

MUSIC BELONGS TO ALL OF US! EVEN TO THE DEAF! (?)

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SUMMARY. We are all different when it comes to the perception modality we prefer when getting to know the world around us. The deaf cannot hear the music, but they can see and feel it if we provide them with the right visual (sight) and tactile/kinaesthetic (touch/movement) elements. For the first time in Romania, we implemented a unique musical project for the deaf and hearing-impaired people of Transylvania. The events were locally based, but were organized in several cities, so deaf people could literally feel and enjoy the wonderful world of music. Thanks to partnerships with various public and private institutions (among which there were schools, philharmonics, choirs, church communities, NGOs), the events were organized without a financial involvement of the deaf people from Transylvania, who also benefited from the services of several sign language interpreters.

Keywords: music, the deaf, feel, touch, vibration, silence, orchestra, Transylvania

Inaudible sounds – according to the researcher Olivea Dewhurst-Maddock²

Sound is a part of life. People have used sounds to convey information about the world around them and to communicate with each other since ancient times. From the beginning of our existence, even before we are born, we are surrounded by sounds, such as the mother's heartbeats and the suppressed noise of the outside world.

We live in a world of sounds. Sounds that we hear or do not hear, musical or chaotic sounds, odd or familiar sounds, stressful or pleasant sounds, sounds that disturb us, and sounds that heal us.

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² Dewhurst-Maddock, Olivea, *Terapia prin sunete (The book of sound therapy)*, Ed. Teora, Bucureşti, 1998, p 9-34.

Sound is movement. Specifically, sound is a vibratory movement produced when objects are moved from one place to another or when they swing, like a pendulum's weight. At fundamental level, sound is the movement of atoms and molecules. Object-made sounds originate in the movement of the millions of atoms and molecules from which the objects are made of. Sound is the result of the vibration movement of objects - hence, it is also a form of kinetic energy. Each atom, every molecule, cell, tissue, and (human) body organ continually transmits frequencies corresponding to physical, emotional, mental and spiritual life.

To produce sounds, an object needs to vibrate or perform a to-and-fro movement. The number of to-and-fro movement cycles in a second is known as the frequency. The frequency of sound is the main factor determining its application for therapeutic purposes. Low sounds have low frequencies and high ones have high frequencies.

Air is made up of mobile gas molecules. Each vibration first produces the compression of the air molecules that are immediately next to the sound source followed by expansion or the increasing of the distances between them. These "waves" of compression and expansion move in the air, starting from the sound source, like the waves of a lake, but in three dimensions. These are the sound waves. Actually, airborne sound waves are made up of air molecules that move from side to side or longitudinally.

In conclusion, travelling in the form of a wave, sound has the ability to pass through any environment - air, metal, glass, wood, water and so on. These waves are invisible. In the cosmos nothing is motionless. The state of absolute zero temperature, i.e. $-273.15\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$, when all atomic vibrations cease, is considered by scientists to be untouchable. Moreover, everything moves in a moving environment: cycles inside other cycles, wheels inside other wheels.

General description of the project

The hearing impaired: this is the collective concept by which society refers to the deaf and hard of hearing people, regardless of the cause, the severity of the hearing impairment, and the state of hearing. The deaf do not have any usable residual hearing, they usually don't wear a hearing aid, their condition cannot be corrected with hearing aids and most of them use sign language.

Sign language is a completely independent communication system that is completely independent from the environment's sounding language. A sign language unit (sign) carries a complex meaning and does not visualise a letter or a sound.

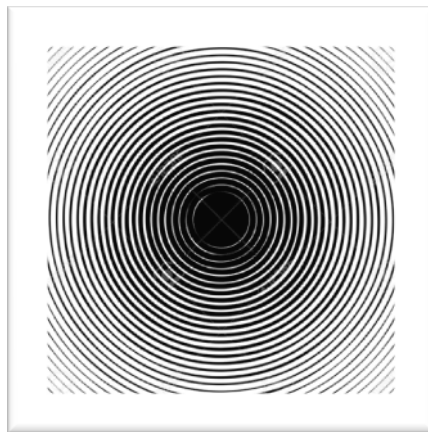
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Society places emphasis on the deficiency of deaf people. Their lack of hearing and smooth speech is obvious. Contrary to this point of view, in this project we took notice of their existing abilities, focusing on the vitality, experience and creativity of the deaf people.

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The project *Music belongs to all of us! Even to the deaf! (?)* was implemented between April 2017 and May 2018 in four Transylvanian cities. Within this project, we have made the participating deaf aware of the fact that each sound and noise comes from a body, which is called a sound source. In order to make a sound, the sound source has to vibrate at an appropriate speed. When the sound source vibrates, the air molecules in its immediate vicinity start to move and cause a circular wave that spreads in all directions. Musical instruments function according to a similar principle.

E.g. 1



The propagation of sound

In the preparatory phase of the project, we discussed specific means, methods and opportunities with the UK-based “Music and the Deaf” group, who enrich the life of deaf audiences with unforgettable musical experiences. With the help of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra in Australia, the world of music was introduced primarily to deaf children. The Mahler Chamber Orchestra in Berlin has also got similar experiences. The project coordinator has also provided us with several video recordings, from which we could learn about other methods.

We have also seen the work of a German expert in Sibiu at an event organized by the Diakoniewerk International association. In the international show *Art Without Borders (Kunst kennt keine Grenzen)*, we got to know the splendid work of the Austrian-born Teresa Leonhard, music and movement therapy professor, performer and researcher.

She has staged a movement co-ordination performance with the deaf and hard of hearing people as well as people with disabilities in Sibiu, highlighting the need for providing accessibility to the disabled to cultural performances.

The library of the Gheorghe Dima Music Academy in Cluj has given us the opportunity to study the Romanian specialised literature of the field. We have found several volumes in which the author examined the relationship between music and physics (mostly in Romanian, or Romanian translations), but we haven't found any references to the music world of the deaf.

On-site report:

1. Cluj-Napoca

The first location of the project was Cluj-Napoca, where in August 2017 we organized an organ tour for deaf and hard of hearing people. We visited and studied the musical instruments of historic churches, we got to know the organ's operating principle, discovered the peculiarities of the hundreds of pipes in the instruments, and the interested deaf and hard of hearing people could study the vibrations of the tongue- and labial pipes upon organ-playing.

Looking at the photos taken at the event, but also based on the closing discussion, we can clearly state that this was an unforgettable experience for the participants and they have never experienced anything like it before.

In cooperation with the Transylvania State Philharmonic Orchestra of Cluj-Napoca, the deaf and hard of hearing students of the Kozmutza Flóra School for the Deaf have been brought closer to the world of music by viewing *The Little Mermaid*, a musical composition with drama-performance. After the magical one-hour performance, the musicians of the Transylvania State Philharmonic Orchestra presented their instruments to the joy of the participating deaf and hard of hearing children. Even though the majority of the children are members of the sign language choir of their school, they have had no previous opportunity to get to know the instruments of the symphony orchestra, so we can state that this collaboration was an experience of a lifetime for both musicians and participants.

2. Tîrgu Mureş

Dr. Csíky Csaba, a composer from Tîrgu-Mureş, has helped us with great enthusiasm and expertise, and introduced the local deaf people to the world of the Queen of instruments, while the members of the female chamber choir Musica Humana showed with great interest the anatomical framework of human voice creation. As the choir sang, the deaf people placed their hands on the chests or skulls of the singers, so they perceived the variety of vocals and the virtuosity of the singers with the utmost depth.

The brilliant orchestral atmosphere was ensured by the orchestra of the Tîrgu Mureş Arts High School.

In the closing discussion after the event each participant said that it would have been a shame to miss this experience and they would be particularly happy to take part in similar events. According to them, music has never touched them so directly, they never thought that the music world had so much to offer. They had already “listened” to concerts through loudspeakers, but have never had symphony orchestra or choral experiences. It was a joy for all of us to see that the positive attitude of the participants and the performers did not only enrich the experiences of the deaf, but has made the musicians more open, more receptive to working with deaf people.

3. Odorheiu Secuiesc

Due to the fact that the local interest representation organisation of the deaf community refused cooperation and provided our team with untruthful information, we had to address the deaf target audience in another way. Minister Kórodi Csaba, representing the Transylvanian Reformed Church District, holds Bible classes to the deaf people in the area every two months, with the help of a sign language interpreter. These regular meetings are attended by 20 to 40 deaf people. Taking advantage of this opportunity, we presented the team with our musical project idea and, given their great interest, we organized the organ tour and the orchestral visit after a short while. The Székelyföld Philharmonic Orchestra welcomed our initiative with the utmost openness and support. The participating deaf people were very enthusiastic about participating in the interactive orchestral rehearsal, they had countless questions, they wished to get to know and to try playing as many instruments as possible. We have given them this opportunity, following which we took a look at the organ of the local Roman Catholic church. They were amazed to discover that the church instrument contained more than a thousand pipes. They got to know the structure of the organ, and, at the end of the event, they had many questions to the organizers.

4. Sfântu Gheorghe

During the organization of the events in Sfântu Gheorghe it was found that there are no such interest representation organisations in the city (and in Covasna County) with the help of which we could address the local deaf people and inform them about our project. Based on our previous experiences, we are convinced that notifying the deaf only through the media does not lead to results. We have personally contacted the municipality, the educational institution for children with special needs and the private audiometry centre several times, but they tacitly refused to cooperate. The head of the Plugor Sándor Arts High School showed openness towards the event, but we couldn't agree on the details with the specialized teachers.

The questionnaire survey

During the implementation of the project, we investigated the relationship between the deaf people in Transylvania and music by means of a questionnaire. It was found that a total of 41 persons participated in the project's past stages, and a total of 6 sign language interpreters aided the communication of the deaf people with the project organizing team.

The questionnaire was filled out by 41 deaf / hard of hearing people from Transylvania, aged between 14 and 61 years.

- 78% of the respondents had a hearing impairment in both ears,
- 36,6% of the respondents had a hearing aid, 2,4% of them had a cochlear implant, and 61% of them did not have any hearing aid device,
- to 58,5% of the respondents hearing music is tormenting and this requires a high level of concentration,
- 87,8% of the respondents does not play any musical instruments,
- 12,2% of the respondents takes part in choral activities (presumably sign language choirs), and clearly state that music has helped them in their speech development,
- the families of 65,9% of the respondents have not contributed to the development of their music world,
- music has no part in the lives of 39% of the respondents.

Sustainability of the project

Given the fact that the objective of this project is clearly in line with the objectives of the National Association of the Deaf in Romania and other NGOs, but also with the objectives of the national strategy to forward the social integration of persons with disabilities in Romania, we intend to further

develop the project and take it to other cities. We are thus looking for partners and such opportunities. The project's results so far clearly show that deaf people can enjoy a great musical experience, even though they cannot hear the music.

Conclusions

The people involved in the project have repeatedly stated that the music conveyed to them by special means provided them with an extraordinary experience that they have not experienced before. It was proven that the vibrations generated by the instruments can be amplified by various methods, their diversity being perceived by the deaf. We were hoping that at the end of the project we can definitely state that *Music belongs to all of us! Even to the deaf!*, without the question mark at the end of the project title. Nevertheless, we will not do that. In our opinion, the more accepting and provident society is towards deaf people, the less they feel their own lives being limited. Transylvanian musical and cultural offers lack innovative opportunities targeting the deaf. Local / regional / national NGOs and private initiatives have no development potential, and potential initiatives are faced with major challenges. For the development of the cultural and musical life of Transylvanian deaf people there is a need for further innovative problem solving and a special methodological approach like in this project.

The interests of the deaf in Romania are represented by the National Association of the Deaf in Romania (ANSR) through its 18 subunits (county organizations) operating at national level. According to the statute of this NGO, it should promote socio-cultural, educational and leisure activities organized for the deaf to facilitate their social integration and community involvement. In addition, the objectives of the county units include organizing various artistic/cultural events for the benefit of the deaf. Our experiences show that the management and staff of the Association interpret these objectives in a very peculiar way, thus, in our opinion, the organisation requires significant and innovative development. In case of the ANSR, organizational monopoly is decisive, which is not entirely optimal for the beneficiaries. Romanian NGOs, including the ANSR, are heavily involved in identifying income sources for their operation and survival and in administrative activities, but capacity building, communication skills, lobbying and advocacy remain often identified tasks that are hard to fulfil. Nevertheless, it is clear that ANSR is a unit through which a significant part of Romania's deaf people (predominantly Romanians) can be reached. Interest representation would be essential, not only by the existing 18 county organizations of the ANSR, but, if possible, in all cities with county rights.

In discussions with the deaf people involved in the project it was found that the cultural possibilities of the deaf in Transylvania are considerably limited. The inclusive Transylvanian society must also conform to the following structure in the relation of the deaf and music:

E.g. 2



The inclusive society

The social integration of Transylvanian deaf people depends to a large extent on the attitude of a local “mediator”. If the contact person subjectively considered that this project was less in line with the interests of the deaf he/she represented, or ignored the project altogether because of other activities, than he/she has limited or completely discarded a cultural opportunity for 15 to 20 potential participants. During the implementation of the project it was proven that the attitude of the deaf people’s representative is decisive: if despite the negative attitude of the representative, the team (or some member of it) has participated in the project, they reported having wonderful experiences in each case.

The partnership between the project coordinator and the various (local) cultural institutions, schools, NGOs is a form of cooperation that can lead to the successful realization of a cultural event organized for the deaf.

In the absence of a partnership, addressing the local target community is almost impossible; the deaf are untrusting and uninterested when it comes to an unknown project / project coordinator; they do not respond to calls in the media (printed, online, transmitted on TV accompanied by sign language). Those who did come to our events, with the help of a mediator, took part in the event gladly and with great curiosity, and were keen on trying out the instruments. Communication between local authorities (incl. school director, orchestra manager, group leader) and the project coordination team was usually based on the principles of confrontation and ignoring each other. The need to develop a partnership was obvious, since the isolated activity of the two key sectors demonstrates a low level of trust and consequently has a negative impact on the consolidation of society. The problem of communication between the project coordination team and the deaf groups' leaders negatively affected the results of the initiated project. In this case, information about our activities did not reach the deaf community. As a result, the effective civil initiatives were still perceived as a „gray spot”.

The possibility of unlimited use of sign language helps the deaf and hard of hearing people to be equal members of society with equal rights. In all cases, effective communication with the deaf should be aided by qualified sign language interpreters.

Translated from Hungarian by Magyari Renáta

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Further information about the project:

- **summary of the questionnaires:**
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QUYC9dVpfcPBH9jXto0Lrjuq7xErmgCN/view>,
- **photos:**
https://www.facebook.com/pg/Music4Deaf-207139213128423/photos/?ref=page_internal,
- **video footage:**
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDcFNtvPrYRnGx-kubivkFg/videos>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HI9irAumdGA&feature=youtu.be&t=955>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXC1ZXZSKwk&feature=youtu.be&t=1693>,
- **Facebook:**
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