

THESIS OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Hausmann Alice

TASTE OR DRIFTING?

**Connections between the musical taste, the music-related behavior and values,
the cultural consumption of ethnic Hungarian students in Romania**

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**Connections between the musical taste, the music-related behavior and values,
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- Doctoral (PhD) dissertation -

Guided by:

Dr. Prof. SZABÓ LASZLÓ TAMÁS

Written by:

HAUSMANN ALICE

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THE AIM OF THE THESIS, DELIMITATION OF THE THEME

The theme of the present thesis is the musical taste and the music-related behavior of the ethnic Hungarian highschool students in Romania. According to our assumption taste depends on the cultural consumption habits and on the range of values. Therefore we also tried to reveal the effect of the range of values on the musical taste and the connection between these two, if any at all.

We believe that the conclusions of the research may help build up a new conception in the musical education, in writing new textbooks and in formulating new goals in music teacher training. All these are necessary because it seems that, due to the dramatically changed view of life and lifestyle of the 21st century, the methods used in teaching music in public schools are not efficient any longer. The obvious inefficiency leads to the conclusion that musical education hasn't been adapted to the changed spirit of the age neither in its views and goals nor in its methods.

According to Bourdieu the behavior related to the cultural values is dependent of the cultural capital, which is transmitted first of all by the family. Andorka and Fukuyama believe that school, cultural institutions, civil organizations and the immediate social environment have an important role in the improvement of the cultural capital (Nagy, 2003)¹. Therefore we evaluated the present state of facts and the extent to which the out of school factors are responsible for the indicators obtained. Their role is important because it seems that they have a bigger effect on the development of the children's musical taste than the musical educations in public schools.

Music is a social phenomenon/product. Consequently, the present research is not limited only to the musical taste and the music-related behavior but it tries to place them into the context of social life. In defining the theoretical framework of the research we used not only the results of the music-related sciences (music sociology, music psychology, music pedagogy, music aesthetics), but also the results of education science,

¹ Nagy Attila (2003): Háttal a jövőnek? Középiskolások olvasás- és művelődésszociológiai vizsgálata. Budapest, Gondolat.

sociology, philosophy, aesthetics and media research. This explains the wider interdisciplinary theoretical framework.

In the theoretical research both foreign and Hungarian sources were used whereas in the chapter about values we used only the sources dealing with ethnic Hungarian young people because these were the sources that we considered relevant from the point of view of the present research (with special regard to the communal values). The most comprehensive research about values and cultural habits is Mozaik 2001, so the references connected to the theoretical aspects of the range of values in our thesis are tackled on these grounds.

This research also offered the opportunity to look into data about ethnic young people living in different countries of the Carpathian basin. Thus the research known as “Youth 2000” was also analyzed. Although the target groups of our research were the ethnic Hungarian highschool students in Transylvania, we considered that the comparison with the Hungarian youngsters in the nearby countries will convey even more subtlety to the image created about them. Beside these two basic works, other smaller regional research results were also used.

ADOPTED METHODS

The empiric research was done in 2009. The first aspect in view in the selection of the schools was that they were not ecclesiastical schools because on the one hand not everywhere are such schools, on the other hand in these schools music is taught in a higher number of lessons. These aspects led to the idea that the survey should be done in the Hungarian school in Bucarest and in the Hungarian public highschools of the county residence towns of Transylvania (where there are such schools). Where there is no school with Hungarian as teaching language but only a Hungarian department (Zalau), naturally the students studying in Hungarian language were interviewed.

Taking into consideration the well-known fact that the family background of the students studying in art and science classes is sensibly different, both types of classes were interviewed for the sake of higher authenticity of the deductions. The 10th form students are the last who study music no matter which curriculum type they study. That's why we interviewed 10th graders. The results show how efficient the ten-year long music teaching is, how much- liked can music as an art be made. Thus the model is a 10yh art and a 10th science class in every high school (except for the Hungarian highschool in Bucarest, as there is only one 10th form).

According to the initial plans the survey was to last one school year. (If every month we had personally had the questionnaires filled in two locations, it would have taken seven months but considering the holidays and the test writing periods, the survey would have taken a longer time than that.) Consequently the conclusions and the picture the students showed at the moment of the survey would have represented the results of nine years (if asked at the beginning of the school year) respectively ten years (if asked at the end of the school year) musical education.

The evaluation of the surveys done with a six-eight months time difference would not be accurate and fair especially because at this age even a few months may mean significant changes in the development of the personality. Therefore the adopted method was that the music teachers at the thirteen locations made the survey using the questionnaires and the CDs containing the music fragments at the very same time (the first week of June, 2009).

The questionnaire was based on the questionnaire used by Nagy Attila in the research called "Turned with your back to the future?", but after studying several other questionnaires, it was completed with the music-related questions.

During the survey in 2009 the questionnaire was filled in by 564 students. In order to be able to find out which are the characteristics of the music-related behavior and the musical taste of the young generation and what is hidden in the background, in addition to music listening habits and preferences, a series of other factors had been taken into consideration: their family background, their range of values, their cultural consumption habits, spare time and media use-related habits.

The part presenting the empiric research can be divided in two larger sections. In the first the data obtained along the process of analysis are examined as depending on seven variables: 1. sex 2. schooling completed by the father (foster-father) 3. schooling completed by the mother (foster-mother) 4. special curriculum (art, science) 5. region (East Transylvania, Mid-Transylvania, Partium, Bucarest) 6. religiousness 7. where the student lives during the school year (at home with parents, with relatives, in a rented apartment, in boarding school). In the second part the relationships between musical taste and range of values, musical taste and cultural consumption habits, respectively musical taste and use of media are analyzed based on the available data. The conclusions were drawn according to all the above mentioned.

THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

The following hypotheses were formulated regarding the theme, based on the questions used in the research:

1. the least preferred cultural practice of the young people is attending classical music concerts;
2. in the background of more sophisticated musical taste stands a sophisticated range of values;
3. the cultural consumption habits and the spending of spare time is determined by a range of values canonized by the consumer society;
4. the media narrows down the youngsters` range of values and musical taste;
5. the goal of the continuous listening to music is not the aesthetic experience, not gaining knowledge by music, but killing boredom or simply a mood element.

Analyzing the musical taste, the music-related behavior of young people we consider that no clear cut conclusion can be drawn. We could see what kind of music they like, which are the viewpoints of the music preferred and we could also see that their choices are influenced by numerous factors. If we conclude that the young generation has a rather

poor and monotonous musical code, we don't make any judgement but we put into words a fact whose reasons we tried to understand throughout our research.

According to the evidence the questionnaire has provided 22% of the highschool students listen to classical music more or less often but they still do. Compared to their parents' music listening habits this still means a 10.5% decrease. The rate of the concert goers is significantly lower. More than half of the students have never been at a concert and the number of the regular concert goers is insignificant: only 1.2% of the interviewed students, namely only seven students altogether from the thirteen towns. Both the previously mentioned data and the comparative results of the research prove that the least preferred cultural practice of the highschool students is attending classical music concerts.

Our analysis shows that the preferred values mostly determine the cultural preferences, the quality of the cultural consumption, thus the musical taste, too. What the youngsters consider important in their range of values are first of all the personal, pragmatic values. The values connected to community and cultures are placed at the end of their range of values. The judgement of values focuses exclusively on self welfare and within this on the instant result and reward giving way to the fast, the whirling, the instant in music, too, while becoming absorbed by music is foreign to them. This phenomenon determines their musical taste and closes the larger horizons of the universe of music for them. Our research also proved that the musical tastes of those students in whose range of values not only the personal but also the community and the cultural values are important, is more sophisticated.

The wider range of values containing the community, learning and culture-related values too is characteristic only of the jazz, classical music, rock and folk music lovers. It is therefore obvious that a multidimensional range of values makes possible a wider horizon, a higher quality orientation and the perception of the world beyond the fashion.

The culture canonized by the consumer society prevailed over the traditional image of culture because of the young generation are not developed in a cultural environment but in a market-conformity one. In their spare time they prefer entertainment, having fun, activities that are not energy consuming. Their cultural consumption habits such as continuous passive listening to music, watching TV several hours a day, frequently the

use of the computer, all serve their entertainment. Reading, going to the theatre, museum or concert is not among the favorite activities. Moreover, the latter two practically are missing. In this culture consuming attitude the quality of a work of art does not matter because gaining knowledge and culture by thorough, concentrated work is nowadays dominated by the quick, varied colored consumption of information.

The subjects of our research spend several hours a day in front of the TV and the computer. Their favorite channels are the commercial ones which are watched by the students two or three hours a day. Obviously their tastes and values are modeled by the mentality of these channels. The TV and the computer are sources of music, too. They listen to songs and hear them from these sources and, as we could see, the free choice of music to be listened to on the computer means mostly light music, the same styles that can be heard on the above mentioned TV channels. Keeping up with the variety and entertaining character of the information offered by the media is an almost impossible task for schools. The colorfulness, the freshness, the flexibility of the mass media means a perpetual advantage as compared to school. That's why nowadays the media is able to shape the range of values and the taste of the young generation more effectively. Youngsters accept the values and listen to the music the media offers them. It is paradoxical that while the youngsters have never had such abundant orientation and cultural opportunities as the media (can) offer them, the huge media consumption does not enrich but it rather narrows down their range of values and musical taste.

The taste evaluation data, the answers to our questions as well as the evaluation of the questions targeting the music-related behavior prove that listening to music for the young generation is merely a sensory process not a mental one. Its goal is entertainment, relaxation. The standards in music: good rhythm, good lyrics and melody have no role, and even less has the harmony. The inner values of the music remain hidden. At most the lyrics may give some orientation. The most important criterion is that they could relax, entertain, jump and have a good time on music. Fast, whirling rhythm are basic, almost exclusive demands, the lack of which makes music boring. This kind of demand makes melody and harmony worthless. Nobody cares about them. Use of language is also revealing regarding the little importance of the melody: the denomination of a light music product is now not "song" but "piece". We might illustrate the main stream in the musical

taste of the young generation with one of our interviewed subject's sentence: "Good rhythm, good chatter, good piece."

Since music is experienced only on acoustic level, listening to music is not knowledge having a certain content, not an aesthetic experience, it's just an element of mood, acoustic decoration meant to entertain. Therefore we consider that the young generation has been shut out of music, so music as an art does not exist for them.

Taste or drifting? This is the question in the title of the present thesis. All throughout the analysis the word "preference" has been consistently used as we were aware as for how occasional or not the answers were. By the end of the data processing the picture became consolidated and we could see that whatever might have been considered occasional, became consistently consolidated. It may as well be called taste but there still are doubts because in our opinion taste is shaped by the people themselves based on many and various offers and selection. But the offer the young people can select from is rather shallow. Most of them don't even have the chance to form their own taste, this being determined by the mainstream in fashion.

Considering the results, we believe that the present research has revealed some facts that, if taken into account, may help the improvement of music teaching and music teacher training. But it is also obvious that the phenomena are so complex and interwoven that the music teachers' thorough grounding and good will only are not able to deal with them. The issue of musical taste is only part of the common-rooted phenomena and it could be improved by families, school, cultural institutions, church, decision-makers joining forces.

Other publications of the author in this topic:

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