

AESTHETIC EDUCATION AND THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF MUSIC IN NEW MODES OF TEACHING: CAN MUSIC BE TAUGHT ONLINE?

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Abstract. *The paper focuses on the aspects of aesthetic education and aesthetic experience of music under the conditions of online teaching of music due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new mode of teaching affected the teaching process, particularly in the field of performance arts which involves direct experiencing of music, stage performances and direct cooperation of musicians. Aside from certain advantages, mostly regarding the organization of teaching and more time for practice, the results show that students were for the most part deprived of a comprehensive experience of music during the teaching process, and particularly of a specific aesthetic experience. A general conclusion is drawn that direct contact between the student and the professor in face-to-face teaching practice is an irreplaceable segment of music education.*

Key words: *aesthetic education, aesthetic experience, teaching practice, music education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A drastic change of the way of life of the inhabitants of Serbia that started in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all social aspects of their lives. Isolation, physical distancing, limited movement, and a disrupted way of life have given rise to the change in the organization of teaching (for the last few months most of the teaching has been carried out online using various platforms). This prompted us to explore the ways in which teaching has been implemented under the new circumstances in fields where direct contact is either necessary or substantial, and the ways in which art, i.e. music education has been carried out. Upon embarking on the unknown territory, both students and teachers had to figure out various 'transitional solutions' for the implementation of the teaching process. But as time went by, it turned out that the online period would not be short, but several months

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long. This fact also prompted the question of educating music performers in home conditions, without stage performances or contacts with fellow students, conductors or orchestras. Besides, as a consequence of such a mode of work, we also opened the issue of competency of the students educated under such circumstances, primarily in terms of their readiness to stand up to the requirements of their profession.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCH

Taking into consideration the problems of teaching music, it is important to point out that this line of education is on the one hand connected with the realm of aesthetics, and on the other hand with art education. Aesthetic education is more comprehensive and superior to the notion of art education. More importantly, it is not only associated with art but also with man's entire environment. The goal of aesthetic education is, in the full meaning of the word, to make a subject receptive to artwork and susceptible to aesthetic feelings (Zurovac 1997). In order to develop this power, it is significant to maintain a permanent contact with artwork as well as with other content that enhances the development and refinement of reception sensitivity to artwork. Such a direct connection with one or more arts remains an irreplaceable component of aesthetic education. On the other hand, art education is more concrete and oriented towards getting the student acquainted with certain types of art or with art in general.

Although one can at times come across different attitudes regarding the objectives and means of aesthetic education, it can be asserted that there is general consent among researchers regarding the fact that music education is one of the forms of aesthetic education (Elliott 1995; Plummeridge 1999; Finny 2002), even that the program of music education should first and foremost be based on aesthetic education (Leonhard and House 1972 according to Goolsby 1984, 15).

One of the leading theoreticians of education, John Dewey (1998), bases his attitudes on the theory that genuine education is achieved through experience. Talking about the role of experiencing art in education, he emphasizes that students can understand facts through metacognition or through upgrading their previous experiences, preconceptions and knowledge, thus increasing the significance of the educator's role, as he is the one supposed to cultivate experience. According to Dewey's theory experience arises from the interaction of two principles – continuity and interaction. Continuity means that each experience takes from the past and has an effect on the future experience of the individual, while interaction refers to the situational and educator's influence on students' experience.

As far as musical arts are concerned, it can be asserted that researchers agree about the huge influence of music on emotions. They also agree that the intensity and comprehensiveness of experiencing music depend on several factors, including external (atmosphere and environment), subjective (sensitivity to music, previous experience and general music education), the person's current psycho-physical condition, as well as cultural and social effects (Juslin and Vastfjall 2008; Brattico et al. 2009; Fossum and Varkøi 2012; Brattico et al. 2013; Popović Mlađenović et al. 2014).

Subjective experiencing of music is a complex phenomenon which involves and integrates various components that play a part in a distinctive musical experience. In spite of the fact that there are numerous studies in the field of subjective experiencing of music, it cannot be asserted that there is a consensus on the precise definition of subjective experiencing of music (Živanović et al. 2018, 398). Yet, the omnipresence of music, from

various art forms to everyday life, can be definitely explained by one of its dominant properties – the emotional echo that music produces.

Taking into account the researchers' attitudes, as well as our own pedagogical experience, we were particularly interested in the issue of interaction, because the newly encountered social circumstances have significantly altered the former modes of teaching practice. The paper rests on a detailed consideration of the essential tasks of aesthetic education such as the ability to perceive, the ability to experience, the ability to evaluate and the ability to implement (Grandić 2001; Grandić and Zuković 2004; Rojko 2012; Denac 2014). The mentioned tasks have a particular significance in the sphere of art education, because music education, aside from allowing for emotional reactions to music, must have other properties too, including intellectual evaluation of music content.

The ability to perceive refers to the individual's capacity to perceive and comprehend the elements of beauty in nature, as well as in different fields of art or other segments of life. In this context certain education, i.e. foreknowledge, is very important because aesthetic qualities cannot be perceived unless one knows the basic characteristics of a specific type of art or art movement. Without such preconditions man is but a naive observer of the beauty surrounding him. Hence, the ability to perceive aesthetic values is developed gradually, with the help of a teacher who guides the process.

Experiencing a piece of artwork is a phenomenon that has been for the most part dealt with by philosophers (Ingraden 1975; Hanslik 1977; Tatarkjevič 1980 and many others), although it has recently become a research subject of (experimental) psychology. Although there are numerous explanations and interpretations of art experience, it can be asserted that there is a prevailing agreement about the fact that full experience is possible only when one is aware of the aesthetic values of a piece of artwork and ready for a certain experience.

Aesthetic experiencing of art stands out as an exceptional phenomenon. It is a special state of mind which is qualitatively different from the 'normal' everyday mental state. In such a mental state one is fascinated by a certain object, while the environment fades away, self-awareness diminishes and the sense of time gets distorted. Some analyses and results indicate that aesthetic experiencing can be generated in two forms, such as fascination with something out of the ordinary, uncertainty, ambiguity and opposing information (as in modern art) and admiration of perfect expression (as in a perfect essay), complex compositional regularity and sophisticated quality on several levels of a symbolic narrative (as in classical art) (Marković 2012).

Despite different theories and understandings of aesthetic experience, it can be argued that it encompasses the functions of two groups of closely related phenomena, such as some exceptional experiences (e.g. ultimate pleasure, flow, etc.) and experience of beauty (e.g. satisfaction, attraction, harmony, etc.). Hence, some researchers also point out the importance of the entire spatial context in which one listens to music, so that sound atmosphere, the musical environment, melody and rhythm can be connected with some ambience in which musical sensations have already taken place (Atali 2007, 35). So far many papers have been written on perception and musical memory, as well as on other aspects (e.g. stimulus, reflex or perception and hearing); however they do not shed light on the aesthetic side of experiencing of a piece of music. So, such studies have certain limitations as they do not go beyond the reception of a sound stimulus in the so-called organ of Corti and its transmission to the brain in which context listening is considered "isolated from the overall experience" (Filipović 1982, 44). On the other hand, educators point out that the increase of knowledge in certain fields also increases the chances for a better quality of aesthetic experience. Such development

does not depend solely on biological factors or on the structure and functions of the body, but also on life circumstances and conditions where it develops together with other spheres of the psyche (Grandić 2001).

Evaluation of an artwork comes as a result of conscious perception and aesthetic experience of a particular artwork. Continuous permeation of the learner's intellectual and emotional aspects of personality is undoubtedly a part of the education process in the field of art, but it must be emphasized that the learner's training for proper judgment and evaluation of an artwork is particularly important for the development of aesthetic taste. Hence, learners need to adopt knowledge, skills and value criteria in order to be able to tell a piece of artwork from quasi art or kitsch. This practically means that evaluation of a piece of artwork requires certain prior knowledge (e.g. evaluation of some literary work or even of a piece of music would be wrong without the adequate knowledge of literary theory; musical forms are often associated with certain architectural solutions etc.). Predrag Ognjenović also points to this problem, because the results of some of his studies (Ognjenović and Morača 1994 according to Milićević 2019, 184) testify that the modes of an aesthetic decision depend on the level of general education and culture.

The ability to implement aesthetic values mostly refers to the area of creativity. The basis for the development of the ability of artistic, i.e. musical creativity lies in the ability to perceive and experience aesthetic values, which should constantly be stimulated and developed. This implies internalization of the gained knowledge, as well as the development of the learner's creative abilities. Aside from the work on interconnecting specific styles in different arts, which is necessary for understanding specific art movements, it is important that learners (students) show more creativity and imaginativeness in their creative attempts.

3. THE METHODOLOGY

Unlike previous similar studies dealing with the implications of aesthetic education and aesthetic experience under 'regular' conditions of music education (Bogunović 2008; Jović Miletić 2010; Stojanović and Zdravić Mihailović 2014; Živanović at al. 2018; Zdravić Mihailović 2020), this research focuses on similar problems but in utterly specific conditions. The shift of the entire teaching process to the realm of online communication is a challenge for all music educators, but also a new experience for students of music. Although the raised issues are significant for all educational profiles, we were guided by the fact that direct contact with a teacher, as well as with the audience, is particularly important for music performers who were deprived in the referral period of this, for them an essentially important, mode of teaching.

For this kind of qualitative research we opted for the so-called key informant interview¹ because we wanted to explore the standpoint of a small group of selected examinees regarding the mentioned problem (Anderson 2005, 203). Our representative sample included nine students of the Bachelor program in Music Performance at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Niš, equally distributed over the second, third and fourth year of study (three from each). We opted for students with excellent results in their previous studies, assuming that they would be motivated for work, ambitious, and ready to continue their education with the same success under the new circumstances.

¹ The researcher is not interested in statistical analysis of a large number of responses, but wants to probe the views of a small number of elite individuals.

As the first step in our research, we focused on making the concept of the interview and its structuring. Well thought of and planned interviews were carried out from May to December 2020.

4. THE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The results, based on the descriptive processing of the collected material, are presented in clusters around the formulated questions and were systematized according to the examinees' age.

Experiencing and understanding music arts is vitally significant for music education. Successful implementation of teaching first requires provision of adequate technical conditions (a good Internet connection, good quality of reproduction devices, good quality of loudspeakers, etc.) where, unlike in regular teaching, educators face limitations set by the capacity of their own technical devices on the one hand and by the capacity of the devices used by the students attending online teaching on the other. Before the interview the examinees were instructed that the questions would mostly apply to the teaching of their major subject as well as their professional subjects (e.g. chamber music, concert practice), which constitute the core of the professional education of young musicians.

Taking into account the above-mentioned facts, the first group of questions was structured around the possible technical problems during online teaching and their impact on class quality. Out of three second-year examinees, two pointed out that they had technical problems, while one did not mention such problems. The third- and fourth-year students did have occasional technical problems that partially disturbed the course and quality of online teaching. Also, such technical problems would occasionally could lead to a part of the class being lost.

The second group of questions referred to the chances to perceive aesthetic values of the compositions included in the syllabi, and to reach a full aesthetic experience during the teaching sessions (fascination or ultimate pleasure induced by a certain composition). The youngest examinees claimed they could perceive the aesthetic properties of some compositions, but complained of not reaching the expected aesthetic experience. Asked for the possible reasons why, the students specified external factors which prevented them from reaching the ultimate experience (the absence of a 'live' performance or listening to music, the lack of higher-quality reproduction devices, etc.). The third- and fourth-year students gave similar answers, pointing out that the aesthetic experience of music remained 'muffled', while one of the examinees (one of the best students of the Faculty of Arts in Niš) presented a different attitude. Namely, in his opinion, online teaching did not significantly disarrange perception of aesthetic values, nor interfere with the full aesthetic experience of music. Although this answer was somewhat surprising, we think that it can be partially explained by the fact that the student who gave it is a multiple recipient of awards, extremely ambitious, always motivated and ready to work, circumstances which most probably defined his attitude regarding the new mode of teaching, and consequently of his experience of music.

As expected, the examinees generally agreed about the importance of the entire environment for the process of listening to music. This can indicate an already established relationship regarding acceptance of a musical object, as well as a very refined taste regarding experiencing music, be it by listening to it or by interpreting it.

During the interview each of the examinees was asked to give their opinion on the quality of online teaching, as well to compare it with the usual 'face-to-face' teaching. While one of the examinees pointed out that there is no difference between them in terms of quality, the others took the stance that online teaching is generally of poorer quality, lacking certain elements of 'face-to-face' teaching. The students mainly emphasize that they miss direct exchange of (sometimes utterly different) attitudes and opinions with their professors² and that due to the very nature of online communication (the sound signal received with a slight delay, or not completely accurate regarding various elements like timbre, emotion during performance and the like) this mode of teaching cannot be compared to traditional teaching.

Our next question referred to the quality of education of professional musicians in home conditions. This question did not give rise to different attitudes; on the contrary, all the examinees had a negative attitude (although one of them did not have a clear attitude regarding this issue). The examinees' explanations reveal that some significant aspects of teaching (e.g. chamber performance, concert practice and the like) cannot be developed in isolation. Also, stage and public performance are more difficult if there is a longer break, as with some students fighting stage fright is connected with gradual adjustment to appearance on the stage.

In line with the above-mentioned, our next question opened the issue of possible replacements for stage performance and contacts with the conductor, orchestra, and fellow students. All the examinees took the same standpoint emphasizing the irreplaceability of the mentioned activities, with almost no chance to make up for the lost cooperation. Their deliberate attitude and direct answer to this question showed that there was no room for any additional questions about the reasons for such an attitude.

We left the question regarding the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching for the end of the interview. Talking about advantages, the second-year students pointed out their better personal organization, time management (regarding the time they needed to come to the Faculty, longer breaks between classes and the like), gaining independence, availability of work materials. One of the examinees pointed out the easier studying of theoretical subjects as an advantage (while, as he put it, that does not apply to performance subjects), as well as the practical side of online teaching – attendance in bad weather conditions or travelling from other towns (for the students who are not residents of Niš or who do not have adequate means of transport). Talking about advantages, the examinees also mentioned lower cost of living, both on the individual and general levels.

The third-year students mentioned as an advantage of online teaching a chance to record and replay teaching materials, particularly those pertaining to less familiar teaching units. Also, talking advantages, they pointed out the surplus of free time which they used to practice their instrument and work on each composition in greater depth. One examinee stated something that we found very interesting – that he had a chance to get acquainted with his professors in a "slightly different way".

The older examinees pointed out yet another advantage showing, in compliance with their age, a higher degree of responsibility and care for others – a chance to attend classes even when one is not feeling well, without any worry of transmitting the disease to other fellow students or professors³. Also, one of the advantages of online teaching applies to

² This applies to the major subject (Piano, Guitar, Violin, Flute, Solo Singing).

³ Referring obviously to Covid-19.

easier organization of teaching or consultations with professors (rescheduling the class if the teacher is prevented from giving a lecture or if the students cannot attend). Here again all the examinees were consensual regarding the excess time in the light of the fact that aside from better chances to make advancements (in terms of playing or singing), this allowed for more family time.

Talking about the disadvantages of online teaching in professional music education, all the examinees pointed out insufficient contacts with their professors⁴. Although the teaching took place regularly, it was obvious that the mentioned contacts and cooperation were not sufficient. This throws light on one specific feature of teaching in professional music education, particularly in the field of music performance. Namely, the relationship between the educator and the learner established in the early phases of music education corresponds to the relationship between 'a sufficiently good mother' and 'the mimicking environment' (Winnicott 1973 according to Andjelković 2006). The quality of that relationship appears in this context as one of the most important factors for achieving high and even top levels of performance by well prepared and talented performers. What lies at the heart of this specific, strong transfer relationship, is the problem of separation – individualization, because a performer under the eye of his supervisor, just like a kid with his mother, goes through the process from magic unity in the early preparatory period to a fear of such unity, i.e. to the fear of the loss of one's idiosyncrasies by the end of the preparatory period. Hence, the issue here is a specific interconnectedness between the educator and the student which is significantly disturbed after shifting to online platforms, a circumstance that was recognized by the students as "insufficient contacts with professors". Faced with that experience, the students conclude that direct, face-to-face cooperation during classes is irreplaceable, and mention poorer quality of the classes of the major subject as a disadvantage of online teaching. As for the group of the youngest examinees, it was noticed that they had a problem with motivation and attention during the teaching sessions which resulted in poorer achievements. One of the examinees pointed out huge efforts made by the professors, as well as a fact that a considerable period of time was lost in the phase of initial organization of online teaching, in terms of adaptation of both sides.

The fourth-year students also mentioned the difficulties regarding organization of one's own time, frequent loss of motivation and problems to maintain it. Besides, they also pointed out some more delicate reasons seen as the weak points of online teaching. For instance, even in cases of the highest quality of sound on the net, the transmission affects the factual sound of an instrument (as compared to the 'live' sound). It was also noticed that a certain percentage of significant sound details get lost when students perform a certain composition, that dynamic differences and timbre cannot be heard and that there is no interaction and expression of emotions shown by movement, facial expressions or gesticulation visible in direct contact.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Aesthetic education and aesthetic experience play a significant role in all spheres of education, but it is notable that they constitute the core of teaching in professional music education.

⁴ Referring the teachers of the major subject.

In online teaching, perception of aesthetic qualities of a piece of music unavoidably depends on the technical support, but it proved to be unreliable rather often. That fact alone is indicative enough of the partial impairment of the quality of teaching, as technical conditions are a *sine qua non* condition for successful communication. The available teaching materials intended for independent study at home, as well as listening to musical pieces on YouTube can be useful in multiple ways, but they cannot substitute good face-to-face communication. This kind of a problem is unstimulating for students, so that they do not attend class, although the platform registers their presence.

Since experiencing music is connected with its understanding and with the perception of aesthetic qualities, a part of the interview was focused on this aspect. The examinees agreed about the possibility of perceiving aesthetic qualities, just as much as about the impossibility to reach full aesthetic experience in terms of fascination or ultimate pleasure. The reasons for such results can be numerous, but according to the students' attitudes, the key is in some kind of 'restricted' acoustic and physical space where one cannot reach a certain level of experience.

As for the question if music performers can be educated in 'home' conditions, most of the examinees expressed disagreement and had a negative attitude. This is indicative of their consciousness regarding all aspects of art education, including jeopardizing of certain competencies, particularly those connected with stage performance. This stood out as one of the weakest points of distance learning.

The general conclusion is that this new mode of teaching offers numerous advantages (more time for practicing, a chance to attend classes even when students are sick, flexibility of the schedule, more comfortable studying for non-residential students, a chance to make records or replay lectures, etc.). A particularly significant circumstance is additional time for practicing one's instrument or singing, which is utterly understandable, because it is widely known that a successful performer must have daily multi-hour practice sessions. According to the research results of Kemp (Kemp 1981, 1994, 1996 according to Radoš 2010), the most competent musicians are often self-motivated to the level of 'obsession'. Hence, under the conditions of the availability of excess time, it is logically recognized as additional time for practicing.

Insufficient contacts with the professors of a major subject i.e. impairment of the already established close relationship, as a significant support for students, stood out as the major disadvantage. The examinees jointly took the stance that nothing can replace face-to-face contact with the professor. The mentioned influence of teachers is obvious from the very beginning of music education, but later – with the growing age and interest for music, the teacher's role becomes increasingly important for acquiring the needed skills and competencies. According to some researchers (Zdravić Mihailović and Stojanović 2016, 122), the educator's role is crucial for building competencies, and their further development mostly depends on educators' engagement.

The problem resulting from the lack of live performances with fellow students or professors, particularly in the field of solo performances or chamber music, as well as the inability to reach a full experience of music ("it is impossible to hear and experience everything in the proper way, because there is no face-to-face teaching") stood out as a significant anomaly of online teaching. Certain difficulty of e-studies stems from the need to search for good organization and self-motivation. We assume that this segment is connected with the inability to have stage performances, take part in competitions etc., so that most of the students lack such challenges.

At this point it is important to mention that some of the problems that musicians come across are not solely a feature of distance learning. Namely, some recent studies (Bogunović and Mirović 2014, 22) show that even ‘regular’ teaching lacks permeation of study trends at university, and that pedagogical and performance practices are not sufficiently present. They depend on the teacher’s implicit pedagogical concept and strategy, as well as on the students’ enthusiasm/interests, while opting for chamber performances is primarily connected with the affinity for group performances, cooperation with fellow students and conductors, conducting and choral singing.

The inability to have public performances does not affect only musicians, but other art fields as well, such as theatre, ballet, opera and various other forms of applied arts. That fact opens numerous questions for each of these professions, but in the context of the musicians’ education it becomes relevant because of the inability to carry out aesthetic education. An academic musician should not only be a good interpreter, but also a highly educated individual who understands and is capable of evaluating art in a wider context. In order to achieve that, it is important to get continuously familiar with all forms of art and art movements, which is hampered or impossible in the new circumstances. The future will show if and to what extent some of the mentioned problems can be solved and if that will affect the future philosophy of music education.

The idea to focus on the problems dealt with in this research came in order to map the fields of professional education which still lack adequate solution regarding the problem of knowledge and skills transfer through online communication. It is possible that future generations who grow up side by side with the Internet and get familiar with online teaching much earlier in their life will manage to develop new mechanisms that will help them to successfully transfer even those utterly specific forms of teaching, typical for art faculties, to some new platform. For now, this and similar studies can be used as initial ideas for a better understanding of the new problems of education of musicians.

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ESTETSKO VASPITANJE I ESTETSKI DOŽIVLJAJ MUZIKE U NOVIM OBLICIMA NASTAVE: MOŽE LI SE MUZIKA UČITI ONLAJN?

U radu se razmatraju aspekti estetskog vaspitanja i estetskog doživljaja muzike u nastavi muzičkog obrazovanja, u uslovima onlajn nastave, koja se odvijala usled pandemije izazvane virusom Covid-19. Novi oblik nastave doveo je do promena u nastavnom procesu, posebno u oblasti Izvođačkih umetnosti, koja je vezana za neposredan doživljaj muzike, scenski nastup i direktnu saradnju muzičara. Pored izvesnih prednosti, uglavnom vezanih za organizaciju nastave i više vremena za vežbanje, rezultati su pokazali da su studenti uglavnom ostali uskraćeni za celoviti doživljaj muzike tokom nastave, a naročito za svojevrsan estetski doživljaj. Opšti zaključak je da je neposredan kontakt studenata i profesora u 'živoj' nastavnoj praksi nezamenljiv segment muzičkog obrazovanja.

Ključne reči: *estetsko vaspitanje, estetski doživljaj, nastavna praksa, muzičko obrazovanje.*