a familiar musical environment.

For them yet unknown and unusual Dorian, Phrygian or Lydian tonalities or with the known and experienced 'classical', folk- and not least popular music's structures absolutely incompatible folk songs' worlds are vainly beautiful, if they initiate wariness or even make soft denying in them just at the very beginning.

For the reasons outlined above, the world of ecclesiastical music, with its modal scale tonalities, melodies and natural free-flowing structure, which was an ordinary peasant life's vocal world, has now become extraneous in the majority society. For this reason, let us move gently with these worlds' familiarization. True; it takes more time, but it is worth every effort.

Nevertheless, it should be yet added: the individual 'colour' and sensitivity of each small community (even any school class) can always deviate from the 'great average'. Later on, for example, because of the orientation towards a 'customised' profession (kindergarten teacher training, ecclesiastical trainings, e.g.) we feel even significant affinity of 'positive homogenization'.

The appeal of ornaments/'ornamented notes' (appoggiaturas and after-notes) dominate mainly in the world of 'parlando', 'rubato' folk songs, and they make them particularly beautiful.

Based on certain old-fashioned music pedagogical (?!) principles, singing book writers deprived folk songs from them, and instead, they only offered the melodic 'skeleton' to sing.

It was as if the birds had been deprived of their most beautiful and colourful feathers.

Their attractiveness and beauty faded, though it can be said from experience; the youth would require it. Therefore, it is worth to introducing these 'ornamented' folk songs to them. It is worth paying attention only; to avoid overlapping of decorative ornaments. The bride is not even the most beautiful if she wears as many glistening jewels as possible. Do not have too much as to cover her, but be less and nice to highlight her beauty.

Finally, about the double or multiple benefits:

To avoid the 'direct communication' of some sensible subject, sometimes it is worthwhile to turn to folk songs that we are not used to, and what 'addressed' can be, for example, the most important and most respected to us; Saint Stephen, who's historical figure appears basically as a saint, in Gregorian chants, in ecclesiastical folk songs and folksongs as well.

Among the folk songs, the world of 'salutatories' is far from being known to children.

Though to the István's name day belonging '*Circuit rejoicing Saints make merry*' reminds us of the long-standing plebeian awarding of our founder (ie, veneration for him as a saint), but the streamlined major melody and the repeating musical phrases are close to modern age classes, besides the 3rd and 4th music lines with their a/av type, quasi dominant half-, and then tonic complete cadences in period-like phrases make simultaneously school studies of Viennese classicism' world more understandable, while making music practising better with experienced experimentalism.

Rend sze - rint ö - rül - vén szen - tek vi - ga - doz - nak,
 az ö ün - ne - pé - re nagy ö - rö - möt vár - nak,
 A ten - ger vi - ze - i a - hány csepp - ből áll - nak,
 any - nyi szent ál - dá - sok Ist - ván - ra száll - ja - nak!

Instead of the generally expected practice; that is to say, instead of (both in text and music material) a sublime folksong, amused greeting melody of István's day might be perhaps closer to children, plus – beyond the above – can be a further benefit beyond if – instead of the original *'Happy Birthday to you'* or its Hungarian version – they are singing the István's greeting melody, updated/adapted to the celebrated person's name, of course.

A similar, though slightly different, certain pagan holiday-related residues, profane folk customs and deep Christian religious messages both having complex holidays issues are Easter and Pentecost. Our folksongs resonate virtually either the one or another message. So, when singing together, if we can choose not two but only one, we need to find another solution because of the sensitivity of the area.

Perhaps it may be something similar, as in the previous case. As an example, here is the example of *'Today's Morning Breeze'*. (Rajeczky: Hungarian Folk Music 3. p. 19)

This is also a 'salutatory' that, due to the similar structure of the above-discussed previous one, in addition to the benefits outlined above, gives the teacher the opportunity to speak about the most significant, multi-layered celebration of June (month of / St. John the Baptist); about Pentecost, just like about the 'midsummer's night' as well, which we celebrate likewise in the month of St. Ivan.

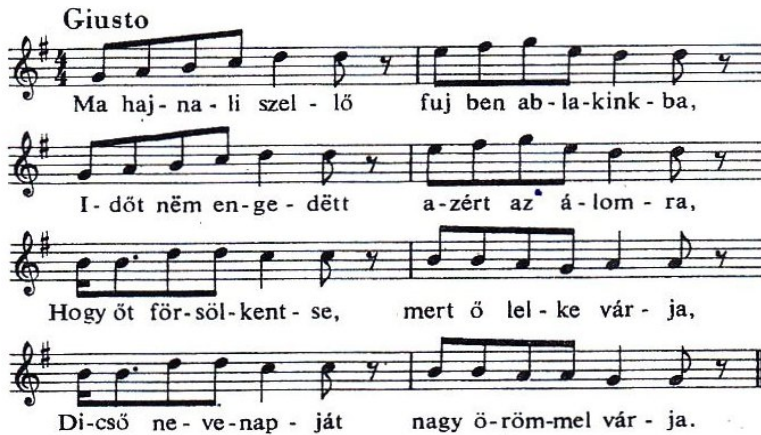
In connection with the name, he can speak about the change of it, starting with Joános that was followed by Jovános, Ivános and finally led to Iván. Besides these the teacher can speak about the important difference between the open 'e' and the ancient 'ë' and the difference was mentioned by Kodály as well.

Therefore, the music teacher, in addition to solving the music problem he/she has, should be receptive to other 'subject areas' and open!

In this case, he/she can call up the children's attention to a treasury of biblical, folkloristic, literary, and native-related curiosities, and, they, according to experience, are always receptive to these curiosities and novel approaches.

E.g. 2

Giusto



Ma haj-na-li szel-lő fuj ben ab-la-kink-ba,
 I-dőt nēm en-ge-dētt a-zért az-á-lom-ra,
 Hogy őt för-söl-kent-se, mert ő lel-ke vár-ja,
 Di-cső ne-ve-nap-ját nagy ö-röm-mel vár-ja.

**2. Rend szerint örülnek szentég, vigadoznak,
 Az ő ünnepjüket nagy örömmel várják,
 Hogy a keresztények mindnyájan kiáltásák
 Szenteket tisztelni, és félmagasztalják.**

**3. Kedves János uram, mégégyszér azt mondom,
 Éltesse jaz Isten, szívemből kívánom.
 Mind ékēs rózsaszál a virágos kerbe,
 Virágozzék ő is a szenték seregébe.**

Summing-up

There is no doubt; it can be said that teachers best know children, their abilities, orientation, momentary spiritual and emotional reception skills, and school spirit.

One such, in the task of community singing, ponders based on the above, make as many opportunities as possible and presumable outcomes. However, let us not forget: whatever your careful and good choice is, the real success will depend on our authenticity for our children: in our personality, in our music making, in our enthusiasm, in our exemplary in school and beyond it. If yes, if we are authentic; they will follow us. After a while, they will sing even if we are not there with them. Even in one or two years, this could be the first major achievement of the idea of 'daily singing'.

In addition, not far from this goal, after a few years, in the best case other battles can be successfully achieved. To do this, we only need to recall the successful anagnorisis of Kodály's fights which was fenced on several fronts at the same time:

He (and some of his followers) targeted the school, the choirs and the audience at the same time, and that is why he was able to achieve a change of sense of aesthetic and attitude in society in a relatively short time.

So the example is given: a song for common singing should be selected so, that the children, when returning home sing it to the parents who may then like that (folk)song, and they themselves would take a fancy to enjoy it.

However, unfortunately, according to the research for example by Ms. Katalin L. Nagy and then by Ms. Márta Janurik, the school generation at that time, which one – according to their research – even liked/likes?/ mathematics better than singing – being young parents even now, are obviously more rejective than lovers of singing.

Correspondingly, these young parents have, since then, obviously been surrounded by music, 'whichever'/'such as it is'. This should be – gently – 'hijacked' or at least be made more open to what the child 'has brought home from school', like them too, and then, as a result, they will sing together as in the olden fellowships!

Therefore, these songs should be such that they can be lived, letting texts of songs be with them too so that they recognize themselves by these songs like in a mirror.

This, in other respects, proved to be good in Handel's life and work: English people of that time recognized their own fate in the biblical world and events of the oratorios. That is why those works have become popular, and, in the long run, this has brought the real success for the composer.

Moreover, because we are talking about a dynamic age group of a dynamic era, a good portion of these folk songs must have a well perceptible inner musical dynamism, so that, ad absurdum, all of them want and can spontaneously move to a number of folk songs because it suits the children and the young parents both alike. (Whether this spontaneous movement will eventually blossom in the dance houses; it is a matter of luck and/or conscious music teacher motivation.)

The point is to love singing and to become aware of them, that they like to sing folk songs together. This could be the real beginning of the era of the 'socialized revival' of folksong singing. In this case, there is really no doubt that this would surely be the greatest result of the cause 'everyday singing'.

REFERENCES

Note: Literature is not included in the source list at the end of the article, because there has been no relevant scientific research in this field.

