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Introduction to the interactive learning environment of body music

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Abstract

Briefly introducing body music, the aim is to emphasize its applicability in general music education which misses some simple but essential fundaments of music due to lack of interaction. It is concluded that body music, music and dance created by playing with body sounds, is a fundamental play-oriented interactive learning environment and is suggested to be included in music education at all levels.

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1. Introduction

This paper is an introduction to the field of body music with a brief review of its appearance today. Considering interaction as the roots of learning music and body music as an interactive learning environment, the aim of the study is to emphasize the applicability and function of body music in general music education.

At first, the problem of music education being too much associated with theory is stated. Secondly, the phrase “play-oriented interactive learning environment of music” is explained. It is followed by information on learning environment of body music and it is concluded that body music is a **fundamental play-oriented interactive learning environment of music education** which gives everybody the opportunity to make music without any prerequisite of theoretical background or talent.

1.1. Problem

Music is an aspect of life that everybody faces as listener or maker. The aim of music education is to encourage learners to make music and become qualified listeners. The definition of music in the minds of many people who went through a formal music education process probably have unnecessary limits because to them, music was introduced theoretically in the first case. This theory based approach, keeps many learners away from making music. Today music is only for listening except the talented, the encouraged and the ones chosen by the media to be raised as stars (Bulut, 2011). No one intends to make music if he is not encouraged by a professional. However music education should be capable of encouraging *everyone* to *make* music because everybody can play with sounds. Learnt incapacity caused by the idea “I am not talented” and alienation between human and music are probably particular results of the theoretical limits in music education. The learners, thinking that they would never succeed in making music, they learn to stay away from making music.

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Music education system based on theory, specific styles and solemnization misses some simple but essential fundaments of music. Theory comes after practise. When it is taken as the basics to teach the music, its organic relationship with life is missed. *"It seems students have been taught forever to count numbers as a means of learning rhythm. Whomever the persons who initiated and sustained the idea, they have unintentionally impaired music education at all levels of instruction. The primary problem is students may correctly name numbers but they do not always recite them at appropriate times,"* (Gordon, 2006:1). Not only incapacity in teaching rhythm, but also limiting the set of sounds with 12 pitches of solmisation and giving notation at the beginning are other factors of music education to cause the alienation between human and their music: *"...we have grown so far removed from and uncomfortable with cogent music that we are no longer able to apprehend its natural sequence,"* (Gordon, 2007: 5). Music is an older phenomenon in human life which was improved by interaction. Theoretical issues such as solmisation and counting rhythm came in as a result of interaction processes, discovering and realization. Thus, it seems logical to begin music education at a point which gives each learner the opportunity discover music with a fundamental sound palette without limits in an interactive learning environment.

2. Play-oriented interactive learning environment of music

In order to begin a discussion on learning, it is useful to know what comes before and after the process. The prior step to learning is experience. *"Strictly speaking, of course, learning is not defined by actual or potential changes in behaviour. Rather, learning is what happens to the organism (human or nonhuman) as a result of experience. Changes in behaviour are simply evidence that learning has occurred,"* (Lefrançois, 2006:5). So, what comes after learning is "change in behaviour"². In this case a useful step in education planning is to provide the appropriate environment for gaining experience which may be called "a learning environment".

How experience had been gained and how human learnt and developed their culture "naturally" through millenniums was explained by the Dutch philosopher Huizinga. He stated that "play" is the irreducible culture creating activity which is done at spare times, isolated from daily life, has its own rules and its outcome is unforeseeable (1955). So, with respect to its being natural, play is a suitable activity for a learning environment. Outcome(s) may be observed after the play and it(they) may lead to change(s) in behaviour for the next time. This is how experience gained in a play-oriented learning environment may cause change of behaviour.

In terms of making sounds, actually imitation is the answer to how humans learn to speak, naturally. As music is also a matter of sound-making, providing a similar natural environment for learning music in which the learners imitate what the teacher does would be a suitable attempt. Being a separate culture creating activity, having its own materials and rules that are set for a time-being, *play* seems to be reasonable to define imitation. However, play and music have a verbal connection in some languages such as German (*spielen*), English (*to play*), French (*jouer*), Dutch (*spelen*), etc. Which all carry the same meaning. Thus music making was related to play centuries ago (Bulut, 2011).

The material of music is a variety of sounds and silence. The question is, how do we define those sounds as music? *"Sound itself is not music. Sound becomes music through audiation, when, as with language, you translate sounds in our mind and give them meaning. The meaning you give to these sounds will be different from the meaning given by any other person,"* (Gordon, 2007: 3). Actually audiation is not necessarily the conscious action of a body; music may be caught by listening in an environment. In other words, music is sounds and silence that are realized in a meaningful order. An individual may live the experience alone. Consequently, the authority to decide if a sound order is music may be an individual who just finds it meaningful. He/she may have made up this sound order him/herself playing with a variety of sounds (Bulut, 2010). This suits every sort of music such as music of the nature, whales or a train or Mozart, Deep Purple, John Zorn or Bali or any ethnic, etc.

A way to teach music to the beginners may be parallel to the instrumental education system applied at the conservatories today. Both the learner and the teacher are active in this environment: Teacher demonstrates how to play especially in the beginning level. It is usually an imitation process at which the teacher plays and asks the learner to do the same. Approaching higher levels, when the learner is capable of playing all the rhythms and sounding all the pitches in the register of the instrument, teacher listens to what he/she plays and gives critics orally. The feedback given by the teacher helps the learner correct the mistakes that he/she can not realize him/herself.

²Lefrançois explains the process with a table as: *Experience → Learning → Change in behaviour* (2006:5).

There may be a point at which the learner objects to the teacher's idea or that the teacher realizes the solution he/she offers is not the best for *this* learner.

Actually this is the case for all applicational artistic courses; the learning environment works with the feedbacks of the teacher and the learner towards each other. Sometimes in ensemble-playing courses, there are times when the learners give and get feedback to/from each other. *"An interactive teaching style means feedback is part of the learning process. Participants will get feedback from how you teach and observe. They will get feedback from their own bodies and they will even learn from each other,"* (Scott, 2008: 40). This is also the case in group music performances in which players react to each others' tempo, nuances, intonation and movements. In other words, group music performances are dependent on interaction by nature. Music is an interactive environment in which a group plays and the others listen and give feedbacks or people play together and meanwhile react as feedbacks to each other. Consequently, interaction has a very significant place both in playing music together and in teaching music.

3. Body Music: an interactive learning environment

Observations and experience gained at body music festivals, meetings, concerts and workshops show that body music is a powerful tool for providing a play-oriented interactive learning environment of music education for all levels. Body music is that music and dance created by playing with body sounds such as stepping, snapping, slapping and vocalizing. It is music that one can see, imitate and react through body movement (Terry, 2002). In the medium of body music, as body is the instrument, learning depends mainly on interaction. This altogether music making environment leaves out preferences of musical talent and practical or theoretical backgrounds³. There are neither twelve pitches of solmisation that one should hear and distinguish, nor compulsory instrument playing that takes a lot of time to master ideal sound-making. Teaching notation may be a later step to be applied when needed. As for an instrument teacher, it is only possible to work with a few learners at the same time. On the contrast, body music gives the opportunity to work with crowds. It is visible music that the movement of the hands and feet may be imitated at once. *"Although it is said there are five senses – seeing, smelling, tasting, touching and hearing – there is at least one more sense: moving. Kinesesthesia detects body movement and position in terms of muscles, tendons, and joints,"* (Gordon, 2006: 2). Movement is the fundament of sound making. Thus playing properly is a matter of moving properly, not listening. Another point is that body music is the most economic environment at which purchasing instruments and/or other equipment is not needed. These are some of the reasons why body music is suggested to be applied in music education at all levels.

In the learning environment of body music, usually there is a leader or leaders directing the workshop. In schools, the leader would be the teacher at the beginning. Anyhow the time will come at which the learners may take over this duty. This brings the leadership practise to the content of the music education.

There are some games that are used in body music workshops and courses. ***Echo*** and ***Mirror*** are two very common imitation games. *Echo* is the "repeat after me" game. This is a useful tool to get the group used to playing basic rhythm patterns and to get familiar with making body sounds. It is also handy in teaching all sorts of rhythm patterns by dividing into pieces to practise and combining at the end. *Mirror* is an imitation game in which the group reflects every movement of the teacher as in a mirror. Here, with slow movements, the preparation process of sound-making is observable. Also, that 'together-playing' is a matter of "not listening but *watching* the others well" so as to make sounds exactly at the same time' is realized. There are further game-techniques and games to experience some environments of music such as canon, rhythm phasing, polymeter and polyrhythm. It is also possible to play with rhythm patterns of prosody and a variety of cultures on the body. These give a clue on how the composers are inspired in creating rhythmic structure of their music.

One of these games based on body percussion rhythm patterns by Karl Orff is "***Sık Sak Tak Bum***". The game was published as a gift of "Liberty Train" to kids by a Turkish newspaper "Hürriyet"⁴. It was designed by Ayşe Akarsu and Gökçe Gürçay under supervision of Tugay Başar⁵. Below is a reduced copy of the game which has an

³ Hearing impaired students at Anadolu University Faculty of Education School for the Handicapped in Eskişehir/Turkey have been attending monthly body music seminaars with Tugay Başar and KeKeÇa (see footnote 4). They prepare a concert program at the end of each academic year with more or less 40 hearing impaired students.

⁴ Hürriyet=Liberty

⁵ Ayşe, Gökçe and Tugay with Timuçin Gürer and Ezo Sunal are members of body percussion group KeKeÇa (www.kekeca.net) who will be hosting the 5th International Body Music Festival in October 2012 in İstanbul.

actual size of 31x43 cm. The two T-shaped pieces, when cut and folded, become a pair of dice with patterns written on each side. Rhythm patterns in the game: (Orff and Keetman, 1966: 78).

Figure 1. ŞIK ŞAK TAK BUM

The note under the title **ŞIK ŞAK TAK BUM** in the figure is the explanation of how to play the game; just under it there is the score table and on the right hand corner there is a reading table for the notation. Shortly, **BUM(BU)**=step foot; **TAK**=beat the thigh; **ŞAK(ŞA)**=clap hands; **ŞIK**=snap fingers. All the rules and scoring are about playing the patterns correctly.

4. Body Music today

There are many ethnic body music styles still in existence today. Balinese *Ketjak*, Ethiopian *Armpit Music*, Irish *Step Dancing*, American *Clogging* and *Flatfooting*, Afro-American *Hambone*, *Pattin'Juba*, African *Gumboots*, Inuit and Tuvan *Throat Singing*, Spanish *Flamenco Dance* and *Palmas* are just a few of those styles (Terry, 2002). Among contemporary styles are *beat-boxing*, *tap-dancing* and combination of all the styles mentioned above.

Today, body music education is given in workshops organised either at international annual body music festivals - that are being held for 4 years now - or by some local institutions or centers that support alternative music education. Besides some body music educators give courses and seminars at some universities. Keith Terry's classes in UCLA Berkeley, Tugay Başar's classes in Bosphorus University İstanbul; KeKeÇa's monthly seminars to the hearing impaired students in Anadolu University School for the Handicapped in Eskişehir and Özgür Bulut's courses at Anadolu University Department of Pre-school Education are some examples. Özgür Bulut has also directed Body Music workshops in some music education congresses and departments⁶ to music teachers, students and scholars.

⁶ 18th and 19th EAS (European Association for Music in Schools) Congresses (2010-2011); İzzet Baysal University, Bolu-Turkey; Gazi University, Ankara-Turkey.

Also his interactive TV program named Body Music Games was broadcasted in the first half of 2011 in TRT Okul, education channel of Turkish Radio Television Company.

Concerning the body music literature, some methods were published and some instructional DVD's were recorded. As mentioned above, there is a body percussion section in Orff Schulwerk. Richard Filz and Gerhard Reiter have methods on body percussion with instructional, interactive DVD's supplied. Keith Terry's instructional DVD is another interactive sample on his own style demonstrating very handy body patterns that he calls *rhythm blocks*. Evie Ladin's instructional DVD is on *Buck dancing*. Besides, there is a thesis in "expertise in arts"⁷ on body music by the author of this paper⁸. There are some other productions and publications which may be reached through internet with keywords "body music", "body percussion", "body drumming" or "body rhythm".

5. Conclusion

Natural sequence of music begins with making sounds on the body. As body is the fundament of sound making, body music is a fundamental play-oriented interactive learning environment of music. Body music has been developed up to a remarkable level with its festivals, styles, education techniques, literature and culture. Its development gives the image of a movement towards becoming a flow. Body music workshops are interactive learning environments that are suitable for all levels of music education, especially the beginners and including the hearing impaired so as to overcome the alienation problem and its future causes. It is suggested to include body music as a major subject in music education.

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⁷ PhD equivalent study program for artists.

⁸ See "Resources" for all the literature mentioned.