The Language of Music Communication in the Space of Human Knowledge

Prof. Dr. IOAN OARCEA
Department of Choral Conducting
Faculty of Music
“Transilvania” University Brașov
Hărman, Alleea 14, nr. 16D
ROMANIA
ioan_oarcea@yahoo.fr

Abstract: This article explores the language of music and the place of choral singing in the space of human knowledge.

Key-Words: language, musical knowledge, arts, choral music, singing

1 Introduction

The existential universe represents for the human being a space of knowledge in a permanent expansion, a partially deciphered language, a complex system whose decoding tends towards an infinite limit. Out of a need for understanding the meaning of his own existence and implicitly of the language of the universe, man has created multiple systems of knowledge and communication.

Despite all this effort and extension of our personal and collective knowledge, the sense of our inability of experiencing the whole amount of knowledge there is and of living life to full capacity is a reality that lacks a viable answer.

Artistic knowledge is predominantly affective, extending over the limits of rational knowledge. Penetrating the intimate and deep layers of affective experiences, as a form of approach and understanding of the great problems of our existence beyond their rational understanding, is the prerogative of artistic knowledge, the aim of its means of communication.

Contemplation of emotional experiences from the level of the spirit is superior, due to its depth, to rational, intellectual contemplation. The emotional warmth and vibration that accompany any aesthetic and psychic experience are above detached observation characteristic to rational thinking.

If the mathematical language and the language of the sciences is concrete and objective, if the linguistic act is notional and relational, the language of the arts possesses what no other language has – the energetic flow of affective experiencing, as a form of human communication.

The natural world is in itself a concrete language while artistic languages are rather spiritual in essence, attempting to capture the nuce or essence of existence in its virtual form. It is in this sense that Heidegger stated that “art and especially music is superior to science in its act of capturing and revealing the essence of reality”, and Schopenhauer affirmed that “music reveals the intimate substance of the world, expressing the most profound wisdom in a language that a composer’s reason would not understand.” [1].

The language of visual arts manifests itself through material and chromatic spaces and dimensions – points, lines, surfaces, volumes and colours; the choreographic language is visual and spatial, it is a language of gestures; music is the language of sounds – an immaterial semantic reality with universal, cosmic values.

The musical language, as well as the poetic language, emerged out of man’s necessity of filling a space left by the inability of the other languages to express affective experiences of a deep and subtle nature in our existence. In other words, there are whole areas of human sensibility that can only find expression in the communicative space that is open to affective
imagination expressed through the musical and poetic language.

The syncretism of the arts brings the image of artistic expression close to its virtual form and the defining evaluating element is the listener, with all the aspects of his personality.

Man’s bio-energetic field, his flux of spirituality, his charisma, his cultural energy, all this can be expressed in multiple ways by means of the language of art. Man’s inner sounds are also a vibrating entity, a cerebral-affective-aesthetic energy. Man’s first message, the first form of communication of the newborn is a sound – an exterior projection of his spirituality open to a new reality.

In all the specialised literature the musical language is defined as the art of combining sounds in order to transmit a musical message. The sound, as a defining element of the musical message, is the effect of the vibration of elastic bodies, and therefore the result of an energetic phenomenon, of a particular energy, of a certain frequency.

But since one sound does not make up a music discourse, a coherent succession of sounds are needed which combined, create a musical phrase. This is structured according to the energetic rapport of its component sounds. In other words, the significance of the message of the musical language is determined by the rapports of energy between the successive sounds contained by the musical phrase. The energetic potential of the musical phrase resonates with the sensibility of the listener, each interval and each succession of chords having its own resonance in one’s neuro-sensitive system.

Consonance and dissonance of the intervals of chords, the tension and relaxation of the music discourse perceived in the functional context of a tonality, are defined by means of the difference of energetic potential of the sounds that constitute the intervals.

Everything vibrates in the universe... our thoughts and feelings (affective, religious or aesthetic) are generated by pulsating energy. Affective or aesthetic feelings are not just energy pulsations or undulating movements but also physical and chemical entities with a double existence – objective and subjective – an existence that is controllable only electronographically, being perceived like an aura, with a chromatic spectrum.

2 Human voice and choral singing

Human voice represents the original sound, the basic component of the art of sounds, the axis around which revolves melody, polyphony, harmony and sonority. It is the means of externalization of the energetic flow of man’s music sensibility.

Vox humana has the status of “natural asset”, being a model from the point of view of the perfection of musical expression as well as in the building of musical instruments.

Choral singing as a form of collective manifestation of the vocal singing is available to all, through its accessibility in the most various forms of creation and interpretation.

An introspective look at the history of mankind reveals the “collective singing” as one of the first manifestations of human existence. Out of a need to overcome some difficult existential situations, as well as for mystical reasons, the sense of communion and closeness was one of the first and deepest human feelings.

It is the same state of complementarity of the individual’s universe that brings people closer to one another today. In a world of loneliness, similar on one level to the drama of primitive existence, present-day man is looking, in art, for an environment where his emotional structure could resonate with that of others. It is a kind of tonic solidarity, a communal joy between spirit and sensibility.

The power of expression of choral singing gains multiple meanings due to the interpretation source – the collective human voice – a direct expression of the human body in its existential form (physical and psychical).

2.1 The social function of choral singing

Along the centuries, the function of creation and interpretation of music was complex and multiple: social, religious, ceremonial or commercial.

In the classic Greek tragedies and comedies choral singing had a main role, being closely tied to the word and the gestures. With many peoples, the choir is an indispensable element of
celebration at the court or a part of religious ceremonies, and in religious music the choir maintains a permanent dialogue with the believers and the gods.

When asking the question “why do people always gather to sing together?” there are several possible answers, such as:

- because singing is a natural phenomenon, a means of communication through exteriorization of the human being, because one sings with one’s entire body, with one’s soul and heart;
- vocal singing can have a constructive and dynamic expression, conveying a sense of well-being and health, because music can bring joy and harmony or can have a healing function, of bringing out all the emotions and negative feelings;
- some will say that participation in choral singing means only the fun had together after practice or “celebrating” a successful concert; others will say that solitude justifies the refuge in a choral community as a form of socialization by means of the choral vocal language.

One often hears the statement „it is through music that group friendship becomes stronger” – because communal interpretation engenders the feeling of belonging to the same values. Music practice, which means frequent meetings, leads to a musical and human refinement of the group. The exchange of knowledge and values among choir members leads to a harmonisation of the members in relation to the musical language adopted based on trust, acceptance and mutual modelling. The members of a choir speak the same language, live the same musical experiences, share the same emotional sensibility, draw spiritual inspiration from the same source. The end result is a state of identification and fusion transformed into a common experience of the harmonious choral group.

As a symbolic model of a harmonious group, the choir can be very educational since each member shows their desire to become harmonious with the others in order to achieve a homogenous sound presented in a synchronous rhythm and full of mutual feelings.

How deep and valid is Moliere’s statement: „Without music a state cannot exist... and if all people learned music, would it not be the means by which they could tune to one another thus establishing universal peace?” [2]

Social history highlights two professional categories very close to the cultural space: doctors and diplomats. If a doctor can perceive in the biological structure of a patient his divine vibration, a diplomat senses in the power of the arts the power of cosmic harmony, for the arts are our universal heritage that goes beyond the space of a country, and by practising the arts one supports the cause of closeness among peoples.

2.2 The educational value of music education through choral singing

Music education can be regarded as part of the whole when it comes to the education of a pupil from an intellectual and cultural perspective or, in a specialised sense, it consists of the deepening and widening of one’s horizons and professional development of a musical talent.

Music must be learned actively by means of audition and interpretation practice. The dynamic and emotional character of the practical collective interpretation is preferred to the sterile, monotonous and stressful one from the lessons of music theory. Let us not deprive children of the emotion of individual vibration by means of song nor of the fascination of collective emotion raised during a concert. The stage is a mirage which any mortal dreamed of at least once, and music is a privilege for those who practise it.

Aesthetic education finds its most efficient educational temporal space in adolescence, when the youth are preoccupied by beauty as a personal form of expression, during a period of profound biological transformations and are in search for their personality. Syncretic cultural education brings models and creates principles, modelling the personality and character, and music becomes a complementary component of the language of ordinary expression, because it transmits an array of emotions hard to express through words.
For a teenager music can have a multitude of meanings and representations: pleasure and the need to express and communicate in a language that stems from his deepest inner self; his need to cultivate his soul, to know himself better, to understand things better; his discovery of a different emotional experience – due to its expression; his discovery of a composer or interpreter in tune with his own emotions; his attempt to model his life through music after models he appreciates and copies.

Unfortunately, a great part of the cultural models promoted by mass media are devoid of any cultural, intellectual, moral and social value, and, like in other countries, the musical education of young people is one of the weak points of the educational system.

The flexibility of the teacher becomes thus a condition and a necessity in present-day education in order to utilise creatively all that the students / pupils bring to school: the reactions of their sensibilities, their preferences, their criticisms and difficulties – problems that „enrich” the didactic activity and make it stronger.

4 Conclusion

Contemporary society is being increasingly confronted with exacerbated manifestations of violence, selfishness, social, religious, ethnic and national differences and divergences, which turn into acute political crises, wars and social violence. When we begin to realize that our differences represent sources of cultural enrichment that offer dynamism and colour to our social system, we will understand that harmony in diversity is a necessity and an existential prerogative, and choral singing is the symbolic community model of expressing diversity through unity. I have personally felt many times the converging spiritual flow generated through choral interpretation of some choirs from the most remote ethnic groups – this kind of harmony is defined by the flexibility of the members of the group.

Feelings, like love, exist in all human beings, to a greater or lesser extent, more or less visible – the role of the master teacher is to know how to reveal them.

The teacher who does not live himself through what he does will not be able to fully express himself.

Without culture, education and interpretation practice, any genius is imperfect; as to art, it must complete and define all that nature has left imperfect.

References: