

The Factory of Sound



Factory of Sound is an educational programme by KONTEJNER (HR) for the youngest musicians of the future. The project is led by electronic musician, composer and teacher Nenad Sinkauz, together with percussionist, composer and teacher Nenad Kovačić. The children learn how to improvise through using their own voices and bodies, and audio equipment like microphones, effects, synthesizers and other devices. They produce music with these devices, as well as with live sampling, voice modulation, and body percussion, but above all, by playing together. This allows the junior improvisation ensemble to perform 'instant compositions' at a level appropriate to their age, perception, and knowledge of music.



Introduction

The increasing importance of informal learning structures in the cultural sector, and the relevance of the participative and innovative elements in such activities, have prompted a wide range of workshop programmes within festivals, artistic organisations and institutions. However, these often seem to assume a similar initial position to that of formal education, thus missing the opportunity to reinvent the existing paradigms within art education. *The Factory of Sound* project was implemented as a part of Re-Imagine Europe, with the aim of introducing children to contemporary music and art, and making music on their own. Factory of Sound tried to address the gaps in standard musical education, not only on a national level, but also in the general Western education system. The initiator of *The Factory of Sound*, curator and musicologist Davorka Begović, reflects on this project and the resulting insights, experiences and recommendations. Speaking from the perspective of an interdisciplinary arts organisation, she stresses the importance of establishing a high-quality relationship with audience members as an integral part of nurturing and educating them.

Audience development, part of the greater need to create changes that are imminent to any creative sector, has to be naturally embedded in the overall identity of a cultural organisation, enabling a two-way communication with the audiences, and an active participation in developments in society.

Davorka Begović

Points of departure

Very helpful starting points are passion and dedication, combined with honesty. And, of course, constructive self-criticism and a willingness for open discussion.

Davorka Begović

Begović explains the basis for a collaborative children's workshop that, in the Croatian context, turned out to be a pioneering project offering an alternative approach to music and art education. Due to a general notion that, for something to be deemed 'musical', it must adhere to a previously established system of music, one of the important goals of the workshop and the potential long-term project was for the participants to realise that 'musical sounds' encompass far more than what they had been told was musical. The aim was to introduce children to the importance of freedom in music, authorship and creative roles, and to have them actively acknowledge from an early age that music today (and, more importantly, the music of tomorrow) goes beyond the traditionally taught definition and understanding of music.

A composer and performer with a highly interdisciplinary profile, Nenad Sinkauz has been designing and leading the project workshops since their inception. He explains how getting children acquainted with different musical devices from an early age enables them to start creating their own music much sooner. This is different from the classical musical training prevalent in some educational systems in Europe (even when other approaches are encouraged), where one learns only to *reproduce* somebody else's music, which is likely to go on for months or years before children have an opportunity to perform music of their own. Given the young age of the participants, the main aim was for them to simply become acquainted with another type of sound world and not be afraid to express themselves within it.

Methodology

Sustainable thinking within the field of music practice and teaching is somewhat uncharted territory that certainly deserves more attention in order to develop a proactive shift in the perception of both arts and education. Questioning to whom, why and how we teach music is an important step that eventually leads to developing the capacities and competences of professionals who engage in the activities and design them. The endeavour to create a methodology and form a suitable artistic approach in the workshop meant deviating from one's own music making practise and education activities in general. As none of the workshop leaders teach regularly in the school system, eliminating this general practice was not an issue. In comparison to the interactive programmes, activities and workshops that had taken place thus far, the particular approach and new elements that were introduced when designing the workshops did bring about changes with regard to the tools and methodologies.

Experimenting with one's own personal music making and listening to and discussing a variety of musical sounds and options was a way of progressing towards further work. It meant fostering interest, and building relations and ideas with other participants. Merging conceptual and technical information within music making became possible very quickly thanks to solid foundations in the workshops. The assortment of instruments was always briefly introduced at the start by the workshop leader(s), followed by assigning each participant a particular instrument or musical part. After this the workshop leader(s) would electronically manipulate the sounds, introducing a set of signs that would be used for the remainder of workshop. The creative exploration of music listening is also an important part of learning music, alongside overcoming technical challenges and gaining a conceptual understanding of music making – whether it's singing, playing or working on the produced material.

We also had a game to introduce the different, less common percussion instruments, in which the participants had to give their impression of each one and grade them on a scale of 1 to 10 – how they like its sound and how they like the sound when it has been processed. Then they would get to hold and try out the instruments.

Nenad Sinkauz

As soon as someone was introduced to a device or an instrument, they were given it to play with straight away. To prevent the workshop from turning into a playground of sounds – given the young age and short attention span of the children – the crucial point was to encourage listening, improvisation and a form of prototype composition. This meant introducing actually making music as early as the second or third session, and developing skills along the way.

Good preparation and guided individual exploration enabled a sense of a non-hierarchical approach and fostered trust from the children. The advantage of having two music instructors at the same time contributed to this. One always played music with them, deepening that collaborative relationship and giving the children a greater sense of participation, while the other manipulated the sounds and gave them real-time feedback on the produced material. Listening to their recordings meant a lot to them and made a great difference in their approach later on.

The programme does not discriminate in terms of sound – between melody and sound. At first it seemed strange to the children that an abrasive sound, such as scratching or screeching, can also be incorporated into the soundscape. It is important to make them understand that there are no mistakes in making music.

Nenad Sinkauz

As the range of possibilities for working with the sounds and music making grew with each session, the children also developed their ideas about what they wanted to create with the tools they had at their disposal, and their curiosity for learning more about technique increased as well.

Fostering inclusion and openness

While communication about most of the music workshops and programmes for the youngest music enthusiasts is usually directed at the children's parents, and is presented as something that the child will surely like, and for which the parents would be willing to pay, in this case the starting point was the complete opposite. The programme was aimed at a particular age category, but it came without any preconditions and was open to a more diverse group, free of charge. It also respected the possibility that a child might choose not to stay for the duration the programme, but would get to know new people and things – gadgets, devices, instruments and sounds. That approach also opened up ways of developing new learning and performing methods that foster audience development, diversity and inclusion. The aim of broadening the scope and methodologies of the project led to shaping a grassroots approach befitting an inclusive practice. Without any exoticising or labelling, it resulted in a full performance at a festival, and raised awareness about social issues – tackling the issue of refugees, asylum seekers and asylees in this case.

Although condensed into six sessions spanning less than two weeks – instead of the usual two months – the workshop with the children of asylum seekers from different backgrounds employed the same artistic methods as it did for all the other children, with the exception of language. Seemingly an obstacle, the language barrier became a communication tool because the participants who spoke Croatian translated for the ones who didn't, and sounds and lyrics were used as an effective communication system,



enabling the children to share their ideas throughout the learning experience. Through this they also acquired a certain critical literacy, giving them a voice to tell their own stories.

We also gave them a task to share the fairytales that they like, and then we tried to create the accompanying music for them. The other task was for them to sing several songs from their culture. We quickly realised that a lot of them knew and were singing this one song, 'Atuna Tufuli', which translated means 'give us back our childhood' and we realised that it was about being a refugee. This is something all of them could relate to, so we incorporated it, and it became a way to bridge the gap, to find common ground.

Nenad Sinkauz

All the children in these workshops were addressed equally, and in such a way that their participation formed the core of the project. There was no preconceived result. Individual ways of learning to engage with art developed throughout the session and in such a context the teachers had to constantly be prepared for potential detours from what might have been viewed as a desired outcome at the start of the collective work. The values transferred during the process included artistic, social and intrapersonal skill sets, knowledge and, primarily, awareness of the possibilities at hand.

Challenges and take-outs

We knew we wanted to create this as a long-term project. We knew we would encounter several obstacles and problems, and we wanted to use the first year as a sort of test run for fine-tuning the ideas for the future editions. However, we had no idea how and whether this would work.

Nenad Sinkauz

A challenge that presented itself from the outset was the age range of the participants in the same group, which was at the same time an element of inclusion and a potential obstacle to further planning and structuring activities. When the group consisted of children from many different countries, many more problems arose, especially when there was less time to work. Some of these children were living at the reception centre for asylum seekers, which created additional scheduling problems.

In addition to the language barrier, there were cultural differences. But most of all, they were refugees – we didn't know what sort of conditions they had left behind, what their emotional state was. At first it was pretty chaotic, we tried different methods until finally, just some days before the performance we were able to get through to them and connect.

Nenad Sinkauz

Some of the shortcomings of the Croatian educational system, both in schools and music schools, which were addressed here were the motivation, ability and readiness to perform music, without the pressure of having to resemble any other performance, interpretation, and in general, without an imposed and tacitly accepted single way of doing things. This

usually impedes the desire to perform even further and often does irreparable damage to the young people's motivation.

Whereas at end-of-year performances in school you are able to reproduce a few minutes of music, at the end of the workshop, we performed a proper, 20-minute concert and the parents were really amazed, both with the amount of music their children could produce and the level of concentration they were able to achieve.

Nenad Sinkauz

As the practice and performance is undefined and led by a teacher-centric set of technical and musical challenges, it allows for more personal investment. Participants were asked to listen and analyse their own performance, their own music, with authentic engagement, especially in the days leading up to the presentation.

The final performance is a vital element, because precisely by demonstrating what they have learned and achieved, the children acquire a better sense of the value of what they have created. This gives them a sense of pride, and it also creates a change in the parents' perceptions of what experimental music is and can be. Several children returned to the workshop, becoming 'regulars'.

Nenad Sinkauz

A meaningful practice of sharing ideas, learning through overcoming challenges, and also by setting out into the unknown: all this matters a lot to young people in their formative years. The effects go beyond the performance, into the social realm. To develop further and 'level up' in both the practice and understanding of art and music, and the role they have in our communities and education, it is necessary to question the purpose of our music schools in Croatia, and perhaps other parts of Europe that share similar concerns. If the scope and goals of music schools stop at the practice of classical music – however admirable, beautiful, and necessary that is – and their mission is limited by the standards of (at least) 50 years ago, as is largely still the case in Croatia, then a whole sphere of expressivity and artistic practices is being ignored. Such a system of music schools not only runs the risk that music education will be labelled as elitist, but also excludes a lot of potential. Providing the knowledge for playing and singing is one of the elementary tools of music making, but it is only one aspect of the musical experience. Creative exploration, involving a lot of experimentation, listening and exposure to a wider variety of musical sounds, techniques and styles, should be an essential part of working with young people and children.

Although mostly neglected, one such practice that is very important and useful in the process of learning music is also one of the oldest: improvisation. Improvisation contains specific creative possibilities in terms of performing according to a more or less structured idea, and is thus considered more of a process than a final result or a 'product'. However, the initial positive impulse for creation that it provides, as well as the liberating effect it has on the children, is channelled as an encouragement to express oneself, something that is usually either lacking or not prioritised in music education. This is often a result of the ideal to reproduce certain music as accurately as possible. Such a practice has long-

term effects, extending even to higher music education, where professional musicians can experience a crisis due to a lack of development in the area of musicality and creativity.

Therefore, as one of the important elements to include in any such endeavours, improvisation serves as a perfect catalyst for many aspects that move the creative process forward. It prompts the young musician to make decisions on the spur of the moment; the unpredictable and uncontrolled phenomenon of creativity thus resurges suddenly, bringing the motivation to the forefront. The number of ideas spring into the mind of a highly motivated participant is much higher. This can be seen in the quantity of interesting musical ideas the participants came up with, which made the intensity and fruitfulness of the collective efforts in the ensemble grow exponentially.

Some of the elements that should be part of any well prepared and creative-led music education system are, for instance, adding chamber ensembles of various configurations to the existing formats of classical music (choirs, orchestra, etc.), encouraging students to form their own ensembles, enabling personal experience in creating music through composition and improvisation, creative listening, and discovering other dimensions in music theory (and even music history). Designing such an approach could also foster interest in contemporary art and music, or a way to make it more accessible through participatory elements such as those explored in *The Factory of Sounds*. Along the way, children learned about processes, art styles or directions, artists' poetics and questions that guide contemporary music practices.

While further experimenting with methods and tools, it is important not to miss analysing the results and outcomes, pros and cons, and formulate effective conclusions that could be embedded in the future work. In the long run, I think the methods and approaches of The Factory of Sound could provide a useful basis for a potential future alternative music school. It could be developed in such a way that it really acts as 'the other' music education system. Coming back to the initial reasons for creating such a workshop, there was a need to fill in some gaps and deficiencies in music education, not only the Croatian, but perhaps also in other parts of Europe. From where we stand right now, one could create programmes for different age groups, and also different groups content-wise, with different specialists from the field of (contemporary) music and more.

Davorka Begović

An education that would help young people to communicate, and to be free and creative in their ideas would also equip them with the tools to shape a different kind of society. Those of us who have been classically trained are very much aware that current music education does not explore potential to the full extent, and that those artists who are perceived as truly authentic are not a fruit of the music education system, and that the need for change is long overdue. Programmes that connect education and artistic practices, with a particular sensibility for the contemporary, have demonstrated that such approaches create other opportunities and open up more directions, a space for intuitive development with children. This has insufficiently explored implications for their overall education and psychosocial development. That is why a potentially alternative system should in fact become (part of) the system, intended for and available to everyone.

The question of what kind of education is needed and the type of society we want in the years to come, is in fact a political issue that we have the opportunity and responsibility to shape and define today. Simply put, the wider aspect of music making with others could effectively help children to make sense of the world.

BIOGRAPHIES

Davorika Begović (HR) is a freelance musicologist and independent curator from Zagreb, Croatia, working in the field of contemporary (experimental) music and related art forms. She is a member of the curatorial team of KONTEJNER bureau of contemporary art praxis, and associate lecturer at the Animated Film and New Media Department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb.

Nenad Kovačić (HR) is a musician and composer. He graduated at the University of Zagreb in Ethnology and Sociology and has been active as a musician since 1997. He is a member of several bands and formations, such as Antenat, Sevdah Takht Damira Imamovića, Afion, Mimika, Truth≠Tribe, and he performs throughout the world. He composed music for more than twenty theatre plays and documentary movies. He has learnt from the greatest masters of West African percussion in Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso, and leads workshops on West African rhythms.

Karolina Rugle (HR) graduated in musicology at the University of Zagreb. In her work she focuses mostly on contemporary and experimental music, as well as interdisciplinary and performance practices. Apart from producing, organising, and curating music festivals, she has a weekly radio programme, makes music documentaries and writes reviews. She also collaborates with Croatian record labels as an editor.

She is active in advocating for human rights through the international work of the non-governmental organisation Are You Syrious.

Nenad Sinkauz (HR) has participated in projects involving music, theatre, contemporary dance, film and sound-based art as both composer and performer. He studied music philology and ethnomusicology in Italy. He explores unconventional musical forms in his artistic work, often in collaboration with his brother Alen Sinkauz. They have been playing internationally for two decades and have composed film scores and produced short animation films. In 2002, they founded a band named East Rodeo, an international group of jazz and rock musicians combining avant-rock, electronic, noise, experimental and improvised music. They are also the authors of the audio visual project named “...day of the year” and founders of the international experimental and improvised music festival Audioart in Pula, Croatia.

CONTEXT

This article is part of the *Re-Imagine Europe* publication. The publication collects articles, essays, interviews and reports about audience engagement for interdisciplinary arts organisations. It aims to share knowledge gained throughout the *Re-Imagine Europe*-project with professionals in the cultural sector who would like to gain a deeper insight in audience development and capacity building.

Re-Imagine Europe (2017-2021) is a four-year project of ten cultural organizations from across Europe, responding to the current social and political challenges. With a programme of residencies, commissions, symposia and workshops, the project partners stimulate both artistic production and audience development. They experiment with new ways of reaching out to their audiences, motivated by the ambition to develop a broader and more engaging approach to audience development and capacity building.

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