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12. MUSIC FOR ALL FOR MUSIC

A Study of the Resonaari Concert Audience and Equalized Interaction

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest in music education that focuses on students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This is partly the result of various concerts, video clips, documentaries, and other publications that have popularized recent progress in the field. With regard to Finland, the most familiar examples are the prize-winning documentary film *The Punk Syndrome* (2012), the feature film *Gimme Some Respect* (2011), the acclaimed pedagogical handbook and DVD *Music for All!* (2011), and the concert DVD, *Resonaari soi 2010* (2010).

It appears that this positive following, which the developments in special musical education have attracted, is not purely pedagogical. Besides the individual progress of students with SEN, which can be seen and heard in musical performances, something else engages human nature: the interaction between diverse members of society and the potential for equalization that special music education awakens.

Among the best-known Finnish achievements in this area is the work of the Special Music Centre Resonaari (Helsinki). Resonaari (as the name is often abbreviated) is an internationally acknowledged developer and promoter of special music education. The Centre's foremost aim is to guarantee that people with SEN have opportunities to participate in goal-oriented and professional music education. Resonaari's results have been demonstrated successfully in sold-out concerts in the Savoy Theatre in Helsinki, for example.

In this chapter, we report on our study of the audience attending Resonaari's concert called "Resonaari soi" ("Resonaari sounds") on May 14, 2012. Our research is based on an online survey (in the authors' possession), which we sent to members of the audience after the event. In addition to giving the results of this survey, we discuss in detail the entire performance that evening and provide examples of the interactions that took place. For this data, we rely not only on respondents' reactions to the open-ended questions on the survey, but also on our own observations, as well as on the video documentation of this musical occasion (in Resonaari's possession).

Our aim is to demonstrate some of the advances in special music education and how these can promote inclusion and equalization. We focus on one event (i.e., a concert), which included multiple levels of basic human interaction. With this focus,



Figure 1. Resonaari students performing at the Savoy, May 14, 2012. (Elomaa 2012).

we can formalize views on how music as an art form and a field of pedagogy can liberate, unite, and educate society in captivating ways.

First, we will briefly introduce some essential aspects of Resonaari and its related concert history. Next, we explain our research process and materials. Then we discuss and demonstrate five different levels of interaction that we were able to identify in this particular concert (in two sections). Finally, we present three key points that emerged from our online survey. We close with a summary of views on the phenomenal potential of special music education.

RESONAARI AND THE ANNUAL SAVOY CONCERTS

Special Music Centre Resonaari was founded in 1995 in Helsinki. The Centre completed its first special music education curriculum in 2000. In 2004, the city of Helsinki granted the Centre permission to give formal music education and to receive public financial support for this. The Resonaari organization, its pedagogy, and its outstanding results have been discussed in dozens of academic studies, from the bachelor's level to the doctoral level. In addition to being a music school, the Centre offers continuing education for professionals and maintains contacts with specialists who are working in the field. For detailed information on Resonaari and its achievements, see, for example, Kaikkonen (2008) and the Centre's webpage, www.resonaari.fi.

More than 200 students from all age groups are enrolled in Resonaari. Approximately 80 of these students perform in the Centre's annual concerts held in the Savoy Theatre in Helsinki, a celebrated part of Resonaari's public events. Most of the ensembles among the performers are made up of learners with some developmental or intellectual disability (or both). Other ensembles are comprised of students with autism spectrum or psychiatric disorders and physical disabilities. The first Savoy concert was organized in 2005. The performance held on May 14, 2012, was thus the eighth in succession.

Right from the beginning, Resonaari's Savoy concerts were a triumph: the more than 700 seats in the theatre typically sell out days in advance. According to Resonaari, in the beginning, the audiences were made up of people who had close personal connections to the students with SEN, comprised mostly of the performers' relatives and friends. Recently, the concert audience has become more heterogeneous. Increasingly, the event appears to attract listeners without any personal relationship to the performers. This change in the composition of the audience is one of the chief factors that has motivated our research.

INTERACTION DURING RESONAARI'S CONCERT

The latest "Resonaari soi" concert was a fascinating demonstration of musical and music-related interaction. Thanks to the video made during the concert, we (Poutiainen, Kivijärvi, and Kaikkonen) were able to study these interactions in some detail. We also relied in part on our observations of the event. We authors deliberately sat in different places in the auditorium so that we could study the audience and its reactions during the concert.

By interaction, we mean here mutual actions, effects, exchanges, or influence that appeared between two or more parties (e.g., between the performers and the audience). In this study, interaction is defined as an interpersonal sharing of information, meanings, opinions, interests, and feelings in which the participants are actively involved as both senders and receivers (see Fogel 1993; Kontu 2006). The interaction may be visual, auditory, or kinesthetic (i.e., vocal or facial expressions, eye contact, movements, positions, postures, and so on). Interaction refers to the continuous, co-regulated change of verbal or nonverbal gestures and the responses to these (see Elias 1991; Stacey 2003). With regard to "Resonaari soi," we discuss five different levels of interaction, beginning with the audience-related interaction (two levels) and concluding with interactions that took place on the stage (three levels). We illustrate the discussion with descriptions of illuminating moments in the concert.

Audience-Related Interaction

The first level of interaction that we noticed took place between the audience and performers. This level is relatively essential in almost any live musical performance. In "Resonaari soi," the musical communication from the stage (i.e., performers playing

and singing to the audience) was supported by lively verbal introductions to the pieces given by two professional moderators. The audience frequently acknowledged the performances with warm applause and cheers. It was easy to see that, in this concert, there were no borders between the performers and the audience. The interaction between the stage and the audience – in both directions – was direct and unchallenged.

For example, after the performance by Class Beat, the two hosts acknowledged the outstanding skills of the lead singer (a student with SEN) and praised her as a very talented young musician. The audience responded with loud applause. The student smiled with some bafflement when the hosts commended her abilities further. The applause seemed to go on and on. (Resonaari soi 2012, time indices 56'20"–57'00")

Special needs often bring additional challenges to interactions. Developmental disabilities or sensory impairments, for instance, can create difficulties in perceiving. A student's worldview may be quite chaotic or inflexible, and the requirements in different circumstances are too complicated to find, organize, or fulfill (Kontu & Pirttimaa 2008). With students who have developmental disabilities, unusual, challenging, or disruptive behaviors may be characteristic (see American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities 2013). The Resonaari students, however, were able to manage in the complicated circumstances of the performance act, and even more, they were able to regulate any uncomfortable emotions, as well as interact and perform admirably.

There were some minor technical problems; for instance, at the beginning of almost every performance, there were issues such as the sounds were not right or the voices were not sufficiently amplified. However, the students behaved very professionally. In any problematic situation, they waited patiently until the teachers solved the problems. Often the singers immediately thanked the audience for their patience. The lead singer of the group Ruuvit löysällä especially provoked some good-humored laughter and encouraging applause from the listeners. (Resonaari soi 2012, 29'00"–34'30") Afterwards, the performance began in relaxed fashion. There were no signs of confusion or tension.

We identified a second level of interaction between different groups in the audience. Our interest lies in two main groups, namely, the audience members with disabilities and those audience members without disabilities. An interaction between these particular groups is rare on the regular concert scene today. In a "Resonaari soi" concert, some in the audience had disabilities, which ranged from major to minor. It was interesting to see how these members of the audience constantly communicated with audience members who had no disabilities or SEN. Evidently, this heterogeneous setting increased the feeling of inclusion and unity, as our survey report below suggests.

Interaction on the Stage

In Resonaari's Savoy Theatre concerts, professional musicians without disabilities frequently play or sing with the Resonaari students. The role of the professionals,

however, is mainly supportive: they are not responsible for any of the significant aspects of accompanying, solo work, or singing. Thus, the third level of interaction appeared between the performers, those with disabilities and those without. From our point of view, there were no challenges in this particular interaction. The musical interactions among all the performers were effortless and successful. In this respect, it was easy to see just how much potential music as an art form possesses. It is a unifying “language.” In other words, music can appear to be common ground, a channel, or an instrument that provides relatively equal settings for interaction between people with diverse backgrounds and skills.

During the performance, the Resonaari students and the professional musicians naturally sought support from each other, since they had to agree, for example, on timings, beginnings, and endings of the musical pieces and also signal these things. Through eye contact and hand gestures, the performers ensured that all these changes were accomplished at the right time.

The students and the professional musicians often had overlapping notions during the performance. For instance, in the middle of a performance by Tähtien sota, the audience suddenly began to applaud and sing along. The lead singer (a Resonaari student) and the professional musicians (without disabilities) responsible for the back-up vocal parts acknowledged this nice surprise by exchanging smiles. (Resonaari soi 2012, 1’28’50”–1’31’30”)

The fourth level of interaction appeared between performers with SEN. This level of interaction did not seem to differ in any way from the interaction just described between the performers as a whole. As for each performer’s level of skill, the communication seemed to be smooth and easy. It looked as if all of the performers were enjoying the presentation. There was no tension evident on stage. For example, the lead singer and the guitarist for Ruuvit löysällä performed several vocal parts together. During the group’s performance, these two musicians frequently communicated by means of facial expressions: the guitarist cued the section changes in the piece using eye contact, smiles, and nods. (Resonaari soi 2012, 29’00”–34’30”)

Creating or learning to create interaction is also of utmost importance for the students’ musical development. As the above examples demonstrate, eye contact and smiles not only contributed to the general atmosphere, but they were also an essential part of the musical interaction.

In the middle of the performance by the hip hop group Resisposse, one of the rappers was “freestyling” (i.e., improvising rap), while the other members of the group listened in the background. The latter encouraged the soloist with smiles, typical hip-hop hand gestures, and frequent “high fives”. Simultaneously, some of them took a step toward the percussionist to remind him when to start playing. Everything went off smoothly. (Resonaari soi 2012, 1’55’20”–2’00”)

The fifth level of interaction appeared between students with SEN and their teachers. The students were allowed, indeed, were expected to take full personal responsibility for their performances. However, teachers were on the stage for

support in the event of something happening. Usually, the teachers' help was not needed except in setting up and turning on the equipment. The students could predict when they would need assistance and signaled for help by asking or simply making eye contact. Sometimes students dropped out of a performance. When this happened, the teachers subtly, but effectively brought the members back into the performance. While one teacher supported a student individually, another would guide the entire group if necessary. All support was systematic and coordinated, but also dynamic and intuitive. This support could hardly be noticed from the audience.

During the performance by the group Marraskuu, the teacher gave the students support and feedback, both verbally and with gestures (e.g., eye contact, smiling, touching, and turning thumbs up). The teacher frequently used a combination of hand gestures, facial expression, and movement. For instance, he efficiently supported the drummer in anticipating a song's refrain by making eye contact and taking a step towards the drummer. Simultaneously, he smiled and waved his hand. (Resonaari soi 2012, 18'25"–22'25")

The teachers were constantly carrying out several tasks at the same time. For example, one teacher supported the guitarists, drummer, and bass player, while another followed the keyboard players and the lead singer. When the latter was supporting the lead singer by singing along, he was also simultaneously fixing small equipment problems. If a keyboard player dropped out, this teacher quickly pointed out the right keys or whispered the related (note) colors (explained below). The verbal instructions were very quietly given and not audible to the audience. (See, for example, Resonaari soi 2012, 1'29'00"–1'32'15") The application of note colors refers to "Figurenotes©," a sophisticated approach to notation that is employed in Resonaari. This remarkable pedagogical tool was developed by Kaarlo Uusitalo, a music therapist and educator, and Markku Kaikkonen, a music educator. The approach relies on colors and figures to indicate pitch levels and the keys or frets of an instrument.

CONCERT EXPERIENCES

In order to gain some knowledge of the concert experiences, we asked 350 of the Resonaari concert participants to answer an online survey. We received a total of 32 replies. With regard to the potential information in this audience for a sold-out concert, the number of replies was small. However, within those 32 replies, we gained a considerable amount of data in the form of typed-in personal reflections on six open-ended questions. These texts were often surprisingly detailed and extensive, and we could refer to them.

Regarding the online survey, we can make three key points. These reveal how the "Resonaari soi" concert *promoted equality, increased unity and compassion, and passed on information.*

Promoting Equality

First, the survey suggests that concerts performed by students with SEN can be musically rewarding and that Resonaari's particular concert format effectively promotes musical equality. The Resonaari students took full responsibility for the musical tasks and their performances: their teachers did not play for them. According to the survey responses, the concert performances appeared to be exceptionally accurate and expressive and engaged the members of the audience to redefine such terms as "professional musician," "musical talent," "professional performance," and "disability." It also appeared that the accuracy and expressiveness of the so-called professional musicians could be questioned. The following samples of textual reflections illustrate:

In my opinion, all questions relating to technical competence are strange. A technical-virtuosity-based comparison of musicianship is irrelevant: I think the most important aspects are artistic quality, stylistic consistency, and a good groove. A musician can be technically successful even if he or she plays, for example, with just one finger, within the limits of his or her learning.

The stars [i.e., the professional musicians who performed in the concert] were overshadowed by Resonaari's students, in my opinion. I preferred listening to them [i.e., the students].

So many people could learn from things [i.e., events] like this. Professional musicians, for example, should attend such concerts and study a little bit about what is really important in music. This concert includes a lot of good examples.

Most of the reflections expressed similar sentiments. Not a single response criticized the musical quality of the concert, but rather acknowledged its exceptional character. The respondents' views of musicianship were highly diverse. They clearly celebrated the progress and the enthusiasm of students with SEN over technical skills and accuracy of musical performance: "Zest and will are among the most important things in music," one respondent summarized.

Unity and Compassion

Many of the respondents found the concert emotionally gratifying. The performers and the audience shared a feeling of extraordinary unity; hence, compassion and understanding of human diversity were experienced together and in a positive manner. The following three reflections outline this effectively:

[This concert conveyed a] great feeling and [it was] the best proof of the vigor that everyone carries and of human rights!

Right from the beginning, both the performers and the audience were involved [in this event] in a unique way. [There was] a very different atmosphere if compared with other concerts.

This concert was unbelievable! It woke up lots of emotions in me: I cried and laughed. It was an extremely positive and touching experience!

This concert experience was clearly different from an “ordinary” one: several respondents hinted at or directly stated that they were moved or touched by the performances. None, however, felt that these emotions made the concert challenging or heavy. On the contrary, all of these feelings were seen in a positive light. One respondent wished to underline that “[o]thers’ [i.e., the performers with SEN] success was so delightful. [I could see] real people performing.”

Passing on Information

Third, regarding comprehensive inclusion, this concert and Resonaari’s other concerts can be seen as an efficient way to convey information about diverse learners. Our study proposes that performing strengthened Resonaari students’ self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-security. The survey responses frequently implied that concerts like the one we experienced increase awareness of empowerment and educational equality, for example. One respondent concluded that concerts should be organized more often “so that people’s consciousness would increase, and more people could understand the uniqueness and talent of people with SEN.” All responses to the open-ended question on the social importance of the “Resonaari soi” concert expressed similar views. Six examples are the following:

The experiences of success and public performing are highly important for the self-esteem of the student with SEN.

The students with developmental disabilities performed surprisingly well in the exciting concert situation. Everyone knew their own position and task, and they were able to work within the group.

Everyone can play and sing if he or she wants to.

The audience has the opportunity to see how talented the students with SEN can be – much more gifted than so-called ordinary people.

It would be great if different learners would perform more frequently and be an active part of the cultural scene.

It [the concert] strengthens the performers’ self-esteem, and as a result they become more capable of affecting their social status themselves.

In this respect, our survey showed that the audience could apparently recognize huge potential in special music education. They connected this pedagogical work and performance to increased inclusion and equalization in society. For those who took part in the “Resonaari soi” concert, the evening was not only about music, but also about learning about humanity. All agreed that the message should be shared and spread: “This way larger audiences would become informed and become part of ‘being different.’”



Figure 2. "Everyone can play and sing if he or she wants to." (Elomaa 2012).

DISCUSSION

The "Resonaari soi" concert implies successful interaction, which shows that music (as an art form) should be taken more seriously when different parts of a society wish to meet and communicate. It could be that Resonaari's concerts are close to a set of ideal circumstances: perhaps the desired, open-minded interaction, and social cohesion are possible only in concerts like this. The concert concept could thus represent a "model" of an inclusive society.

The "Resonaari soi" concert reveals that this type of musical activity can be an outstanding way to promote equality in society. Lubet, for example, argues that music learning, making, and experiencing can encourage mutual caring and striving towards a more stable society (Lubet 2009). The far-reaching effects of a concert experience clearly reflect the emotion-laden encounter that the Helsinki audience had with disability (see Shakespeare 2005): At best, the "Resonaari soi" audience recognized the potential and the opportunities for marginalized groups in music education. At the same time, the audience could themselves acknowledge how the knowledge and skills acquired allow students with SEN to take an active part in society.

Performances by students with SEN signify inclusion in a beautiful and artistic way. The "Resonaari soi" concerts appear to be an exemplary arrangement, one that is simultaneously enlightening and entertaining. Since these values rarely meet on the contemporary music scene, this concert concept feels very refreshing.

The concert demonstrated the exceptional potential and quality that can be found in Resonaari's pedagogical contribution. According to Adamek and Darrow (2005), what is significant first and foremost is to maintain sensitivity in pedagogical interaction. Through this sensitivity, teachers can subtly support, for example, the independence of students with SEN (Adamek & Darrow 2005). Resonaari's pedagogical approach was acknowledged by the audience. One of our survey's respondents elaborated on this particular point by writing, "[i]t is interesting to follow how the teachers support the musicians in their performances. The students [i.e., the musicians] receive the support they need, but still maintain all their independence."

Resonaari's concert was a truly fascinating example of a performance concept that simultaneously educates and unites society. It is an ideal, inclusive forum in which music is *about, by, and for everyone*.

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