

MUSIC MEDIATION ON STAGE

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SUMMARY. The scope of this paper is limited to music mediation in the context of specifically designed concerts, hence the title “on stage”, with a focus on performances for children. In addition to research findings, the main part of the presentation will be devoted to insights gained from more than a decade of personal practical experience in moderating and conducting more than 120 educational performances for children. With the professionalization of music mediation, the many different approaches and strategies that can be used to best serve the goal of creating access to classical music have been studied and classified. The most important of these will be presented in the context of the concert. They will be illustrated with examples from the study of practices in different music institutions worldwide.

Keywords: children’s concerts, music mediation

In recent decades, an increasing number of professional arts organizations – museums, theatres, opera houses and orchestras - have been working to make the arts more accessible to wider audiences. Many orchestras and opera houses in various countries have created special departments of education and community outreach. To develop the necessary programs, the field of cultural mediation, and in particular music mediation, has become increasingly professionalized. Music mediation is now offered as a degree course at several Universities and Conservatories in many countries.

Without going into detail, the rather tedious issue of the definition of music mediation needs to be mentioned briefly. While the term is now well established in many languages (in German-speaking countries under the

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equivalent name Musikvermittlung), it is not used at all in the English-speaking world. In the UK a music mediator is called an animateur and in the USA a teaching artist. I am using the English form “music mediation”, which is used by the University of Montreal (in the French-speaking part of Canada), whose Faculty of Music offers the only specialized program in music mediation in the country.

Music mediation is one of the forms of cultural mediation for which I will quote an abbreviated version of the definition given by Bruno Nassim Abouddrar, Professor in the Department of Cultural Mediation at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University in Paris: “We call ‘cultural mediation’ a set of actions which aim, through an intermediary – the mediator, [...] – to put an individual or a group in touch with a cultural or artistic proposal (a singular work of art, an exhibition, a concert, a show, etc.), in order to promote its apprehension, its knowledge and its appreciation.”² As far as music is concerned, this “set of actions” has become increasingly diverse in recent decades. I will limit the scope of my paper to music mediation in the context of concert performances – hence the title “music mediation on stage” – and, in particular, to performances designed for children.

However important cultural mediation is for all generations, many specialists believe it is crucial to take advantage of the so-called ‘open ear’ age, and so do I. In an article on the development of aesthetic responses to music, published in 1982, Hargreaves used the concept of ‘open ears’, which was and still is widely used in academic literature in forms such as open-earedness (in English) or *Offenohrigkeit* (in German).³

As a conductor and music mediator who stands on stage in front of an audience of children, I am an advocate of abandoning the traditional name of “educational concert”, which has an overly didactic connotation, in favor of one of many creative titles. Think of the London Philharmonic Orchestra’s *BrightSparks* concerts or the name *Lollipops* used by several American orchestras⁴. Simple names like *Young People’s Concert* for the New York Philharmonic series, made world famous by Leonard Bernstein, *Children’s Concert* or *Family Concert* seem much more appealing to me - and to the children, I am sure.

² Abouddrar, Bruno Nassim, and François Mairesse. *La Médiation Culturelle (Cultural mediation)*. QUE SAIS-JE, 2022, p. 3. „On appelle « médiation culturelle » un ensemble d’actions visant, par le biais d’un intermédiaire – le médiateur, [...] –, à mettre en relation un individu ou un groupe avec une proposition culturelle ou artistique (œuvre d’art singulière, exposition, concert, spectacle, etc.), afin de favoriser son appréhension, sa connaissance et son appréciation.”

³ Hargreaves, David J. “The Development of Aesthetic Reactions to Music.” *Psychology of Music*, no. Special issue, 1982, pp. 51-54, p. 51.

⁴ Charlotte Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony, Greenville Symphony Orchestra, Utah Symphony, Grand Rapids Symphony. Richmond Symphony, The Little Orchestra (New York)

Let's take a look at the toolbox of a mediator, which can be used for children's concerts. With the professionalization of music mediation, this toolbox is full of different approaches and strategies that can be used to best serve the goal of facilitating access to classical music. Several excellent books⁵ and countless examples of good practice provide valuable information for both the beginner and the experienced professional in the field. In the process of conceiving and planning a children's concert, the music educator must carefully choose the best tools for the given program.

Verbal explanation

The oldest and most common form is the host's speech. Regarding speaking the first pitfall to avoid is the tendency for the script to be too long and too verbose, full of information and unnecessary or unexplained technical words. Allowing parts of the verbal presentation to be delivered by different musicians taking part in the concert, in a so-called 'ping-pong' style, adds to the liveliness of the talk. Changing speakers also keeps the audience's attention. It also involves the musicians more in the unfolding of the concert beyond the performance of the music. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon, especially at children's orchestra concerts, to see some of the musicians on stage projecting an attitude of inattention and disinterest in the concert. Enthusiastic stage presence is of paramount importance in engaging the audience, especially young audiences.

Even a well-written and well-performed script can be greatly enhanced by turning some of the talk into a question-and-answer dialogue with the audience - a rather simple but highly effective form of interaction with young audiences. A well-planned and skillfully coordinated dialogue can result in getting the information you want from the audience, replacing an explanatory monologue with an activity that engages them and makes them proud.

During the educational concert "What is American music?" (Young People's Concerts), Leonard Bernstein gathered information from the audience about some of the musical works of the national schools of composition. Bernstein asked the audience what the music they were about to hear reminded them of, conducted an excerpt from Maurice Ravel's *Spanish Rhapsody*, and the audience unanimously answered that it was Spanish music. For the next two excerpts (from Johannes Brahms's *Hungarian Dance*

⁵ For example: Booth, Eric. *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible: Becoming a Virtuoso Educator*. Oxford UP, 2009; Wallace, David. *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance*. Berklee Press Publications, 2018; Stiller, Barbara. *Erlebnisraum Konzert. Prozesse der Musikvermittlung in Konzerten für Kinder*. Regensburg: ConBrio, 2009.

No. 5 and from the Finale of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony*), the audience response was correct each time, so the information about whether the music was Hungarian or Russian was provided by the audience⁶.

Music examples

Showcasing selected short excerpts from the piece to be performed is also a traditional part of educational concerts. The musical example can illustrate the verbal explanation by showing a main theme, an instrument or an important musical characteristic of the piece the audience is about to hear. It is also a unique opportunity to show the different layers of a composition by having the audience listen to them separately before performing them together in their original form. As well as drawing the audience's attention to one or more crucial moments in the piece to follow, listening to the music examples has another benefit: it familiarizes the audience with the excerpt. "Multiple listening facilitates a deeper understanding of musical works"⁷, and recognition of the melody has a positive effect on the audience's response to the piece.

In the family concert called "The Magic Wand" we used musical examples to illustrate the families of instruments and the multiple layers in Tchaikovsky's *Miniature Overture* from *The Nutcracker Suite*. We showed the audience first the theme played by the violins, then by the woodwinds, and then we played the violin theme with accompaniment by the violas.

A more sophisticated form of musical example is the use of another, simpler piece to introduce a particular feature of a more complex work. David Wallace calls this strategy "using one performance as a 'warm-up' for the next work".⁸ Leonard Bernstein used this technique to illustrate the Dorian mode before playing an excerpt from Sibelius's *6th Symphony* in the concert titled "What is a mode?"⁹ He first demonstrated the major scale, the minor scale and the arrangement of the tones and semitones on the piano for the Dorian scale. Then a group of instrumentalists from the orchestra sang a plainsong chant, after which Bernstein played the song *Along comes Mary*

⁶ "Leonard Bernstein at 100." *What Is American Music?* | *Young People's Concerts* | *Television Scripts* | *Lectures/Scripts/Writings* | *Leonard Bernstein*, leonardbernstein.com/lectures/television-scripts/young-peoples-concerts/what-is-american-music. (Accessed 20 June 2023).

⁷ Wallace, David. *Engaging the Concert Audience: A Musician's Guide to Interactive Performance*. Berklee Press Publications, 2018, p. 45.

⁸ Wallace, 2018, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁹ "Leonard Bernstein at 100." *What Is a Mode?* | *Young People's Concerts* | *Television Scripts* | *Lectures/Scripts/Writings* | *Leonard Bernstein*, leonardbernstein.com/lectures/television-scripts/young-peoples-concerts/what-is-american-music. (Accessed 20 June 2023).

recorded by the American pop group *The Association* on piano and voice, all in the Dorian mode.

In several concerts for school groups featuring Dvorak's *9th Symphony "From the New World"*, we highlighted the main theme of the slow movement, which uses the pentatonic scale. The English horn played the pentatonic scale, after which we used the well-known Hungarian children's song *Rossz a Jézus kiscsizmája* to tune-in the audience to the sound of pentatonic music. The song was first performed by a baritone alone and then as sing-along for the audience.

E.g. 1

Rossz a Jé-zus kis csiz-má-ja sír a köd-mő-ne,
 Á-zik, fá-zik meg-ve-szi az Is-ten hi-de-ge.
 Hogy-ha vol-na kis csiz-mám, Jé-zus-ká-nak o-d'ad-nám
 Bá-rány hő-rös köd-mön-kém-mel jól he-ta-kar-nám.

Hungarian children's song

Comparative listening

Music examples can also be played side by side for comparison. This strategy helps the audience experience the differences between instruments, differences in tempo, dynamics, or character.

In his concert *What is orchestration?*¹⁰, Bernstein explained how difficult a task the composer faces when having to choose among all the instruments and their multiple possible combinations. The audience got to listen to the beginning of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto*

¹⁰ "Leonard Bernstein at 100." *What Is Orchestration?* | *Young People's Concerts* | *Television Scripts* | *Lectures/Scripts/Writings* | *Leonard Bernstein*, leonardbernstein.com/lectures/television-scripts/young-peoples-concerts/what-is-american-music. (Accessed 20 June 2023).

No. 3, performed in the original version for string orchestra and then in an arrangement for brass ensemble.

In our concert “The Magic Wand”, the various instruments playing the Russian folk song theme *Little Birch* at the end of Tchaikovsky’s *Fourth Symphony* separately demonstrated how the theme sounds on each instrument. The trumpeter and tuba player came forward to demonstrate, adding a visual aspect to the sound. The orchestral accompaniment to the various variations of the theme was also demonstrated. To help the children notice the changes in the instrumentation of the melody and accompaniment, the conductor suggested associations with different characters that they could identify. The three musical examples from the finale of the symphony are presented in tabular form below:

Table 1

Instrumentation of the theme	Instrumentation of the accompaniment	Suggested character	Bars
oboe, bassoon, triangle	<i>pizzicato</i> violin, viola, cello	silvery sound dreamy atmosphere	60-67
wind instruments	string instruments	playful melody	10-17
tuba, trombone, double bass	small values played by the rest of the orchestra	ominous sound danger	84-91

Musical examples from the finale of P. I. Tchaikovsky’s *Fourth Symphony*

In our school concerts featuring Dvorak’s *9th Symphony “From the New World”*, before the performance of the second movement, a baritone, accompanied by the strings, sang the song “Going home”, which has a negro-spiritual-like text added to the theme. For a while after the song gained popularity, the melody from the slow movement was believed to be a spiritual or gospel hymn quoted by the composer in his symphony, when in fact it is his original composition to which one of his students, William Arms Fisher, set the words. We also showed the audience how the main theme of the second movement was born. Dvorak had initially composed it for clarinet, in a traditional major key. (E.g., 2) He then changed it into a pentatonic melody. (E.g., 3) In the final version he entrusted the melody to the English horn, believing that its timbre was closer to the voice of his black student in New York, who had introduced him to spirituals.

E.g. 2



Clarinet theme in traditional major key

To help the children concentrate on listening, a kinesthetic activity was used to focus their attention on the clarinet motif (cuckoo song), introduced in the form of a “game” in which the children took on the role of a cuckoo hiding deep in the forest, coming out from behind a tree each time they heard the cuckoo. The palms of the hands were raised in front of the eyes and the parallel forearms represented the tree from behind which the children had to briefly peek their heads out to each cuckoo call. Covering the eyes focused attention on the auditory stimuli by interrupting the reception of visual stimuli and helped the audience to respond to each appearance of the clarinet motif. Over the course of the piece, the clarinet motif is repeated 17 times. By focusing their attention on the clarinet motif, the children were able to follow the whole piece in a concentrated way, so that they could play the part of the cuckoo at the right moment. Due to the overall *pianissimo* nuances of the piece and the desire not to miss the musical motif to which they had to respond through movement, the activity unfolded in a silence that exceeded all expectations. In all the performances of the “Carnival of Animals”, the activity went as expected and was a great success with the children and their delighted teachers.

To focus the attention of the children, visual elements can be added to a concert. It is important to keep in mind that the focus of the children needs to be directed toward a musical aspect. Occasionally, visual elements are added to children’s concerts without a direct connection to the music itself, for enhancing the entertainment value. This might well keep the children’s attention directed to the stage, but not to the music. Serious music mediation should avoid that kind of gimmicks and keep in mind Leonard Bernstein’s warning “It’s a concert, not a show!”¹²

For the opening piece of the *Carnival of the animals*, in which Saint-Saens depicts the lion with a royal march, the composer uses tone painting and lets the lion roar in the low register of the instruments. We asked the children to recognize this roaring and helped them focus their auditory attention with a visual element, shown at the right moment in the score. The musical motif used by the composer to imitate the lion’s roar was visualized by a lion’s head cut out of cardboard. By raising it from behind the piano at each of the six times the motif appears, the audience’s attention was drawn to the musical motif, which was easily recognizable.

¹² Rose, Brian. *Televising the performing arts. Interviews with Merrill Brockway, Kirk Browning, and Roger Englander*, Praeger Publishers Inc, 1992, p. 137.



Lions roar from Camille Saint-Saëns: *Introduction & Royal March of the Lion* from *The Carnival of the animals* (No. 1), m. 34-36

Modelling

Modelling or piece simulation is a term for the activity in which the music mediator interacts with the audience to create or perform together something similar to the piece of music they are about to hear. Depending on the work, various aspects of the music can be modelled: the rhythm, the character, the musical form, some descriptive elements of program music.

In the children's concert "What's So Great About Mozart?" which David Wallace designed and presented at the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, he introduced the children to the finale of Mozart's Flute Quartet in D major, K. 285 by creating a piece in the form of a rondo. As a recurring theme, the quartet played the theme of the rondo, while the audience provided the episodes: a volunteer playing on a metallophone, the audience singing "Happy Birthday" together, and another volunteer playing on the drum. Wallace summed it up for the audience as follows: "So our rondo will go musicians/ metallophone scales/ musicians/ "Happy Birthday" /musicians/ drum/ musicians."¹³

In the "If I Had a Little Violin" concert for children which we structured as an imaginary journey through several historical periods, we introduced the concept of tempo with an activity mimicking travelling with vehicles at various speeds. We used the tune of the famous *Sailor's Hornpipe* as the leitmotif of the journey. In the tradition of Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea Songs* the theme of the hornpipe is played in increasingly fast tempi, including a huge accelerando at the end. The children modelled the different tempi by imitating the movement of the wheels of a carriage and of a locomotive, as well as of the propellers of an airplane with the rolling of the forearms. The audience was then asked to "travel" at different speeds together with the music. With the slow

¹³ Wallace, 2008, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

performance of the tune, the wheels of the carriage turned very slowly, the locomotive started slowly and accelerated gradually, and the propellers of the plane turned very fast. This activity introduced children to the concept of musical tempo and especially to the rather difficult concept of *accelerando* through direct kinesthetic experience, without the aid of theoretical explanations.

Participation in performance

Music mediation strategies that actively involve the audience in creating and/or presenting musical content are particularly effective. Moments involving the participation of the audience should be chosen so that they have a clear link to the concert program. A judiciously chosen participatory activity can either focus the audience's attention for concentrated listening of the following music, or give them the opportunity to perform along with the musicians on stage. Participation can be done in a variety of ways: vocal participation, body percussion or instrumental participation. "One of the major achievements of perform-along is that they demolish the delineation between listeners and performers. For a moment, audience members enjoy the thrill of being equal partners with great musicians."¹⁴

In our family concert "The Magic Wand", before performing the final movement of Tchaikovsky's *4th Symphony*, we familiarized the audience with the music by teaching them the Russian folk song *Little Birch*, which the composer quotes in the symphony. The children first learned the song with translated lyrics line by line and were then invited to perform together with the solo trumpet.

In our school concert "Invitation to the Dance", the orchestra played the mazurka from the ballet *Coppélia* by Delibes. The children in the audience were invited to perform along, interpreting a typical "oom-pah-pah" accompaniment with body percussion. They slapped their thighs on the first beat and clapped their hands on the second and third beats. This fun activity helped them intuitively grasp the triple meter.

In our children's concert "The Bremen Town Musicians", based on the Grimm Brothers' tale, the character of the donkey was illustrated with music from Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Prior to listening to the excerpt, the audience was asked to sing the well-known children's song "Old McDonald had a farm", in dialogue with the bassoon playing the donkey's hee-haw from Mendelssohn's music.

¹⁴ David Wallace, 2018, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

The musical score is written in G major (one flat) and common time (C). It consists of four systems, each with two staves: Audience (treble clef) and Bassoon (bass clef).

- System 1:** Audience: "Old Mac-don-ald had a farm E I E I". Bassoon: rests.
- System 2:** Audience: "O! And on the farm he had a don-key E I E I". Bassoon: rests.
- System 3:** Audience: "O!". Bassoon: rhythmic accompaniment consisting of quarter notes with rests (G, F, E, D, C).
- System 4:** Audience: "Old Mac-don-ald had a farm E I E I O!". Bassoon: rests.

Musical dialogue between the audience and the bassoon

The strategies for music mediation on stage described and exemplified above must be harmoniously integrated into a well-conceived and attractively presented script for an educational concert. They must be chosen in such a way as to facilitate the musical-pedagogical objectives of the concert and to correspond to the way in which the concert theme is approached. Particular attention should be paid to participatory elements. From my own experience with young audiences, I have found that audiences of 5–10-year-olds are the most enthusiastic about participatory activities.

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Performances

- What is American Music?*** (Orchestral program), Young People's Concerts Series, New York Philharmonic, conductor and moderator: Leonard Bernstein (1 February 1958)
- The Magic Wand*** (Orchestral program), educational concert for families, Notes & Ties Orchestra, conductor and moderator: Dalma Toadere (2 December 2012)
- What Is a Mode?*** (Orchestral program), Young People's Concerts Series, New York Philharmonic, conductor and moderator: Leonard Bernstein (23 November 1966)

- From the New World*** (Orchestral program), educational concert for school groups, Cluj Hungarian Opera, Transylvania Philharmonic, Dinu Lipatti Philharmonic from Satu-Mare, Oradea Philharmonic, conductor, and moderator: Dalma Toadere (first performance 13 April 2022 at the Cluj Hungarian Opera, followed by 11 additional performances in several Philharmonics in Romania)
- What is Orchestration?*** (Orchestral program), Young People's Concerts Series, New York Philharmonic, conductor, and moderator: Leonard Bernstein (8 March 1958)
- Carnival of Animals*** (Chamber music program), *Do Re Mi START!* educational programme, children's concert for school groups, Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy, conductor and moderator: Dalma Toadere (first performance in 2012 followed by 10 additional performances in several cities in Romania)
- What's So Great About Mozart?*** (Chamber music program), Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, moderator: David Wallace
- If I Had a Little Violin*** (Chamber music program), *Do Re Mi START!* educational program, children's concert for school groups, Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy, Dinu Lipatti Philharmonic from Satu-Mare, conductor, and moderator: Dalma Toadere (first performance on 7 April 2015 followed by 20 additional performances in several cities in Romania)
- Invitation to the Dance*** (Chamber music program), *Do Re Mi START!* educational program, children's concert for school groups, Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy, Dinu Lipatti Philharmonic from Satu-Mare, conductor and moderator: Dalma Toadere (First performance on 5 December 2015 followed by 9 additional performances in several cities in Romania)
- The Bremen Town Musicians*** (Chamber music program), children's concert for school groups, Dinu Lipatti Philharmonic from Satu-Mare, conductor and moderator: Dalma Toadere (7 March 2023)

