

MERYC2013

Proceedings of the 6th Conference of the
European Network of Music Educators and
Researchers of Young Children

17th-20th July 2013,
The Hague, The Netherlands

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Dr. Susan Young



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Edited by Jessica Pitt and José Retra

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GIVING BIRTH TO INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY PRACTICES: THE MUSIC'S "DOMINO EFFECT" IN THE OPUS TUTTI PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Opus Tutti is a four year project that aims to create ways of improving full human development through the involvement with music in early infancy. In this paper we present three types of initiatives that demonstrate how a project aimed at infants has spread to a whole community. In the first year we ran several types of workshops aimed at educators, parents and artists. At a later stage, very much inspired by the ideas of Murray Schaffer, participants were involved in exploring music and movement activities in communication with the sound ecology of the magnificent gardens of the Gulbenkian Foundation. This process led to an open musical performance - "Um Plácido Domingo" (A Peaceful Sunday)- shared with invited passers-by, especially caregivers accompanied by their babies and young children. They would pause, listen, observe, explore, discover and enjoy the series of musical, choreographic and scenic events developed as a dialogue with the elements of the

gardens. This experience became the subject of *Budding*, a documentary which focuses on the importance of taking care of the youngest children and on the potential of music as a tool to connect people. During the second year of *Opus Tutti*, attention was focused on a day-care facility. As well as a regular musical intervention on the premises, we designed *Babelim*, a participatory performance that involved caregivers, infants and their older brothers and sisters. *Babelim* was built on the exploration of non-verbal communication and the fusion of music and language that took place in preparatory workshops. Currently, we are working on *Play to Play* – a set of portable musical and theatrical pieces that are designed to be presented in day care facilities and kindergartens. These three experiences support the idea that making music with parents and infants causes a ‘domino effect’: music produces spontaneous responses in infants, which affect their own caregivers. When a caregiver and infant are musically involved, their involvement easily spreads to other pairs. This effect is magnified when musical practice occurs in groups that share feelings of parenthood in common - the conjunction of both elements is powerful in supporting the emergence of a special type of community.

KEYWORDS

Infancy, community, intergenerational, music, *Opus Tutti*

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the authors of this paper have progressively broadened their vision and practice from a purely artistic and academic focus towards a conception of music and art in general, that is rooted in the need to communicate and acknowledge its immense potential in nurturing many aspects of what can be generally defined as human development. Several experiences in our artistic life have shown us very strikingly that our artistic activity should be regarded holistically. Projects such as *Bebé Babá* (Rodrigues, Leite, Monteiro, Faria & Rodrigues, P., 2010) and *Grande Bichofonia* (Rodrigues, H. & Rodrigues, P., 2008), developed within the scope of *Companhia de Música Teatral* (please see www.musicateatral.com) or the work developed while coordinating the Education Service of *Casa da Música* (Rodrigues, P., 2009) made us realize that an important part of our role as artists was related to the development of ideas that produced interesting artistic results at the same time as transformations in the people that participated in them. These projects have been described specifically as referenced above, and a more general, philosophical, discussion based on our practice has also been attempted in Rodrigues, P. and Rodrigues, H. (2011) and Rodrigues, P. (2011). These background and philosophical ideas allowed *Companhia de Música Teatral*

and Laboratory for Music and Communication in Infancy to conceive the project Opus Tutti (www.opustutti.com) and its proposal to the Education Service of the Gulbenkian Foundation.

Opus Tutti is a project that aims to create methods to improve full human development through arts in early infancy. It is a four year project, now in its third year, and the different stages have been given metaphorical names (Budding, Rooting, Growing, Fruiting) inspired in biology and in the idea that the project would be, itself, a developmental process with sequential phases and a sense of direction, but would also have an organic nature and the capacity to react and adapt to circumstances, results and people. The project is not purely academic nor educational, artistic, or social. It involves aspects and approaches of all these areas and it is neither a pure early childhood project. Indeed, with time, the project has become truly intergenerational. Adopting a Systemic approach has been a very influential perspective for us and this is probably one of the reasons that explains why a project concerning early infancy has included initiatives addressed to adults and older children. In fact, having that theoretical model in mind, we look at infants as elements belonging to different systems – the nuclear family, the extended family, and the nursery care institution – that also belong to collateral systems in the community. Accordingly, we plan initiatives that are directly addressed to infants and we also extend our action to other components of the system that can indirectly benefit them.

AN OVERVIEW OF BUDDING, ROOTING AND GROWING

The first year of Opus Tutti, the Budding stage, was dominated by a series of experiments with very young children. We wanted to explore the possibilities of involving them with older children and adults in exploratory artistic activities, and find out possible models and strategies of action. We wanted to start studying in a systematic manner their reactions to artistic performances specifically devised for very young children. We wanted to identify a target nursery school where later phases could take place and gradually start to involve that community (educators, families) in the project. We wanted to create a “community” of artists/educators that could develop and implement artistic work aimed at very young children. A series of workshops took place at the Gulbenkian Foundation, directed at parents and infants, infants and older children (7-12 years old), and

young artists and educators. We performed AliBaBach [please see: http://www.musicateatral.com/publicfiles/Details/AliBaBach_pt.html and held workshops of BebéPlimPlim] please see: http://www.musicateatral.com/publicfiles/Details/BebePlimPlim_pt.html] in which the reactions of 8 individual children were video recorded for further analysis. This series of activities created the momentum, interest and awareness necessary for the development of a performing project involving many of the people that had already participated in the workshops mentioned above. We decided that we wanted to create a performance that was unique and would reflect the identity of the people involved and the space in which it would take place. We decided that this project would be prepared in two one-week artistic residences, one in July and another in September 2011. We decided that this should be a performance conceived not as a “show” (with clear borders between audience and actors/musicians, both in terms of roles and spaces, and definite times) but as a series of interactions (mediated by music and movement) with all the elements that would inhabit the gardens on a normal day (people, birds and flowers) of which caregivers and their young children are an important part.

Very much inspired by the ideas of Murray Schaffer (1977), we mapped the gardens according to the soundscape and took decisions about particular areas and sound/movement textures/actions that could occur as fixed structures/moments involving the whole group (about 70 people), as opposed to variable, wandering moments involving smaller groups. Names such as “Patio of the Gamelans”, “Bed of Sonivouros Plants”, “Field of the Singing Drums”, “Forest of the Birds Houses”, “Trail of Canes Rumors”, identified areas that were subjected to a visual/sound intervention with sound sculptures such as the Porcelain and Glass Gamelan [<http://vimeo.com/46079934>] or with simpler strategies, like in the last case, where bamboo canes were made available to be played by the participants. A series of signals, both acoustic and visual, and a “code” were developed to direct actions or directions in improvisation collective moments, as well as within the smaller groups. The performance Um Plácido Domingo emerged on the 11th September 2011 from a set of prepared “tuning moments”. The literal translation of Um Plácido Domingo in English is A Peaceful Sunday and through this name we wanted to convey the idea of a certain informality.

Basing our thinking on the extension of the events that normally take place on a Sunday (wandering families of humans being one of the distinctive bio-entities), we knew also that we were dealing with a certain type of “gesamkunstwerke” (Rodrigues, P. & Rodrigues, H., 2011), and although this was not an opera, it could be interesting to play with the double meaning emerging from using a name that could be identified with that world. Um Plácido Domingo, was, therefore, a “performative dialogue” (a “site specific performance”, a “garden-opera”, a “happyning”) that invited casual visitors of the gardens - specially caregivers accompanied by their babies and young children – to pause, listen, observe, explore, discover and enjoy the series of musical, choreographic and scenic events that were developed as a dialogue with the elements of the gardens. Budding, a documentary by Pedro Sena Nunes [9] reports that experience, aiming to spread the ideas that taking good care of the little ones is an important issue and that music is a powerful tool to connect people.

In the second year of Opus Tutti, the Rooting stage, the intervention at a particular day-care facility was of paramount significance. Not only was it important to test ideas and strategies in real situations, but also because we feel that our work, whenever possible, should contribute to the actual improvement of the people we work with. Very much inspired by the concepts of “intuitive parenting” by Papousek (Papousek, H., 1996, & Papousek, M., 1996) and “communicative musicality” by Malloch and Trevarthen (2009), we consider that companionship is rooted in inner musicality resources that can be awakened by musical practice in daily life and believe that music can be a powerful tool to connect people and contribute to better ways to take good care of infants. The institution we started to work with is the Centro Infantil do Roseiral, in Lisbon, a nursery/kindergarten school in Lisbon that takes care of almost 80 children, aged 4 months to 5 years old. The social environment is very diverse, with a relevant number of children coming from deprived backgrounds. We planned several approaches that would make music reach not only the young children but also their caregivers. One of these is Creche e Apareche: weekly, two members of our team started visiting the centre, providing music sessions for the several groups of infants and toddlers located in the different rooms of the building. These music sessions were scheduled for the closing of the day, when caregivers come to take their children home. In this way, we started to promote the joint participation of parents and day care professionals in the music activities. These were mostly singing, chanting and

movement-orientated since one of the main goals was to stimulate a feeling of togetherness in making music and also to provide some tips to caregivers to play musically in their daily life.

In addition to this intervention located at the daycare, we designed a project for which we invited the caregivers (parents and professionals working at the day care), infants, and older children (typically the older brothers and sisters of the participating infants and the children of the daycare's professionals) for a series of music and photography workshops named *Playing with Music, Tuning of Listening and Tuning of Seeing* that were held at the Gulbenkian Foundation during six weekends along the period between February and May. These workshops would be followed, on the same morning, by another type of workshops, *Tuning of Playing*, in which all participants would share their experiences in a playful atmosphere mediated by music. Other parallel sessions were run with artists and professionals interested in artistic creation for infancy, aiming to build a bank of educational and artistic resources and to contribute to their personal and professional development. The workshops, devised for specific target groups, led to the conception of a performance that would incorporate the different groups and many ideas and materials created throughout the process.

The title of this final performance, *Babelim*, is inspired by the idea of "Babel", and aims to convey the concept that the performance is a mixture of musical idioms and sounds searching to respond to the human need to communicate. Based on transhumance between music and language, we borrowed the idea that babies are born as universal communicators and guided towards narrow languages through adults' companionship. The performance, open to the general public, involved several layers of information and participation: the public could contemplate the beauty and detail of the interaction between a couple of dancers with their infant placed on stage in conjunction with a movement and voice chorus formed by the older children and the professionals that participated in the workshops. Parents and infants were seated in the audience and participated by singing and playing specially adapted music boxes. The piece *Babelim* is an open form consisting of a series of tableaux that include moments of complex textural sounds alternating with very simple melody-based elements. Voice, piano, cello, toy pianos, pre-recorded sounds electronically manipulated and diffused by the piano soundboard, thumb-pianos attached to the piano soundboard and small sound sculptures were some of the resources used. A screen with easily under-

standable graphic scores was displayed to allow the participation of all the public in specific moments of the performance. Babelim was the culmination of a shared creative process that involved the community we were working with but also the audience. It expressed in very poignant terms our idea of music as a tool to bring people together.

The third year of Opus Tutti, the Growing phase, is where we are currently. The weekly sessions of Creche e Apareche at the Roseiral are still going on, because we consider them the very centre of a successful music intervention: it takes time and it needs to be done on a regular basis. At the same time we are working on an idea that started to be developed earlier on. In two one-week creative residences held in July and September 2012 we started to work on the idea of creating highly portable performing pieces that could be presented not only in theatres but also daycares and kindergartens. This intends to answer the need for democratizing the access to high-standard performances. Although there are many cultural institutions that programme music concerts for very young children, the fact is that many do not have access to these experiences, due to practical and socio-cultural reasons (they tend to be attended by families of a higher cultural level). Additionally, we feel that the possibilities arising from integrating music, dance and theatre are immense and there is a great deal of innovation needed within this area. We decided that the pieces would be the result of a collective creative process in which artists, educators and children would participate. These creative residencies were also training opportunities and a way to contribute to the development of skilled, imaginative performers/educators specialized in early childhood. The first drafts of the pieces were shown in the II International Symposium Art for Infancy and Human Development held at the Gulbenkian Foundation in September 2012 (please see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hxbfmkPSVc8>). This set of pieces was denominated Peça a Peça (Play to Play) and each piece, a solo or a duo, has a distinctive identity but there are also common features that easily identify the different pieces as the result of a common background and a shared creative process. Among these, a genuine human interaction rooted in the idea that art and ludicity share common territories and an emphasis in fostering the interaction between parents and children. After the first draft presentation, the pieces entered a phase of “working progress” that aims to tune the pieces by the experience of presenting them in the real context of Roseiral, as well as by a further process of experimentation and consolidation,

this time shared with teachers and education agents working in daycares and kindergartens. These sessions not only serve the purpose of consolidating the pieces but also fulfill the need to train and raise awareness within the education community and prepare them for the presentation of the piece at their institution, at a later stage. There are seven pieces, named Opus 1 to 7, some of them in very advanced stages of preparation or already on tour, whereas others in the initial stages of development. Different pieces involve different combinations of elements of theatre, dance and music (the voice being a recurrent musical resource, alternating with instruments such as clarinet, cello, harp or percussion) and they last for approximately 30 minutes, followed by a variable time of informal ludic interaction.

THE MUSIC'S "DOMINO EFFECT" IN THE OPUS TUTTI PROJECT

Throughout our experience, it looks as though when we do music for parents and infants there is a result that can be metaphorically described as a "domino effect": music produces spontaneous responses in infants which affect their own caregivers. A dyad musically involved easily contaminates other dyads.

There is no doubt that music promotes social cohesion through specific devices such as rhythmic synchronization or melody/pitch alignment. This effect is magnified when musical practice occurs in groups that share parenthood feelings. In other words: music helps to synchronize groups and this effect increases when the group is tuned in parenthood feelings. According to our experience, the conjunction of both elements is powerful in making up the emergence of a special type of community.

For a long time we have been leading musical guidance sessions based on musical learning theory of Edwin Gordon (1997) and we have observed the power of music in the construction of a community through that "domino effect". *Bebé-Babá*, an emblematic project that was conceived in 2001 – reported in publications such as Rodrigues et al. (2010) and Rodrigues, Rodrigues, & Correia (2009) – helped us to find out strategies to develop its potential in the construction of a parenthood community. We look at *Um Plácido Domingo* and *Babelim* as projects in which the "domino effect" is amplified to the entire community.

Besides very positive feedback from the participants, we realized that for a lot of them it was the first time they entered a cultural institution such as Gulbenkian

Foundation and one of the few performances they had attended. Whether or not this will last and lower the barriers many people face in engaging in cultural activities is something that the future will tell. This is not, however, the reason why this type of work needs to be done. In other words, educational work should not be justified by the need to create audiences or increase the number of concertgoers. It has an identity of its own and its own worth, artistic and ethical.

We also believe that these projects have a very positive impact within the educational and the artistic communities. Working in this integrated manner allows a genuine interchange of experiences. Artistic creation is frequently a process of isolation and although the encounter with oneself is certainly one of the strongest aspects, the sharing with others does not diminish this dimension; on the contrary, it probably adds extra challenges, solutions and a sense of worth. The educational community finds in projects such as Opus Tutti the renewal of ideas needed for direct application in their professional environment but, above all, the context for deep artistic experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

When guided under human and social concerns, music has a powerful effect in developing interaction and communication between people. Music has, therefore, a vast potential to diminish social isolation and in shaping relationships between individuals towards cooperation. Music's "domino effect" has been present in the way we've been designing Opus Tutti.

"Artists and educators are discovering new aspects to their activities and we are entering an era where music is no longer a solitary pursuit for the ultimate work of art but collective processes of constructing worlds that Music can improve" (Rodrigues, P. & Rodrigues, H., 2011, p. 43).

Opus Tutti is now on its Growing stage. Fruiting will be the last stage. We hope that many can taste it.

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