

## ORFF-SCHULWERK: PAST & FUTURE

Carl Orff

To understand what Schulwerk is and what its aims are we should perhaps see how it came into being. Looking back I should like to describe Schulwerk as a wild flower. I am a passionate gardener so this description seems to me a very suitable one. As in Nature plants establish themselves where they are needed and where the conditions are favourable, so Schulwerk has grown from ideas that were rife at the time and that found their favourable conditions in my work. Schulwerk did not develop from any preconsidered plan—I could never have imagined such a far-reaching one—but it came from a need that I was able to recognize as such. It is an experience of long standing that wild flowers always prosper, where carefully planned, cultivated plants often produce disappointing results.

From this description of Schulwerk one can deduce its characteristics and its advantages and disadvantages. Most methodical, dogmatic people derive scant pleasure from it, but those who are artistic and who are improvisers by temperament enjoy it all the more. Every phase of Schulwerk will always provide stimulation for new independent growth; therefore it is never conclusive and settled, but always developing, always growing, always flowing. Herein of course lies a great danger, that of development in the wrong direction. Further independent growth presupposes basic specialist training and absolute familiarity with the style, the possibilities and the aims of Schulwerk.

To return to how it came into being; it was in the twenties. A new feeling for physical activity, for the practice of sport, gymnastics and dancing had seized the youth of Europe. The work and ideas of Jaques-Dalcroze that had spread all over the world helped considerably to prepare the ground for a new interest in physical education. Laban and Wigman, to mention only two names, were near the zenith of their careers. Rudolf von Laban was without doubt one of the most important dance teachers and choreographers of his time, and his writings about dance made him internationally famous. The highly gifted Mary Wigman, pupil of Jacques-Dalcroze and Laban, created a new kind of expressive dancing. The work of both these had considerable influence in artistic and educational circles and it was at this time in Germany that many gymnastic and dance schools were founded. All these enterprises were of great interest to me, for they were all closely connected with my work in the theatre.

In 1924, in Munich, Dorothee Guenther and I founded the Guentherschule, a school for gymnastics, music and dance. Here I saw a possibility of working out a new kind of rhythmical education, and of realizing my ideas about a reciprocal interpenetration of movement and music education. The specialty of the Guentherschule lay in the fact that one of its founders and directors was a musician. This meant that from the beginning there was a special emphasis on all musical work and I found the perfect experimental field for my ideas.

## THE INSTRUMENTS

The musical side of the instruction had to be different from what had so far been accepted as usual. The centre of gravity was transferred from the exclusively harmonic to the rhythmic. This led quite naturally to the favouring of rhythmic instruments. I disassociated myself from the exclusive use of piano music in physical education, as was then common practice and is still current today, and I encouraged the activation of the students by the playing of their own music, that is through improvising and composing it themselves. I therefore did not want to train them on highly developed art instruments, but rather on instruments that were preferably rhythmic, comparatively easy to learn, primitive and unsophisticated. For that a suitable instrumental ensemble had to be thought out. Purely rhythmic instruments, both indigenous and exotic were available in plenty through the development of Jazz; one had only to make some kind of selection. But without melodic instruments and without those capable of sustaining a drone bass it would have been impossible to develop an independent instrumental ensemble. Therefore to start with, pitched percussion instruments with wooden and metal bars, such as the different kinds of xylophones, metallophones and glockenspiels were made. This meant in some instances new constructions and in others it meant referring back to medieval or even exotic prototypes. The newly constructed 'trough' xylophones had nothing to do with the orchestral type of xylophone but were based on the highly developed Indonesian models. For this work I found just the right man in the piano maker Karl Maendler, who had made a name for himself just after the turn of the century by reviving the art of making harpsichords, and he took up my ideas with the enthusiasm of the born experimenter. These new forms of xylophone and metallophone that he developed which are now known all over the world, brought to our instrumental ensembles an incomparable and irreplaceable sound, and together with glockenspiels provided the foundation. They were built in soprano, alto, tenor, and bass range. Besides these barred instruments we soon made use of the flute as another melodic instrument. The flute in some of its earliest forms is one of the oldest of all melodic instruments. After some experiments with various exotic types of flute I decided to use the recorder, which up to then had suffered a kind of museum-piece existence. Through the particular assistance of my friend Curt Sachs, who was then in charge of the famous Berlin collection of musical instruments, I acquired a quartet of recorders copied from old models, consisting of descant, treble, tenor and bass. As bass instruments, in addition to timpani and the lower barred instruments, we used string instruments such as cellos and viola da gambas to provide a sustained drone bass. Guitars and lutes were also used as plucked strings. With these instruments our ensemble for the Guenterschule was settled. It was clear that for this ensemble new music would have to be written, or else already existing suitable music would have to be arranged, and the first to be considered was both native and foreign folk music. My idea was to take my students so far that they could improvise their own music (however unassuming) and their own accompaniments to movement. The art of creating music for this ensemble came directly from playing the instruments themselves. It was therefore important to acquire a well-developed technique of improvisation, and the exercises for developing this technique should above all lead the students to a spontaneous, personal, musical expression.

## FIRST PUBLICATIONS

In 1930 the first edition of Schulwerk called Rhythmic-Melodic Exercises appeared. Further books followed in quick succession: Exercises for Percussion and Hand Drums; Exercises for Timpani; Exercises for Barred Percussion Instruments; Exercises for Recorders; and Dances and Instrumental Pieces for Different Instruments. From the beginning my pupil and colleague Gunild Keetman played a decisive part in the establishment of the instrumental ensemble and in the preparation of all publications. My assistants at the Guenterschule at that time, Hans Bergese and Wilhelm Twittenhoff, were also involved. In addition to, and as a result of, these educational enterprises the Guenterschule dance group came into being with its accompanying orchestra, for which Gunild Keetman wrote the music and Maja Lex worked out the choreography. At their performance, dancers and musicians were able to exchange their functions. To give some idea of the wide-ranging variety of the dance orchestra here is a typical combination: Recorders, xylophones of all pitch ranges, metallophones, glockenspiels, timpani both large and small, all kinds of drums and tom-toms, gongs, different kinds of cymbals, triangles, bells of fixed pitch, antique cymbals (Indian bells), and claves, and also viola da gambas, spinet and portable organ. The dance group toured all the year round in Germany and abroad, and attracted much attention. In addition there were educational demonstrations that contributed significantly to the spreading of the Schulwerk idea.

Already in 1931 I had meant to make use of my experiences at the Guntherschule for the musical education of children, and in 1932 Schott's issued an advance notice of forthcoming publications called "*Orff-Schulwerk—Music for Children, Music by Children—Folksongs*". These books were never printed, nor was Kestenbergs able to carry out his plans to introduce Schulwerk in a big way into Berlin primary schools, and he was in fact soon removed from office. The political wave swept away all the ideas developed in Schulwerk as undesirable, and all kinds of misconceptions survived, like flotsam, to lead a meagre existence right up to the present day. In the course of events the Guenterschule in Munich was completely destroyed and burnt out, which meant the loss of most of the instruments. The school was not rebuilt and the times were different. I had turned away completely from educational work and was waiting, quite unconsciously, for a new call.

## A NEW BEGINNING

This came quite literally, in 1948, when I received a telephone call from the Bavarian Radio. The question I was asked was: "Can you write music of this kind for children that children could play themselves? We believe that this kind of music appeals especially to them and we are thinking of a series of broadcasts."

At the time I was working on my score of *Antigone* and my thoughts had turned away from all educational considerations. Nevertheless the offer attracted me as it opened up quite new problems, and would mean a continuation of my experiments that had been so suddenly interrupted. As I have already said, the instruments at the Guenterschule had nearly all been destroyed, and the times were so bad that the raw materials for a new set

were quite unobtainable. Apart from the missing instruments, there were other far more weighty problems to be considered. Schulwerk had formerly been used for teachers in physical education— that is, for those who were more or less adult—and would not have been suitable for children in its original form. I was well aware that rhythmic training should not start after adolescence but during the first school years and even earlier. Here was yet another opportunity for experiment.

The unity of music and movement, that young people in Germany have to be taught so laboriously, is quite natural to a child. This fact gave me the key for my new educational work. It was also clear to me what Schulwerk had so far lacked. Apart from a few painful experiments, we have never allowed the singing voice and the spoken word their rightful place. Now the call, the rhyme, the word, the song were the decisive factors, for with children it could not have been otherwise. Movement, singing and playing became a unity. I would not have undertaken to write some "children's pieces" for the radio in addition to the work I was already doing, but the idea of a new musical education suitable for children fascinated me. I therefore decided to accept the commission from the Bavarian Radio and to carry it out in my own way.

Now everything fell quite naturally into its right place; elementary music, elementary speech and movement forms. What is elementary? The word in its Latin form *elementarius* means: Pertaining to the elements, primeval, rudimentary, treating of first principles. What then is elementary music? Elementary music is never music alone but forms a unity with movement, dance and speech. It is music that one makes oneself, in which one takes part not as a listener but as a participant. It is unsophisticated, employs no big forms and no big architectural structures, and it uses small sequence forms, *ostinato* and *rondo*. Elementary music is near the earth, natural, physical, within the range of everyone to learn it and to experience it, and suitable for the child. With an experienced teacher, Rudolf Kirmeyer, Gunild Keetman and I began to work out the first radio programs; and thus the new Schulwerk grew out of the work for and with children. The melodic starting-point was the cuckoo-call, the falling third, a melodic range of notes that was increased step by step to the five-note pentatonic scale that has no semitones. Speech started with name-calling, counting out rhymes and the simplest of children's rhymes and songs. This was an easily accessible world for all children. I did not think of an education for specially gifted children but of one of the broadest foundations in which moderately and less gifted children could also take part. My experience had taught me that completely unmusical children are very rare, and that nearly every child is at some point accessible and educable; but some teachers' ineptitude has often, through ignorance, nipped musicianship in the bud, repressed the gifted, and caused other disasters.

### BROADCAST EXPERIMENT

We began our broadcasts in the autumn of 1948 with unprepared school children from about eight to twelve years and with the remains of the instruments from the Guenterschule. The children took to these instruments with great enthusiasm—and their enthusiasm infected those who were listening in. It was soon clear that the few broadcasts we had planned were not going to be enough, and that here was an embryonic cell that held possibilities of development that were as yet unimaginable. A big response quite beyond our expectations came from the schools; the children had

been stimulated and wanted to make music in this way themselves, and the question was being continually asked: "Where can we get the instruments?" At this point Klaus Becker, a young instrument maker who had worked under Karl Maendler, stepped into the breach and made the first pitched percussion instruments as best he could with the materials that were then available. The very next year, as the difficulties of obtaining the best materials lessened, he was able to start his musical instrument factory, Studio 49. And here, in collaboration with me, he has continued the development of instruments.

### WIDENING INTEREST

After some experimental courses with children at the Mozarteum, Dr. Eberhard Preussner, the director, invited Gunild Keetman to join the staff as teacher for Schulwerk. In the autumn of 1951 she started children's classes there and was now able to include movement, which had not been possible in the broadcasts. For the first time Schulwerk could be taught in its fullest as we had always visualized it.

At the many demonstrations that took place during the various educational conferences at Salzburg foreign visitors also became acquainted with Schulwerk. In this way I again met Dr. Arnold Walter and he was the first to have the idea of transplanting this work to Canada. At his suggestion Doreen Hall studied with Gunild Keetman in Salzburg and on her return to Canada built up Schulwerk there with excellent results. In the same way Daniel Hellden, after studying in Salzburg, returned to his homeland, Sweden, and started Schulwerk there, and Gunild Keetman's assistant, the Danish Minna Lange, brought Schulwerk to Copenhagen. In quick succession it was introduced into Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, England, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Spain, Latin America, Turkey, Israel, the United States and Greece. The Schulwerk broadcasts that were sent out to many foreign broadcasting stations were particularly helpful in preparing the ground. I next became involved in translating and adapting the original "*Music for Children*" into other languages. Obviously it was not a case merely of translation, but rather of a new Schulwerk interpretation of the respective indigenous children's songs and rhymes. So the various new editions appeared; first the Canadian, followed by editions in Swedish, Flemish, Danish, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. All these editions, which were within the field of Western culture, were only variations of the original.

When Japan showed interest a new problem was introduced: To what extent could Schulwerk be built into an Eastern culture with its different origins and outlook? In 1953 Professor Nachiro Fukui, Director of the Musashino Music Academy in Tokyo, saw a Schulwerk demonstration in Salzburg. Then, with the aid of the Schulwerk books, films and recordings, he began to develop this work in Japan. In 1962 I made a lecture and study tour of Japan with Gunild Keetman and we were then able to see how spontaneously the Japanese children reacted to Schulwerk, how open-minded the teachers were, and how naturally the elementary style fitted into this foreign music culture.

### THE ORFF INSTITUTE

To return to Europe: After having written the five volumes of Schulwerk, made two gramophone records and one film, I thought I would be able to consider my educational work completed. But the continuous spread of Schulwerk, the editing of new editions, and the additions of new aspects,

such as the medical one, brought me incessant, unforeseen work. The ever-increasing questions, particularly from abroad, as to where an authentic training in Schulwerk could be obtained, and the knowledge that Schulwerk was being amateurishly and falsely interpreted, convinced me of the necessity of founding some kind of training center. Mistaken interpretations and the nonsensical misuse of the instruments threatened in many places to turn the whole meaning of Schulwerk into the very opposite of what had been intended. I therefore felt obliged to intervene personally. Again, it was Dr. Preussner, at the Mozarteum Academy of Music and Drama in Salzburg, who offered me the appropriate solution; and at this point special mention must be made of the generous support given by the Austrian Government. Now that Schulwerk has its own institute, the Orff Institute, dedicated exclusively to the work of Schulwerk and its development, here is at last a central meeting point for all interested parties, both teachers and students from at home and abroad, and, above all, here is the special training center for Schulwerk teachers that has so often been demanded in the past.

This is not the time or place to speak of the increasing importance of Schulwerk in all therapeutic work. It is continually being mentioned in the relevant journals. It can only be said that Schulwerk with its instruments is being widely used in work with the blind, the deaf and the dumb; in speech therapy, in schools for mentally retarded children, for all forms of neurosis, and as an occupational therapy in the most varied kinds of sanatoriums. In recent years much has been written about Schulwerk both at home and abroad, and it is cited in practically every educational work concerned with music. There are, however, many "continuations," "completions," "improvements," "elaborations," and school song books "written along Orff-Schulwerk lines," amongst others, which amount to much chaff and very little good grain. The so-called "Orff instruments" are being used in many schools today, but it would be a mistake to conclude that Schulwerk has a solid foundation in all these schools. The instruments are often used in a completely misunderstood way, and thereby do more harm than good.

Year in, year out, many Schulwerk courses are given for teachers of all kinds. Schulwerk is taught alongside other subjects in various schools of music, in schools for gymnastics and dance, and in private courses. Useful as all these efforts may be, they do not alter the fact that Schulwerk has not yet found the place where it belongs, the place where it can be most effective and where there is the possibility of continuous and progressive work, and where its connections with other subjects can be explored, developed and fully exploited. This place is in the school. "*Music for Children*" is for the school.

Because I do not wish to speak technically about all the questions of educational reform that are being discussed so much in all parts of the world today, I should like to express my thoughts in an untechnical way that should be easy to understand. For this we must return again to Nature. Elementary music, word and movement, play, everything that awakens and develops the powers of the spirit, this is the "humus" of the spirit, the humus without which we face the danger of a spiritual erosion.

When does erosion occur in Nature? When the land is wrongly exploited; for instance, when the natural water supply is disturbed through too much cultivation, or when for utilitarian reasons, forests and hedges fall as victims of drawing-board mentality; in short, when the balance of nature is lost by interference. In the same way I would like to repeat: Man exposes himself to

spiritual erosion if he estranges himself from his elementary essentials and thus loses his balance.

Just as humus in nature makes growth possible, so elementary music gives to the child powers that cannot otherwise come to fruition. It must therefore be stressed that elementary music in the primary school should not be installed as a subsidiary subject, but as something fundamental to all other subjects. It is not exclusively a question of musical education; this can follow, but it does not have to. It is, rather, a question of developing the whole personality. This surpasses by far the aims of the so-called music and singing lessons found in the usual curriculum. It is at the primary school age that the imagination must be stimulated; and opportunities for emotional development, which contains experience of the ability to feel, and the power to control the expression of that feeling, must also be provided. Everything that a child of this age experiences, everything in him that has been awakened and nurtured is a determining factor for the whole of his life. Much can be destroyed at this age that can never be regained; much can remain undeveloped that can never be reclaimed. It worries me profoundly to know that today there are still schools where no songs are sung, and many others with very defective music teaching.

The challenge is clear. Elementary music has to be included in the training of teachers as a central subject, not as one amongst other subjects; the realization of this aim and its effect on schools will take some decades. I have discussed this challenge in detail with leading authorities in education here and abroad, and have tested the possibilities of its execution. We can now proceed along this path, but we have a long way to go. Everyone can learn elementary music, but those who want to teach, especially those in primary schools, must learn it unconditionally. Those who cannot understand elementary music, and to whom it is alien, cannot be teachers of the young since essential qualifications are missing. Only when primary schools have laid the foundations can the secondary schools build up a successful musical education. The means for educating teachers are already at hand in Schulwerk. In some isolated cases people are already working successfully along these lines within the normal school framework, but the general and urgently necessary change of direction can come only with a mandate from the highest authority.

Though here in this Institute we continue to work, collect experiences and make experiments, the Schulwerk complex is complete and proven, so that one has to accept it as a fact. The structure of Schulwerk, however, is such that the existing material can be developed in many ways. In all modesty, but with emphasis, I would like to conclude with Schiller: "Ich habe das Meinige gethan . . ."\*

\* Translator's note: Schiller's Don Carlos ends with the words by King Philip: "Ich habe das Meinige gethan. Thun Sie das Ihre. I have done my part. Now do yours." Copied from "*Music in Education*" September/October 1964

This speech, given by Professor Dr. Carl Orff at the opening of the Orff Institute in Salzburg on the 25th of October, 1963, is published by kind permission of B. Schotts Soehne, Mainz, from the Orff Institute Jahrbuch 1963. The translation is by Margaret Murray.