

Katalin Bogyay: Music and Sustainable Development in the framework of UNESCO's International Year of Cultural Rapprochement

*Presented on the XVth International Summer University at ISES
1st of July 2010, Kőszeg*

Albert Einstein once said:

„If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician, I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music...I get most joy out of music. „... Einstein commenting about his theory of relativity, he boldly stated:” It occurred to me by intuition, and music was the driving force behind that intuition. My discovery was the result of musical perception.”

From the dawn of human history , the sounds and images emanating from the Earth's environment have inspired composers, musicians, painters and sculptors to heights of creativity. They have been inspired by the flowing stream, or a raindrop falling from a leaf, or a wave ending its journey on a sandy beach. What composer or musician could be inspired to produce melodious and uplifting music contributing to humanity's spiritual and cultural values and well-being by a polluted stream? A cleared forest? A degraded coastline?

In the context of rapid global change to our environment, it is critical to raise awareness among all segments of society of the environmental issues which will have far-reaching consequences for future generations- for our very own grandchildren who will be facing a very different world in 2100 with an increase of 2C in average global temperature, possibly a one-metre rise in sea level, and the loss of up to a third of all species currently living on Earth.

The IUCN(International Union of Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species shows that too many animals and plants are threatened with extinction. Half of the turtle

species, one third of frogs, one quarter of mammals, and 12% of birds are all facing a high risk of disappearing from our world forever!

To celebrate International Years related to the environment such as the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010- music has been used throughout to raise awareness on the global crisis of biodiversity loss.

But this year is not only about raising the awareness of the importance of biodiversity but the importance of the Rapprochement of Cultures at the UN. In UNESCO-s International Year of Cultural Rapprochement - I am very happy to say that this very Kőszeg Summer University – with Professor Miszlivetz determination and excellence has been chosen to represent the universal message of the year. As Hungary’s UNESCO Ambassador it gives me a great pleasure to be here and discuss the two international years in the the aspect of music as a tool in sustainable development.

I truly believe that we must rise beyond the sustainable development rhetoric and mantra of past decades. We must become more tangible and concrete in our orientations and action, lowering our individual and collective demands in order to protect the world’s natural resources. This will be a tough act, especially for developing world as it struggles to provide basic food and water, security, housing, health, and educational needs and realises old-fashioned economic growth.

So how can we use the language of Music to enhance sustainable development in our built, natural, and tangible environment and in our way of thinking!

Introductory notes

UNESCO is a perfect place to understand the importance of interdisciplinary way of thinking. The pillars of UNESCO: education, science(both basic and social), culture and communication must go hand in hand!

Searching for harmony in music is a very similar process to searching for harmony in the planet. For me they both are about giving, sharing and understanding!

The motifs of being a musician or an activist for planetary consciousness are similar. For me they both are about giving, sharing and understanding!

Topics which come to my mind are the follows: „Mikromosmos”, better understanding, education, international communication, responsibility of music makers and consumers!

I: Mikrokosmosz! (Béla Bartók)

I am proud to remind everyone here that my Hungarian compatriot **Béla Bartók** spent a lifetime recording and collecting folk songs and listening to the voice of the people whilst developing the personal style through which he would become known as the father of modern music. Perhaps those simple songs moved him because he was hearing the dying voice of a truly sustainable lifestyle and with **Zoltán Kodály** a great music educator they have preserved through music a format of sustainable life we are dying to find!

Dr Richard McGregor, Principal Lecturer of Music at St Martin's College(UK) argues, that *„human beings, but more particularly as musicians, we are used to using analogies and metaphors to describe the processes we want others to understand. Like: ‘regular, like a heartbeat’ (of pulse), ‘rippling’ (like water) of arpeggios, ‘fast like a hare, slow like a tortoise’ (of speed).*

He also states, that *it is possible through words and music, and sometimes just music alone (as Nietzsche would advocate) to explore concerns about : - poverty in the developing world or , - the destruction of the rainforest or , - the effects of war .*

We could set out to explore reactions to oppression, slavery and exploitation through teaching and learning about jazz, the blues, protest song etc., and in the process, develop pupils’ skills in melodic and harmonic writing (in other words not taking the teaching of 12-bar Blues as an end in itself but as part of a continuum).”

II: Better understanding: ..."the unique strength of music as an ambassador for peace..."(Solti)

And another very effective initiative from another Hungarian Compatriot: **Sir Georg Solti** founded the **World Orchestra of Peace** which still exists, led by Maestro Gergiev. Solti was born in 1912, studied piano and composition with Zoltán Kodály and Béla Bartók in Budapest. He went on to become one of the most influential conductors of the 20th century, holding posts with many of the world's most renowned orchestras, and leaving an extensive discography that remains a benchmark of excellence.

Solti conceived the notion of the World Orchestra for Peace near the end of his life. He formulated the idea at a concert held in honour of his 80th birthday at Buckingham Palace, and made it a reality in Geneva three years later. His own experiences as a young man living through the Second World War, experiencing fascism and communism led him to believe that musicians could show the way for politicians when it came to international co-operation. The first concert was a triumphant proof of this vision. Sadly, he died in 1997 before being able to conduct the orchestra's second concert in Baden-Baden. **Valery Gergiev** succeeded Georg Solti as conductor of the World Orchestra for Peace. Gergiev was so fascinated by the idea that he postponed a previous engagement, and conducted the programme Solti had planned for the occasion.

There can be no argument that music can be used for affecting change in the world. One has only to look at another example of **Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra** where young Israeli and Arab classical musicians have learnt to work and perform together and break through deep hatred and political impasse. The repercussions of their individual experiences throughout their home communities is only beginning. In the words of Barenboim himself:

"The Divan is not a love story, and it is not a peace story. It has very flatteringly been described as a project for peace. It isn't. It's not going to bring peace, whether you play well or not so well. The Divan was conceived as a project against ignorance. A project against the fact that it is absolutely essential for people to get to know the other, to understand what the other thinks and feels, without necessarily agreeing with it. I'm not trying to convert the Arab members of the Divan to the Israeli point of view, and [I'm] not trying to convince the Israelis to the Arab point of view. But I want to create a platform where the two sides can disagree and not resort to knives."

One of the young musicians of the orchestra reinforced this point:

"Barenboim is always saying his project is not political. But one of the really great things is that this is a political statement by both sides. It is more important not for people like myself, but for people to see that it is possible to sit down with Arab people and play. The orchestra is a human laboratory that can express to the whole world how to cope with the other."

Sustainability can be regarded as living within **planetary boundaries**, and also living in harmony between ourselves. ("Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity", by Rockstrom, Stockholm Resilience Centre)

Culture, Arts and Science have a unique role to play in promoting sustainable development, environmental awareness, and scientific understanding by concentrating on taking advantage of opportunities for developing **"bottom up" "grass-roots" activities** for complementing the **"top-down" global efforts** currently under negotiation.

In this it could be playing the role of a jazz band rather than that of a classical orchestra with its highly defined score and a conductor exercising mandatory authoritarian power over the players - with his or her back to the audience !

We all know that sustainability of the planet is threatened by many issues, and the jazz musicians each have a specific instrument that they play, working from a few basic musical principles (values) with each musician listening to actively and effectively to each of the other musicians in what can be described as the **"Ubuntu" concept**. This is a conversation of equals ! *"Ubuntu", the philosophy is an ethical concept of African origin: a person with Ubuntu is open and available to others; does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs to a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished when others are tortured or oppressed.*

III. Educating: Be a Dreamer, be an Optimist, be an Activist!

Sustainable development could sound like a compositional technique for writing tunes which have development potential. And yet, that's not so far fetched, because really we do want to encourage children and young adults both to be able to create new material which has development potential, and also to know what to do with such material when they have it.

It cannot be denied that the exploration of issues provides a useful and valuable starting point for creative work in music.

Dr McGregor argues that” ***the training of a music teacher needs to be based on nurturing student teachers’ ability to develop musical ideas across broader, probably topic-based approaches, probably not starting from a musical idea or concept, but translated into a musical one . This is the idea that one can analogise processes such as sustainability, diversity etc into musical terms either explicitly or implicitly .***”

I have read a story about some groups of children who were given musical instruments (guitars, keyboards, percussion) which they could not necessarily play at all They were sent off to listen to a CD and come back having learned to play the song. First it was total chaos but after a while they began to explore the music and a bit later later some sort of song was born.

Music can be used to reach beyond socio-economic barriers. A prominent example is **Venezuelan Jose Abreu and his El Sistema voluntary music education** program. In the 35 years since the program was established, some 250,000 children, 90% from poor backgrounds, have received musical training and 30 youth orchestras have been formed, headed by the world class **Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra**. One of the most exciting talents today is a product of El Sistema, the young prodigy conductor, **Gustavo Dudamel**. Here is what he says:

“Thanks to the El Sistema, street kids change weapons, from knives and guns to clarinets and violins,” Dudamel says. “Many boys from my school got pulled into gangs and drugs. But those who came along to the sistema were saved. In a youth orchestra you must be in harmony with those around you. This makes you a good person, I think

As you probably all know, El Sistema was awarded the famous IMC-UNESCO International Music Prize in 1993. Here are some words from the founder, Jose Abreu, himself.

"In the struggle for Human Rights, let us vigorously incorporate children's sublime right to music, in whose bosom shines Beingness in its splendor and its ineffable mystery. Let us reveal to our children the beauty of music and music shall reveal to our children the beauty of life."

IV. International communication

Another powerful tool for breaking through traditional structures and joining the world in its problems, as well as its solutions, is the internet. Everywhere, even in the poorest of countries, people have access to the internet. Music can be disseminated without having to go through the “star system”, the agents, the studios, and all the other middlemen which in the past have meant that only a few can make a living from music and the stars are disproportionately remunerated. Furthermore, the public’s taste is manipulated by advertising interests and those in power and loses its authenticity. It is high time the music industry became more sustainable,!

Now I would like to discuss two media phenomena that are proving hugely popular and suggest how they could be used in the service of sustainable development.

1.

The first is the **Virtual Choir**, a remarkably creative internet project which is currently ongoing. Eric Whitacre, a young North American conductor and composer, wrote a piece of choral music. He posted the four singing parts (soprano-alto-tenor-bass) on the internet and invited people to record their individual parts and post them on Youtube . His technicians then put all the voices together and formed a virtual choir. Within a short time there were 180 voices came from twelve countries. Every day more people are joining. In Whitacre’s words, “The response went ‘viral’!”

2.

The second example of a media phenomenon is the **reality talent contests** held in a growing list of countries where the winners are determined by the public’s votes. Not only are audience ratings extraordinarily high, the talent discovered is as professional (and probably fresher) as that uncovered using the old methods. The public (many of whom have never been to a Broadway or West End-type theatre) takes a personal interest in the rising stars they have discovered and go by the busloads to weekly performances to support them.

V. Responsibility of music makers and music consumers

I've heard several people complain that the 'sustainable development movement' doesn't have enough music attached to it. I suspect they just aren't looking in the right places. I think it is blossoming - in different corners around the world that are not necessarily called 'sustainable development' - that term not being all that, well, poetic.

There's two main ways sustainable development interlinks with music. One is '**greening**' the **music industry** - everything from no-waste music festivals (Woodstock continues to find new ways of supporting sustainable development) to Burning Man to green music (concerts) to bands travelling in environmentally friendly ways. There's also the somewhat controversial increase of high-profile musicians getting concerned with poverty and the subsequent unconventional policy approaches by organisations such as One.org.

And then there is **the music itself**. From hip hop to country to funk, there is music about sustainable development - loosely defined. Sometimes it's about poverty, sometimes about the environment, sometimes about both. Folk music might be on the forefront (which might, unfortunately, also explain why people don't know about it as much) of this, since that's where much of the experiences of rural people who are often on the forefront of climate change and other natural disasters frequently turn their experiences into music (and where there is a tradition of 'ordinary people' having the capacity and the expectation to do so). The Appalachian mountain top removal has been expressed some piercingly beautiful and painful songs.

A few years ago, at a retreat with eco-philosopher, **Joanna Macy** learning about the **Work that Reconnects. Music** was an essential aspect of the experience in learning about sustainable development, precisely because music can take us from *minds to our hearts and our bodies and then back again, liberating us for action.*

(VI: NEW PROJECT- announcement : Hungarian initiative

UNESCO could take inspiration from all the above by sponsoring a global music competition on the theme of sustainable development.

Theme: Although it is clearly the industrial nations which have created most of the world's pollution and which must foot the bulk of the bill for its clean-up, poor nations cannot stand by uninvolved. Everyone everywhere can have ideas for both the needs of their country/community and what each individual/community/country can do in order to make tomorrow's planet a better place in a sustainable way, using the resources and creativity at hand. People in poor countries or families must be reminded that limited financial resources

does not necessarily mean limited outcomes or impact. The reward of this competition is the participation itself in something bigger and the ability to work together, mobilise energies and change minds.

Examples of a theme connected with sustainable development:

A song about how you/ your community can make a difference in the planet

A song highlighting the plight of an endangered species in your area,

A song about how you can make a better life for your children

Write a prayer, sing a dream...!!!

*The song can be a simple tune sung by an illiterate street kid or a sophisticated orchestrated song. What matters is that it reaches the heart of the public who vote. And , dare I add on a personal note, more 'finance ' should not figure as part of the solution. What we are looking for is **creative thinking!***

*We at UNESCO now have a chance to come down from our ivory towers, to hear new voices and to include them. We need to make use of whatever popular means we know will work in order to reach the people. We must trust the public to choose what will truly contribute to real global communication and change. Most importantly, the competition would be an excellent way for local UNESCO staff to get involved from the grass roots level. In fact, the competition can only be successful if we have their complete commitment and enthusiasm.
)*

Epilogue: The Poetry of Diplomacy

I have been a committed bridge builder among cultures for decades and an advocate for the growing importance of cultural diplomacy!

„It is difficult to get the news from poems-

Yet men die miserable every day

For the lack

Of what is found there! „

(William Carlos Williams)

Cultural and educational affairs are the poetry of diplomacy. Diplomacy is not different from life: it needs a balance of prose and poetry if it is to be worth living! Cultural diplomacy is a strong tool for searching for harmony in music and sustainable development!