

Creating a Culture of Peace The Performing Arts in Interethnic Negotiations

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Abstract

The Norwegian national institute for music dissemination (Rikskonsertene) initiated a three year school research project "Resonant Community" (1989 - 92). The project aimed at creating an understanding for the cultural traditions of immigrant communities in the Norwegian capital, and preventing discriminatory attitudes through an art program related to cultural traditions of the various immigrant groups. The project further aimed at releasing and promoting the artistic talents and resources in these communities through cooperation with leading artists from countries of origin in the fields of music and dance. The author directed a comprehensive research program and published the main findings in a report Participating schools were found to benefit from the program through improved interethnic relation. Incidents of harassment were reduced and immigrant children with improved self image were found to find easier acceptance.

The Norwegian project was followed up through other intercultural initiatives, and led to a new profile in educational and cultural policy. A Norwegian multicultural music centre was founded, arranging a yearly world music festival.

The Department of Music and Theatre of the University of Oslo has been responsible for cooperation programs with countries where interethnic problems have called for new initiatives. A cooperation program with the Institute of Aesthetic Studies in Sri Lanka has led to intercultural initiatives including an Asian multicultural music festival. Cooperation with University institutes in Croatia and Slovenia and Israel have likewise been centered on the role of the arts in conflict transformation. Experiences from an Israeli/Palestinian childrens' choir project are discussed within the general background of intercultural relations.

keywords: immigrant communities, cultural traditions, Participating Schools, cultural policy, State Concert Agency of Norway, culture of peace, conflict transformation, Israeli-Palestinian Ensemble, Multicultural Bosnia.

Introduction:

What are the basics of peace education? What ignites it, what powers the process? The study of peaceful societies, societies in social balance, may give us some answers to questions we educators ask. I have found in my studies of tribal societies, mostly in South - East Asia, an intimate connection between artistic training and education for citizenship. Music, dance and theatre are important arenas for training in democratic participation and conflict transformation.

The cultural crises we now see unfolding may be traced to our modern societies discontinuing these vital processes of social learning. And those societies that still retain and practice the traditional techniques of promoting conflict solution through the performing arts are threatened with extinction. I am especially referring to the aboriginal peoples of Australia, South America, Asia and Africa.

Musical interaction creates social values. Two or more people create something that is greater than the sum of what they create each on their own. And sympathies are formed - strong feelings of belonging. Music making in a group brings out the social dynamics of the group. Harmonic as well as strained relationships are brought to the front. This is the very essence of chamber music. Through musical dialogues the interrelationship within the group is explored. The following is a report on three projects

where inter-ethnic music making has proved successful in promoting inter-cultural understanding.

A. A Time for Exploring: Resonant Community

In 1988 the State Concert Agency of Norway (NORCONCERT) initiated a pilot project to probe into the possibilities of extending its school program in an intercultural direction with the intent of fulfilling the new Curricular Master Plan and assist schools in their effort to foster interracial understanding and intercultural cooperation. The project aimed at involving competent teachers from the immigrant communities together with artists from the countries of origin in presenting immigrant and refugee cultures- music, dance and performing arts.

The convincing success of this program brought about the inauguration of a three - year program involving 18 schools in the Oslo area. Six of these schools (A-schools) were to participate in an intensive arts education program concentrating on immigrant cultures. Six others (B-schools) were to participate in a regular school concert series also featuring immigrant cultures, while the six remaining (C-schools) would function as control institutions.

The following goals were formulated:

2 To spread knowledge and create understanding for the values that reside in the culture of immigrants by presenting live music and dance to children.

3 To bring out the musical resources that lie in the various immigrant groups in Norway, as well as to provide external professional support through performers from the immigrants' home countries.

4 To ease the process of integration for immigrants through multicultural interaction.

The target groups were

1. Pupils between the ages of 10 - 12 years old in Norwegian primary schools situated in areas with varying concentration of immigrant pupils. The same pupils were to follow the project for three years (grades four through six).

2. Families of the children involved in the trial study.

Researchers from several countries, in several independent studies, have discovered negative attitudes towards children of other races or minority cultures already in pre- school age. Prejudicial attitudes in the form of stereotypes become more pronounced with age. But it appears that the personality development in pre-adolescence gives room for more nuanced views, based on a greater interest for individual features and curiosity for other ways of living.

Based on a greater ability for identification across racial boundaries among the 10 - 14 year olds, a more open and friendly disposition is found in this age group. But the positive disposition does not seem to last once these children become teenagers, when peer-group pressure and the need to conform makes itself felt.

Many factors indicate that the ages 10 - 14 are critical years. The development towards a greater openness as a result of personal maturity may also, with appropriate influence continue into adolescence, or it may stiffen into stereotypical attitudes and negative patterns of behaviour. Once prejudicial attitudes have been internalized, they are extremely difficult to change. A standard American textbook in adolescent psychology (Cole and Hall: Psychology of Adolescence) states:

"Various people have attempted to reduce the amount of already measured prejudice in a given group. The logical assumption was that an intolerant person will loose his negative attitudes once he has been given adequate information about, and adequate contact with, those whom he dislikes. The matter is, however, not so simple, because prejudice rests upon emotional rather than intellectual grounds. There seems to be practically no relationship between knowledge of a feeling toward a group, and an already established prejudice is reduced only a little if at all by supplying facts to counterbalance it. Nor does more education have much effect. Increased education can give information about negroes, their problems and the condition under which they live but can still fail to dent basic attitudes." (Cole and Hall: 1970 , p. 495).

This is confirmed by van Dijk in his in-depth study *Communicating Racism*:

"Positive information, counterarguments, and basic principles of adequate interaction in multiethnic societies, are virtually absent in socialization, communication, and other instances of social information processing. This also explains why challenging ethnic prejudice is much more difficult than accepting them.

This means that if recipients are already prejudiced it will not be easy to change such prejudices"

It was precisely this kind of understanding that led to the focus on a musical methodology as an important tool in fostering tolerance. The conclusion from these findings must be that preventive measures must be set before prejudicial attitudes have been firmly established. They cannot be based on the communication of information alone, but must confront the irrational and emotional bases of racist and discriminatory attitudes. Van Dick, writes on the basis of his findings that "ethnic attitude change may require complete ideological reorientation." (Ibid., p. 328)

The idea was not primarily to present the music traditions of the immigrant communities in their "pure" form, but rather to stimulate participation in interethnic musical activities. Students of different ethnic origin were encouraged to try their hand on various percussion instruments, forming small classroom bands or ensembles, accompanying dancing and musical plays. In the larger gatherings the whole school population was invited to join in. Sometimes even parents were invited for evening performances and musical games.

Cultures from three geographical zones would be presented: Asia (first year), Africa (second year) and Latin-America (third year). Immigrant organizations, foreign embassies as well as individual artists were contacted for participation in the project, and auditions were held for musical talents in refugee centers. Countries of origin were in some cases visited to study programs of artistic education and the ways music and art function as integrative factors in the individual communities and the society at large. During these visits contacts with leading artists were established, and their teaching methods discussed. The actual content and forms of presentation were worked out in a long process of cooperation with the participant artists, who also helped in finding suitable audio-visual aids and material for a written syllabus for each cultural area. With the cooperation of the State Film Board two videos were produced centering on the musical heritage of immigrant and refugee children and youth. These films were made available in the native languages as well (Farsi and Urdu).

Tests were given at the beginning and end of the project and evaluated. The main findings were:

1. A considerably greater increase in the A-schools (as compared to the other school models) from 1989 to 1992 in the number of pupils who report that they have no personal problems with mobbing. This is most marked with the immigrant pupils and it indicates a clear connection between the project and improved social relationships in the schools. The tendency towards better social relations and diminished ethnic conflicts in the school environment is confirmed by reports from the teachers.
2. Attitudes towards immigrants seem to have remained unchanged in the A-schools, while there was a greater degree of negative attitudes among the pupils in the B- and C-schools in 1992 than at the beginning of the project in 1989
3. A greater number of pupils in the A-schools at the end of the project consider immigrants to be honest, law-abiding, industrious and kind, while there are fewer in the other school models.
4. Immigrant pupils in the A-schools have strengthened their self-image during the project. The teachers report that there has been a highly positive development in identity formation and activity level of immigrant pupils.

B. A Time for the Celebration of Differences: From "The World in the North" to the "Multicultural Asian Music Festival"

The immediate success of the project led to a new direction in the musical programming of the National Concert Association as well. Several troupes of immigrant musicians have been involved in around 1000 intercultural performances reaching half of the school population. Most of these concerts have presented music of more than one ethnic group.

In a community project in an area of racial conflict all schools and cultural organizations of the village joined forces with the visiting group in a coordinated intercultural effort. Music and dance workshops were held for several age groups from pre-school children to adults, school concerts as well as creative cooperative sessions with local folk music groups. One of the outcomes of this cooperation was a

recording that turned out the number one Norwegian bestseller.

On Aug. 1st.1992 a Norwegian Multicultural Music Center was started as a follow up of this program. It functions as a resource center in close cooperation with NORAD, the State Agency of Development and Aid especially focusing on artistic and especially music cooperation on an equal basis with developing countries in three continents, and establishing links with immigrant communities.

One of the first initiatives was the Afrobrazz project. An African and a Norwegian ensemble were invited to live together in a small Norwegian village, VÆgÆ, and develop a common musical concept for later concerts in Norway and in Africa. An important aspect of the plan was to involve all the various musical organizations of the community in the music-making, in the way the whole village is involved in festivities in a traditional African setting. The project proved to be highly successful.

Each year a World Music Festival is arranged simultaneously in all four Nordic capitals featuring immigrant and refugee musicians in concert appearances with artists from countries of origin. The festival also includes interethnic music projects in schools and kindergartens in and around the capital.

The Nordic model of the multicultural festival became the inspiration and basis for the Multicultural Festival of Asian Music, held in Colombo and Kandy, Sri Lanka, The festival was initiated by the present author, who between 1992 - 1995 directed a three-year scientific exchange and development program instituted between the Institute of Aesthetic Studies, Kelaniya University and the Department of Music and Theatre, University of Oslo. This festival featured ensembles from 5 Asian countries, including a mixed ensemble from Sri Lanka of Singhalese and Tamil musicians playing together. The festival was aired by Sri Lankan TV and Young Asia Television.

C. A Time for Peace -Zaman el Salaam

Right in the heyday of the Intifada Israeli singers often joined Israeli Palestinian and

Arabic singers combining Hebrew and Arabic texts. This must be seen as some kind of protest against the official cultural policy. Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Arabic song in Israel was an extremely marginalized phenomenon. Hebrew and Arabic programmes on Israeli TV are completely separated. Since these media are government controlled, Arabic songs with strong social and political messages are never aired, not even in programmes for the Arab minority, This rejection of Oriental or Arabic music meant not only the rejection of minority cultures, but the rejection of the culture of the large part of the Jewish population, that of oriental descent. (Perelson 1998, pp. 113 -128)

The first one to break this pattern was the Israeli singer Alon Olearchik, very popular in Israel, with the song "Shalom Salaam" performed together with the Arab singer Amal Murkus at the annual childrens` song festival in 1986:

Believe there is reason enough
In the world
To make peace now between people
It«s time to make peace
Not tomorrow, but today

Shalom Salaam
Shalom Salaam

Another song Moshe and Mussa was written as part of an Israeli-Arab kindergarten project in Jaffa. Two children Moshe (a Jew) and Mussa (an Arab) tell of their friendship.

Moshe and Mussa two friends
Moshe and Mussa go to kindergarten
Sometimes silent, sometimes crying

Sometimes laughing, sometimes singing

By the port of the city of Jaffa
 Everyone will sing this song
 Shalom Aleihem, Aleykum Salaam
 There` s nothing like a twosome to tour the world

Another song by Uzi Khitman goes:

Here we are, you and me
 And me and you
 With two voices
 And one song

And this is exactly the idea that made the following event such a remarkable demonstration of the power of song. During an Intifada demonstration the well-known Israeli singer Amnon Abubbul was hit in the head by a rock hurled by a Palestinian.

Rather than thinking of revenge, he began to ponder in what ways he could contribute to bring peace. After being released from the army he found out that near his kibbutz there lived a Palestinian poet from Nazareth - Fathi Kasem. He contacted him to tell his story and share his thoughts. Together in a few days they made a peace song in Arabic - Zaman el Salaam - expressing the longing of both peoples for peace:

Like an ocean - Peace, my love, has a wide embracing soul
 There are times of ebb and flow in days of struggle and sorrow
 Between storms and thunder feelings burst out my love:
 Time for Peace - Inshallah

There is a time from far away I long like a lone star in the sky
 There are times of ebb and flow in days of struggle and sorrow
 Out of the lightning the rainbow glows and I will know the time has come
 Time for Peace - Inshallah

But still there was no music. Then out in the desert Amnon heard a violin sobbing. It sounded very Arabic. It was the violin of the master musician Yair Dalal, who headed an Israeli - Palestinian orchestra. Dalal had been teacher at the Eilat Conservatory of Music and since 1992 Assistant Professor at the State Teachers College Seminar Hakibutsum. He had been teacher in oriental music at the Jewish-Arab community Center in Jafo and director of a Palestinian-Jewish childrens' orchestra at the Jerusalem Center for Music. He has been giving workshops in intercultural music methods and Middle East music traditions at the University of Oslo and Norwegian teachers colleges. This was the music he wanted for the peace song. Two days before the signing of the Cairo agreement it came out as a CD. Did it influence the negotiations? The artists had no way of finding out.

But they got a new chance. To celebrate the anniversary of the Oslo Accord famous Finnish singer Arja Sajonmaa was looking for music and heard about the song. She wanted a choir to come to Oslo to reach the emotions through poetry and song. And so it happened that 50 Israeli and 50 Palestinian children under very difficult circumstances met on several occasions for practice in the Palestinian territories to prepare for the concert. Other Arabic and Israeli songs were learned and permanent friendships were formed. They were to sing with 100 Norwegian children - in three languages: Arabic, Hebrew and English. And they were to be accompanied by the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra directed by the famous conductor Zubin Mehta.

Then on Sept. 13, 1994 after long unresolved negotiations in Paris and a whole night of fruitless talks in

Oslo, Chairman Yassir Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres came to the concert, exhausted and disappointed. The children sang, joined by 7000 spectators in the refrain, and accompanied by Yair Dalal on the oud and violin, the Israeli- Palestinian orchestra and the Oslo Philharmonic. Before a stunned audience the former Norwegian Foreign Minister, Bjørn Sverre Godal, announced that a peace document had been signed.

How could this happen? What potential for emotional and conceptual impact lies in a multicultural ensemble? What did the event signify for the participant musicians, the children, the live audience, the politicians and the international TV- audience who watched the performance?

The focal point of departure was a real life experience, human suffering brought about by war, by ethnic conflict - the wounded singer seeking out his enemy to make a plea for peace in poetic images. Then there was the marriage of words to music, a music born out of the experience of multi-ethnic music making, the Israeli - Palestinian orchestra performing across borders, the fruit of a long interaction. And then there was the all - important process of the rehearsals, of preparing for the performance. Jewish and Palestinian met for the first time through the medium of music. Finally there was the process of the social ritual of the performance itself. In a way it served as an initiation of the children into peacemaking, supported by key devoted artists, politicians from both sides and a huge public identifying with the children, accepting and endorsing their message.

Since the Peace concert Yair Dalal, together with the Israeli-Palestinian ensemble that formed the instrumental nucleus beside the Oslo Philharmonic as well as other interethnic groups, have been extremely active giving concert performances in many parts of the globe and issuing new recordings. I was happy to witness last August the highly successful Ethno-dance festival in an immigrant part of Tel Aviv where the various ethnic groups, mainly oriental Jews presented their music and dance together with visiting foreign artists from Asia and Europe. National dishes were served in an outdoor bazaar area where handicrafts were on display and sale. Dalal is a teacher at the Bar Ilan - University outside Tel Aviv, that recently employed 40 new teachers of Arabic and other oriental music, according to Dr. Seroussi's correspondence with me inspired by the Resonant Society project.

D.A Time for Sharing - Music for a Multicultural Bosnia

In 1994 Dr. Svanibor Pettan of the Ljubljana Academy of Music came to Norway on a research assignment , supported by the Norwegian Research Council. This was after my lectures in Croatia and Slovenia on creative peace education. The main purpose was to initiate a research program on the possibilities of music intervention in the rehabilitation of refugees. Together we started a course at the Department of Music and Theatre in the University of Oslo "Music in Exile", which focused on the cultural situation in former Yugoslavia, with special emphasis on the interethnic character of Bosnian ensembles. As part of the research program the participating Norwegian students formed, together with Bosnian refugees , a sevdalinka ensemble, Azra.. The ensemble was expressly formed to perform in refugee reception centres and culture clubs with the purpose of helping the refugees living in Norway and preparing them for resettling in a multi-ethnic Bosnia of the future.

The Azra project was designed to use ethno-musicological and anthropological evidence of commonalities among the Bosnians, as an alternative to the political "general understanding" locked in the alleged differences along ethnic lines. It was to confront negative propaganda to which many refugees fall victims that people claiming different ethnic and religious affiliation, though all indigenous to Bosnia-Herzegovina, cannot live together any more. The project was designed to help Bosnian refugees during their stay in Norway and prepare them for coexistence in a multiethnic Bosnia- Herzegovina in the future.

The ensemble set out to offer to all Bosnians, regardless of their ethno-religious affiliation, a musical concept with which they could associate, and at the same time to keep public attention on Bosnia-Herzegovina and its fate, including the refugee problem.

Prior to the war, musicians of all Bosnian ethnic groups shared in the preservation, evolution and affirmation of both the rural musical traditions as well as the urban musical genres, foremost the "sevdalinka". Musical ensembles were often inter-ethnic. The dividing lines were geographical, not ethnic. After the war a process of musical apartheid set in. Instruments that originally had been shared by

all ethnic groups, were now seen to be ethnically exclusive, like the epic songs with gusle accompaniment, now claimed to be Serb only. During the siege on Sarajevo, Serbian rebels placed loudspeakers in their positions around Sarajevo blaring out such gusle songs performed by their leader, the notorious war criminal Radovan Karadzic.

The Azra ensemble, on their part, under the guidance of Dr. Pettan carefully chose Bosnian songs that were loved cross-ethnically and that had themes of a common emotional appeal: The Bosnian landscape, love and longing. The instruments were "neutral" - accordeon, clarinet, flute, guitar, bass - in order to counteract the apartheid tendency mentioned. The ensemble included Norwegian songs in their repertory, so as to build bridges between the refugees and their Norwegian hosts.

The project proved successful from the very start as there seemed to be an almost insatiable demand among the refugees for the music of their homeland. Evaluation on the basis of activities during the first six months indicated positive moves toward the strengthening of Bosnian cultural identity, improved self - image and social relations. Since then the ensemble has expanded its activities, having performed on national TV- in the Norwegian Theatre and in a number of Norwegian cities with very positive feedback. One should add their participation in international conferences on migration and music education and cultural support work in other European countries. The project also led to a series of interethnic music and theatre initiatives in Croatia and Slovenia.

The lessons from the past hold promise for the future: From various parts of the globe we are experiencing new efforts to incorporate the performing arts in peace education. It is important that we share these experiences and move forward in a concerted effort to realize the goal set before us: Spreading a Culture of Peace.

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