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"The entwining traditions of music and music education are immense resources," Interview with educational researcher, Damien Sagrillo (/english/the-entwining-traditions-of-music-and-music-education-are-immense-resources-interview-with-educational-researcher-damien-sagrillo-107894)

Linked to the Academy's research program, and organised by the MTA-ELTE Visual Culture Research Group, a scientific conference with an evaluation system and an English-language series of workshops were held between 22-24 June 2017 for the educators, researchers and teacher training specialists of the four arts disciplines (drama, dance, visual arts and music) and of children's and youth culture. One of the lecturers of the conference was Professor Damien Sagrillo of the Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education at the University of Luxembourg.

18 July, 2017

Within the framework of the Subject Pedagogy Research Program of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, nineteen research teams are working to support the revival of the educational-pedagogical methodology applied in schools through interdisciplinary researches and to contribute to the formation of a science-based strategy that aims at overcoming challenges in public education. The target of the cooperation between researchers and teachers is the theoretical process of and practical solutions to pedagogical problems.

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participants became familiar with the research groups' annual results, which form the essence of their annual reports to be finished by the end of September.

One of the lecturers of the conference was Professor Damien Sagrillo, Head of the *Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education* at the University of Luxembourg. Professor Sagrillo, a researcher of the history and education of music, has had a long connection with Hungary, due to which this February the Hungarian Academy of Sciences requested that he support the two music education workgroups of the Subject Pedagogy Research Program (MTA SZTE Music Education Research Group and MTA-LFZE Research Group on Active Music Learning) as a scientific expert with an external, international background. We talked to the professor after his lecture at the conference.

It's been just a few minutes after your lecture, a main theme of which was the cultural heritage that defines music education. It has become clear that you are well aware of the traditions of Hungarian music education. How did your connection with Hungary start?

This connection dates back to my years as a practising musician, when, almost twenty years ago, through a Luxembourgian friend of mine with Hungarian roots, Lajos Gránicz, I arrived in Budapest to play in a concert. During my later visits, I met Zsuzsanna Buzás, who was doing her doctoral studies in the early 2000s, and whom I invited to Luxembourg to do research in the field of art education. The objective of her doctoral work was to create an easily available online measuring instrument that can provide a general view of musical abilities and their development in



Damien Sagrillo
source: facebook

the area of music education, specialised music education and the subject of solfeggio-music theory. As a teacher at the university in Kecskemét, she later requested that I hold lectures in Kecskemét, and through her, I also received

invitations to the University of Szeged and to Eötvös Loránd University. In 2014 the university in Kecskemét conferred the title of *honoris causa*, honorary professor, on me – so my connection to Hungary is becoming stronger and stronger.

The University of Luxembourg, where I work, is a rather young institution, as it was founded in 2003. I have been participating in their work since the beginning, and have been leading its research projects in music education since 2005. Besides my researches into the history of Luxembourgian music, I am primarily interested in the place and role of folk music in contemporary music life and culture, and, in the field of music education, I have specialised in two major areas: music education applied in music schools (e.g. conservatoires); and the processes of music education in public education. As a former bassoon and tuba

chamber artist, I am of course also attracted to researches and educational possibilities regarding wind music, and recently I have frequently lectured on the current situation of the internationally well-known and well-acknowledged Kodály concept and questions regarding its applicability.

Initiated by President László Lovász, the Academy launched its programme on issues of public education methodology in 2016, in which you will provide professional support for two research groups.

Yes, I received Mr Lovász's request in February. My task is to evaluate the annual reports of the research groups with a kind of 'supportively critical' attitude and to advance scientific success through advising and orienting. Since we are at the beginning of the process, I cannot yet present detailed information about the joint work. A relationship has been established between both research groups; at the moment I am looking forward to the tasks becoming concrete and also to the research results and directions of the first annual reports.

It is already clear, however, that while the researches are searching for answers to certain Hungarian questions and problems, the defined starting points are, naturally, not completely new; they fit the international tendencies. Similar researches are being carried out in the German language area, America and France. Thus, right after my lecture, when I had a few words with two young psychologist researchers of the Research Group on Active Music Learning, who carry out measurements among primary school pupils, I could already make German specialised literature recommendations that link to their work done so

far. So if you ask me about my possible role in the research process, I highlight the fact that coming from traditions other than Hungarian, I am familiar with different traditions compared with my Hungarian colleagues. Consequently, I strive to convey to them the results achieved in our scientific media as effectively as possible.

It is clear that bearing the support of an expert with different cultural roots can be a great advantage regarding the enrichment of Hungarian research processes. But what are the yields for a Luxembourgian professor of having Hungarian professional connections?

What primarily inspires me about Hungary is its truly unique musical traditions. And not just because of Kodály. Studying his achievements, I assumed that his oeuvre might not have had such a big effect had he not created it here but in another place – because elsewhere it would not have fallen on such fertile ground ... What we today call the ‘Kodály concept’ goes hand in hand with genuine Hungarian folk music. I do not consider Brahms’ *Hungarian Dances* to be Hungarian folk music, but rather Romani music. What Bartók, Kodály and others, however, collected during their search for Hungarian traditions is not only significant as a source of enrichment to their art and a basis for Kodály’s principles of music education – it is also such a uniquely rich folk music treasure that is compelling merely by its magnitude. For it is a much larger collection than other European countries could create. This collection, spanning the entire Hungarian language area and reaching over today’s country borders, resulted in an enormous abundance of material, manifold compared to the volume of what was recorded in the German language area, for example. Based on

this, the entwining traditions of music and music education are immense resources, having impressed me for a long time.

Do you have an insight into current music education in Hungary? What do you think about the situation and viability of the Kodály concept?

Regarding solfeggio training in Hungary, I believe it is generally much more musical and serves the actual learning of music much better than in Western countries, where solfeggio is rather a training of a technical nature. The Kodály concept, being over eighty years old now, must undergo significant adaptation processes in order to remain in use. Children's musical development takes a big turn during adolescence: they turn away from their parents' tastes and start orienting towards their own age group. Folk songs could become the basis for the Kodály concept, because they contain archaic, incomplex melodies that are vocally sonable. The music teenagers listen to is not like that; it cannot be relied on when applying the Kodály concept, or it comes with many difficulties in doing so. The same goes for polyphonic choral works, or classical music, which has musical instruments as its focus. The concept, however, can be updated with the inclusion of dance or motion, for example. Generally speaking, I believe in combinations and interdisciplinary ideas: music can be connected with mathematics and language learning, and may even be applied in the education of visual arts ... Music is a fortunate area of education, since you get a chance to do it in breaks between classes, at ceremonies and class outings – without the children even realising that they are being educated. New media possibilities, digitalisation and interactivity, also open never-before-seen prospects for education.

A large number of researches are carried out in Germany, while experts are sounding the alarm: there are not enough skilled teachers; most music lessons in public education are held by teachers without proper qualifications. A considerable portion of missed classes is music classes, even though musical training is known to comprehensively promote the development of the brain, empathy and social sensitivity, and to contribute to the balance of hormones and to overcoming fears. It is my personal experience that in holding a class for primary school children in Kecskemét, we got to the point of singing songs together without any difficulty, even though it wasn't a music lesson, it was a German lesson. The same thing would definitely not have happened in Luxembourg. Hungary is far ahead of us in this respect. In other words, Hungary is a lucky country, since it has a tried method in operation which has proven to be successful and which can and must be adapted to new demands. Other countries with no such tradition are in a more difficult situation.

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