

Verena Maschat

Gunild and us children

When we talk about Orff-Schulwerk, very rarely we remember Gunild Keetman. However, Carl Orff expressed himself very clearly:

“I am not exaggerating when I say that without Keetmann's decisive collaboration through her double talent, the "Schulwerk" could never have come into being”.

I would like to show you a few short examples from the television programmes, based on my memories and impressions of Gunild Keetman's children's group, which I participated in from age six to nine.

It is often said that the Orff-Schulwerk is the most successful music education concept of the 20th century. This statement is not easy to prove, as it is not a question of sales figures or anything similar but rather of the power of what is certainly the most versatile approach to music education which has awakened interest and love for music in people in many parts of the world through active involvement in music and dance.

As a child, I was lucky enough to grow up with the Schulwerk, so to speak. When I was three and a half years old, I started in my brother's group with Rudolf Kirmeyer. With five years I also started violin and dance. I was one of the youngest in Gunild's group at the Trapp Conservatory, which had a relatively wide age range. On Saturday afternoon I went with my brother to the big hall where we prepared the instruments. During these long afternoons we worked on rhythmic practice, sound gestures, singing and speech practice, instrumental playing, improvisation and movement.

Once a month we spent the Saturday in the Bavarian Television studio. In the morning we rehearsed what would be broadcast live in the afternoon. Due to lack of space and time only a small part of our classwork could be included.

As in the structure of the Schulwerk, Gunild developed from melodies with two notes consistently and conclusively the learning of all the elements and musical parameters, which the children and parents watching could then perform and learn with us. Godela, Carl Orff's daughter, moderated and Gunild explained and guided us through the sessions.

In the first excerpt we see examples with three tones (a-g-e), preparation of instrumental accompaniment through speech and sound gestures, technical practice, changing dynamics and tempo. I enjoy especially how Gunild explains different possibilities of melodic improvisation with three tones over a children's rhyme.

DVD #16: Songs with three tones (a - g - e), from 4:59 - 8:38.
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You have seen for yourself with what strong charisma our teacher guided us - convinced and convincing, inspired and inspiring. She was natural, music making and moving came from body impulse and emotion. She was a master in non-verbal communication with gestures, facial expressions and voice modulation as main guides. To follow her was compelling, gestures and looks so strong that one was always with the person and therefore with the task. Everyone practised all the parts before deciding who would play what. And we always sang while we accompanied ourselves on the instruments.

Gunild animated us to work on details and to listen, to her, to the others and to ourselves. And she was always a role model. To be creative, you have to have ideas, but you also need the tools and the know-how to carry them out. And she worked tirelessly with us on this musical and technical basis.

Another example shows the importance of speech exercises and texts as a model for pulse and rhythm, time signature and structure, tempo and dynamic variations. At first, two different proverbs combined together, then two others alternating duple and triple time.

DVD #19: Speech exercises with rhythmic accompaniment, from 1:11-2:16 and 2:20-3:03
from: Orff-Schulwerk, *Basic Exercises*, compiled by Eberhard Werdin, Schott ED 4455, Mainz 1955. Speech pieces and sayings.

The improvisation models were totally structured. However, Gunild did not conduct but the group and the respective soloist had to listen to each other. She animated insecure children ("You can't do anything wrong"), and if a child stopped too early she would complete the melody and then say "Good". She made us feel that each one of us was important and that it will only sound good if we all help together.

Movement has always been involved in our practice and frequently was the starting point of our activities. For special dances and scenic play, children from the Suse Böhm Studio participated in later programmes.

We hear and see "Rhythmic playing in canon - with hand drum and movement".

DVD #20: Rhythmic playing in canon - with hand drum and movement.

To summarize: What are the characteristics of this teacher and her teaching style that have made a lasting impression on me?

- Spontaneity in the reaction to the children and to specific situations
- Empathy

- Directive working method - often by imitation - not to model us after her example but to give us material and opportunities to create ourselves.
- Kind seriousness. We enjoyed going to our sessions - motivation, success, and joy.
- Very dynamic sessions, varied but always concentrated. If somebody made a mistake, even Gunild, we all laughed together and tried again.
- Then there was her insecurity in front of the audience or on television. There she was vulnerable, afraid not to remember the programme or the script. A certain complicity developed ("If I forget something you have to help me").

So it was a collaboration in which Gunild actually only wanted to be "primus inter pares". She preferred to sit at a xylophone herself and improvise with us. This is how I remember her most clearly, and in her modesty, her friendly attitude, she has always been a role model for me, both professionally and personally. I am grateful to her and to my teachers and mentors at the Orff Institute for everything I have learnt and can now share with others.

Thank you.

Musical Coda: Xylophone piece from: Musik für Kinder IV:
Kleine Stücke für Stabspiele, P. 8 #6

Bibliography / Discography

DVD Examples from the book

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