

Blue is the Sea: Music Dance and Visual Arts

By Sofia López-Ibor
San Francisco, CA: Pentatonic Press, 2011



Sofia López-Ibor is a chef. Not because she is known for her culinary passion in the kitchen, or has volumes of recipes in her head. A skilled chef does more than follow the recipes. She is intricately familiar with ingredients and techniques. She has an insatiable appetite, for food and for using her expertise to explore, experiment, and create. Sofia may apply all of these skills in the kitchen, but what makes her a true chef is how she approaches the art of the music she teaches.

López-Ibor's *Blue is the Sea* is a “cookbook” of sorts that embodies a lifetime of inspiration and teaching in music, dance, and visual art. It is hardly a simple collection of recipes. Instead, it is a collection of limitless possibilities. “Lesson plans” are secondary, while in the forefront is something far more valuable to the Orff practitioner: page upon page of inspirational raw materials, philosophical discussions, and vibrant photos of child-created art and dance accompanied by the author's artful arrangements of traditional rhymes and songs. The book's presentation plants seeds of ideas for the reader, outlining entire thematic explorations and copious suggestions for the diverse paths these explorations might take.

As part of the Integrated Learning Series published by Pentatonic Press, *Blue is the Sea* focuses on the visual arts aspect of an integrated music curricu-

lum. Herein lies its strength. In the book's dedication to Barbara Haselbach, Sophia remarks on her own training at the Orff Institute, “I became closer friends with Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Alexander Calder, and Pablo Picasso, as well as Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Alfred Schnittke, and Igor Stravinsky.” Such an awakening to the vitality of integrated visual and performing arts evokes classical ideas of education and culture. Rather than focusing on compartmentalizing and standardizing disciplines in order to achieve higher test scores, *Blue is the Sea* combines them to cultivate learning in the child as a whole. As one peruses the pages filled with diverse music, poetry, movement, and art, it is clear that López-Ibor paired these elements carefully to create unified concepts ripe for exploration. Each of these concepts is solidly rooted in countless hours of work with children. The book beckons readers to adapt the lessons to their own tastes and teaching styles, as well as insert new elements and materials.

One of the most enlightening graphics for this integrated approach is a diagram in the preface, which entwines activities such as singing, movement, art appreciation, listening, art projects, Orff ensemble, games, drama, and percussion in a web of flowchart-like arrows. At first glance the complexity is perplexing. On further inspection, the message becomes

simple: All things are connected, but the directions those connections can take are endless. In spite of myriad possibilities, López-Ibor has organized the book into carefully unified, discrete sections: music, movement and art; graphic notation; connecting image to music, art, and poetry; and music listening and the visual arts.

Much like the Orff Schulwerk *Volumes*, *Blue is the Sea* resembles a chef's pantry with its carefully organized shelves stocked with a bountiful array of raw ingredients. But unlike the *Volumes*, this book provides glimpses of the end products of the activities. These are presented not as points to achieve, but as inspiration for the reader's own goals and visions. As Sofia herself recommends, “Not only reproduce the ideas, but also re-create them.”¹

As a source for teaching materials, *Blue is the Sea* is impressive, with plenty of beautiful Orff ensemble arrangements, art projects, movement activities, and references to children's literature. But its true power lies in how Sofia López-Ibor has, like any great chef, married these elements together. *Blue is the Sea* will bring a feast of integrated art to any classroom—music, art or otherwise. *Bon Appétit!* ■

David Thaxton teaches kindergarten through sixth-grade music at Diedrichsen Elementary School, Sparks, NV and serves on The Orff Echo editorial board.

1. Sofia López-Ibor, *Blue is the Sea* (San Francisco: Pentatonic Press, 2011), 5.