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We present ...

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## The San Francisco School – a special place for Orff-Schulwerk

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The San Francisco School  
Orff-Program

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Doug Goodkin

### **A short history**

*Small acts sometimes have large consequences. When a school parent donated six Orff instruments to The San Francisco School in 1974, there was no way she could have foreseen that this simple gesture would be a major force in defining and shaping the school culture to come. Nor could she have guessed that the material, ideas and vision developed in the school would radiate out far beyond the school gates, not only touching just about every Orff teacher in The San Francisco Bay Area, but spreading further to reach children and influence teachers throughout the U.S. and indeed, the world.*

### **Small act, big effect**

*A school with Orff instruments needs an Orff teacher and thus appeared a young man two years out of a college where he had the good fortune to take a se-*

*mester long class with an Orff teacher named Avon Gillespie. He was hired with few credentials beyond knowing a bit more than the teachers at the school about how to use the instruments. And off he set into the dark forest of possibility with nothing but a few dittoed sheets from Avon's class and a faith that he would find his way. He experimented, improvised, tried things out, noted the children's reactions and adjusted accordingly.*

*I was that young man. 38 years later, still at the same school, I now walk down the well-trod tried-and-true paths of what I know works well. But the children and I also habitually go into the underbrush to see what else we might discover off the trail.*

*Thus began a story of how a music program in one small school grew and flourished to become a model for teachers, children and schools far and wide. Though its history and particular development can't be replicated elsewhere – each situation is entirely unique and must find its own way – there were and are some core features that might prove useful in helping other programs define their own school culture with music at the centre.*

### **Romance: The First Stage – 1975–1990**

*In his brilliant book of essays, "The Aims of Education", Alfred North Whitehead notes three phases in every cycle of learning. The first he calls "Romance", a time to freely explore, investigate without concern for right and wrong answers, play your way into understanding. This is an apt description of the first 15 years of the program as I improvised my way into discovery with the children and built a program from both my failures and successes.*

*During this time, I was the only music teacher, working with all the children in the school from three-years-old to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I re-connected with Avon Gillespie, becoming his student again in the Orff Certification Levels program and later, co-teacher in the North Texas training he directed. I began my first experiments combining jazz and Orff-Schulwerk, met Keith Terry and learned the fundamentals of Body Music, and also started the tradition of recording the students each year, thus creating a culture of constant research for new material adaptable to the Orff Ensemble. I travelled and studied various musical traditions, from South Indian drumming, Balinese game-*

lan, Brazilian samba (music and dance) and more that quickly found their way into my program. Inspired by the way music and dance were at the centre of these cultures, present in the daily life and the calendar of festivals and ceremonies, I began to create all-school rituals and celebrations in the integrated media characteristic of the *Schulwerk*, replete with song, dance, poetry, percussion and Orff-instrument ceremony and amplified by Balinese flags, samba costumes, festive art and decoration. Our school community took on a colour and life partly defined by the pomp and circumstance of what became beloved school traditions that continue to this day.

### **Precision: The Second Stage – 1990–2000**

Sometime around 1990, I took on a fledgling apprentice short on experience, but long on intelligence and imagination. His name was James Harding and he quickly moved from observer to apprentice to co-teacher, enriching the program considerably as he found his own way to inspired pedagogy. Around the same time, I met a young woman in Salzburg who seemed a kindred spirit and some six years later, Sofia López-Ibor joined the team at The San Francisco School. As James and Sofia gave their input into the emerging curriculum, this became the time of Precision, the second stage in the cycle of learning when we long for classified ideas and relevant techniques, when we give language to our intuitions and begin to systematically develop a pedagogy that serves the whole of the children's promise.

During this period, we refined the curriculum, developed the program for the new Middle School spanning 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, shared our particular ideas and techniques to develop the children's music and movement skills and made sure the developmental thread from the three year olds to the 8<sup>th</sup> graders was strong and sturdy. During this time, we also created and performed with other local Orff teachers in an adult performing group called Xephyr, seeking to constantly push out the parameters of the *Schulwerk*'s possibilities combining music, movement and drama in integrated performances. Xephyr performed at many AOSA Conferences and was featured at three Symposiums in Salzburg. James, Sofia and I also taught alongside other Orff teachers in the Mills College Orff Certification Program, continuing the conversa-

tion between adult performance, teacher training and the work with children in the classroom.

### **Synthesis: The Third Stage – 2000–2012 and beyond**

In the year 2000, the three of us began a job-sharing program that allowed each of us one trimester free to write, study, teach and travel. Now the ideas and material generated at school were further tested in the soil of diverse cultures, were more cogently gathered and articulated in books and articles, were informed by the very travels themselves as we returned from our travels with new material to try with the children.

This time was – and still is – a period of Synthesis, when the ideas and techniques of Precision inform that habitual playful exploration characteristic of Romance. During this period, the Middle School curriculum (described later here) continued to grow and flourish, opportunities outside of the Orff classroom blossomed – a band program developed by James, a choir and orchestra developed by Sofia, some after-school jazz groups developed by Doug, and some special performing groups led by all three. The latter included performances in Keith Terry's International Body Music Festival, The San Francisco World Music Festival, a jazz performance with the great vibraphone player Stefon Harris and a performance at the Salzburg Orff Symposium in 2011.

Meanwhile, the recordings continued, now totalling 26 different recordings with over 900 pieces arranged for Orff instruments. Our travels have found us teaching in some 45 countries and the San Francisco International Orff Course we direct (formerly the Mills College course and now sponsored by The San Francisco School) has attracted teachers from some 25 countries worldwide. We have published ten books between us (and more to come) and numerous articles in music education journals worldwide. The school rituals begun in the first stage have matured and are going on stronger than ever, constantly refreshed by the collective vision and imagination of the teachers and children.

In short, the remarkable confluence of three dedicated Orff teachers in a school atmosphere that gave us free reign to exercise the full range of our vision helped shape a school culture that serves children's inmost needs and makes every day a memorable one.

There is no more need for conjecture and guesswork, to wonder what it would be like to teach children as they deserve to be taught. We now have 38 years of living proof that music can enliven a school, refresh everyone it touches and as Gandhi said, “be the kind of change we would wish to see in the world.” One parent donates six Orff instruments to a school and from this small act, vision is given feet and hands – and xylophone mallets.

So much for the history. And what of the program itself?

### **A short overview of curriculum**

Our school is divided into three sections – preschool (3, 4, 5 year olds), elementary (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade – 6 to 10 yr. olds), middle (6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade – 11–13 year olds). In our teacher training, we always answer the question “What age is this activity for?” with the answer “All of them” to help teachers understand that the same spirit and way of working runs through all the developmental stages of a human being. But of course, different ages have different needs, different interests, different balances of the many possibilities and we build our curriculum around this. (A complete version of this curriculum can be found in both our school Website – [www.sfschool.org](http://www.sfschool.org) – and in Doug’s book “Play, Sing and Dance”.)

The Alfred North Whitehead model of Romance, Precision, Synthesis is once again useful here.

In the **preschool years**, it is clearly a time of Romance, much free play and exploration and games and getting a feeling as to how speech and rhythm connect, song and dance connect, fantasy play and artistic imagination connect. It is the time to build a repertoire of nursery rhymes, chants, songs, to master the basic locomotor movements, to move following music’s contours, meters and energies, to make the first steps from body percussion to simple percussion and occasionally, Orff instruments.

The **elementary years** continue all of this exploratory work at higher and higher levels of skill and complexity. In this stage of Precision, we begin to work with the grammar and syntax of music and dance, the overall concepts of shape, time, space, energy, contrast, repetition, the simple rules and guidelines that help shape the students improvisations into more precise musical composition and dance choreographies.

In the Orff instrument ensemble, we follow the sequence that Orff and Keetman present in Volumes I, II, IV of “Music for Children”, working largely in the pentatonic scale (included pentatonic modes and transpositions not modelled in Volume I) in grades 1 to 3 and in the diatonic modes in grades 4 and 5. Of course, there is still plenty of Romance at the beginning of each new learning and also a great deal of Synthesis in culminating performances like the Winter plays and Spring concert.

**Middle School years** are the time to synthesize the skills, not only in more multi-media productions, but also connecting to history and culture. Our unique curriculum takes seriously the task of both widening the children’s definition of music through exposure to diverse compositional styles and connecting them to the vital cultural aspects of the arts. To this end, we add an additional listening/history class to the two playing classes.

**6<sup>th</sup> grade** focuses on “World Music”, introducing styles that might include Balinese gamelan, Philippine Kulintang, Brazilian samba, Bulgarian song and dance, Ghanaian xylophone music and beyond. In addition to learning games, songs, dances and pieces, students experiment with movement studies, dance and music improvisation and composition within each presented style.

**7<sup>th</sup> grade** features the European and European-influenced classical music tradition, from the Medieval Cantigas to Stravinsky. Compositional projects begin within given styles, but might expand outward to short film scores, dance accompaniment, graphic notation and more. Meanwhile, the kids learn a bit about select famous composers, hear their music and analyse at their level of understanding.

**8<sup>th</sup> grade** explores the dynamic history of jazz, naturally through playing great jazz pieces in diverse styles (blues / jazz song / swing band dance music / jazz rock / Latin jazz) and also investigating the lives and works of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Thelonious Monk and beyond. Other projects range from choreographing the Lindy Hop to creating a movement study based on Langston Hughes’ poems. The art of jazz improvisation is at the core of the study and here students draw from everything they have learned, often playing pentatonic scales over complex chords changes.

*The Middle School curriculum strives to widen the scope of children's music-making and dance experience to connect them to the diverse traditions that get short shrift in popular media, but are essential parts of the world they inhabit. To begin to get beneath the skin of the "foreign" and unfamiliar and feel it as their own, to open the world of nuanced emotion that Bach and Chopin offer, to learn about the jazz musicians who influenced every contemporary pop star and sang the true American story – this is exciting and necessary work and we're proud to offer this model for consideration. (The 17 Middle School students we took to Salzburg to perform at the 2011 Symposium built the show around this three-year curriculum.)*

### **Conclusion**

*The 38 years of The San Francisco Music Program have been a remarkable journey. I'm not convinced any of the details that made it what it is are transferable, but there are some essential qualities that I believe were indispensable:*

- *A host school culture that understands child-centred education and was open every step of the way to the gifts of the Schulwerk.*
- *The freedom all the teachers have had to follow their passion, trusted to be left alone with their own way of doing things.*
- *Colleagues who are perpetually curious, questioning, researching, reading, studying, developing themselves both as musicians and educators.*
- *The stimulating balance between teaching children, teaching adults, writing articles and books, performing with both children and adults, each one informing the other.*

*And thus it came to pass that the visionary ideas and practices of Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman reached deep into the heart of a little school in San Francisco, offered a life path for three dedicated teachers, touched the lives of hundreds of SF School children, helped transform the teaching of thousands of teachers worldwide working with over 100,000 children, helped move the ideas of the Schulwerk further down its evolutionary path with jazz, world music, classical music, body music and beyond.*

*And it all began with a donation of six Orff instruments to a school.*



## The artistic and humanistic culture of the school

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Sofia López-Ibor

*A 4-year old is getting ready to start her music class. While she takes off her shoes, the music teacher starts playing a recording of a jazz piece performed by the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.*

*“Hey Sofia! This is us playing!” she shouts.*

*Another child quickly intervenes: “No, no, it is not us! We are learning the song about the cat and the hammer.”*

*“YES, it is us! It’s The San Francisco School!”*

*How smart she was! She knew it wasn’t her particular group playing, but also identified with the older kids, sensed that this was her community and that she herself would one day play like that. She felt part of an artistic and humanistic culture larger than just her twice-weekly music class.*

*The San Francisco school is like any other culture, a world of its own. What distinguishes our program from other schools is our efforts to do more than teach a curriculum in scheduled music classes. Orff-Schulwerk is a way of living, a way of growing and a way of belonging to a community. The music is indeed at the centre of our school community. The year-long cycle of music activities is eagerly anticipated by the kids. They come in September confident that they will be performing, improvising, acting and singing throughout the year. They understand that taking bars off a xylophone in 1<sup>st</sup> grade is not a big deal because soon they will have the full keyboard to play with in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. They are excited to get their recorder in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and look forward to what they will play in the Halloween performance from year to year.*

*One of my strongest impressions when I came to the school 16 years ago happened when the children were organizing the Samba Contest at the end of the year. In this event, all of the students in the elementary grades meet in groups to choreograph a dance, they think about the costumes they will wear and practice independently in their free time. I asked my colleagues James Harding and Doug Goodkin when the older kids were going to rehearse the music, imagining that it would be an elaborate teaching process. But the rhythms were alive in the air. The students clapped the responses to the caixa de guerra with the natural flair of musicians who have lived that event over and over – as indeed they did.*

*Besides the rich cycle of rituals and celebrations, we also strive to collaborate with the classroom teachers and connect the students’ learning. To give a recent example: I am working on a project based on the Medieval story of Robin and Marion by Adam de Halle. While the students play the famous Lydian introduction song and arrange it in groups with drones, ostinati and so forth, we have worked on drama skits, danced the farandole and looked at the original manuscript in the music listening class. Meanwhile the Language Arts teacher has read the original play with the students and asked them to rewrite the play, setting it in modern times.*

*Yet another contribution to the unique character of our program is the work that Doug, James and I do training teachers. This work with adults demands that we reflect deeply about our classes, teaching methods and pedagogy and strive to articulate it in our courses, our writings, our public speaking, our little talks with the constant flow of teachers visiting our classes. We have been fortunate to not only maintain a rigorous schedule of weekend workshops, conferences and courses throughout the U.S. and Canada, but also through the world. Through our international travels, we are constantly learning games, songs and dances that enrich our program.*

*We also try to keep active as performers, both with and without the students. Through the participation in festivals, like the Body Music Festival of Keith Terry or the World Music Festival, we keep challenging ourselves to learn new music, styles and instruments together with the kids. The kids see us as active artists, constantly developing our craft in a variety of ways.*

The collaboration with teachers in our school, the performances with musicians and dancers in the Bay Area, the commitment to writing articles and books, the connection to so many inspiring international institutions and Orff colleagues – all of this and more contributes to making the vision of teaching Orff-Schulwerk in a small school bigger than such programs often are. We take equal pleasure in the joy it gives to our children and the model it provides teachers worldwide<sup>1</sup> about what a musical culture in a school might look like. Come and visit us!

### **Celebrations**

The San Francisco school students are rooted in music and dance traditions that are part of their collective life during the school year. The music and dance department is mostly in charge of organizing the celebrations, sometimes in collaboration with other teachers who are interested in the topic for cultural, political, religious or other reasons. Some celebrations are important marks in the school calendar – such as the opening and closing days of the school, or the 100 day in the school year where the children collectively need to come up with a list of 100 songs they know! Other celebrations are tied to the cultural calendar the children sing and play and dance around Diwali (North Indian festival of lights), Hannukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa (African-American), Chinese New Year in the winter. All traditions are honoured in the classroom through storytelling and reading, decorations and art projects and even include some special lunches and treats for the students. The rich diversity of our community is also represented in longer projects like Latino-Heritage, African-American or Asian-American months. In some particular year, the students might focus on ceremonies of a particular culture, third grade studies the California Indians. For some of them we have guest speakers, presentations, art exhibits and special composition projects – the children celebrate the life of Martin Luther King through songs and poetry reading. Which is the favourite celebration of all? Halloween of course! The full elementary school meets in the music school for a special performance with the children in full costume that includes dance, drama performance, singing, chanting, recorder and xylophone playing and storytelling.

### **Sofía López-Ibor**

Concert diploma in recorder, diploma in Music Pedagogy at the Royal College of Music, Madrid. Master course in recorder at Trinity College of Music in London. Continuing education studies (B Course) at the Carl Orff Institute, Mozarteum University, Salzburg. Presently teaching at the San Francisco School in California, USA. Faculty member at international summer courses, at Orff-Schulwerk “Level Courses” in San Francisco, California and guest faculty member for the Postgraduate University Course at the Orff Institute.

### **Articles in the OSI about The San Francisco School**

#### **Doug Goodkin**

No. 65/p. 24 Festivities as Expression of the Social Life of a School Community

No. 83/p. 13 Improvisation – the Pleasure of Survival

#### **James Harding**

No. 71/p. 36 The Calder Centennial: A Trip to the Circus

No. 75/p. 47 The Lumière Project: A Journey into the Art of Film Music

No. 86/p. 30 Put Together by Chance: Three Composition Projects from the Classroom

#### **Francisco Hernández**

No. 71/p. 41 The San Francisco Murals – an Integrated Project with 6th Graders at The San Francisco School

#### **Sofía López-Ibor**

No. 74/p. 34 Playing with Words from One’s Own and Other Cultures

No. 80/p. 38 Musica Viva

#### **For further information:**

**[www.sfschool.org](http://www.sfschool.org) • [music@sfschool.org](mailto:music@sfschool.org)**

Wegen des außergewöhnlichen Umfangs dieses Berichts müssen wir aus Platzgründen leider auf eine deutsche Übersetzung oder Zusammenfassung verzichten. Wir bitten unsere deutschsprachigen Leser um Verständnis.

<sup>1</sup> At this writing, we are planning to offer one of the first formal Orff Apprenticeship Programs where teachers can study with Doug, Sofia and James four months at The San Francisco School with the children. Projected date is Fall of 2013. For further information see: [www.sforff.org](http://www.sforff.org) or [www.douggoodkin.com](http://www.douggoodkin.com)



