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Music Teachers Influencing Lives

Abstract: There are many teachers in Slovak music history and in present times who have educated generations of musicians with love and who have influenced many artistic careers and lifestyles. Paying homage to these personalities and making their activities accessible to the public is the goal of the national project KEGA 003UMB-4/2021, Lexicon of Personalities of Slovak Music Pedagogy. The paper aims to briefly present two exceptional personalities who work with talented pupils/students of different ages, in different cities, different types and levels of schools, but with a common mission. They are united by their love for the teaching profession, their way of communicating, and their responsibility and exceptional human values. The authors present piano teacher, performer and accompanist Viera Horváthová, a prominent figure in primary art education; we also present Gregorian chant teacher, researcher and author of theoretical works Janka Bednáriková, a respected pedagogue at the Catholic university. The method used in this research is a questionnaire and interviews conducted in 2021–2022.

Keywords: music, teacher, Horváthová, Bednáriková, education.

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Učitelia hudby ovplyvňujúci životy

Abstrakt: V histórii a súčasnosti slovenskej hudby je veľa učiteľov, ktorí s láskou vychovali celé generácie hudobníkov a ovplyvnili ich umeleckú kariéru i životné smerovanie. Vzdať hold týmto osobnostiam a

sprístupniť ich činnosť širokej verejnosti je cieľom rozsiahleho *Lexikónu osobnosti slovenskej hudobnej pedagogiky* v rámci projektu KEGA 003UMB-4/2021. Cieľom tohto príspevku je stručne priblížiť dve výnimočné osobnosti, ktoré sa venujú svojej práci s talentovanými žiakmi rôznych vekových kategórií, v rôznych mestách, na rozdielnych typoch a stupňoch škôl, ale so spoločným poslaniem. Spája ich láska k učiteľskému povolaniu, spôsob komunikácie, zodpovednosť a výnimočné ľudské hodnoty. Približujeme učiteľku hry na klavíri, interpretku a korepetítorku Vieru Horváthovú, výraznú postavu základného umeleckého školstva a vyučujúcu gregoriánskeho chorálu, výskumníčku a autorku teoretických prác Janku Bednárikovú, uznávanú pedagogičku katolíckej univerzity. Vo výskume bola použitá metóda dotazníka a rozhovory, ktoré sa realizovali v rokoch 2021–2022.

Kľúčové slová: hudba, učiteľ, Horváthová, Bednáriková, vzdelávanie.

Introduction

Music education in Slovakia takes place in state, private and church schools. Music is taught at three levels: primary art schools, secondary schools, conservatories and tertiary level universities with an artistic or pedagogical focus. At all of them, formally educated, licensed teachers prepare their students for active performance and composition, for a conscious music perception and also, they systematically develop students' talents and enrich their professional knowledge. Through music, and with their own artistic and personal contributions, teachers influence students in the educational process. Moreover, they often provide lifelong support for their students; they are a source of artistic and human wisdom, role models and lasting friends. The versatile American artist Maya Angelou (1928–2014) aptly described such exceptional personalities: "People will forget what you have told them, they will forget what you have done, but they will never forget how they felt about you." ([Ballard, 2022](#))

The purpose of this paper is to briefly present two exceptional teacher personalities working with talented pupils/students. The first one is the piano teacher, performer and accompanist Viera Horváthová, a prominent figure in primary art education. The second one is the Gregorian chant teacher, researcher and the author of theoretical works Janka Bednáriková, a respected pedagogue at Slovak Catholic university. In order to gain the necessary data, we created and distributed a questionnaire to selected teachers. Further, we conducted personal interviews, in order to add information, clarify some answers and to ensure the quality of information. The research started in 2021, and is not finished yet – we still collect data from more respondents. The result of the research will be a Lexicon of Personalities of Slovak Music Pedagogy, which will be an outcome of project KEGA 003UMB-4/2021. The Lexicon will be published online to make accessible information about important Slovak music pedagogues.

Results

Viera Horváthová (1949, Banská Bystrica)

Viera Horváthová is a piano teacher. Behind these austere, little-spoken words hide a wide range of her work and generations of pupils: gifted preschoolers, young schoolchildren, adolescents, adult music lovers, pupils with special educational needs, for whom piano playing is a kind of therapy.

Viera Horváthová is a teacher with a big heart and empathy. At the piano, she patiently wipes the tears of the little ones when their "fingers do not listen", she listens to schoolchildren

when they talk about joys and worries, she gives advice to older pupils about “unjust” prohibitions and orders from their parents, she solves love problems of high school students, she helps them to choose a profession, she analyzes attitudes of her adult students...

Viera Horváthová is a teacher with a high degree and quality of pedagogical mastery. Her students win prizes at national and international interpretation competitions. Her model lessons were broadcasted by the opinion-forming media radio and television. Recordings and concert performances of her pupils are stored in the archives of the regional television and the Christian radio station. She organizes attractive class concerts at which her students perform with their parents, grandparents and siblings in various chamber groups, and which are regularly of interest of regional television AZTV Group. (*Hrá a spieva celá rodina, 2005*) Her graduate students continue to use progressive, well-thought-out and experience-enriched methods of their teacher in their own pedagogical work at basic art schools, conservatories and pedagogical and art universities at home and abroad. Several of her former students work in the arts as soloists, chamber musicians, and two devoted themselves to church music in monasteries in Italy and Finland.

Viera Horváthová is a professional, who constantly develops her own professional competencies, updates her knowledge and studies the most modern literature in the field of music, pedagogy and psychology. During well-deserved vacations, she regularly participates in courses and seminars organized by one of the most important educational art-pedagogical platforms for piano teachers, EPTA (European Piano Teachers' Association), and she attends workshops and lectures. Consequently, she implements acquired international knowledge to Slovak school practice and publishes it in pedagogical periodicals “with recommendations for piano teachers.” (*Horváthová, 1991, p. 5*) Her rich private library includes a number of music sheets and rare methodologies and piano methods from around the world.

Viera Horváthová is a piano “therapist.” She applies specific strategies and alternative approaches when educating pupils/students with disabilities, which contribute to building their self-confidence, to the development of communication, motor skills and emotional world, to the development of children’s creativity. She has taught children with various speech disorders, a girl with cerebral palsy, autistic or Asperger boys, a child with selective mutism, a child with ADHD, a girl with dyslexia and two blind boys. They all graduated from the first level of primary art school, and they keep in touch with their teacher. From a professional point of view, her teacher’s exceptional approach and, from a human viewpoint, a loving care about disadvantaged pupils reflect her life credo “Art teaches us humility.” (*Horváthová, 1992, p. 11*)

Viera Horváthová is a performer. She performed solo and 4-hand pieces at school and occasional concerts, and she accompanied students and colleagues. Also, an organist, she plays in the church of St. Anthony of Padua in Donovaly near Banská Bystrica, she has been a member of the singing choir Xaverius at the Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier in Banská Bystrica (*Horváthová, n.d.*).

Some information from the Curriculum vitae

She graduated from high school—Secondary School of Economics in Banská Bystrica—in 1968. She studied piano at the conservatory in Žilina and graduated in 1977, when she obtained the title DiS. art.—Diploma graduate art specialist.

Since 1969, she has been working at the Primary Art School in Banská Bystrica as piano teacher and accompanist. At the Conservatory of Ján Levoslav Bella in Banská Bystrica, she was teacher of compulsory piano class, accompanist and teacher-leader of the pedagogical practice of student teachers (1992–2000). At the same time, she became a lecturer and head of the Cabinet of Primary Art Schools at the District Pedagogical Center in Banská Bystrica.

For her excellent pedagogical work, she received many diplomas, thank-you letters, medals at competitions, and the rarely bestowed Plaque of Ján Amos Komenský for her contribution and active work in the field of education (2019).

One of her former students in the interview said, “This teacher was the one, who helped me to overcome my worries, who was patient with my issues, who dedicated time to me beyond the compulsory hours—not only during extra classes, but also during extracurricular activities, competition preparation etc. She was always willing to listen to me, she was always prepared to help me and she was the one of the reasons why I decided to continue in my music studies after finishing the primary art school...” ([Interview..., 2021–2022](#))

Janka Bednáriková (1969, Ružomberok)

Janka Bednáriková works at the Department of Music in the Faculty of Education at the Catholic University in Ružomberok. Her character features are her tireless professional activity, high professionalism, extraordinary pedagogical tact and rare human values. She shapes in her students, future music teachers, both their minds and hearts through the common intersection of art and music education. In interaction with students, she is an equal partner, and in mutual communication, she provides sufficient space for their artistic and human self-expression. She fulfills J.W. Goethe’s prudent recommendation.

“Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of being.” ([Burk, 2014](#))

Associate professor PaedDr Janka Bednáriková, PhD. (maiden name Bystríčanová) completed her master’s degree in Russian language and Music education at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra (1987–1992). Further, she received a master’s degree in Gregorian chant at the Pontificio Istituto di Musica Sacra in Rome (1992–1997). Afterwards, she passed a rigorous exam at the Catholic University in Ružomberok and obtained the title Paedagogiae Doctor—PaedDr (2002). She extended her qualification by doctoral studies in Rome, where after defending her dissertation *Frammenti gregoriani in Slovacchia*, she became a Philosophiae Doctor—PhD (2010). After meeting strict criteria and defending her scientific work on the topic *Teaching Gregorian chant in Slovakia*, she successfully completed the habilitation procedure at the Catholic University in Ružomberok and she was awarded by the scientific and pedagogical title Associate Professor—doc. (2014). (Pedagogická fakulta Katolíckej univerzity v Ružomberku)

The titles of Bednáriková’s qualifications theses indicate her priority research, publication and artistic focus are on medieval church music and Gregorian chant. With the research and processing of medieval notated resources from Slovakia, especially notated fragments, she still contributes to the advancement of Slovak musical medieval studies. She has participated on major research projects, such as unique historical gradual research, antiphonales and psalters. She implements her new knowledge into the content of theoretical lectures in the bachelor

studies of Gregorian Chant at the home university. The repertory consists of mass songs, songs of hour liturgy and works that became the starting point for the initial stage of polyphonic music. It is a 4-semester core course, during which students get acquainted with the history, semiology, modology and musical forms of Gregorian chant. J. Bednáriková also involves students in practical artistic activities in the elective course Schola Cantorum, which is offered in each semester in both the bachelor's and master's degrees. She is the founder and the conductor of the vocal ensemble Schola Cantorum Rosenbergensis. Its mission is “to arouse a positive relation towards Gregorian chant... and at the same time, to interpret this spiritual genre as faithfully as possible for future liturgical purposes.” (*Schola..., 2020*)

The ensemble regularly performs at liturgical festivities, public concerts of sacred music, competitions and international festivals (France, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary).

J. Bednáriková's special interest in education is documented by her monograph Historical overview of teaching Gregorian chant in today's Slovakia from the Middle Ages to the present, where the author states, “The stimulus for writing the publication was my own pedagogical experience and natural demand for a work in which available information related to teaching Gregorian chant was concentrated.” (*Bednáriková, 2018, p. 7*)

Other valuable educational materials are studies in journals and scientific proceedings (Journal of the Czech Musicological Society, Adoramus te, Studia scientifica Facultatis paedagogicae, Disputationes scientificae Universitatis catholicae in Ružomberok, Roczniki Humanistyczne) and numerous published papers at both domestic and foreign conferences. (Hudobné centrum)

Bednáriková's professional profile is completed by regular invitations to lectures at the popular week-long Gregorian chant workshops (Ogólnopolski Kurs Śpiewu Gregoriańskiego), which take place every year in Poznan, Poland. She provides the course participants with rich knowledge and skills in the field of Gregorian semiology. Since 2005, she has been regularly responsible for specialization Gregorian chant at Slovak courses of church organists and cantors.

Her extraordinary lectures at Faculties of education at Czech universities in Hradec Králové, Ostrava, Olomouc and Pilsen, have been met with great interest and attention. Her lectures series was a part of her residentship at the Departments of music education.

Associate professor J. Bednáriková has worked in important institutional positions in the academic, artistic, scientific and social environments. She has been a member of the scientific councils at universities, professional commissions and various professional associations.

For her extensive work, she received several rare awards, including the unique Fra Angelica Award for personal contribution to Christian values into the culture in Slovakia, which was awarded to her by the Council of the Slovak Bishops' Conference for Science, Education and Culture (2015).

The extensive personal bibliography of J. Bednáriková contains 2 scientific monographs published by foreign publishers, 6 domestic scientific monographs, 12 scientific papers in peer-reviewed scientific proceedings, 13 papers published in Slovak and foreign conferences, 26 papers in peer-reviewed journals and proceedings, 3 editorial titles among other published documents.

Discussion

The topics about education resonate in the circles of both lay people and professional public. Although considerable attention is paid to key competencies in school subjects such as mathematics or languages, art and music are no less important in terms of personal development. Through music education, it is possible to influence the cognitive, social, emotional and even physical characteristic of pupils/students. One of the most important factors influencing the effectiveness of the music impact on pupils/students is the music teacher. (S)he plays a key role not only in contributing to cultivate the student's personality, but also in building his relationship to art and music. It is necessary for passionate music teachers to be given the necessary gratitude to be able to maintain their enthusiasm and passion in demanding and challenging vocation—education, and to continue to influence the lives of their pupils/students. The creative energy which they devote to their pupils/students, teachers could also draw (besides others) on the recognition of pupils, parents, colleagues, school administration or even public.

Therefore, general public should also be informed about music teachers' profession so that people can appreciate their daily efforts and their importance in the lives of young generation. We find it important to provide certain space to pedagogical personalities in musical life. Several questions arise here. What is the most effective way to identify teachers who are prominent personalities influencing the lives of their students? What are the criteria for selecting those who deserve the most attention? Further research could also address the competence profile and qualities of music teachers who have a strong influence on their pupils/students. Although topics about teachers, their qualities, competencies, characteristics, etc. are relatively frequent, they require constant attention and research, as the school as a system and a living organism is in constant development and movement, which causes changes in all its substructures and subjects.

Conclusions

In this article, we have tried to briefly characterize two exceptional pedagogues who, with their well-founded and tireless work, personality, love for people and music, have influenced and are still influencing the lives of their pupils and students. It was music that gripped by their hands and hearts became an important means of education and a bearer of beauty and knowledge for pupils and students. The first one, Viera Horváthová, has been working at the primary level in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. She is not only an exceptional teacher, but also, she is endowed with characteristics that make her unforgettable to her pupils: based on her updated knowledge gained at various courses and workshops, she can choose the adequate approach for her pupils, encourage them, and find methods that are effective for each personality. Moreover, she has been a performer: not only she accompanied many students on piano, but also, she plays organ in the nearby church. The second exceptional teacher/lecturer is Janka Bednáriková. She teaches Gregorian Chant at tertiary level in Ružomberok, Slovakia. She gained precious experience during her doctoral studies at Rome and dedicates her time not only to teaching, but also to research on medieval church music and publishing.

Both of these teachers deserve attention, since they have dedicated their lifetime to teaching. They have had a great impact on their pupils/students and contributed to educating the new generations of music lovers, concert goers, music teachers, performers, and artists.

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