

CHAMBER MUSIC INITIATIVE IN CHORAL SINGING AND ENSEMBLE WORK IN ERASMUS IP COOPERATION

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SUMMARY. Promoting chamber music initiative in the field of music education was regarded as priority of the Erasmus Intensive Program *Chamber music initiative in choral singing and ensemble work based on compositions by Robert Schumann*. Every European partner country in the consortium contributed individual suggestions and complements to develop students' chamber musical creativity. At the end of the program participants represent program results in their final concert performances.

Keywords: chamber music, networking, initiative, Erasmus, Schumann

Teamwork means cooperating, especially singing in ensemble or playing in instrumental groups like orchestra or other chamber music formations. It is a part of our everyday life in both of teaching and performing. The *Chamber music initiative in choral singing and ensemble work based on compositions by Robert Schumann* Erasmus Intensive Program 2012–2014 (IP) aimed to improve this skill in the new generation of teacher trainees. Instructors and trainees from the participating institutes worked together in multinational choir and instrumental groups on compositions by Robert Schumann and additionally on composers' works of their own country. The process of learning was focusing on chamber music aspects offered by the various range of Schumann pieces selected to the IP. To give the priority to important sections with staying secondary by others is the goal of chamber music approach. Chamber music is not restricted only to concert hall and opera stages but also has to be presented in the field of education. The three yearlong IP aimed to create the self-requirement of chamber music approach by participants not only for the project period but also for the whole life as a real Lifelong Learning Program. This project consortium relied on a co-operation accumulating multiple teamwork experience as well as high-level artistic result that can be used by participants in their future teaching activity.

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In the third year, the project consortium² could continue implementing new actions in the process of the IP: involving new partner institution in the program, and widening the range of IP repertoire. A new higher educational institution (HEI), the University Babeş-Bolyai Cluj-Napoca from Romania was invited to join the project. Students from the partner HEIs could create new ensembles and formations in order to perform wider range of chamber music repertoire. During the IP period participant students studied two complete concert programs that were performed in the IP location. The goal of chamber music approach (to give the priority to important sections with staying secondary by others) appeared in the concert performances of participants. The audio-visual recording of the IP concerts, the analyses of these recordings made by teachers and students, were the means to be used to monitor the effectiveness and success of the IP. The IP tied with participants' previous instrumental studies in their homeland institute, as chamber music requires previous instrumental skills (reliable technical level in playing musical instruments) to develop chamber music approach. Although music faculties of the partner universities had previous experience in the field of chamber music education, the intensity of the program (6-8 hours daily chamber music training and performance practice) was real innovation for participants who have not met this focused learning process in their past experience so far.

Teachers' participation in chamber music formations – as the most effective way of knowledge transfer – caused extraordinary result at students. In the third year of IP implementation the project consortium developed and focused on this pedagogical method: the most talented and aspiring students had the possibility to play in teachers' ensemble. Students could experience professional chamber musicians' behaviour at rehearsals and utilize it in their concert performances.

Despite of the most effective preparation and study process, the manifestations of stage fright (fluttering or pounding heart, tremor in the hands and legs, sweaty hands, dry mouth) caused serious problem at instrumentalists and singers, even reduced the artistic level of the concerts and performances in the last IP year. Everything could go to pieces when external factors, having nothing to do with music, interfere and shake a performer's confidence. In this IP year, there was special focus against stage fright focusing on elimination of physical and emotional tensions made playing easier in order not to lose confidence in students' ability to control the movements necessary to playing or singing.

² Masarykova Univerzita Brno, Conservatorio di Musica "L. Perosi" di Campobasso Italia, University of Szeged, Stiftung Universität Hildesheim, Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg, Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Krems.

Other results of the IP were the development of key competencies, such as communication in foreign languages, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression, as well as tolerance towards other people with other lifestyles. In this project beside the improvement of the musical competencies students and teachers could work together in a way to establish the need for the cooperation of different people with different cultures and social backgrounds. Music education is quite different in the participants' homeland due to different state culture policies (each partner brought its own tradition and created multi-cultural exchange) but the IP gave an excellent opportunity to recognize these differences. However, the interaction (and integration) of these differences among participant HEIs contributes to build European dimension in educational strategy as well as improves own teaching and learning systems of IP Partner institutes.

Experience gained from chamber music aspect appeared also in multidisciplinary approach. As chamber music approach requires extremely strong brain memory work, there were important connections between psychological sciences (the process of learning) and music. There are common links between chamber music and information technology due to the audio-visual technology used for IP analyse, and sheet music notation software "Finale" used by students to write certain sheet music parts of the IP repertoire which were unavailable in libraries and music shops.

Altogether the three yearlong IP project achieved to create chamber music initiative in the field of school music teacher training, and disseminated the experience in the academic year 2013/2014, gained in the first two years of the IP, to a new partner institution as well.

Organisational Approach and Structure

The roles of participating institutes were determined during the early preparatory meetings of project implementation. As the program took place not in the coordinator institution (University of Szeged) or its country, the IP location representatives (Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Krems) offered essential and useful help to the coordinator HEI with their field knowledge (student facilities, concert locations, accommodation, financial accounting etc.). The Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Krems took the responsibility to support the IP with all the necessary bigger music instruments (piano, organ etc.), which had difficulties with transportation from the coordinator HEI. They also offered to organize non-stop practice room facilities for participants, and full information technology support to the IP including audio-visual equipment, analyse facilities, public internet access, photocopying and

printing. The participants took the smaller instruments of their own to the IP. Among them was a Paolo Castello cello 1776 Genova, brought by the teacher representative from the University of Hildesheim. Without these contributions of the participants, the IP could not have been implemented.

Also pedagogical and artistic roles were determined at early preparatory meetings: the Conservatory “Perosi” of Campobasso and Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg were to bring the most skilled vocalists, the University of Hildesheim and the Masaryk University Brno were to give the most skilled string players, the University of Szeged the best pianists to the program. As the language of Schumann’s vocal music is German, three partner institutes coming from German speaking areas (University of Hildesheim, Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg, Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Krems) made extremely important lingual influence (pronunciation) on the other five IP partners’ project activity (Masaryk University Brno, University of Szeged, Conservatory “Perosi” of Campobasso). Students’ individual tasks and rolls during the IP appear at the detailed IP Concert programs.

The dates of auditions were pointed out at the first preparatory meeting. According to the project plan, representatives of the coordinator institute hold live auditions at the new partner university in order to choose the best applicants. At former participating HEIs, auditions were held by teachers directly related to the participation in the IP, and they made the decisions. Students applying for participation in the IP had to play or sing two pieces by memory, from different composers in different styles. After these auditions the coordinator institute finalized the IP concert and teaching programs with detailed task for each student and teacher in order to have enough time to practice and prepare.

Outputs and Additional Benefits

The main outputs of the program (rehearsal process) were the IP concerts and their audio-visual recordings.³ The daily rehearsal process and lessons went according rehearsal plan. Students who just not played or sang in certain pieces, they listened to the other students’ lessons. Significant part of the daily work was the individual instrumental and vocal practice, which was to prepare for the next lesson and correct mistakes identified from audio-visual recordings. One of the important outputs are the bowing, fingering, breath and dynamic remarks in the IP Concerts sheet music made by each participant themselves in order to play or sing the compositions in their adequate way (according to each students’ physical skills).

³ www.jgypk.hu/?p=8589; www.jgypk.hu/?p=8584 (2017.01.19.)

During the rehearsals, some participants also appeared with a repertoire with which they could demonstrate their instrumental and vocal skills they use in ensemble work. These spontaneous and really short performances (sometimes 3-4 minutes) were very exciting and improvised moments. The highlight of these performances was the EU-Café evening “Jedes Land stellt sich vor”.⁴

The languages of project implementation were English and German. In this project beside the improvement of the musical competencies students and teachers could work together in a way to establish the need for the cooperation of different people with different cultures and social backgrounds.

Impact and Evaluation

The process of learning was focusing on chamber music aspects offered by the various range of pieces. The IP created self-requirement of this chamber music approach by participants not only for the project period but also for the whole life. The project consortium relied on a co-operation accumulating multiple teamwork experience as well as high-level artistic result that can be used by participants in their future teaching and artistic activity. Students, who took part in this project, and who will later become teachers themselves, could awake the demand of their pupils for a similar cooperation as well.

The third year of the IP was extraordinary challenge again for teachers, as the program took place not in the coordinator HEI, but in another country. The achieved aims, students' enthusiastic feed backs (many of them wanted to continue the IP for a week longer), altogether the success of the IP increased also teacher's self-confidence and allow them to contribute with maximum efficiency; the more they contribute to a special field of education, the more they will be rewarded with personal success and recognition.

In monitoring and evaluation, the most useful tools were the daily video and sound recording analyses of rehearsals. It helped the effectiveness of rehearsal process from day by day in order to have successful IP concerts. Teachers and students made together the analyses, and then teachers decided about which part to practice and repeat by the next rehearsal. The general failure during the previous IPs, which was the level of volume had to be corrected by all the instruments and sections (they

⁴ www.kphvie.ac.at/international/international/article/begruessungsabend-fuer-internationale-gaeste-1.html (2017.01.19.)

were often too loud), and by vocalists' text could be hardly understood because of not enough or not adequate pronunciation, this time caused much less problems: in the IP concerts the dynamic was much more colourful, and one could understand much better singers' pronunciation.

The third year of the IP had far more results than teachers and students previously expected, so for the project consortium it was absolutely clear, that in the Erasmus+ Program period similar program has to be carried on, disseminating and dedicating the results to talented, aspiring young musicians from the field of teacher training and hence to promoting the tradition and development of European chamber music.⁵ The program created new approach and energies in teaching and studying, and contributed to the building of a European dimension in education.

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⁵ About similar programmes can be read in Asztalos Bence: "Musik kreativ+." in: *Empirikus kutatások az oktatásban határon innen és túl – I. Kárpát-medencei Oktatási Konferencia Tanulmánykötet*. Partiumi Keresztény Egyetem Nagyvárad, p. 12-22.