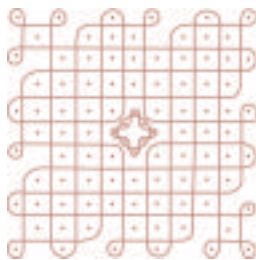


project of the Bern College of Arts and Natanakairali in Irinjalakuda, which focuses on music education in India.

All children hitherto deprived from opportunities to make music as part of their “normal” education are bound to benefit from being exposed to music from an early age.¹ Participation of children and young people, in and outside India, in Indian music has a positive effect on their intellectual development and well-being, in addition to providing scope for celebration, sharing and light-hearted abandonment. To attain this little is needed in terms of money and/or (costly) instruments. In fact, the absence of big money and costly instruments may be a boon in disguise to enhance the students’ participation in music. The scarce funds available should be invested in training and rewarding good teachers and artists who can make a difference in the day-to-day realities of regular schools, rather than in the acquisition of instruments. Musical instruments may be expensive to acquire and maintenance intensive. They can stand in the way of having a good time of making music together, because they are too difficult to handle to be useful in general education. Unless a musical ensemble is the aim of a class, their absence can have a liberating effect. It is more fruitful to sensitize pupils to auditory perception, good posture and proper breathing and the diverse manners by which collective music making can increase their concentration and self-confidence.

At the same time, *more* music is called for in order to enhance the very quality of daily (school) life. Children should be encouraged to make music themselves rather than enjoy it in a passive mode. The importance of music as a school subject is not so much the study of music for its own sake, but its effects on the whole mental and spiritual world of children, above all on their morals.² All this can happen naturally when administrators are convinced of the significance of music for the development of the child and willing to undertake efforts to make joint music experiences part of the school routine.

The importance of music in general education was perceived already by Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), herself an ardent admirer of Indian culture. Until the revolutionary concepts of Montessori education percolate down sufficiently in order to enable average school children to make good use of their innate talents, their teachers should be encouraged to explore avenues that are both affordable and pleasing so as to stimulate their pupils to develop themselves artistically and intellectually. In actual practice this means doing *more with less* in order to ensure that music classes will also reach school children at the grassroots level. While doing so Indian educators can draw inspiration as well as expertise from a range of initiatives started with great success in other fields such as ecology, adult literacy programmes and information technology (Seashore 938 (1967)). Even the most basic music experience a child enjoys at school helps her to cope with situations encountered at home, in public spaces, such as places



Less is More and More is More:
WHY INDIAN MUSIC SHOULD
FIND ITS WAY INTO GENERAL
EDUCATION

~~~~~ Ludwig Pesch ~~~~~

*Ludwig Pesch* (1955) is a musician, musicologist and teacher specialized in Carnatic music. He studied music at Freiburg University Hochschule für Musik and at Kalakshetra College of Fine Arts in Chennai. He is the author of *The Illustrated Companion to South Indian Classical Music* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and received the 6th Rabindranath Tagore Cultural Award of the Indo-German the Cross of the Order of Merit by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany for his work. At present he is involved in a research

of worship, where individual feelings tend to be subject to restrictions that may stifle the very talents civil society needs to cultivate in order to flourish and prosper as a whole. Montessori was the first (Western) educationist to realize that several considerations need to be taken into account when one wants to give priority to the quality of a school career rather than to the status of a learner's parents:

- all healthy children are (musically) talented, but much needs to be done to bring out their latent talents;
- disadvantaged and handicapped children (the first group she worked with as a young medical doctor in a poor Italian neighbourhood) have special talents that can be cultivated with some insight into child-psychology and patience among parents and teachers alike;
- peer-teaching among children of different age groups needs to be harnessed by way of eliminating age-based segregation at the pre-school level and possibly even beyond;
- good education always relies on a continuous trust building effort mirrored by an atmosphere in which children feel safe, are motivated to maintain some order on their own, and stimulated to learn by way of playful activity (play being the "work" of young children—work that deserves to be taken seriously in Montessori's qualified opinion).

Educators need not necessarily be trained in the Montessori system to realize that they stand much to benefit themselves, just as their pupils, by looking at the potential offered by including music activities in their classrooms on a routine basis rather than on special occasions, such as festivities. The key in doing so successfully lies, no doubt, in the enormous variety of experiences inherent in all activities relating to Indian music—*it need never be the same thing twice!* A majority of South India's leading performers has benefited from the old *gurukula* personal education system before obtaining degrees in syllabus-based training available in government recognized institutions in order to qualify for employment. Yet in daily school life, most children in "normal" schools rarely get an opportunity to learn and practice music, leave alone reflecting on the need for endowing it with the values we would like to associate with it: joy, beauty, serenity, mental peace, and even transcendental experiences in tune with our religious background. Who has access to music education? Access is almost exclusively reserved for children belonging to the educated middle and upper class although some notable exceptions are, naturally, found in the poorer families of hereditary musicians for whom the artistic pursuit is endowed with prestige and the promise of economic benefit. Among the hurdles faced by many teachers, some are relevant in our present context: the use of jargon, a wrong perception that text books hold the key to good music education, and a lack of proper understanding how musical and non-musical memory works. There is also the misunderstanding that

elementary music classes need to emulate the conventional training of a performer with the customary (and costly) *arangetram* debut appearance looming on the horizon. In situations where textbooks are widely used, as in the case of the teaching of "classical" Carnatic music, these books do not include detailed indications of tempo, intonation or dynamics as in a Western music score as all these parameters are regarded as impossible to notate in Indian music and therefore supplied by means of oral transmission. Several solutions to fill this "void" have been attempted with varying success but have never met with widespread approval among teachers and performers. Those involved in the training emphasize the importance of memorizing rather than encouraging sight-reading even in the form of syllabic notation that is commonly used as an aid to memory. In short, in a culture that has never relied on detailed notation scores in the past, the musical strength to harness also lies in a multitude of non-musical factors. Musical experience is acquired in close contact with other forms of arts. Text books can (and do) supplement music classes designed to train professional or competent amateur performers. But in general education, they are either dispensable altogether or new ones need to be written from scratch to be interesting and useful. The key to success is therefore motivation at every level, not achievement. The sense of achievement is its own reward as music education follows its natural course in the awareness of a child's need for developing her own faculties in several, seemingly unrelated fields. For these reasons, it matters little whether teachers apply time-saving teaching methods supported by text books and multimedia technology, as long as children have the opportunity to actively participate on a regular basis. Many school children are deprived of such active participation in music making, denying them the chance to fulfil their innate potential in a manner that directly influences the quality of their lives and of society as a whole. Even at the risk of being dismissed as being too idealistic, I believe that this has all to do with peace (not just the absence of violence), tolerance (not mere co-existence) and prosperity (the general conditions in which life becomes meaningful and enjoyable). It is not unlikely, though hard to prove, that the recent decline in music education in Western societies, is part of a crisis wherein the lack of access to music education goes hand in hand with the lack of self-esteem which, if combined with socio-economical deprivation and cultural alienation, leads to an alarming rise in youth delinquency. It is therefore heartening to see how initiatives such as the recent production of a music film *U-Carmen* in South Africa's black townships, wherein the participation of local talent stands central, and inner city music projects in Germany, have brought a fresh sense of direction and justified pride to countless young people. In these and similar instances, the professional aspect has been secondary while active participation is what music making is really all about.

What can be said about music education that is of practical relevance in our present context? A Montessori music

teacher described musicality and music teaching as follows: “[t]here is no such thing as a non-musical child; there are just non-musical adults who did not get this practice as children. Songs give children a way of expressing emotions, and the very act of singing is a physical release. I have always watched for the casual, unintentional singing in class, knowing that it is a positive sign. (...) We do not need beautiful voices to model singing for children. (...) In a class, where children work individually instead of having group lessons, the teacher will sing a song, make music, dance, at any time during the day with two or three children who aren’t busy. Others may join in as they please. Any child can make music whenever she feels like it.” (Olaf 2004)

### The Suzuki Approach

*What does not exist in the cultural environment will not develop in the child.*—Dr. Shinichi Suzuki

The “Suzuki Approach” (<http://www.europeansuzuki.org/approach.htm>) is “based on the principle that all children possess ability and that this ability can be developed and enhanced through a nurturing environment. All children learn to speak their own language with relative ease and if the same natural learning process is applied in teaching other skills, these can be acquired as successfully.” Suzuki referred to the process as the Mother Tongue Method and to the whole system of pedagogy as Talent Education.

Rather than re-inventing the wheel that keeps organized music education going, Indian educators should check out for themselves which of the following Suzuki criteria are most relevant to the children entrusted to them before identifying the actual contents that are desirable in their own environment, including the language(s) spoken and the familiarity with some local artistic idiom or other:

- an early start (aged 3-4 is normal in Europe)
- the importance of listening to music
- learning to play before learning to read
- the involvement of the parent
- a nurturing and positive learning environment
- a high standard of teaching by trained teachers
- the importance of producing a good sound in a balanced and natural way
- core repertoire, used by Suzuki students across the world
- social interaction with other children: Suzuki students from all over the world can communicate through the language of music

Among the above points, “listening to music”, preferably to competent musicians, and “learning to play before learning to read” touches upon the very essence of Indian music training. The Indian perception that everybody sings—in one’s natural voice or otherwise—creates favourable conditions for the rest to follow in a playful

manner without worry of failure or ridicule from one’s peers. This is in fact the main point as regards the title of this article, *less is more*, as the voice is a free gift we all share, and one’s voice need not be refined to become an active participant in Indian music, whatever one’s age may be.

At the core of children’s artistic experience lies the opportunity to repeatedly probe the depths of their own imagination and expressing their findings through a type of music that is appropriate for the very moment this happens. This calls for a situation where there is no room for fear, such as appearing to be incompetent while handling an instrument or even damaging it.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>. In the following the word “music” may be substituted by “performing arts” in the widest sense: “classical” as well as “semi-classical” or “folk”. The idea of the confluence or interconnectedness of several art forms is expressed in the word *sangita* or *sangeet*, found in many Indian languages. The use of the term *sangita* to refer to any particular genre of vocal or instrumental music is a fairly recent phenomenon.

<sup>2</sup>. Dmitri Kabalevsky quoted in *International Journal of Music Education: Showcase* 2004:155.\*