

Reviewed by Jane Frazee

Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk: Basic Texts from the Years 1932-2010

Barbara Haselbach, ed., Margaret Murray, trans.
Mainz: Schott Music GmbH & Co., 2011

Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk: Basic Texts from the Years 1932-2010 is a unique and valuable resource for the student of the Schulwerk. Comprised of thirteen important historical texts authored by a “who’s who” of German Orff Schulwerk proponents, the selected articles span almost 80 years of thoughtful reflections and include three essays by Orff himself.

A forerunner to this collection, translated and edited by the American Orff teacher Mary Stringham (now Shamrock), was published in 1976. *Orff Schulwerk: Background and Commentary* contains selected articles from German and Austrian periodicals. Like the volume under review, it presents invaluable insights by those closely involved with the origination and dissemination of the then-new approach to music learning.

Similar to its predecessor, the current collection is not limited to history. Five articles concern application, or ways in which Orff Schulwerk has been adapted to the realities of school music since the 1970s. All contributors are identified in a biography section, supplemented by a useful selected bibliography and discography. The book is dedicated to Margaret Murray for her many contributions to Orff Schulwerk, and she continues her assistance by providing English translations for all but one of the articles.

An extensive introduction by Michael Kugler summarizes the content of the book’s essays. Arranged chronologically after Gunild Keetman’s delightful initial presentation, “Memories of the Gunther-Schule,” subsequent essays explore the roles of movement, elemental music, and speech in Orff’s holistic approach to music education that was revolutionary a half-century ago, and remains so today. Orff’s insistence upon music’s relationship to movement, dance, and speech is reinforced throughout these essays, as well as music’s root in play. The central role of improvisation, making up music from given models, is also emphasized throughout.

Orff Echo readers will be familiar with some of the essays, including Keetman’s Guntherschule memories and “Orff-Schulwerk: Past and Future,” written by Orff in 1967. One of Hermann Regner’s articles from the book, “Carl Orff’s Educational Ideas – Utopia and Reality” appeared in the *Echo* in 1977.

But ten gems from the collection have not appeared in print in the U.S. before. Included among these are two articles by Orff’s Guntherschule partner, Dorothee Gunther. The first, “The Rhythmic Person and Their Education,” written in 1932, is a polemic against conventional teaching that excludes dance. She argues that rhythmic education should be central to general education. In another essay, she argues for free exploration of various movements, and against the kind of structured dance teaching one finds in ballet. Gunther’s ideas are rooted in the 1920s dance innovations of Dalcroze and Laban, and find their application in her work with adult dancers.

In contrast, Barbara Haselbach’s helpful essay traces the role of dance in Schulwerk training from its roots at the Guntherschule to the pedagogical work recast for children beginning in 1961 in Salzburg. She identifies elemental movement as consisting of rhythmic, expressive, and traditional movement dance forms



from the home culture. Here music, movement, and dance are understood as a “bridge between the inner and outer world.”

In an early essay from 1932, Orff argues that music arises from improvisatory play and results in “bodily music” from the child within all of us. Two additional articles by Orff elaborate on these themes. He insists that Schulwerk is non-professional music training, intended to release the music found within every person. This music education is not directed toward proficiency, but to the development of the child’s whole personality.

We find a compelling opportunity to compare Orff’s theories with their subsequent realization in articles by Hermann Regner and Rudolph Nykrin. While Regner articulates the components of elemental music, Nykrin concerns himself with how they fit the needs of music education in schools today. He argues that the “timeless” aspect of 19th century texts and songs found in the original Orff volumes have little relevance today and must be updated for 21st century students. However, he suggests that the so-called “classical” Orff Schulwerk pieces are inspiring models for improvisation. Further features of Orff Schulwerk that continue to be relevant for today’s children are rhythmic-melodic exercises, singing, body percussion, and elemental instruments—and that all must be part of a systematic learning plan.

Nykrin believes that Orff Schulwerk’s contribution of playing-practicing-learning leads to student comprehension of musical elements that provide

material for original composition and understanding of how music works. Revised only three years ago, Nykrin’s article speaks to the natural and necessary collaboration of children’s hearts and heads to master the school music curriculum.

The gift of this rich collection might have been enhanced by contributions from historical figures who could have provided a non-German perspective. Doreen Hall (Canada), Daniel Hellden (Sweden), and Minna Ronnefeld (Denmark) would have offered insightful commentaries about the introduction of Orff Schulwerk in their own countries. Additionally, with the page format of English text on the left-hand page and the original German on the right, this reviewer continuously bumped into the original German. This scholarly approach to reading requires a lot of practice to master.

Readers should approach this book like the feast that it is. Read the introduction as if it were a menu. Then sample the courses that most appeal to you. Finally, try some unfamiliar flavors. You will be richly satisfied as you broaden your understanding of the work you love, and you will become a better teacher as a result. ■

JANE FRAZEE is founder and former director of Graduate Music Education Programs at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. A former Fulbright teaching scholar at the Orff Institute in Austria, she has authored six books on the theory and practice of Orff Schulwerk. Her biography appears in the second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*.

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

| | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|--------------|
| American Recorder Society Inc. | 50 | Music Together LLC | 19 |
| Anderson University | 38 | New England Dancing Masters | 17 |
| Backyard Music | 17 | Peripole | back cover |
| Beatin’ Path Publications, LLC | 28 | Quaver Music | 13 |
| Boston University | 16 | Rocky Mountain Chapter of AOSA | 25 |
| Carl Orff Canada 2014 Conference | 54 | SONOR (HOHNER, Inc.) | inside cover |
| Ethnomusic, Inc./Percussion Marketing | 10 | Vandercook College of Music | 45 |
| J.D. Wall Publishing Company | 56 | Villanova University | 56 |
| Macmillan/McGraw-Hill | 1 | West Chester University School of Music | 45 |
| Mad Robin Music and Dance | 10 | West Music Company | 31 |
| MMB Music - Studio 49 | inside back cover | Woodwind and Brasswind | 5 |
| Music is Elementary | 19 | Yamaha Corporation of America | 34 |