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New musical reality and contemporary education: curricular development and methodological strategies at European conservatories (focus on Music Theater, Interdisciplinary art, Vocal studies and Opera)

In this article I explore the needs and challenges for music education in relation to the changing reality of the music world with particular focus on opera, music theatre and interdisciplinary art. I give an overview of several innovative curricular development strategies at different European schools.

The music reality which underpins the classical musical education differs greatly from the contemporary situation. The differences are apparent in the musical expression, not only in the great variety of styles and genres, but also in the variety of conceptual approaches, technologies and forms of production. Hence, a wider range of musical specialisations are required in the creation and production of music theatre. Composers, singers, instrumentalists, directors, actors, visual artists and computer programmers need to be primed with a thorough understanding of current and innovative practices.

When we compare music from the XIX and beginning of the XX centuries to the post war era (ca. from 1950), the most significant change is the democratisation of the music scene. This entails: new ways of expressions, alternative forms of production, broad access to financial support. All this today results in a cultural landscape in Europe that is marked by a pluralism of expression, musical means and institutions. Parallel to the traditional orchestras, opera and concert houses, a growing number of contemporary ensembles, independent music /dance / theatre groups, interdisciplinary art platforms, each with very different artistic and economic strategies are influencing the production of music. This scene operates with its own set of dynamics - often more personal and swift - compared to the traditional formations - and this too requires new competences from the musicians in terms of communication and networking.

The task of the educational institutions today is to respond to all these changes and support students with adequate strategies. Next to the traditional competences such as mastering voice/instrument techniques, which are covered by the classical education or classical theoretical subjects, the new musical reality requires mastering extended vocal and instrumental techniques, a solid understanding of modern musical notation, a developed confidence in the creativity of the performer, the ability to understand / use technology, a broad cultural awareness, a willingness to collaborate, an aptitude to communicate and manage one's own career.

The traditional music education is based on the clear objectives: mastering the traditional repertoire. Crucially important are: a readiness to perform specific roles in an opera for the singers, well prepared orchestral parts for instrumentalists, classical orchestration skills for composers, etc. The efficiency of this type of education is based on a specific functionality which is best achieved in a linear progression throughout the academic studies. This process methodology based on repetition is not the best suited however to prepare students for contemporary music reality. The new methodologies (such as project related education, creative incubators, etc.) and new subjects (such as notation of contemporary music, new media skills) are often missing in the curricula of today's music education institutions.

The largest European project studying subjects related to higher music education, Erasmus Network for Music "Polifonia" (INVITE Working Group), has analysed descriptions of national systems for education in Europe; learning outcomes, recent changes and challenges in the music profession. Even if the focus is on instrumental/vocal teacher education, the 'Polifonia' project has a much greater reach and contributes significantly to the debate on methodology and curriculum development.

These are some of the insights from the Polifonia handbook "Instrumental and vocal teacher education: European perspectives" (1):

Student - centered education

the focus of the pedagogical discourse should shift from the teacher to the student, from the musical product to musical processes and from teaching to learning; increasing emphasis on developing the complete musician.

Student as a reflective practitioner

The rapidly changing environment makes it difficult to prepare instrumental/vocal education students with prescriptive instructions for all occasions and contexts. Instead, instrumental/vocal teacher education programmes should help students to learn to become reflective practitioners who are able to adapt their teaching according to the changing circumstances and needs of different pupils.

Student's autonomy

There is a greater emphasis on more creative approaches, on developing student autonomy, on teaching students how to learn. Learning is seen in terms of developing ways of musical thinking rather than merely the acquisition of specific skills. Generally, the student's musical experience is no longer limited to the individual lesson with the individual teacher, and many young instrumentalists engage in a range of group learning contexts related to their instrument and to developing their general musicianship. (...)

The teacher is regarded as facilitator and guide rather than as 'instructor'.

One-to-one tuition vs. group work

One-to-one tuition is often bound to a curriculum, approached in a systematic way and focuses on the different aspects of learning an instrument. These include the development of instrumental technique, knowledge of the repertoire, performance skills and knowledge of music theory and history.

Group tuition enables a holistic form of musical learning, integrating theoretical notions, technical matters, social interaction and musicianship in a single musical activity. It implies also a wider range of possibilities concerning repertoire and forms of musical interaction, thus encouraging fulfilling music making, peer learning, student involvement and motivation. Furthermore, group contexts represent a particularly convenient environment for the development of autonomy and creativity.

One-to-one and group tuition should not be seen in terms of polarities, but rather as complementary settings. Teachers might focus on one or the other, use them as options for particular targets and goals, or develop flexible systems in which the different settings play different roles in the process of music learning.

Theory supported by praxis

This division belies the important connection and interaction between theory and practice. Without this connection theory can lose its relevance to real working life situations and equally, practical situations need to be reflected upon, studied and questioned. Establishing a real relationship between reflection and practice could be challenging in courses where these activities are

approached separately, especially if we consider that theoretical thinking is in itself a practice and that practice always involves an implicit or explicit theory.

curriculum design as integrated approach

As was referred to earlier, output oriented curriculum design requires an integrated approach where courses, traditionally grouped in instrumental/vocal teacher education according to certain core areas (e.g. performance, music theory, pedagogy, supporting academic subjects), are no longer regarded as separate and discrete areas of knowledge, but seen as elements in a holistic learning process which will equip students with the competences necessary to function successfully within the instrumental/vocal teaching profession.

The embedding of informal learning

The embedding of informal learning within the formal context of higher education might be perceived as a paradoxical task, and entail a wide range of organisational challenges, but it is certainly an issue in which conservatoires need to become increasingly engaged.

Curriculum development can be seen as a collaborative process

Curriculum development can be seen as a collaborative process involving all staff teaching on a programme and requires good teamwork and pedagogical skills on the part of all the teachers, as well as an ability to make connections between and across the various courses being offered. Collaboration is called for in identifying and defining course content, teaching methods and assessment procedures. An integrated curriculum implies a pedagogical team elaborating and implementing the syllabus together, presenting a coherent study programme, accommodating the needs of students, allowing for personalised learning and helping students to organise their own learning. The elaboration of the curriculum is permanently reworked according to changing circumstances, new opportunities, specific needs, and commonly agreed goals. Interdisciplinary activities and theoretical discussions linked with practical implementations are part of the process. The process can also include ongoing input, as suggested above, from students, alumni, community groups and representatives from the wider music profession. It is important to point out also that the process is not only a reactive one, but is also proactive in creating futures for instrumental/vocal teacher education.

Extending the traditional boundaries of the music profession

There are many ways to learn about music which are not necessarily confined within the boundaries of music classrooms: people learn about music through spontaneous meetings with fellow students and friends; develop musical skills in band rehearsals and performances; create electronic music and spread it all over the world through the Internet, etc. The instrumental/vocal teacher's work in such contexts might reach even beyond the traditional boundaries of the music profession, involving project management, fund raising, entrepreneurship, networking and advocacy.

These insights strongly correlate with observations of our working group during the practical ISP labs in the frame of the EOA.

About this research

My investigation of the curricular development at different European schools revolves around these two questions:

1. which methodologies do we need, to develop the necessary competences for music students to become adept players in today's music scene?
2. how do the European schools find the balance between new and traditional educational approaches and programs?

In this research I took samples from the curricula of 13 European conservatories in a broad geographical and cultural scope, and reviewed which of these qualify as trend makers. I also included our EOA partners - Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre and Conservatorium Maastricht. Unfortunately, the information on Porto's Superior School of Music and Performing Arts website is only in Portuguese language and therefore could not be compared. Not all schools publish their curricula online: this is the reason why such an important institution as the Conservatoire National Supérieur de musique et de Danse de Paris is not part of this research.

List of schools in this research:

- Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien
- The Royal Danish Academy of Music
- Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki
- Universität der Künste Berlin
- Hochschule für Musik und Theater München
- Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg
- Hochschule für Musik u. Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main
- Conservatorium van Amsterdam
- Oslo National Academy of the Arts, The Academy of Opera
- Hochschule für Musik Basel
- Royal Academy of Music- London
- Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LMTA)
- Conservatorium Maastricht

Research structure

Following objectives are taken as the filter for comparing the curricula:

- Student - centered education
- Student as a reflective practitioner
- Student's autonomy
- Group work
- Theory supported by praxis
- Curriculum design as integrated approach
- Extending the traditional boundaries of the music profession

This research shows some tendencies and helps to understand the strategies of European music conservatories, even though the list is incomplete, the sampled curricula indicate the current state of affairs.

The curricula of traditional subjects such as singing technique, acting and language courses, etc. appear to be similar in most of the schools, therefore they are not included in the comparison, except when they offer a praxis beyond the traditional scope.

Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien

<https://www.mdw.ac.at>

Observed: Master of Arts in Vocal Performance

Due to changing professional environments that have come to make high demands on operatic and concert performers alike, alternative career profiles are gaining in importance. Furthermore, a trend towards freelance work has been observable for several years now in the singing profession. The broad-based demands made by the areas in which singers work urgently necessitate that master's degree-level university training be made more flexible.

Increased attention must be paid to ensuring that singers who aim to perform in concerts and in operatic productions are comprehensively trained, while it is also necessary for singers-in-training to be equipped with additional practical qualifications in areas including operetta and musical theatre, professional choral singing, vocal ensemble work, mixed forms that include singing and language and/or bodily movement, etc.

New subjects / new competences in a free module

media expertise, contemporary music, introduction early music

The Royal Danish Academy of Music

Observed: Voice, The Opera academy

Teaching methodology

Individual teaching and, if relevant, class teaching in small groups. Parts of the teaching may take the form of project teaching.

New subjects / new competences in a free module

Entrepreneurship

Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki

www.uniarts.fi

Observed: Vocal Arts

As a master's student, you will acquire the extensive professional competence of a vocal artist in the main areas of classical vocal music. Depending on your interests, you can specialise either in voice pedagogy, oratorio music or lied and vocal chamber music and choose minor subjects and optional studies from the selection of the Sibelius Academy or the University's other academies:

Drama, Dance, Small-scale vocal music production;

The singer as an actor;

The singer as a dancer.

New subjects / new competences in a free module

Post-tonal music workshop

Introduction to writing and arranging music

Music of the 20th and 21st centuries

Project work / labs with students and teachers from different disciplines

Composition performance practicum: The Composition performance practicum is a working group that brings together students of composition on the one hand and of music performance on the other. Group members are required to write music for the group and to perform and study new

music from the perspective of a composer and a performer. Working methods also include improvisation, along with study and analysis of existing contemporary music.

School collaboration / integration with (external) partners

Deep integration with Institutions / programs such as the Academy of Fine Arts, Theater Academy and Sibelius Academy, Acting, Arts Management, Business in the creative field, Choreography, Comparative Dramaturgy And Performance Research (Double- Degree Master's Programme), Dance Performance, Design for the Performing Arts, Directing, Dramaturgy and Playwriting, Global music

Universität der Künste Berlin

www.udk-berlin.de

Observed: Vocal Arts / Opera

This study course offers vocally and musically gifted students an education which is in accordance with current standards for all-round vocalists, musicians and actors.

Extended subjects / new competences as part of the main curriculum

Interpretation of contemporary Lied

Artistic narration

New vocal literature and notation

New subjects / new competences in a free module

Next to the typical subjects the curriculum offers Modul 10 – Extended artistic praxis (contemporary music, contemporary vocal music, oratorio/concert, early music, vocal chamber music)

School collaboration / integration with (external) partners: lessons

KlangKunstBühne is a continuing education program offered by Berlin University of the Arts. It is aimed at all artistic disciplines. In courses lasting one week each, participants experience the possibilities of moving beyond the borders of their disciplines.

School collaboration / integration with external partners: projects

Art and Media, Art in Context, Costume Design, Creative Writing for the Stage, Design and Computation, Fine Arts, Musical/Show, Stage Design, Theatre Education/Drama, Sound Studies and Sonic Arts

Hochschule für Musik und Theater München

<https://www.hmtm.de>

Observed: Vocal Studies (BA), Concert/Art Song (BA). Liedgestaltung (MA)

Institut für künstlerische Gesangs- und Theaterausbildung (The Directing intensive course comprises a bachelor's and a masters study programme); Cooperation with the study programmes of the Theaterakademie (acting, music theater/opera performance, musical, wigs & make-up for stage and screen, dramaturgy, composition, scenography & stage design, culture criticism)

Extended subjects / new competences as part of the main curriculum

Acoustics / recordings, music mediation

Project work / labs with students and teachers from different disciplines

Workshops/Projects Contemporary music,

Workshops/Projects Old music

Collaboration / integration with external partners (projects)
Ballett-Akademie
Institut für Kulturmanagement und Medien

Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg

<https://www.hfmt-hamburg.de/start/>

Observed: Vocal Studies

School strategy:

Innovative Conservatory (Stage_2.0: Alsterphilharmonie): the Hamburg University of Music and Theater was able to assert itself in the nationwide funding competition Innovative University using the stage as a place of artistic knowledge transfer and social participation. As the only arts university in Germany, it is among the 48 sponsored universities that were selected in 19 individual and ten joint projects.

Extended subjects / new competences as part of the main curriculum

Notation software (Finale, Sibelius), Concert Lab 2022 (Entrepreneurship)

New subjects / new competences in a free module

Contemporary music (history of ideas), introduction in to the music technology, analysis of contemporary music, film music, Musikmobil, history of contemporary music, Online Marketing for Musicians, Sampling Video+Audio into a Filmkomposition.

Project work / labs with students and teachers from different disciplines

Innovation Lab: The Interdisciplinary Future Workshop.

In collaboration with various departments at the university, project-specific solutions are sought in order to implement new, interdisciplinary, interactive stage formats. The innovation laboratory sees itself as an incubator for innovative technical interfaces and new interdisciplinary stage concepts to support the interaction and cooperation of the various departments of the HfMT. Because the stage of the future bundles all the competencies available at the HfMT in order to benefit from the symbiosis and utilize synergy effects.

Collaboration / integration with external partners (projects)

Synergy in collaboration with: Operngesang, Directing Music theater, Regie Drama theater, Drama, Dramaturgy.

In more than 400 annual events, new artistic ideas and creative strategies are already being implemented, often as the result of research and learning processes. Numerous other project proposals with the participation of various departments of the HfMT are now becoming a reality: Transferbüro, Concert Lab, Dr. sc. mus., Innovationslabor, Forum: Stage_2.0, Elementare Musikpraxis International, KlangwerkStadt, Online-Lexikon der szenischen Künste, Moving Sound Pictures, Multifunktionsstudio, Online-Musikgeschichte der DDR, Die Musik Ostasiens, SPIIC, ZM4, Webcast.

Comment: the curriculum is quite traditional, but the school offers a very innovative approach for the project work.

Hochschule für Musik u. Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main

www.hfmdk-frankfurt.de

Observed: Vocal Studies

General subjects

Professional orientation, Marketing and Management

Project work / labs with students and teachers from different disciplines

Szeneprojekte der HfMDK, opera productions

School collaboration / integration

„Ensemble Modern“ Akademie, Institute for contemporary Music IzM, KunstPAKT, The artist's body, Audio- and video production, studio for electronic music, cooperation with the Goethe Institute and HfMDK.

Collaboration / integration with external partners

Choreographie und Performance

Contemporary Dance Education (MA CoDE)

Burgfestspiele Bad Vilbel

Comment: what makes this school stand out is a strong partner for contemporary music: „Ensemble Modern“ Akademie.

Conservatorium van Amsterdam

www.conservatoriumvanamsterdam.nl

Observed: Vocal Studies, Early Music, Opera

New subjects / new competences in a free module

historical performance, early music voice as a subsidiary subject, jazz voice as a subsidiary subject, possibly within the framework of methodology, ensemble conducting

General subjects

Professional orientation, Marketing and Management

School collaboration / integration with partners (lessons)

Students are given the chance to participate each year in masterclasses led by internationally renowned artists. Recent guest teachers include Margreet Honig, Dame Ann Murray, Nelly Miricioiu, Ira Siff, Alexander Oliver, Claron McFadden and many others

Collaboration / integration with external partners (projects)

Dutch National Opera Academy:

Voice students who have finished their bachelor's degree programme, have the possibility to study opera at the Dutch National Opera Academy, a joint effort undertaken by the Conservatorium van Amsterdam and the Koninklijk Conservatorium in The Hague.

Comment: quite unique is the opportunity for voice students to engage in ensemble conducting.

Oslo National Academy of the Arts, The Academy of Opera

www.khio.no

Observed: Academy of Opera (MA)

Featuring world-class educators and stage facilities, the Academy combines individual, group and project-based training. Stage productions and concerts represent important milestones under way in the programme. At the Academy, students are allowed to work with professional directors and conductors and a full team of stagehands. This provides students with a versatile, practical education and a solid foundation for becoming professional opera singers both in Norway and abroad.

Many of the courses are process-oriented

Collaboration / integration with external partners

Academy of Dance

Academy of Opera

Academy of Theater Design art and Craft

Academy of Fine Art

Comment: many of the courses are process-oriented and, interestingly, more credits are given to the projects than to vocal training.

Overview of all the courses, with ECTS credits:

Year	Code	Course name	ECTS credits
1	OP401	Vocal Training	10
1	OP402	Coaching	10
1	OP403	Physical and Mental Training for Stage Performers	10
1	OP404	Acting	10
1	OP405	Stage Work and Productions	15
1	OP406	Language	5
Total ECTS credits, year 1			60

Hochschule für Musik Basel

<https://www.fhnw.ch/de/die-fhnw/hochschulen/musik/klassik>

Observed: Master in Solo performance, Contemporary music, Improvisation / open creative processes

School strategy

New Music is central to both teach and research at the Academy of Music. The Academy has an electronic studio, two ensembles – Diagonale and zone expérimentale – and two specialised Master's programmes in the performance of contemporary music and free improvisation.

New subjects / new competences in a free module

New Chamber Music

Project work / labs with students and teachers from different disciplines

Improvisation / open creative processes:

Instruction and self-study take place both individually and in the group. Regular public performances allow students to gain stage experience. In addition, projects in various formats are co-developed with other sonic space Basel study courses including performance in contemporary

music, composition, and audio design and are performed at national and international festivals. According to their personal interests, students also explore artistic work at interfaces to other media (e.g. dance, theatre, film, literature, installation).

Collaboration / integration with external partners (projects)

The Academy of Music teaching staff, students and study programmes all benefit from the close links between the institute and the Musik Akademie Basel, the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis and its Music School, the Jazz Institute and the University of Basel.

The Academy of Music is an integral part of the dynamic and vibrant Basel music scene. Thanks to the School's excellent connections, its students are able to acquire valuable experience working on larger projects with the likes of the Theater Basel, the Gare du Nord, the Phoenix Ensemble and the Basel Orchestras.

Royal Academy of Music- London

www.ram.ac.uk

Observed: Vocal Studies, performance classes, Opera, Open Academy, Musical Theater.

Methodology

The classes provide a bridge between one-to-one tuition, masterclasses, and concert performances.

Opera

The two-year postgraduate course, which includes invaluable performance experience, is for exceptionally talented singers with the potential and aspiration to succeed as principals at the highest levels.

Our highly focused study environment includes one-to-one tuition, group classes and opera scenes, as well as three fully staged productions per year, which are regularly attended by representatives from opera companies, artist agencies and the national press.

Open Academy

Open Academy is the Academy's learning, participation and community initiative, working with more than 6,000 people beyond our enrolled students and staff each year.

Open Academy electives at undergraduate and postgraduate level are available to all students, offering seminars and workshops alongside hands-on experience in the field. Open Academy also offers fellowships to graduating students who will be the future leaders of this work.

Open Academy works closely with artistic and community partners, offering opportunities for students and project participants to explore making music together.

Musical Theater

The Musical Theatre Department functions as a theatre company. Our day-to-day acting, voice, speech and movement tuition is taught by current practitioners, offering a direct link to the industry, with projects and masterclasses being led by top professionals. Opportunities to perform throughout the year are a priority, enabling students to learn by doing.

Collaboration / integration with external partners (projects)

Artistic partners include: Wigmore Hall, Glyndebourne, English National Opera, English Touring Opera, Spitalfields Music.

Community partners include: Camden Music Hub, Tri-borough Music Hub, Resonate Arts, Royal London Hospital, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, City Lit, Awards for Young Musicians, IntoUniversity

Comment: the BA curriculum is quite traditional, but the master students have the opportunity to focus on performance classes.

Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LMTA)

www.lmta.lt

Observed: Vocal Studies

Extended subjects / new competences as part of the main curriculum

Language of Music (the 20th Century), Alternatives of Music History

General subjects

Philosophy, Aesthetics

Collaboration / integration with partners

Faculty of Music, Faculty of Theatre and Film (also includes art management), contemporary music (composition, electronic composition, music production)

Comment: LMTA has affiliated Theatre and Film faculties, a well developed composition department and a master program for contemporary performance. However, there is no structured synergy or cooperation between these entities, neither in the form of curriculum nor in project activities.

Conservatorium Maastricht

<https://www.conservatoriummaastricht.nl>

Observed: Vocal Studies (BA)

Extended subjects / new competences as part of the main curriculum

Basic Digital Tools, Studio Recording Preparation, Creative Lab

General subjects

Your Art as a Business

comment: conservatory of Maastricht makes a part of the ZUYD

Master Vocal Studies & Master opera: no information about the curriculum online.

Comment: The ZUYD University of Applied Sciences contains a music and theater school, as well as: interdisciplinary arts, design and fine arts. Unfortunately no collaborations between them or curricular cross-over is currently being explored.

Conclusion

This overview shows that the classical one-to-one tuition is more or less uniform in all schools. What differentiate the Institutions is how much flexibility the school gives to the students to adopt their curriculum, what / how many innovative subjects are offered and how wide the network of internal / external partners is, in order to create the necessary interdisciplinary projects.

Some questions that arise: are all the partners listed on the website actively involved in creative project work? Does the school facilitate these collaborations? Is there enough openness from the teacher to allow different points of view? What are the financial possibilities? A long list of partners on the website does not automatically mean: many projects.

A handful of institutions stand out.

The Sibelius Academy, the Universität der Künste Berlin and the Hochschule für Musik und Theater München all have these features:

- the curriculum of classical vocal training is united with new subjects related to the contemporary music scene;
- extensive collaborations with local external partners is guaranteed;
- creative labs are credited as part of the curriculum.

The Hochschule für Musik und Theater München offers a classical curriculum but is very strong with its innovative approaches regarding the projects and it has an extensive list of partners.

The Hochschule für Musik u. Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main and the Hochschule für Musik Basel are very strong in contemporary music. The question arises if there is a synergy between singing and instrumental departments.

An interesting addition for the curriculum of the singing students in Amsterdam is Ensemble Conducting.

The main focus of the Oslo National Academy of the Arts / The Academy of Opera is on project work: many of the courses are process-oriented and, interestingly, more credits are given for the projects than for vocal training.

Both, the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre (LMTA) and the Maastricht conservatory, can do more to encourage interdisciplinary projects and specifically projects with affiliated departments.

Appendix

1. "Instrumental and vocal teacher education: European perspectives polifonia working group for instrumental and vocal music teacher training"

The group consists of the following experts:

Kaarlo Hildén / Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki

Natalia Ardila-Mantilla / Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien, Vienna

Thomas Bolliger / Haute Ecole de Musique Genève HEM GE and Conservatoire de Lausanne Haute
Ecole de Musique CdL HEM

Jean-Charles François / Cefedem Rhône-Alpes, Lyon

Mary Lennon / DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, Dublin

Geoffrey Reed / Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester

Tine Stolte / Prince Claus Conservatoire, Groningen

Terrell Stone / Conservatorio di Musica di Vicenza "Arrigo Pedrollo", Vicenza

AEC Publications 2010, Handbook

<https://aec-music.eu/publication/aec-handbook-instrumental-vocal-teacher-education-european-perspectives/>