

## The Orff Approach to Music Education

**Carl Orff** (July 10, 1895 – March 29, 1982) was a 20th-century German composer known for his oratorio *Carmina Burana* (1937). In addition to his career as a composer, Orff developed an influential approach to music education for children known as Orff-Schulwerk or Music for Children. As music director for the Gunther-School of music and dance he perfected his ideas with dancer Gunild Keetman. His principles were then published in *Orff Schulwerk*. Unlike music methods devised by Kodaly and Suzuki, the Orff approach is not a method. There is no systematic procedure. It offers a holistic and dynamic experience.

Carl Orff's genius lies in his synthesis of art forms. "Elemental music, never alone, always connected with movement, rhythm and speech" he believed. Dance, song, body percussion, improvisation and musical instruments were then natural additions and made meaningful in active participation. The materials needed to teach students are also "simple, basic, natural, and close to a child's world of thought and fantasy." The Orff approach uses speech tones, and two note tunes from the start and moves into pentatonic scales, folk modes and polyphony. Music revolves round the IV, V I harmonies. Songs are drawn from world folk music but they can also be well known nursery rhymes or drawn from the child's heritage. Word rhythms are connected with movement and played out on percussion instruments. Variations in form and improvisation on a theme are main features. Simple sequential structures are included such as drones and ostinatos.

Orff designed glockenspiels, xylophones and metallophones to fulfil his purpose adding drums, shakers and other percussion instruments used in world folk traditions. In order to draw out the student's inherent affinities for rhythm and melody and allow these to grow naturally he would intuitively lead him or her from primitive to increasingly sophisticated expression through stages parallel to western music's evolution. The melody and rhythm of compositions are often determined by the words of the song. Composition is also included. "Let the children be their own composers," said Carl Orff for he recognised that creation is not only the highest level of thought but the most motivating as well.

Since the 1930's *Orff's Schulwerk* a programme of elemental music and movement instruction, has recharged music education for children in over 30 countries around the world. His was passionate about working with beginners. Here where he had constant contact with children, his work evolved. Throughout much of his life, Orff worked with children, using music as an educational tool. The Orff Approach is a "child-centred way of learning" music education that treats music like language and believes that just as every child can learn language without formal instruction so every child can learn music in a friendly and informal way.

In order for the Orff Approach to work effectively teachers are expected to create an atmosphere that is similar to a child's world of play and fantasy. In this environment children feel at ease exploring an instrument or learning a new and often abstract musical skill. Every child is treated as an equal so performance pressure is not part of the Orff classroom. In this way children appreciate the joys of group music making, communication and cohesion. Confidence is generated from the start. From a teacher's perspective Orff-Schulwerk's process of breaking down each activity into its simplest form, presenting those steps one at a time until a completed performance is achieved, is a valuable one.

The Carl Orff approach to music is accessible to all ages and stages - to both musicians and non musicians. It is an exceptionally enriching way into music for those with additional needs. These students respond well to Orff's belief in the use of pentatonic and modal scales, creativity, exploration and free expression within a structured framework. In addition the use of sensory materials and multi-sensory activities support and facilitate the learning process. Music is therapeutic, it calms, energises and nourishes.

Since Music Trains' inception in 2004, the Orff approach to music education has been central to its theme targeting all ages and abilities with introductory and intermediate training by international tutors such as Doug Goodkin whom I introduced to Music Trains at its outset thanks to a chance read of his inspirational book *Play Sing Dance* and the availability of Nesta funding. Training in the Orff approach has revolutionised my music teaching and revitalised my intuitive creative powers. It is an approach for today and the future. It connects us with the roots of world music and yourself. Above all it teaches us to listen and to use our imagination.

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