
PLAY SPACE MUSIC – An Improvisation Workshop with Musicians and Dancers with and without Additional Support Needs¹

Shirley Salmon
Orff-Institute
University Mozarteum
Shirley.salmon@moz.ac.at
Austria

The concept of PLAY SPACE MUSIC (SPIEL RAUM MUSIK) was developed by Stefan Heidweiler in Salzburg in 1996 at the Orff Institute, Salzburg. The basis of the project lies in the pioneering work of Wilhelm Keller who developed the ideas of Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman (Orff-Schulwerk) and applied them also to work with children and adults with and without disabilities. Heidweiler recognizes another important contributions to this project in free improvisation particularly in the work of some music therapists e.g. Fritz Hegi. The fundamental idea of the 5-day Improvisation workshop was the musical and artistic encounter between 6 professional musicians, who had experience in improvisation, and adults with additional support needs and an interest for music. The method of Free Improvisation took place in duos, trios and small ensembles and ended with a performance on the last day. Between 2000 and 2002 the project was further developed by Brigitte Flucher and Thomas Stephanides who extended it to include dance, painting and drawing. 2 short films documented the projects from 1999 and 2002 and articles on the projects were written by the directors (Salmon & Schumacher 2001). The project was revived in 2014 as a “Workshop for artistic improvisation and creation” by Coloman Kallos and Shirley Salmon (lecturers at the Orff Institute) and included workshops with music, dance and, for the first time, sculpture. In addition to 2 professional musicians and 4 dancers, the sculptor Andrea Kuhnlein was invited, students from the Orff Institute as well as adults with additional support needs and adults from a day-centre for adults in need of psychological support. The projects showed the wide range of creative artistic abilities in all the participants using the media of music, dance, painting and sculpture. The diverse experiences of dialogues were beneficial to all. The project 2014 were documented fully. The main implications for Special Music Education and/or Music Therapy are firstly, the value of free improvisation as a method in different social constellations as a means for individual artistic expression and communication. It allows and furthers elemental expression, encounter and dialogue and is not dependent on the ability to learn and repeat particular parts of a song or piece. And secondly, the value of working with different media such as dance, painting, sculpture and combining them in a variety of ways with music.

Keywords: Free improvisation, dance, artistic dialogue

¹ The paper was accompanied with video examples from the project 2002 and 2014
PLAY SPACE MUSIC is a week of encounters in artistic dialogue

"The disabled person also does not live on bread alone but has the same right to enjoy life as the so-called normal or talented. Musical enjoyment is an irreplaceable element in finding harmony and balance in one's personal as well as social life" (Wilhelm Keller 1974: 2).

This statement from Wilhelm Keller has not lost any of its relevance. Keller recognized that each person had a right to music, happiness and inclusion. With his reflections and demands he was years, if not decades, in advance of the integration and inclusion movements (cp. Keller 1996) of today. Keller got to know Carl Orff and his humanistic concept of elemental Music and Dance Education also known as Orff-Schulwerk in the late 1950s and adapted this approach for work with children and adults of all ages and abilities, with and without disabilities especially in inclusive groups (Salmon 2012). Keller’s pioneering work has been developed and extended at the Orff Institute, by colleagues and by its graduates and can be seen as one of the roots of this project.

The artistic project PLAY SPACE MUSIC has always taken place in the medieval Goldegg Castle near Salzburg, Austria and was initiated by Stefan Heidweiler, a graduate of the Orff Institute, in 1996. The essence of this project were the artistic encounters in improvisation between adult participants with additional support needs (from sheltered workshops) who had an interest and talent for music - together with professional musicians with interest and experience in improvisation and later also with dancers. A few carers from the sheltered workshops were also present and some also participated.

Heidweiler states that it is particularly improvisation that enables and furthers being together authentically and intensely. In Improvisation, the abilities of each person can emerge and contribute to interesting artistic results. In interviews with the musicians, they emphasize that they too also learn and profit from this project. The creative processes that develop make personal expression and communication possible – especially for those participants where this otherwise often restricted (cf. Heidweiler 2001). Hegi emphasizes: “There is a fundamental strength in improvisation processes that activates momentary experiences and enables them to be extended.” (F. Hegi 1997)

One of the goals of the first projects was to address diverse types of musicality and talent during the week and to show these in a public work-in-progress performance at the end of the week. The professional musicians offered a wide range of styles so that each participant could find their own preferences – from experimenting to improvising to creating together. Although the primary goal was artistic and not pedagogical or therapeutic, therapeutic effects could be observed during and after all the projects.

The documentation of these projects has been important and to date has resulted in two films from the projects in 1999 and 2002 produced by Coloman Kallos. There is a wealth of video-material from the three-day workshop in 2014 which will be evaluated and used in a new DVD project. Apart from the artistic work, the interviews with participants from the sheltered workshops, with carers and the professional musicians and dancers have given extra insight into the effects of the project. The experiences and feedback from the Orff Institute students will give a different perspective to the evaluation.

After Stefan Heidweiler had directed four projects, they were taken over and further developed by Thomas Stephanides (musician, doctor and psychotherapist) and Brigitte Flucher (music teacher and music therapist) who had also collaborated in some of the previous projects. From 1999 – 2002 they introduced further developments and enlarged the project considerably. Firstly, dance was introduced as a new medium and later painting. In addition to the professional musicians and dancers and participants from sheltered workshops, a few students studying elemental music and dance education or social and community work also participated.
The goals included social well-being, personal growth and communication, artistic expression as well as musical development and development in movement and dance. In one publication\(^2\) Thomas Stephanides who co-directed four projects wrote: “There are moments without goals, full of sensory experience and joy in constructive, purposeful activities. Moments of ‘healing’ and social learning – which cannot be planned or made but are perceived as a gift.”

**Figure 2. Examples of duet and trumpet.**

In 2014, the project was revived by Coloman Kallos, lecturer at the Orff Institute. There were a number of differences compared to previous projects:
- 3 days (instead of 5),
- 2 professional musicians, 4 professional dancers,
- the introduction of sculpture with wood as a new medium – specifically creating heads,
- 8 students from the Orff Institute (on the bachelor or master degree course “Elemental music and dance pedagogy”) participated and some were often asked to lead some of the music activities in small groups,
- some participants were from sheltered workshops for adults who were suggested by the carers,
- some participants came also from the day centre ‘Laube’ (arbour) an institution for young adults and adults in need of psychological support, many unable to find or hold down a job,
- In 2014, the project focused more on specific pedagogical and social goals and not so much artistic ones.

All the participants decided at the beginning which medium would interest them most (there were only 8 places in the sculpture workshop). The working phases were from 10 – 12 a.m. with a break for lunch and free time and then 2 – 4 p.m. On the last afternoon, there was a work-in-progress performance.

**Figure 3. Example of sculptures created in the project.**

The addition of sculpture with Andreas Kuhnlein gave the project a new artistic dimension. The sculptures of Andreas Kuhnlein\(^3\) are stunning and extraordinary. He has exhibited internationally and he has also

\(^2\) Stephanides 2001
\(^3\) http://kuhnlein.eu/
worked with people with additional support needs in the past. For this project, tree trunks had been prepared that would be worked on to create individual heads. None of the participants had any experience of this type of sculpture or of handling the tools. In two days, each of the eight people had created a highly individual head out of wood – some were able to talk about their sculpture in the interviews. The finished heads were then used in the dance group as stimulation for various types of improvisation.

![Image](image1.png)

Figure 4. Examples of instruments and small group with harp.

There were many impulses for musical improvisation in the large and smaller groups. Franz Schmuck – an Austrian musician and instrument maker who took part in every project since the beginning – introduced ‘Improvisation signs’ for the large group inspired by the London Improvisers Orchestra⁴. Not only him but also a few participants conducted the group. A wide range of Western and non-Western instruments (percussion, wind, string) with different playing techniques as well as original self-made sounding objects were available. Sessions sometimes involved the whole group but often split into smaller groups e.g. with just plucked instruments, with different sorts of wind instruments etc. Sometimes duos or trios emerged. Anklungs were used for the first time in this project. They are musical instruments from Indonesia made of two to four bamboo tubes attached to a bamboo frame. The tubes are carved to have a resonant pitch when struck and are tuned to octaves so that one can have a complete diatonic scale or choose particular pitches to create different scales. These instruments can be played in 2 ways and require particular movements to produce a sound. This was possible for all participants in the music group. They were used not only for sound and communication games but also for rhytmical playing and layering of patterns.

![Image](image2.png)

Figure 5. Examples of anklungs and Ballaphone.

The dance activities were sometimes without music and in the 2014 project mostly with live music. Impulses included spontaneous movement, stop and go, question and answer with a partner, tasks for trios or

⁴ http://www.londonimprovisersorchestra.co.uk/
quartets – and at the end tasks that involved the sculptures. e.g. observing them closely, imitating with one’s face and arms, making faces, coming into contact with the sculptures during the dance improvisation.

Figure 6. Example of duet with statue and dance with statues.

Space

Space came to play an important part in the projects and had many meanings:
- the medieval castle, the courtyard, stairway, the rooms of different size, the knights’ hall with paintings,
- the space between and in between the different media – music, dance, sculpture,
- The play space, the term Winnicott used to describe the transitional space, or developmental space between mother and child, in which the child is free to play with emerging aspects of the self. In this context, it can mean the space between two or more adults allowing them to experiment and improvise with each other.
- Space to unfold, to express oneself, to communicate, to relax and withdraw when necessary (e.g. in the ‘quiet room’).
- The Stairway in the old castle: On the 2nd day a vocal improvisation happened spontaneously that was so innovative and rich with ideas that we decided to repeat it for the audience as they went upstairs for the performance on the 3rd day.

Dialogue has played a central part in all these projects on many levels – social and verbal dialogue between the participants, dialogue between the organizers and the institutions and of course artistic dialogue during the projects. The Italian doctor Adriano Milani Comparetti’s defined dialogue as “the interplay with the partner(s), aiming to achieve results together, which are unpredictable and frequently surprising to the participants themselves.” This could be seen in numerous improvisations during this week of artistic encounters.

The social aspects of these projects were especially important. Any individual development can only be understood in the sense of the co-ontogenesis of systems (Feuser, 2008). Martin Buber’s statement *The human being needs a ‘You’ to become an ‘I’* (Buber, 1965: 32) stresses that the development of the ‘I’ depends on the ‘You’ - the other people that one is in contact with and the environment available to the individual. Feuser also stresses the importance of this: “We cannot help but recognise that any limitation of an individual’s exchange with his/her environment – exchange that is necessary for both the individual and the entire species of which he/she is a member and includes culture-specific schooling as well as social exchange – will also limit his/her development and not just modify it” (Feuser, 2008).

Building up of self-confidence and self-awareness can also be supported in group work and are important requisites for learning and living. Self-confidence can be seen as “a necessary but still not adequate precondition for the maintenance and revival of the joy of discovery and desire to create and thereby for the search for creative and innovative solutions” (Hüther, 2008).
Inclusive Pedagogy

Looking at Georg Feuser’s definition, we can recognize that there are many parallels in this artistic project. According to Feuser inclusion means that
- all participants (without excluding anyone due to the type or severity of their disability)
- work, play and learn together,
- in cooperation with each other,
- within one theme, activity or task at their respective developmental levels taking their present levels of competence in perception, cognition, movement and behaviour into consideration (Feuser, 2001: 27).

Essential aspects of inclusive teaching are *individualization* and *cooperation* when working on a common subject or task. Students/participants cooperate within one theme, task or activity where working together may involve different social constellations. Nobody is excluded and the subject, task or theme is made available to everyone. At the same time inner differentiation is made possible when the teacher/leader enables each student to experience and understand the topic on his/her own level and where individual tasks can be set that play a part within the common topic (Feuser, 1997).

The concept of **Elemental** is also a central aspect of this unique project where we can also see parallels between Elemental Music Education and as well as Community Music. Wilhelm Keller sees elemental music as the ‘music of the personality as it is’ and writes: “‘Elemental’ cannot only be seen as ‘original’ but must also be understood as ‘focal’ or ‘central’. It is the realisation of an original, central musical potency anchored in each individual” (Keller, 1984: 801). The Elemental was also for Carl Orff central to his artistic and educational work: “The elemental remains a foundation that is timeless. The elemental always means a new beginning (...) The elemental is always productive.” (Orff, 1978: 277). It is “the force that brings forth the genuinely original, as the autonomously active and effective, the self-organising and self-renewing and as an event which autonomously sets itself in scene.” (Jungmair, 1992: 136) The fact that elemental creativity exists independently from any determined age or from special talents or disabilities means that creative activities should be made available to everyone. This project shows one of the many possibilities.

![Figure 9. Example of large group and wind instruments from the project.](image)
Future projects

In the future we hope that projects will take place every 2\textsuperscript{nd} year with the focus alternating between social-pedagogical goals as in 2014 and explicitly artistic goals as in 2016. Once again, they will be looking for diverse approaches and forms of expression furthering potential, creativity and artistic expression. In 2016, the project will also be filmed and a DVD documentary of the projects from 2014 and 2016 is planned including case studies, as well as an evaluation of both projects from the many perspectives of the participants.

References


Milani Comparetti, Adriano (1998): Fetale und neonatale Ursprünge des Seins und der Zugehörigkeit zur...
