

MÓNIKA DEÁKNÉ KECSKÉS¹**Becoming a Good Chamber Musician – a Kodály Approach**

The Kodály-concept is often associated with the relative solfa and choir singing. Both are important features, although the concept involves variable forms of activities. Being a member of the academic staff at the University in Győr, I have had the opportunity to teach methodology for primary school teachers as well as keyboard skills and solfeggio to professional instrumentalists at university level. In the course of my research conducted among my students at the Faculty of Arts of Széchenyi University, I experienced that the difference in the background of primary school music education might influence the development of future musical competences. Due to the limitations of this paper, I will focus on competences which may have an effect on being an accomplished chamber musician.

Being a member of the academic staff at the University in Győr, I have had the opportunity to teach methodology for primary school teachers as well as keyboard skills and solfeggio to professional instrumentalists at university level. The instruction of school music based on Kodály's principles is one of the subjects in the Hungarian music teacher training programme. Beside music lessons, musical activity itself is a versatile methodical tool in the hands of future primary school teachers with regards to other subjects like Maths or Science. While exploiting it, they have to ensure that their lesson plan contains which musical activity to choose to revise and which ones can be used to make their pupils memorise something. They also have to specify what kind of competences (Communication in the Mother Tongue, Communication in Foreign Languages, Mathematical Competence, Competences in Natural Sciences, Digital Competence, Learning to Learn, Social and Civic Competences, Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship, Aesthetic and Artistic Awareness and Expression) they intend to develop with the help of the given musical activity. The most obvious cross-effect of musical activity - e.g. singing in choir – can be seen best in Aesthetic and Artistic Awareness and Expression. Social Competences may also play an important role in the future career of students attending a university of music. In the course of my research conducted among my students at the Faculty of Arts of Széchenyi University, I experienced that the difference in the background of primary school music education might influence the development of future musical competences, like singing,

¹ egyetemi docens, Széchenyi István Egyetem Művészeti Kar/ Apáczai Csere János Kar; monimail11@gmail.com

successful cooperation in chamber music or flexible thinking during improvisation. I tried to find the connection between the output of my students and the level of their school music education. Due to the limitations of this paper, I will focus on competences which may have an effect on being an accomplished chamber musician.

Making chamber music is a group-activity which requires background knowledge and practical skills, sophisticated social skills as well. Chamber musicians, who had high standard school-music education in kindergarten and primary school, have stronger social competences, so they have more chance to become a good chamber-musician. The development of social skills is influenced by multifold factors, as personality, family, and school-environment. Factors given by the personality, like positive self-esteem, positive attitude and the acceptance of others, as well as familiar background have a great effect on social development. Let us focus on how the school environment influences this process. We may say that someone has advanced social competence who takes an interest in other persons, can control his or her interactions in a flexible and sensible way. It has to do with good communication skills, assertivity and empathy as well (Németh, 2008). Social competence is a bunch of other competences. Perhaps the best summary was given to us by Daniel Goleman. He stated that relevant competence has five groups of further elements.

- the consciousness of self (self-knowledge, self-estimation, and self-confidence);
- self-regulation (self-control, reliability, adaptivity);
- empathy (understanding and development of others, realization of others' needs, appreciation of diversity, perception of emotional tension);
- motivation (drive, optimism, engagement, stimulus for efficacy);
- social abilities (influencing, communication, treatment of conflicts, control, building connections, cooperation, and team spirit) (Goleman, 1995. p. 6).

This classification describes the best way what competences a chamber musician must have besides his/her musical skills.

Let us have a glimpse on how different activity areas of musical reproduction and musical reception – both activity forms are prescribed by our National Curriculum² - contribute to the development of the three most crucial factors of making chamber music, or any activities in a group:

² Kerettanterv az általános iskola 1-4. évfolyamára. Ének-zene Kerettanterv. [online] http://kerettanterv.ofi.hu/01_melleklet_1-4/index_alt_isk_also.html. [2018.03.14.]

- self-identity,
- cooperation,
- communication.

The basis of the whole process has to do with stable self-identity. That means the ability to identify ourselves as a national human being in the frames of the European Culture. So to say: this is the basis of developing the social „self”. The musical training even in public schools based on the Kodály Concept may effectively contribute to achieve this in various fields. Let us summarize the activities of the prevalent Hungarian school music education which help enhance social competences. Singing – the use of human voice with the exclusion of nearly any musical instrument - is a basic feature of the Kodály Concept. This method ensures a way of self-expression for everyone using own voice, own body and soul. The other important peculiarity is the presence of musical mother-tongue built upon vernacular children’s plays, nursery rhymes and folksongs. The acquisition of musical mother tongue has a close contact with the development of personality. Beside this, the curriculum contains several examples taken from other cultures. By this pupils study to stand upon inherited cultural values of their home country, as well as venerate and like that of other nations. Singing together, singing in a choir – a third feature of the Kodály Concept – also motivates children to get acquainted with the culture of other nations through a common activity. This activity helps them also to define themselves in our world. In the frames of school music lessons the possibility of cooperation is given in many ways. The possibility is given in the material of music lessons, as well as several possible methods of learning adopted by the teacher.

The Kodály Concept is often associated with the relative sol-fa and choir singing. Both are important features, although the concept involves variable forms of activities. Versatile forms of singing activities are chamber-singing, singing in more voices, making easier or more compound forms of chamber music presupposes cooperation among participants. Via all these music activities pupils learn interactions beyond music, like cooperation, mutual reacting and communication on partnership level to gain the best result at the end.

In the course of lessons, there are further not directly musical possibilities for working in smaller groups, and on smaller project works developing cooperative skills. The creation of a common project causes a feeling of joy and gives positive impressions. During this type of activities, the effect of the process of working together is often more generative than the result of the project itself. Thanks to the feeling, the creation of something together has a more positive effect on social skills, than on musical development. The most relevant examples are children’s

plays, or singing-exercises collected or composed by Kodály himself. At the same time the prevailing methods of teaching musical reading and writing via cooperative games e.g. melody-cards, relay-race games, composition game, group improvisation games with compositions or motion, etc. also contribute to enhance cooperative abilities. We are going to show some of them. We may form groups at the very beginning of the singing lesson. Each group agrees on a melody sung with text or with solfa, with the help of which they greet each other. The entire class are going to repeat it. This exercise strengthens group identity.³ For the identification of melodies studied earlier we may use melody-cards with melody fragments given to each group written in alphabet-score. The group have to identify their own melody fragment. A person of the group will make the whole class sing with hand-sign, or rhythm-clapping and ask them whether they found out which melody was sung in solfa or clapped by hands. Another version of the same game is when short parts of a song are cut into pieces notated in letter-notation. The members of the group have to find the right order and sing it to the whole class. Communication is an interpersonal interaction which starts and finishes in the human mind, which is constant, irreversible, and compound. Its three functions (representation, prediction and control) are also helped by the music lessons of primary school. Making music in itself is a sort of communication. A soloist communicates with the audience, while chamber musicians communicate with each other and the audience at the same time. Singing and listening, as well as musical reading and writing obviously play an important role in the development competence of musical communication by increasing the knowledge of the meaning of different musical symbols, and an ability to decode them. These all help the students to be able to derive consequences to tonal and formal phenomena. Any forms of improvisations assume a great deal of ability to communicate. Helga Szabó's works (1976) contain a practical guide how to improvise by singing at different levels of school music education. Her directives are broadened by Creative Music Activities of László Sály (1999), and Improvisation manual of János Gonda (1997).

What do music professionals think about our topic? In my questionnaire I asked opened as well as closed questions from practical chamber musicians, students and staff members still working or studying in our institution in connection with my topic. The majority of the respondents were between 18-60 years of age, and still active as chamber musicians. To my great surprise, people playing accordic instruments and singers had more interest in my questionnaire than those who played stringed instruments. The professional training of pianists

³ Kerettanterv az általános iskola 1–4. évfolyamára. Ének-zene Kerettanterv. [online] http://kerettanterv.ofi.hu/01_melleklet_1-4/index_alt_isk_also.html. [2018.03.14.]

and singers focuses on training soloists. The answer for the interest may lie in the fact that quite a lot of my students meet chamber music and the aforementioned instruments only on academic level. They have not got so many possibilities to gain practice in chamber music as students playing stringed instruments. While a violin player can play together at least with a piano player almost from the beginning of her/his studies. They have several possibilities to participate in chamber music formations in their whole professional life. At the same time, because of his/her soloist training, to become a good chamber musician is always a challenge for a young pianist.

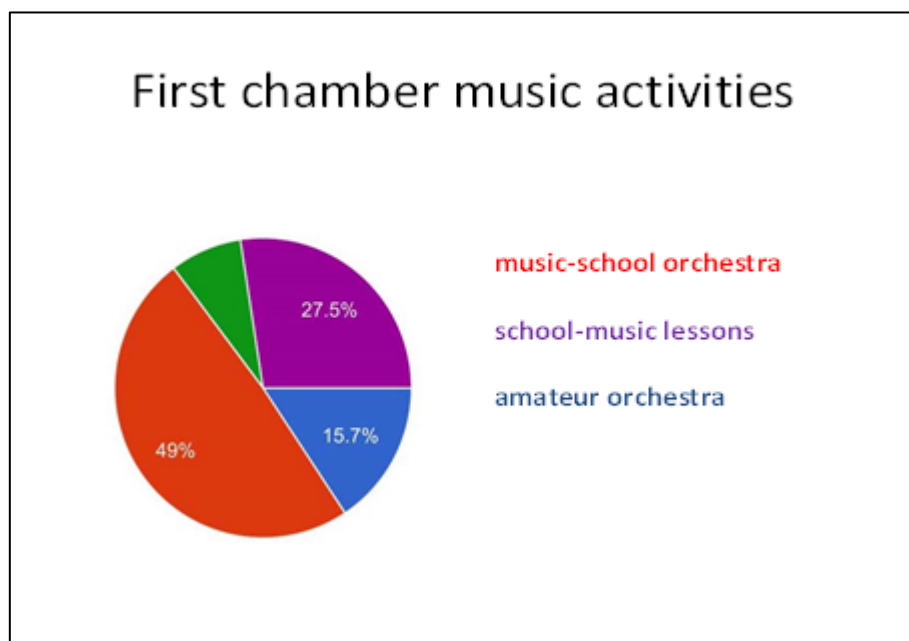


Figure 1. First chamber music activities

As seen in *Figure 1*, the majority of participants has gained their first direct experiences with the chamber music orchestra of the music school or an amateur orchestra already before 14 years of their age. Nearly 28 % of them mentioned school music lessons as first meetings with chamber music. They even remembered activities in primary school music lessons which helped them to establish their professional development, like singing in groups, playing with idiophone instruments, singing with a recorder – one of the allowed instruments in the Kodály Concept.

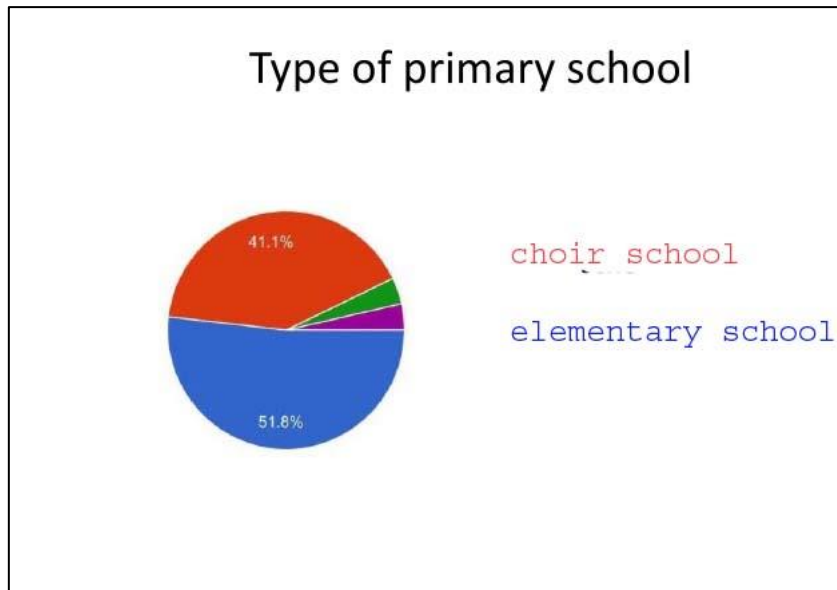


Figure 2. Type of primary schools

As *Figure 2* shows about 51 % of participants attended regular state schools.

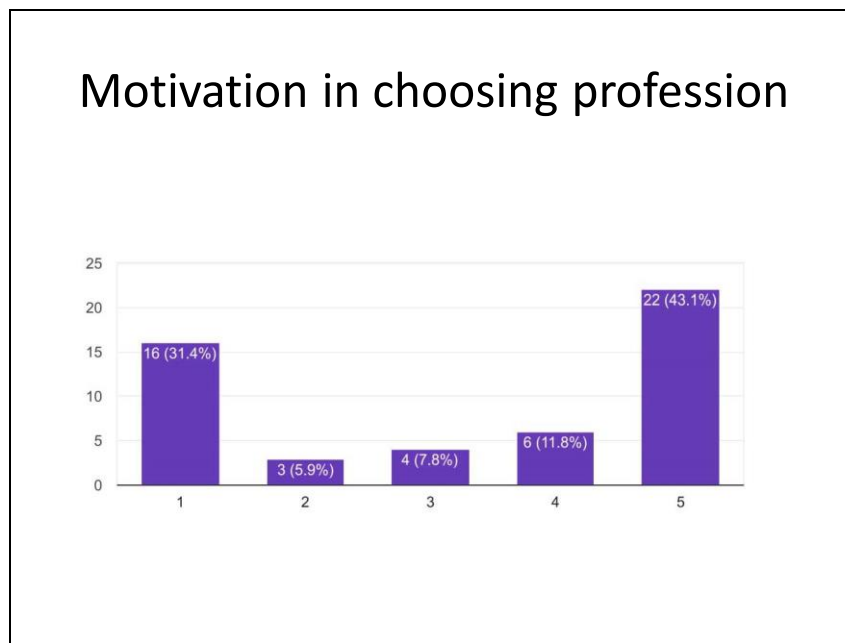


Figure 3. Motivation in choosing profession

According to *Figure 3*, nearly 45% stated, that they were positively influenced by Kodály-concept -based school music lessons.

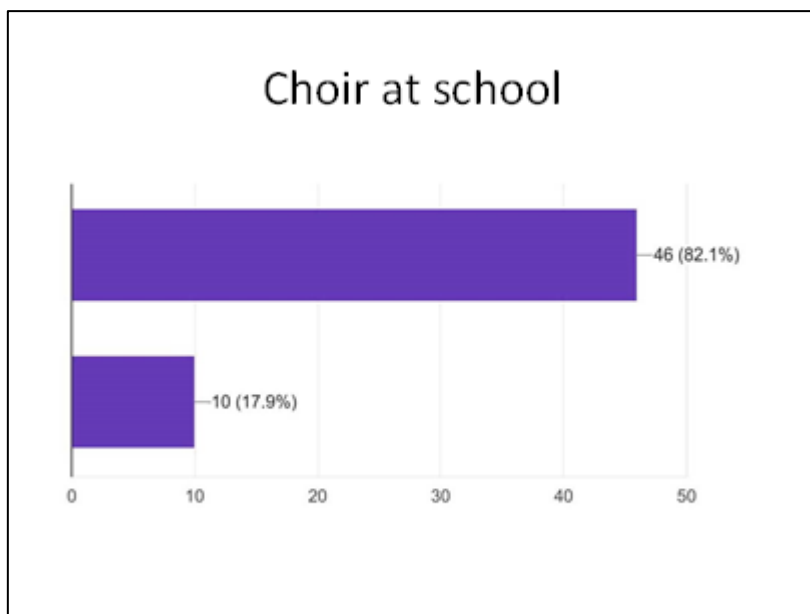


Figure 4. Choir at school

As you can see on *Figure 4*, 82 % of them attended the school choir and gave very positive remarks on it at the final question. The older generation also stated that singing in a choir motivated them towards making more chamber music in various forms. Almost all of them stated that competences gained at school music lessons helped them in their professional life.

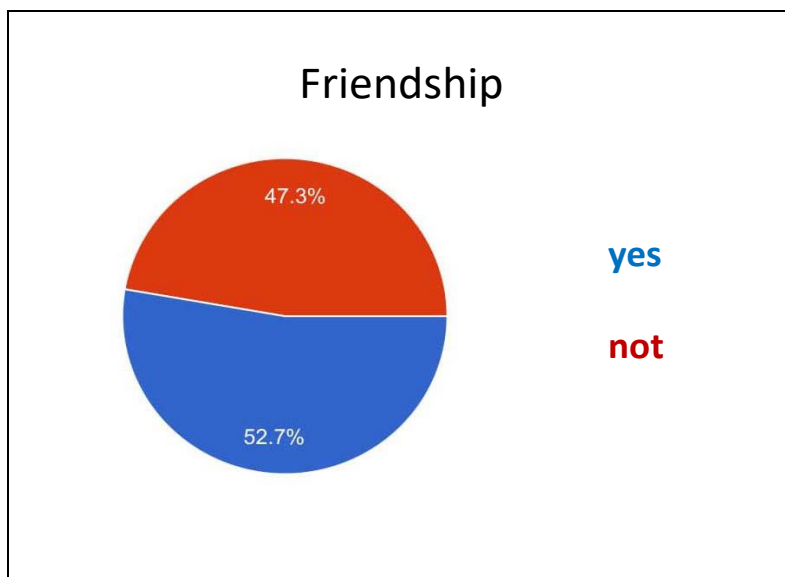


Figure 5. Friendship

As it can be seen in *Figure 5*, that about half of the participants reported about friendships and other types of social interactions due to school music lessons and choir. Nearly 42 % of these friendships are long lasting ones, still existing in our days.

44% of them have contact with their former school music teacher.

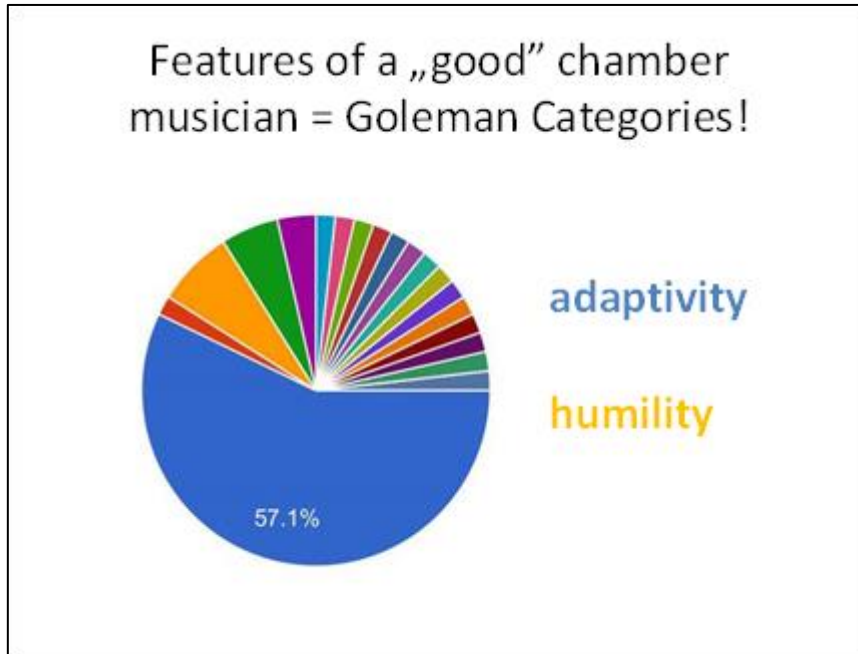


Figure 6. Features of a good chamber musician

According to *Figure 6*, 57,1% of them mentioned adaptivity as the main feature of a good chamber musician. Besides this they mentioned as a ‘sine qua non’ the ability of humility besides good instrumental skills and sight reading. If we go back for a moment to Goleman’s categories of the above mentioned social competences, we can see that the answers to the last, opened question (what kind of skills shall have a musician besides musical one) coincided almost exclusively with Goleman’s EQ categories.

- the consciousness of the self (self-knowledge, self-estimation, and self-confidence);
For a musician it means that he or she will be more than 100 percent aware of his/her own abilities. In terms of dealing with his/her own stress, positive self-esteem and self-confidence are needed. At the same time partners in a chamber music group need confidence in each other as well.
- self-regulation (self-control, reliability, adaptivity);
Playing chamber music we are all responsible for the others. We have to study our part in a stable, trustworthy way, at the same time we have to adapt our own imagination about the piece to the opinion of the partner musicians and to the musical progression of the given moment. Since one part of this progression is spontaneous, every participant will adapt his/her mood of playing to the given situation.
- empathy (understanding and development of others, realization of others’ needs, appreciation of diversity, perception of emotional tension);

Doing so in chamber music we need empathy. We have to feel the emotional tension of music while paying attention to the needs of our partners (e.g. if one needs a weight to start a motion, or agogic weight to support important harmonies.)

- motivation (drive, optimism, engagement, stimulus for efficacy);

The existence of engagement towards the project is inevitable for every cooperative activity.

- social abilities (influencing, communication, treatment of conflicts, control, building connections, cooperation and team spirit).

The respondents also mentioned that influencing other group members either verbally or via the way of playing, as well as assertivity in the treatment of conflicts (e.g. other opinions about stylistic points of view, or sudden mistakes during the performance) were also important for a chamber musician. This task also differs from soloists' tasks.

In the course of my research I have found that my hypothesis is right, but evidently needs more research in a practical field. The research has shown that the strong point of the Kodály Concept is the activities helping the enhancement of social skills. School music education is based on its folk tradition of children's plays, its cooperation-centered methodology was developed (Kodály, 1964) by pupils of Kodály, like László Sály, and up to this day the prevalence of choir singing. As Kodály himself stated (1929) in parallel with Leo Kestenbergy's philosophym (Kodály, 1964) that the standard of school music teaching was a decisive feature in the question of music pedagogy. He also stated that singing in a choir improved thinking – today we say cognitive competence – and created disciplined people.

I hope in the future we manage to ensure standards in music teaching in primary schools in Hungary which will be really fruitful for every pupil without exception, even for those who will not choose a professional music carrier.

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