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SfE newsletter

Music education must be an interactive, holistic and creative process.

For the first time since the kick-off of Songs for Europe in September 2020, two project partners finally managed to meet in person at Detva, Slovakia: five members of Superar Slovakia and two from wirth music academy, Austria. Our partners from House of Good Tones in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, could not join us because of Covid-19 restrictions. As for El Sistema Greece, the date was too close to their first scheduled concert after a year in Athens and due to the Covid-19 protocols, they weren't able to safely combine both events. Both partners were connected via live stream for the teaching sessions and via Zoom for the follow-up discussion. Even for Austrians it was everything but clear whether everything would work out. Regulations kept changing but, in the end, everything went well. With all participants vaccinated and tested, with FFP2 masks and the required distances, we made it happen and it was a worthwhile effort!

On May 24th, we met at Masarykov Dvor to take care of the last details and on the 25th, we were welcomed by the Director of the "Primary School A Vagac in Detva" Ms. Margita Gajdosova. This school was not a random choice— Superar Slovakia has been actively working there since 2015, as this is a school with a high concentration of children from disadvantaged families. Despite that fact, school academic performance ratings are the best in the Detva region. High-quality music education is accessible to all children in this school – 2 lessons weekly in the curriculum for all classes in grades 1-5, and additional 2 lessons in weekly after-school program.



Ms. Gajdosova and the children participating in the workshop showed their appreciation for quality music education. This school is a positive example of its integrating effect and the positive impact on the academic performance of children.

The first session was delivered by Olga Budinska and Zdenka Fekiacova Skrutekova – "native" Superar Slovakia teachers from Detva. In their lesson, they led a class of Year 3 children (7-8 years) who sang, among others, the song Από ξένο τόπο (Apo xeno topo) from the Greek Repertoire on the Songs for Europe website – in Turkish (Üsküdar) and one song from the Austrian Repertoire (Let us sing together). (www.songsforeurope.eu/library)



© Songs for Europe. Olga Budinska and her Year 2 pupils

After a short break, the session with Tomas Boros and Eva Suskova followed, supported by Ivan Siler who met the Year 4 children (8-9) for the very first time. They demonstrated the original music education method developed during 2019-2020 by Tomas Boros with intensive testing and feedback from Superar Slovakia music teachers.

Months & Numbers - new original music education methodology developed by Superar Slovakia was showcased in the SfE workshop in Detva

Complex while wonderfully natural and welcoming – that is the most accurate way to describe the new methodic by Tomas Boros named Months and Numbers. It builds on simple rhythmic and melodic models and connects them with speech (names of months and numbers) and movement. When everything adds up together, children have a composition in their hands. It feels like play and children – not aware of it – grasp and start using all areas of music. The methodic is easy to integrate into music lessons, yet versatile enough to modify. Teachers can adapt the exercises and songs to their students' age and to their level of music knowledge as well. Moreover, the author himself would be most satisfied if the ones using Months and Numbers would alter his material as creatively as possible. After all, the goal is for children to learn to make their own music and work with music autonomously, without the instruction of their teachers.

The methodology titled Months & Numbers will be published in Slovak during the second half of 2021 with other language versions likely to follow.



Superar Slovakia. First presentation of Months & Numbers methodology to Superar SK teachers - by its author Tomas Boros in August 2020

For the third session, it was Gerald Wirth's turn to sing with the children using as few words as possible and the wirth method to bring out their full potential in an effective and enjoyable way as far as this is possible in a single 45min rehearsal.



© Songs for Europe. Gerald Wirth working with the children, Superar teachers watching, El Sistema Greece and House of Good Tones connected via live stream.

The wirth method

The wirth method combines best practice of traditional music teaching and develops it further, defining specific contents and elements essential for highest standards. These are taught using a set of conveying pillars, applying adequate tools to meet classroom situations.

While music lessons still need to be prepared, the wirth method introduces highly flexible and readily available ways of reacting to students' triggers, lack of attention and other challenges.

Singing and performing from the very beginning are at the core of the wirth method. It aims at keeping the children's attention at the highest level through a constant interaction between the teacher and the pupils. Children learn to cooperate for a better result. The happiness achieved through success from the very start leaves an inestimable impact on the children.

Skills acquired through excellent music teaching are applicable to all other subjects and will thus create a change in education. (www.songsforeurope.eu/wirth-method)

Due to unforeseeable logistical issues the sessions could not be recorded and analyzed by smART (Systemic Music Analytics Response for Teachers). Nevertheless, it was important to see in person the diverse pedagogical approaches of each teaching musician and especially the following discussions and peer exchange, which were of a completely different quality than via Zoom. Live conversation and discussion happen naturally whereas engagement and discussion through ZOOM seem still difficult, especially if the participants have not met yet.

The school kindly invited the whole group for lunch in the school canteen. After the lunch, the prominent Slovak journalist Oliver Rehak (Musicology expert by his academic training) interviewed Gerald Wirth for the national daily newspaper Dennik N, preparing a big article about the importance of accessible, quality music education in primary schools.

Later in the afternoon, a Zoom Meeting with all the partners was scheduled to listen to Tomas Boros's presentation of his method and to discuss the morning sessions.

A big THANK YOU to Marek Kapusta for the perfect organization of the workshop and his kind support with the travel arrangements which were not easy in the current situation.

In the meantime, smART currently undergoes technical tests in Vienna, to determine whether it works when children sing with masks, as was required in the case of Slovakia.

We are very much looking forward to the next scheduled Workshop in Athens in early November and do hope that the Covid-19 situation will allow it, with full partners participation!

Thank You,

The SfE team

Partners

