

The Netherlands, à la Guildhall, 2002

Guildhall is a music project based on a holistic approach to music originating from the Tanzanian NGOMA. The project was initiated by the Utrecht Centre of the Arts (Utrechts Centrum voor de Kunsten - UCK).

Background

The project has its roots in the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. The school's contact with Tanzania resulted in it adopting the 'NGOMA' concept. NGOMA stands for a holistic artistic experience in which music, dance, voice, theatre, stories and rituals are inextricably connected. Guided by this principle, the Guildhall School has a small department that carries out projects in primary and secondary schools in London.

Inspired by the London approach, those in Utrecht went looking for possibilities to translate the methodology into suitable applications for the Utrecht situation.

Concept

The underlying ideas of Guildhall are illustrated nicely by the following verse by Kenneth Patchen:

I listen with my heart
I speak with my hands
I look with my ears
I feel
I play

The Guildhall approach is highly suited to participants who have had little exposure to music making. It is based on developing skills that promote music education, characterised by a low threshold and high enthusiasm. The basic idea is 'instant music', using mind, heart and hands. Participants enjoy movement, singing and making noise, all of which provide the perfect foundation for making music. Guildhall is also an interdisciplinary method that uses movement, theatre and language to stimulate the musical experience. Movement is the most powerful way of communicating rhythm and making it palpable and is also an excellent means of teaching. The instruments used, most of which are percussive, are appealing and non-intimidating. Learning occurs on an auditive level, without participants reading notes.

Instructors offer structure, while also allowing room for individual contributions. Children respond well when listened to and this, in turn, serves as way to relate to the children's realm of experience. In order to stimulate this, an informal, relaxed atmosphere is essential. The group must be prepared to listen, wait, accept constructive criticism and work together. Therefore, instructors must pay attention to social skills in addition to offering a certain degree of structure.

The Utrecht variation experimented with a 'chain offer'. This is an activity offered during school hours which may be continued in the student's free time. Three consecutive projects strive to complete the trajectory between orientation and a concrete product.

Objectives

The project aims to develop concepts to respond to needs that art education perceives in a multicultural society.

Description

Guildhall is intended for participants between the ages of 5 and 18. The group's musical level is secondary. The main concern is that the children are able to demonstrate the previously mentioned social skills.

Each lesson or workshop starts with a warm-up:

- Physical exercises help warm up body and voice;
- Processes are initiated to teach cooperation, such as listening to one another and taking turns;
- Forms of communication are taught in a playful way by showing and imitating movements and sounds;
- Activities normally considered scary or intimidating are played around with; and
- Improvisational urges are encouraged.

The entire lesson is auditive. Instrumental parts are taught that are easy to play on their own and create a pleasing and sometimes complex result when played together. The pieces also offer an opportunity to add personal variations and improvisation. As a finishing touch, attention is paid to structure and presentation. In conclusion, the music is presented and evaluated to some degree.

Organisation

The UCK worked closely with the Utrecht Art College's Music Department (HKU) to translate the London approach into appealing content and variations suited to Utrecht. The cooperative effort resulted in a cross-pollination in which each institute's strengths were applied, with the College handling the training aspect and the UCK taking care of practical implementation. A project group was appointed to oversee project organisation.

Products & Evaluation

This project resulted in a booklet and CD with text and sound excerpts appropriate for use in the lessons. The CD is also intended to serve as inspiration and can be used to develop new material. In addition, the product gives an impression of the possibilities afforded by the project. An overwhelming majority of projects have generated enthusiastic responses. One conclusion derived from the project is that making music can be enriched by other artistic disciplines. Although that may not seem like breaking news, the fact is that good Guildhall teachers are few and far between. Logically, the next step would therefore be to educate musicians who have an affinity with the method.

Literature & Information

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