AUSTRALIANS AT THE KODÁLY INSTITUTE

by Aleta King

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Introduction

Whilst a choral conducting and musicianship student at the Kodály Institute in Hungary (2002-04), a chance discovery of the Institute's archive listing of all Australians who are past students of the Kodály Institute prompted the author's curiosity about the reasons why so many other Australians have been inspired to make a similar journey to Hungary.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the motivating reasons for Australians to pursue studies at the Kodály Institute, Hungary, reflect on the nature of these unique experiences whilst in Hungary and reflect on the effect these unique experiences may have had on them personally upon returning to Australia.

Research design

This study was constructed in broadly qualitative terms and the nature of the topic dictated certain methodological approaches, specifically questionnaire and interview techniques. However, in order to form a more holistic picture, participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences from a number of perspectives and in this sense, this study incorporated elements of ethnography. Given the core importance of music and of participants' musical experiences, it is also important to acknowledge the methodological role of musicology and ethnomusicology. This approach requires the gathering of information from participants on a range of topics in order to gain a richer perspective on both motivating reasons as well as the experience of study itself. Similar eclectic approaches are evident in the work of Bresler (1995), Goetze & LeCompte (1984), Merriam (1964) and Wolcott (1988).

While the primary purpose of this study was to reflect upon the experiences of selected Australian music educators, significantly these experiences are compared and contrasted with that of the author. Personal reflection in terms of autobiography and biography are considered essential components of the research process according to Schuster (2003). In a recent review of Schuster's *The Philosopher's Autobiography: A Qualitative study,* Morehouse states the following:

> 'Schuster defines philosophical autobiography as a narrative self-questioning of the self. This self questioning explicates the social context of the autobiographer. Schuster understands philosophical biography to be a critical inquiry into the self and its times. This philosophical self-narrative is a creative way to understand the human inner world.' (2004, p. 603.)

Importantly, the inclusion of the author's experiences within the workings of this study provides a platform for personal reflection and comparison. Such processes both validate the author's experiences and also facilitate a deeper understanding of the personal issues connected to this journey. It is of great significance to the au-

thor, that the processes of reflection involved in preparing this study have shed new light and understanding upon the author's own unique journey to Hungary and that this understanding has a direct impact upon the formation of the author's ideas about music education.

For the purpose of this study, selected participants were chosen from a complete listing of Australians who are past students of the Kodály Institute (1976-2006)[1] according to their suitability against the following set of criteria:

· Australian citizen – by birth or citizenship
· Enrolled in a one academic year course (approx. 9 months) at the Kodály Institute
· Equally spread across 30 years (1976-2006)
· Involved in Australian music education – primary, secondary, tertiary
· Involved in Australian music education for a substantial period throughout their professional career
· Involved specifically in musicianship education and/or choral/instrumental music education
· Currently working in (or recently retired from) Australian music education
· Geographically fair representation of Australian states and territories: QLD, NSW, VIC, WA, ACT (Not included: SA, TAS, NT)
· Balanced representation of both male and female gender

Questionnaire analysis

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section one gathered necessary quantitative, factual background information about each participant which helps to contextualise responses in section two (see table: Questionnaire analysis section1).

The questions in section two are organised according to the three stages (before, during, after) of the journey. Question 1 explores the 'before' stage. Participants' responses to question 1 were analysed according to personal, musical, cultural and other experiences. Questions 2-5 explore the 'during' stage. Participant's responses to questions 2-5 were analysed according to personal, musical and cultural experiences. Questions 6-12 explore the 'after' stage of the journey. Participants' responses to questions 6-12 were analysed according to the salient points which emerged.

Research findings

This study has found that firstly, personal relationships appear to be the primary motivating reason for initiating the desire to pursue studies at the Kodály Institute, Hungary. Understandably, musical, cultural and other reasons for choosing to study at the Kodály Institute were also heavily influenced by and/or inextricably linked to personal considerations. Further implications from the research findings suggest the overarching significance of personal relationships which contribute to the uniqueness of each journey.

Secondly, the nature of each unique experience can be better understood in terms of personal, musical and cultural experiences. Personal experiences (most cherished and/or most challenging) appear to be influenced largely by self esteem in connection to one's relationship with teachers and/or other students. Musical experiences (most cherished and/or most challenging appear to be directly influenced by the differences (real or perceived) between Hungarian and Australian systems of music education. Cultural experiences (most cherished and/or most challenging) centred on the joys and frustrations of living in a vastly different cultural setting to that of Australia. The acquisition of Hungarian language skills was considered the first and most basic necessity to a better understanding of these cultural differences.

Thirdly, the effect these unique experiences had on author and participants upon their return to Australia highlighted two important points. Firstly, Kodály's philosophy of continually striving to be a better musician as outlined in his famous 1953 address 'Who is a Good Musician?',[2] suggests an ongoing process of personal and musical development and secondly, the significance of going back to the 'source' in order to obtain the expertise perceived to be offered at the source.

Finally, *Esti Dal*, the Hungarian folk song, provided the inspiration for this author's journey and ultimately for this study. The 'token of dispensation' role of *Esti Dal* in the author's autobiographical narrative has served to reveal deeper motivations and as a result, the anthropological notion of pilgrimage has subsequently emerged as a way to define and contextualise the author's journey, and the journeys of the selected participants. It is also apparent that the research data may be viewed not only from the perspective of music education but may also be seen through the anthropological lens of pilgrimage. While an in-depth consideration of pilgrimage is somewhat outside the parameters of this study, it has become apparent that there are definite parallels between the notion of pilgrimage and the journey undertaken by both author and participants. Van Gennep (1908) established pilgrimage as a 'rite of passage' and later Turner & Turner (1978) endorsed three essential stages of such a journey: preliminal (before), liminal (during) and postliminal (after).

Perhaps the most descriptive explanation of pilgrimage is illustrated through Catherine Bell's more recent definition which highlights the nature of the three stages (before, during and after) and the importance of the token of dispensation at the sacred centre:

> "...setting out from home and a familiar world, the pilgrim endures the trials and tribulations of the journey, passes through strange lands to which he or she does not belong, and finally arrives at a place considered holier than others, a sacred centre where wisdom or grace or gifts are dispensed. Securing a token of that dispensation, the pilgrim returns home bearing the transformed identity of one who has made the journey, touched the sacred objects, and received heavenly boons for the effort." (1997, p.102)

Recommendations

A review of scholarly research related to the specific context of a musical 'pilgrimage' appears to be rather limited in relation to the significance of the three stages of the musical 'pilgrimage', the 'source' as a 'sacred' musical centre, tokens of dispensation and transformation of identity. Likewise, the influence of personal relationships on securing musical tokens of dispensation at the 'source' or musical centre through one's unique journey appears to be somewhat lacking which would suggest these are areas that would benefit from additional research.

Further investigation of the concept of musical 'pilgrimage' in a variety of contexts may also reveal interesting research findings and offer a greater understanding and appreciation of the significance of musical 'pilgrimage'. Firstly, an in-depth study of all Australians who are past students of the Kodály Institute from 1976 until the present would be useful from not only an historical perspective but would also provide more conclusive data about the nature of musical 'pilgrimage' (in terms of the three stages, tokens of dispensation, the source as a musical centre and transformation) in this particular context. Secondly, this musical 'pilgrimage' research model could also be transferable by way of collecting and subsequently analysing data from people who have made similar musical 'pilgrimages' to places other than Hungary.

Thirdly, if this study explores what could be considered a formal musical 'pilgrimage', perhaps defining and exploring the nature of informal musical 'pilgrimage' could be another dimension worthy of exploration. Lastly, an investigation of the connection between music and 'pilgrimage' with particular focus on what constitutes a musical token of dispensation at the musical centre could be an area for further research which may reveal common ground in terms of tokens of dispensation for informal and/or informal musical 'pilgrimages' and for professional and/or amateur musicians alike.

Conclusion

Finally, there is an innate desire in each one of us to search for truth and meaning in life. What began as a quest to find truth and meaning in music eventually became a much greater journey of discovery about truth and meaning in life for both author and participants. While music may have the ability to illuminate the truth and give meaning to life, the exact nature of this truth and meaning is unique to the individual to whom the journey belongs. As long as there is a desire for truth and meaning in music, which in turn gives truth and meaning to life, there will be the desire to embark upon a musical journey of discovery perhaps more aptly described as a musical 'pilgrimage'.

End notes

[1] This list was compiled based on information gathered from the author's personal contact with past students (1976-2006) in addition to the list of past students (1976-2000) found in the *Year Book of the Kodály Institute, IV. (2001). Kecskemét, Hungary: Kodály Institute. p. 247,248.*

[2] Kodály's famous 1953 address to students at the end of the Liszt Academy's academic year was entitled 'Who is a Good Musician?' and can be found in *Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1974) p. 185-200.

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