

Social Change through Babumba and Beethoven

Musical Educational Ideals of El Sistema

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Introduction

The idea that music can serve as a resource for human and social development has attracted the attention of researchers in several musicological fields in recent decades. While music sociologists underscore the potential of music to serve as a resource in terms of organising social life and creating identity (DeNora, 2000; Frith, 1996a), music psychologists have demonstrated its ability to generate physical energy and emotional response in the listener, as well as how music can function as a health promotion resource (Juslin and Sloboda, 2001; Ruud, 2010). In addition, music education researchers have highlighted the potential for music to develop democracy (Woodford, 2005; Gould, 2008).

The fact that music can serve as a social tool is also the starting point for the El Sistema choir and orchestra school in Gothenburg, Sweden, which like other El Sistema programmes that have emerged around the world in recent years, is based on a Venezuelan model developed in the 1970s (Hollinger, 2006; Allan et al., 2010; Majno, 2012; Tunstall, 2012). While the overarching objective in Venezuela is to combat poverty patterns, El Sistema in Sweden and specifically Gothenburg focuses on breaking the typical segregation patterns found in metropolitan regions and the related social exclusion (Beach and Sernhede, 2013). The programmes in both Venezuela and Gothenburg are based on the concept that music and music-making have the potential for both individual and community development, and one of the goals is to make Western art music accessible to all citizens. In relation to how Swedish music education practices in recent decades has been dominated by Anglo-American popular music (Bergman, 2009; Georgii-Hemming and Westvall, 2010; Ericsson and Lindgren, 2010), we find this program on behalf of its focus upon Western art music as interesting to analyse. Our interest focuses on how the music of El Sistema in Gothenburg is designed as a tool for social and human development, and its relationship to discourses surrounding music. According to research studies, the legitimisation of popular music in school and Community school of music and art is supported by discourses concerning beliefs about the musical preferences of children

and young people (Holmberg, 2010; Lindgren and Ericsson, 2010). Against this background, posing questions relating to how music is legitimised within the framework of El Sistema is of interest from both a music education and musicological perspective. *The purpose of this article is to explore how representatives of the El Sistema choir and orchestra school legitimise music and the function of music, in relation to ideas and traditions about music and music education. Furthermore, the article aims at discussing the results in relation to theories of late modernity.*

The first El Sistema programme in Sweden began in 2010 in Gothenburg as a collaborative project between the Community School of Music and Art in Angered and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra (GSO). The programme has gradually expanded since the fall of 2011 and as of the 2013–2014 academic year, it is offered in all Gothenburg neighbourhoods and in several other major Swedish cities. Based on the idea that musical and human development go hand in hand, and with the belief that high musical quality is created through strong social cohesion, El Sistema offers education through orchestra and choir participation three to five times a week. To realise the vision that music helps children to develop both musically and socially, El Sistema works with achievable objectives and role models. Older children serve as role models for younger children and all participants also have the opportunity to regularly meet musicians from the GSO. By meeting these musicians, children gain early contact with professional role models, as well as access to the musical space or context of the Concert Hall.

Background

The idea that music can serve as a means to challenge the asymmetric structure of societal power was neither new nor unique when El Sistema started up in the 1970s. For example, within the Cultural Studies tradition, music has been discussed as a means of resistance against social hegemonies (Hall and Jefferson, 2006; Sernhede and Söderman, 2013). A similar approach can be found in the more practice-oriented Community Music movement, which in turn seems to incorporate marginalised groups in the local community by offering participation in various music-related activities (Higgins, 2012; Veblen et al., 2013). In the Swedish context, the adult education movement during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is cited as another example of how music, specifically classical music, has been used to develop the individual and create a more democratic society (Edström, 1997; Rydbeck, 1997; Öhrström, 1997). The idea of the educational potential of music was also central when the School of Music and Art were established in Sweden in the 1940s (Persson, 2001).

Considering how music was used in the 19th-century adult education movement, the idea of prioritising Western art music to promote human and social development is not

new either. However, it is interesting that El Sistema prioritises the symphony orchestra repertoires in relation to the weakened position of Western art music (McDonald, 2010; Botstein, 2013), and how both institutional and voluntary music education practitioners in Sweden the recent decades, have been dominated by a rock hegemony (Bergman, 2009; Georgii-Hemming and Westvall, 2010; Lindgren and Ericsson, 2010). A study of Swedish schools of the arts by Holmberg (2010) also addresses the legitimacy problems associated with adaptation to the market of what was once a strong educational tradition in municipal music schools. Among other things, these developments have resulted in prioritisation.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches

The theoretical starting point of this article is social constructionist (Burr, 2003), which entails a repudiation of an essentialist view of both identity and knowledge. Instead, emphasis is placed on underscoring and challenging established truths, how knowledge and meaning are constituted through language, the discursive patterns they form and how language at the micro level relates to collectively constructed discourses (Foucault, 1970/1993). Inspired by Foucault, we also construct a power perspective based on an understanding of power and knowledge as closely linked. This further implies that our interest is aimed at both productive aspects of power as well as the effects and exercise of power (Foucault, 1980). The need for a critical review of El Sistema, given the aspiration of the programme to achieve goals on a societal level, has been discussed in general terms in a previous article (Bergman and Lindgren, 2014). In the present article, however, the power perspective serves more as a starting point in the analysis of empirical data.

In our effort to contextualise the El Sistema programme, we also linked social and cultural theories to the theoretical framework. A starting point here is that the late modern society's dissolution of tradition has placed greater responsibility on the individual to navigate among various lifestyle choices and reflexively relate to personal subjectivity (Giddens, 1991; Ziehe, 1993, 2004). According to Ziehe (2004), this dissolution of tradition has also meant that the aesthetic norms, which previously maintained a dichotomy between high and low culture, have been substantially weakened and that everyday culture has been dominated by popular culture (see also Edström, 2008, pp. 227-229). Another consequence has been the weakening of knowledge hierarchies, and that the previous cultural and theoretical heritage is no longer accepted as self-evident, thereby weakening the position of cultural institutions in society.

Yet, despite the weakening of aesthetic norms and the change in the ideal of knowledge resulting from the dissolution of tradition in late modernity, their roles have not yet

been completely exhausted. For example, studies show that people relate to and help reproduce existing discourses in the form of culturally and historically constructed norms and dichotomies with respect to aesthetics, such as when reviews based on taste are negotiated in discussions about music (Frith, 1996b; Bjurström, 1997; Bergman, 2009).

The methodological approach is ethnographic and a collection of material began in 2011. The empirical study can be likened to an ongoing process that, thanks to continued dialogue with programme representatives, also takes into account how the programme changes and evolves. To date, the material consists of interviews with operational leaders, municipal officials, musicians, GSO management, and El Sistema teachers. Field notes have also been gathered from rehearsals, family gatherings and concerts, as well as from conferences and seminars at which the programme has been discussed. The material also includes official documents posted on the website¹ and documentary footage. The ethnographic approach also encompasses the aspiration to incorporate first-hand experiences by studying the programme as it occurs in order to subsequently relate interview statements and official documents to each other (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Experiences from one of our previous studies (Bergman, 2009) shows the benefits of combining various methods since this makes it possible to note any contradictions between what is expressed and what is actually 'done'. As in other ethnographic studies, it is important to reflect upon the relationship between researchers and field participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

The analysis has focused on investigating the empirical material in relation to ideas and traditions about music and the role of music in the educational context. Initial analysis of the material on a global level focused on identifying the dominant assumptions, as well as on potential contradictions between various ideas in order to identify what might be at stake for the various participants (Parker, 1999). On the macro level we have connected the analysis to modern theories of society (Ziehe, 2004) and Foucault's (1972/1986) genealogical method. But since the empirical material concerns activities at the micro level and encompasses interactive human actions, the analysis is also characterised by a narrower and more action-focused discourse-analysis perspective, focusing on the rhetorical organisation of language (Edwards and Potter, 1992). One starting point here is that people construct meaning by referring to both global and local discourses, and that through their actions they also help to create and sustain discourses (Ericsson and Lindgren, 2011).

Three different ways of legitimising music will be highlighted and discussed in the following. The first way, *Music with the power to unite*, focuses on how music is con-

1 www.elsistema.se

structed as a tool in order to create an open society where all humans possibly might be included. The second way, *Music to provide individual development*, concerns how music and knowledge about music are constructed as a device for individual development in relation to aesthetical ideals formulated during the 19th century. Finally, *Music as a social ladder*, deals with the way music is constructed as a bridge between the suburbs and the city centre in order to reduce societal power structures.

Music with the Power to Unite

The El Sistema programme is legitimised, both by teachers and leaders, in relation to the overarching aspiration to achieve an intercultural dialogue in which individuals from diverse backgrounds establish contact with each other and work to achieve a less segregated society. In the following quote, this rhetoric is constructed around a symbolism representing the orchestra as a society in miniature:

We would like to use classical music because an orchestra is a small social community where I become good when my friend stays focused and if I stay focused my friend becomes good. Everything is interconnected, which makes it interesting to grow and it is interesting to improve at playing my instrument as well. But we've also added a lot, like folk music and personal creativity so these are the three cornerstones on which we build everything: notes, listening and personal creativity. (Interview with operational leader)

This quote illustrates the idea that musical and social development go hand in hand and that classical music presents an opportunity to make music, which in turn promotes the ability to cooperate. However, the music that is performed is of secondary importance in this quote. But in practice both arranged symphony orchestra pieces from the Western art music repertoire, folk music and specially composed songs rooted in traditional melodies are performed. Much of the repertoire, particularly the specially composed music, is common to all El Sistema schools in Gothenburg in order to facilitate encounters across neighbourhood boundaries in the hopes of increasing understanding among children from different sociocultural backgrounds. One example of this is the song Babumba, which has become a signature piece for El Sistema in Gothenburg.² The song, which refers to West African music culture in both melody and text and thereby signals an inclusive approach, is often included at concerts. The song has been written in both choral and orchestral versions and has been performed together with the GSO. The text of the specially composed pieces often emphasises community and belonging. For example, lines of text include 'We are El Sistema', 'Everyone is cool, here at our school', and 'Would you like to be part of our gang? Come on over and we'll just hang'. The song 'Side by Side', which expresses the theme that everyone is equal and that together we

2 Sheet music to the song Babumba can be found at www.elsistema.se/?page_id=345

are strong, also highlights belonging within the El Sistema community to which the children, their families, educators, and musicians all are meant to belong.

The priority given to playing in an orchestra and singing in a choir is further legitimised because they present the opportunity for many people to participate, and are based on the principle that the greater the number of participants the better the potential results. The Director of the GSO also underscores collaboration and cohesion when she highlights the importance of creating a strong wind section, rather than promoting individual soloists. She compares the situation with certain sports organisations, which sort out children as early as age seven, playing the stars on the team while keeping others on the bench, noting that the point of departure for El Sistema is just the opposite:

... the social perspective, access for everyone, not turning anyone away, and not starting to sort people out and all that. Instead, here, there's room in the boat for everyone. Because it's extremely strong in Venezuela. No one is ever turned away once they have been accepted to El Sistema. (Interview with the Director of GSO)

This quote illustrates the idea of social inclusion because everyone has access to the activity. The way that the quote focuses on the social objectives and the rhetoric of how the boat has room for everyone can be interpreted as a rhetorical answer to how students at schools of the arts – in terms of their parents' socioeconomic situation, level of education and previous musical training – are a relatively homogeneous group. This can be related to a study that showed the significance of ethnic background for the extent to which parents register their children for the music programme at a school of the arts (Hovfander Trulsson, 2010). According to the operational leaders, by translating information into various languages El Sistema makes a conscious effort to reach a broader group of students with respect to ethnicity than what was accomplished by the school of the arts in the same area in the past. One aspect of the quote that is worth highlighting is the idea that all students should be kept in the activity, at any price. This can also be viewed as analogous to the perceived dilemma of the school of the arts, where the rhetoric focuses on adapting the musical repertoire to popular music in order to capture those students who would otherwise drop out (Holmberg, 2010). In other words, even here the aim is to ensure that students continue to participate in the programme for as long as possible. This concept appears to be a guiding principal for both El Sistema and schools of the arts in general, which may seem remarkable in light of the activities of voluntary schools.

As playing in a symphony orchestra and singing in a choir are the prioritised forms of music-making, it may seem uncontroversial that the official rhetoric focuses on the aspiration to teach the children to play Western art music. However, the path to achieve this goal – the repertoire that best prepares the children – may vary. To sum up the ideal in

the following quote, a programme should start where the children currently are in terms of music and build from there:

They play many songs, short songs they have written themselves, taking inspiration from the different nationalities. You sneak in the theme, they're working on the theme from Beethoven's 9th, this Ode to Joy, and now it was Dvorak, I just heard Dvorak's 9th there, the New World Symphony ... they sneak it in slowly. Because it's supposed to be classical music. Eventually.

(Interview with the Director of GSO)

The quote illustrates how musical genres are arranged in a hierarchy so that famous major classical works are given priority over songs and other types of music. The statement is also based on the idea that children are not initially receptive to classical music, but that this music must be gradually introduced. Another approach to the musical development of children towards playing symphony orchestra music is to emphasise classical training as more suitable for beginners than the specially written repertoire. In some cases, the song Babumba, which is often included in joint concerts, is mentioned as an example of songs that actually hinder rather than promote development as an instrumentalist because of its technical complexity. It can be concluded that there is a lack of consensus over which repertoire is best suited for El Sistema. One way to understand this rhetoric concerning repertoire is through two different discourses on learning: statements about the repertoire can be linked to both a creative child-centred discourse and a music-centred educational discourse (Lindgren and Bergman, 2014).

Music to Provide Individual Development

In addition to the potential of orchestral and choir music for developing children's social skills, El Sistema's website also notes how music can serve as a personal development tool, describing its vision to 'help to develop and create positive social change in children's lives'.³ This aspect is also mentioned in an interview with conductor Gustavo Dudamel:

El Sistema is no musician factory. It isn't a conservatory like all the others. What it does do, and what is most important in all of this, is to create better citizens. Because ... empathy, solidarity with others, discipline are difficult. They use all of this later in their daily lives too. (Interview with Dudamel)⁴

3 www.elsistema.se/?page_id=977

4 Gustavo Dudamel received his own musical education through El Sistema in Venezuela, and as principal conductor of the GSO at the time that El Sistema was established in Gothenburg, he has been described as an important source of inspiration. The interview with Gustavo Dudamel is included in a film clip that is part of a series of short films about El Sistema by Sergio Joselovsky, which was made with the support of Region Västra Götaland's Cultural Affairs Secretariat, Angered School of the Arts, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, and El Sistema, Gothenburg. It is available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWQtWBB76c4 as on www.elsistema.se

In the discussion here about how the most important aspect of El Sistema is to create better citizens, we see how such a citizen is designed through concepts such as empathy, a sense of belonging to the orchestra and strict discipline. As described in the above quote, not only do these skills create good citizens, but they also benefit the individuals as a resource in their daily lives.

A great many similarities can be found between Dudamel's description of the potential of music for individual development, like the portrayal of El Sistema in the official rhetoric as a tool for social and personal development, and the aesthetic values on which the adult education movement in Sweden was based in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Arbetarinstitutet, an adult education organisation dating from the late 19th century, and rooted in the idea that all people regardless of class or occupation can be educated, offered educational opportunities to urban workers in Sweden's metropolitan areas (Rydbeck, 1997). The overarching objective of this organisation for adult education was to impart scientific, humanistic and aesthetic knowledge in the hopes of improving health and quality of life, as well as hindering workers from engaging in immoral acts. A link between education and improved quality of life in terms of better health was also pointed out by a district administrator interviewed for this study. He expresses his hope that El Sistema would help raise the number of passing grades and improve living standards among the residents in the suburb that he represents. He also describes the average life expectancy in his neighbourhood as being eight to nine years lower than in more affluent neighbourhoods:

We have two main goals in this neighborhood, that students should earn more passing grades and we believe that all the efforts we are making will contribute to this, but we also have to improve health ... It would be great if El Sistema could serve as a tool or method to help achieve these goals because then more passing grades and everything else will follow. Then again, maybe health is most important. (Interview with district administrator)

Yet, another similarity between El Sistema and the efforts to promote adult education in the 19th century is that both were established during a time of social structural upheaval and in response to problems related to them. While the adult education campaign was directed towards a growing working class, El Sistema was founded on an ambition to break the segregation patterns typically found in Swedish urban regions, which can also be compared with the structural upheaval in Swedish society of the 1990s. The aesthetic schooling in the context of the 19th-century adult education movement consisted of music belonging to the bourgeois music tradition, which was imparted by means of public concerts and music history lectures (Öhrström, 1997). This approach was legitimised by referring to the inherent qualities of music and its emotional and religious reverberations (Edström, 1997). The similarity between the legitimisation of music more than 100

years ago and the role of music in El Sistema, as related in the following quote, is striking:

Nothing is more important than experiencing beauty. And this right should belong to everyone, especially the new generations. By this I mean the opportunity to get a good education, good living conditions, and also to feel inspiration, to experience art as such. To be allowed to enjoy the arts to the fullest. But the most important insight is to realise that everything you do, from the simplest to the most difficult, must be done with a spirit of dedication and love. Because that is the only way to achieve success in life. Success does not mean fame and relates to more than just social position. Success is achieving happiness and experiencing a rich and full life. (Interview with Dudamel)⁵

The discussion here about the human right 'to experience beauty' and 'be allowed to enjoy the arts to the fullest' can be linked with the aesthetic ideal that we recognise the 19th-century bourgeois musical tradition in which music was considered to foster culture and promote personal growth. In this context, culture refers to applying contemplation to achieve an understanding of music, especially the inherent meaning of autonomous instrumental music that was assumed to be achieved through silent and focused listening (Dahlhaus, 1989, p. 50; Edström, 2008, pp. 84-88). The following quote, in which the Director of GSO refers to an event that took place when the children were invited to listen to the Symphony rehearse Mahler's Sixth Symphony under the baton of Dudamel, illustrates how the bourgeois cultural heritage can be recognised in El Sistema, both through the demand for focused listening and the portrayal of symphonic music as possessing strong emotions:

I also heard an incredible story about a guy who had a really messed up background who was extremely disruptive and acted out and ... he came along and caused a bit of a ruckus in the group at first He was just blown away when he heard the orchestra and started to conduct ... and this leads me to believe that the music we represent is so emotionally charged that it goes straight to the heart. I believe this as well ... that through this emotional high ... well I think that's important. (Interview with the Director of GSO)

In the rhetoric of El Sistema it is not uncommon to use narratives such as the one in the above quote. Narratives about children who, with the help of El Sistema and the music they encounter there, undergo strong growth and gain a legitimising function in the process of running and maintaining the programme. The idea that both aesthetic discourses and the concept that music education can promote individual development linked to 19th-century bourgeois culture, as touched on in El Sistema, may seem remarkable in the perspective of the dissolution of tradition described as characterising late modernity (Ziehe, 2004). However, given how the focus on Western art music and references to the 19th-century aesthetic ideals break with the Anglo-American popular he-

5 See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=UWQtwBB76c4

gemony, which has been described as having a strong influence on music education both at schools of the arts (Holmberg, 2010) and in public schools (Bergman, 2009; Lindgren and Ericsson, 2011), El Sistema may just as well be considered to be a progressive force. Especially in light of the mission statement on which the concept is based, El Sistema could possibly be viewed as a response to the openness and uncertainty of what aesthetic ideals have been described as typical of late modernity (Ziehe, 1993).

Another notion about music that relates to El Sistema is the idea that Western art music, considering how widespread it is, can eradicate the boundaries that create barriers that impede people's ability to meet:

The universal language of music can break through all boundaries. Simply put, to us music is life itself. ... Music is a way to relate to others. Playing in an orchestra or singing in a choir is a way to relate to others while retaining one's own identity. You are still an individual, but just as in the rest of society, there are certain rules which you must understand and observe. (Interview with GSO musician)⁶

The way that the quote above refers to music as a universal language can be viewed in relation to discourses on music that have been highlighted and addressed by music ethnologists and music anthropologists. That is to say, discourses that declare that music has common denominators, regardless of the music culture or social context in which it was written, and that all humans are basically the same biologically and therefore have the ability to understand music in a similar way, regardless of the cultural context from which they come (Nettl, 1983, pp. 36-38). The idea that the musician above highlights the ability for music to tear down barriers, without specifying the kind of music to which they are referring, can also be set in relation to the idea that universal music, according to Nettl, refers to the ability of Western art music to unilaterally and without problems be understood as the 'true' music and be viewed as the given point of reference to which other music relates (*ibid.*, p. 36). Yet, another way to understand the discussion of music as a universal language in the quote above is to put it in relation to 19th-century musical aesthetic discourses, which held that music can express what is impossible to express verbally and for which no words can be found, for which reason music was proposed to be superior to speech and written language (Dahlhaus, 1989, p. 90). Along with the notions about music as a work of art, the autonomy of instrumental music and the value of listening to music in a structured and focused manner, the idea concerning the ability of autonomous instrumental music to express what cannot be spoken, also provided the notion about the ability of instrumental music to create a spiritual experience for the listener (Edström, 2008, pp. 123-124).

6 One of the GSO musicians is interviewed in the movie *El Sistema tillsammans med Göteborgs symfoniker [El Sistema together with the the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra]*. It can be viewed at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-YPf0bgUSE

Music as a Social Ladder

The ambivalence concerning the position of Western art music in late modern society can also be viewed in relation to how El Sistema is legitimised in the context of a cultural and economic elite power structure, whose support is described as crucial for the survival of the programme. One of the interviewed municipal officials who was involved in the establishment of the Friends of El Sistema association, a nonprofit organisation to promote development of the programme in Gothenburg, stresses the importance of involving 'old men with large networks in financially important circles', while also ensuring development of the pedagogical concept:

El Sistema provides leverage for the local schools of the arts, bringing them to a level where the old head of the opera would be willing to serve on a board like this, or an old concert hall director would be willing to serve as chairperson. ... If that's what you find, bring what is happening out there to a more established level or into the community that makes me feel like it's something important. It would not have been as easy to get old Volvo directors involved in hip-hop; it just isn't that simple. In this case, we're dealing with an encounter of cultural views and experiences in a different way, one that we can experiment with. (Interview with municipal official)

This meeting of cultural views between former Volvo and concert hall directors and El Sistema, such as it was put forth in the quote above, could not have taken place if the programme had been rooted in the hip-hop culture. Rather, the consensus concerning culture is based on El Sistema's link to the Western art music tradition, and possibly to the collaboration with the GSO. The idea that it is simpler to involve the actors who make it possible to 'raise the level of what is happening out there, to a more well-established level or into the community' also means that maintenance of existing social power structures is a necessity for the programme, which might seem contradictory in relation to the earlier discussion about 'room in the boat for everyone' and El Sistema's aspirations to promote democracy.

The use of hip-hop as the opposite pole in the quote above is also interesting given how in other contexts involving grassroots movements and researchers, hip-hop music culture has been singled out as a means of articulating opposition to social injustice from a marginalised position. This is similar to how the expression of hip-hop has been likened to a gateway to the social community for young people who experience alienation in relation to society at large (Beach and Sernhede, 2013; Sernhede and Söderman, 2013).⁷

7 Pantrarna and Megafonen, based in Gothenburg and Malmö, and Stockholm, respectively, are two examples of grassroots movements that organise young people in the suburbs in the struggle for social justice (pantrarna.wordpress.com ; megafonen.com).

When the Director of the GSO discusses the role of the orchestra and the Concert Hall in promoting the overarching goal of countering segregation and social alienation, she does so explicitly from her position of cultural legitimacy and status:

And of course as an institution we can lend status to this movement, and strengthen it. Because we have the power structures in society on our side, so to say, and an institution like ours carries a lot of weight. And of course we feel this has been of help, especially at the beginning when the project was getting started; at that point it was extremely important for us to participate for that very reason Ultimately as an institution like this we can build bridges ... for real. We've extended a bridge out to Hammarkullen, and now we hope to build a bridge to Hisingen and then to Northeast Gothenburg. A bridge between city centre and suburb.

(Interview with the Director of GSO)

The bridge metaphor to which the Director refers when discussing how the GSO as an institution can work to counteract societal power structures is interesting given its reference to a horizontal movement. A bridge usually links two points at the same level and can therefore be likened to the idea of music as a universal language uniting biologically equal humans, standing at the same social level (Nettl, 1983). However, symbolically crossing the bridge that the Director states has been extended to Hammarkullen and now wants to extend to Hisingen and Northeast Gothenburg is not enough for integration to take place. As the next quote shows, individuals must also formulate dreams and be prepared to work hard to achieve them in order to cross the bridge to the other side:

Because that's my issue... it's easy to descend into some type of despair over how society looks today with segregation and many feeling trapped. And perhaps especially for these groups sitting in these areas. And in this sense it's extremely important to show that becoming a musician requires tremendous drive. And of course their role is to show that dreams and hard work are worth the price. People should not bury their dreams, but should keep them alive because their dreams can actually be achieved. And we spell this out in more or less clear terms. Gustavo Dudamel spends a lot of time discussing the importance of nurturing dreams. And feeling hopeful. That music brings hope. And I think that our musicians can help with that. (Interview with the Director of GSO)

The discussion of the importance of setting goals and working hard to achieve them indicates that integration with music as a tool is conditional in the sense that it is reserved for those who have the capacity and potential to walk across the extended bridge on their own. Yet, given that a variety of factors such as socioeconomic and ethnic background have been pointed out as crucial with regard to the degree to which parents choose to allow their children to participate in voluntary music education, not all children can be assumed to have the same opportunities to formulate dreams of becoming a musician (Hofvander Trulsson, 2010). Given the emphasis on hard work, it might have been more appropriate to use a metaphor indicating vertical movement such as a staircase or a step ladder. From this point of departure, the discussion about hard work

and keeping dreams alive can be understood as creating integration demands personal responsibility, and that musicianship, as athletic achievements, demands long-term and systematic training in order to reach a high level of skill, and is well suited as a tool to formulate dreams.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the three ways of legitimating music as a tool for individual and societal development highlighted in this article is supported by a rhetoric that largely has its roots in the late 19th-century adult education movement in Sweden. Just as the organisation to promote adult education for workers over 100 years ago was based on the argument that musical training improved quality of life, today's ideas concern the potential of music to help people develop and provide an opportunity for social mobility. Nevertheless, the link between the educational ideals of El Sistema and Western art music appears to be somewhat weaker in Sweden. Although the programme largely relates to art music as an obvious platform, an ambivalence concerning musical genre is clearly present. This may possibly relate to the weakening of the hierarchies of aesthetic values seen in late modernity (Ziehe, 2004). In light of the ambiguity arising from the view that anything is possible and that no knowledge content has an obvious given standing, El Sistema in Sweden offers an aesthetic and ideological mission statement in which Babumba and Beethoven are equally possible in the repertoire of a symphony orchestra and choir performance.

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Oral sources

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Electronic sources

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Megafonen's website: megafonen.com (Accessed 18 March 2014)

Pantrarna's website: pantrarna.wordpress.com (Accessed 18 March 2014)

Abstract

The El Sistema music education programme, which is based on a Venezuelan model developed in the 1970s, was introduced in Gothenburg, Sweden in 2010. One cornerstone of this choir and orchestra school is the use of music as a tool for individual and social development in order to provide a more democratic society through increased integration and decreased segregation. By using a discourse-analytical perspective as a starting point, this article aims to investigate how El Sistema legitimises music, and discuss discourses on music in relation to the idea of music as a tool for social and individual development. The results of our ethnographical study show that rhetoric related to music is largely based on aesthetic discourses developed during the 19th century in a manner similar to the late 19th-century Swedish *folkbildningprojekt* (adult education project). The discussion also addresses the blurring of aesthetic values and norms in the late modern era.

Keywords

El Sistema, social development, Western art music, bildung, discourse, late modernity

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