

# WORLD MUSIC CENTER

## The World Music Initiative in Aarhus, Denmark: Thoughts on its Approach, Rationale and Operations

*The World Music' Center Denmark* (WMC) is an autonomous department under the wings of the Aarhus Music School. The WMC tries to build bridges between people from different cultural backgrounds, by creating positive cultural meetings using music and dance as cultural icebreakers. The centre, which has existed since 1999, is the only one of its kind in the Nordic countries (possibly in Europe) and it employs professional musicians and dancers who teach school children in municipal schools and at the music school.

To date, approximately 6 500 children and adolescents have been taught by the centre's eight teachers. WMC has a close cooperation with municipal schools in Aarhus, the Aarhus Music School and The Royal Academy of Music. It was necessary to break the ice on these levels to help create WMC as we now know it. The centre is funded by the municipality of Aarhus, with a yearly budget of 200 000 euros.

The centre's musicians and dancers teach two lessons (1 ½ hrs) a week over a period of five months (four classes at each of the four schools each semester). The lessons are an integral part of the normal school curriculum and the relevant groups here are pupils from the fourth to sixth grades. After the sixth grade, music is no longer part of the compulsory school syllabus.

.....

### 1 Definition of World Music:

We choose to define the term World Music geographically and by splitting it up into categories.

- It is mainly music that has its roots in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, South America, Greenland and the Caribbean Islands, in short not 'the industrial western countries'.
- World Music is split up into categories: Classical music, folk music, popular music and fusion. (This also includes the music that is created in meetings between people from different cultural backgrounds.)



*Fig. 1 – Girls dancing Flamenco dance at a concert.*

Photo by WMC

Kindergarten pupils and schoolchildren up to third grade are taught by WMC musicians after school. At municipal schools, WMC teachers teach in pairs and the municipal school music teachers are important partners. The latter receive a competence boost as they are provided courses in the different music and dance forms before and during the teaching period. This enables schoolteachers to be active participants during lessons and not just passive policemen whose only role is to keep discipline. There is a constant exchange of knowledge between both groups of teachers after each class and an evaluation at the end of the teaching period. Parents are informed about the teaching modules and about the new teachers from the beginning. The semester ends with a concert at each school for the other school children as well as a concert involving all four schools (around 400 pupils) at the concert hall in Aarhus. As the schools involved are from all areas of the town, the audience also comprises of people who come to the concert hall for the very first time in their lives and proudly enjoy the fruits of the pupils' hard work.

Here are some reflections from a Danish music teacher from Kragelundskolen where the pupils were taught for five months by Jimmy Mhukayesango (Zimbabwe) and Sasidevi Chandrabalan (Sri Lanka).

With Jimmy, we worked with rhythms, so they were more precise. He has a fantastic charisma. With Sasi, we danced a lot. She even motivated the boys to dance really beautifully. The rhythms were the foundation. We worked really hard with our bodies, listened with our bodies – or generally took a physical approach to music and dance. For the music teachers we realise that rhythms are very important

and we should build on them. The pupils developed a better feeling for rhythm, also with their bodies. They met other pupils from other schools and those pupils had different cultural backgrounds. The parents feel that this is very exciting and we received a very positive response at our concert.<sup>2</sup> (Christoffersen and Lyhne 2007)

## TEACHER RECRUITMENT

When we first advertised for teachers in November 1999, the response was overwhelming. We needed four teachers for a period of two months with only four weekly hours of teaching. We received over 50 applications. We chose 15 and invited them to play and to talk to us. We were looking for very good professional dancers and musicians, and equally important was the ability to pass on their knowledge to the pupils. At the end of the day we were confirmed in our belief that there really are many good musicians, more than we could use.

We decided at the onset that we would cut them loose into the classrooms (after a short course) and observe, and guide them only if this was necessary. This was based on the fact that many teaching methods are closely knitted to the music forms and we hoped to gain some knowledge from this. The pupils found out very quickly how good these musicians were; that they were also very friendly and ‘cool’ and thus were given respect.

The musicians are role models. They make the pupils play and dance an hour at a time repeating the same steps and drum rhythms until they



*Fig. 2 – Isaac Laryea from Ghana playing djembe at a concert with fifth grade pupils.*

Photo by WMC

2 Translated by the author.

are satisfied. They increase the pupils' social competence as the pupils have to work closely together in playing complex percussive rhythms and using dance steps. They build bridges. As an example, Sasi, the Indian dance teacher, uses Western pop music as a background for Indian dance. They tell them about their way of living, their food, clothing, religion, and also show videos from home and extend the teaching to encompass a broader cultural context. The musicians in turn learn about the education system and about the schools in Denmark. With intensive training, most of the pupils achieve a ground pulse and their playing and dancing reach an unexpectedly high level compared to the short time they have for this.

This is one of the few times where musicians without a 'Danish' education are allowed to teach at municipal schools and they are part of the school staff for the duration. Some of these musicians are autodidacts and have learned to play their instruments from their family. Unfortunately, there is no formal education yet that gives these musicians and dancers the tools they require, and no final certificate that allows them to teach. This is something the newly-established Centre for World Music Studies wishes to accomplish.

**The goals of the *World Music Center* are:**

- To find and use the resources in the immigrant community;
- To create an environment, where children and young people experience and work actively with other cultures' musical traditions by using world music;
- To create positive cultural meetings between the 'old' and the 'new' Danes using music and dance as cultural icebreakers;
- To develop pedagogical methods for teaching music from different cultures, through the exchange of teaching experiences and methods on local, national and international levels with the goal to develop new pedagogical methods for teaching music in a multicultural society, and
- To work at instigating and developing educational initiatives in relation to the area – World Music, teaching and cultural meetings.

## **INTERSCHOOL MEETING (IM)**

In autumn 2005, the WMC began an additional module to the existing one called the *Interschool meeting* (IM). During the normal teaching module, cultural meetings were created between WMC musicians who taught the music and the pupils who received lessons. In the IM the aim is to expand the cultural meeting to also include pupils from different schools, as schools

with a large number of pupils with immigrant backgrounds and pupils from schools that are ethnically Danish live isolated from each other. We wish to create the circumstances for positive cultural encounters that will give the pupils positive common experiences, and will create a fundament for openness and friendship. Personal contact here is very important and this is the ground pillar in the *Interschool Meeting*. Music and dance become the tools for the cultural encounters. The goal is to create an encounter between pupils with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but in the meeting itself it is not the pupils' background that is in focus, but music and dance.

Pupils from the parallel classes will first write to each other and send photographs, establish contact and make penfriends. This takes place in Danish classes. Then the pupils visit each other's schools. This visit has two aspects: First, to learn a simple dance that will be presented at a final concert, for which the WMC musicians are responsible. The other element is that they do some activities together, which the class teacher from the host school is responsible for organising.

There were certain events that we did not anticipate. For example, one encounter occurred during the period of Ramadan, when the children of the host school (fifth grades) were fasting. The visiting 'Danish' pupils showed their solidarity by deciding to take part in the fast.

One of the teachers from the host school wrote after the meeting:

"It was a very good meeting and the pupils were very glad and relieved over how well everything went. I feel that there was a big development in relation to the other school. They became more open and positive. They thought that the other pupils were more handsome."

The pupils' answers to some of the questions asked at an evaluation were: What was it like to meet the other pupils?

"I thought that they would look different – nicer. One actually had pimples."

"I thought Sarah was taller, but I found out that she is shorter than me."

"I thought that they would have smart and expensive clothes, but they did not at all."

Was it easy to talk to the pupils from the other school?

"Yes, because they were happy. They were happier than I had expected. It was easier than I thought it would be. They were great fun and sweet."

(Quotes from the evaluation report of the Interschool Module 2005/06 by Helene M. Pedersen)



*Fig. 3 – Girls from Vejlbyskole dancing African dance in 1999.*

Photo by WMC

## THE GLOBALISED WORLD

Global development and increasing immigration has had an effect on our societies. During the past 20 years, the amount of music production in the world has increased immensely, and again it has become a lot easier to gain access to this production via the media and the Internet, to which a lot of children and adolescents have access.

At the same time, many people have immigrated to Europe, bringing new music forms, music cultures, music practices and teaching methods related to these forms from other parts of the world. This means that the Nordic countries in particular and Europe generally, have received a substantial amount of musical knowledge and musical resources that deserve to be recognised and to be used.

The musical landscape has changed locally and globally and this creates challenges for music teaching, whether this occurs in the class-room, of a music school or in other institutions. The questions that arise are:

- How does music teaching relate to the changes that are happening in society and in the music sphere?

- What types of music teachers do we need in a multicultural society?
- Which pedagogical and didactical challenges do we face?

## MUSIC TEACHING

In the first verse of *Hist, hvor vejen slår en bugt* [Here, Where the Road Bends]<sup>3</sup>, the famous Danish author Hans Christian Andersen in his description of Denmark ends by simply saying “solen synker – og så videre” [the sun sets – and so on]<sup>4</sup>. He tells us here that we have already formed an image of a certain understanding of the Danish ideal. However, contemporary Danes do not have the same type of image of the Danish ideal, while both Hans Christian Andersen and Danish national romantics knew that this was a postulate.

In spite of the fact that the music teaching system built up in the Nordic countries has goals such as ‘equal access’, ‘equal rights to participate in’ and ‘cultural democracy’, the subject matter in music teaching is still based primarily on western classical music and commercial musical styles. As of 1995, the guidelines for music schools in Denmark has its origin in a monocultural perspective as it builds on the teaching of western music forms. This is a problem as approximately 7,5 % of the Danish population comes from other countries.

Music teaching does not reflect the demographic constellation of cultural groups or the musical diversity that exists in our societies. This means that some of the cultural groups’ musical traditions are never heard in the public arena, and the musical horizon of children and young people is never expanded but is cemented in the music horizon they already possess. One can build on this observation by postulating that children and young people with an immigrant background are not a common sight in music education institutions.

It is interesting to note that apart from a few small pilot projects, no other municipality other than Aarhus or other music schools in Denmark have taken steps to use the good results from Aarhus. Union Scene in Drammen in Norway has been inspired by us and has started a mini-WMC with financial help from the Norwegian Arts Council. We are planning to strengthen the network between the musicians by arranging exchange visits. In 2007, the Municipality of Aarhus was given the *Best Municipality Award* from the Danish Association of Music Schools (DAMUSA) for supporting the WMC and its goals. The Councillor for Culture accepted on behalf of the municipality a painting by Mr. Malangatana, a well-known artist from Mozambique.

.....  
3 Translated by the author.

4 Translated by the author.

## **MUSIC, DANCE AND INTEGRATION**

Music and dance create fellowship, openness, and intuitive understanding between people and these are exceptional tools when working with cultural meetings, cultural understanding and integration. Music has a special property, and Mr. Jørgen Carlsen, philosopher and leader of the *Free Academy*, Denmark, expresses it in this way:

Music transcends over time and place, and is most certainly the most transgressive of all art forms. It is universal in the way that it does not need any special language skills or prior knowledge to relate to it, but music calls on the openness of the mind, attentiveness and awareness. (Carlsen 2001)

In today's world it is necessary to promote a mutual understanding of different cultural backgrounds and resources, on an international and local level. Multicultural music teaching needs to involve the musician in teaching and hence create a basis for a real cultural encounters between people. Experience shows that music and dance as a common activity play a very unique role when dealing with positive cultural encounters.

## **HOPES FOR THE FUTURE: ESTABLISHING A CENTRE FOR WORLD MUSIC STUDIES**

In 2008, the Danish Arts Council as part of the Ministry of Culture gave a little funding to kick-start a Centre for World Music Studies.

We wish to:

- Create a meeting place for musicians, music pedagogues and culture workers;
- Collect, work on, and pass on knowledge about world music, and to start and to help promote relevant research and new initiatives. The focus areas here would be teaching World music forms and practices, and cultural meetings through music and dance:
- Create educational initiatives to help develop diversity in music teaching and education at schools and relevant education institutions, as well as create educational opportunities for World Music musicians, and
- Disseminate knowledge and experience nationally, regionally (EU and Nordic) and internationally.





*Fig. 4 – The grand finale at a WMC concert at Aarhus Concert Hall in 2007 with 320 school children.*

Photos by WMC

## References

- Carlsen, Jørgen. 2001. Musikkens verden – verdens musik. *Jyllands Posten*.
- Christoffersen, René and Erik Lyhne. 2007. World Music Center – Musik i skolen på en hel anden måde. *Dansk Sang*, September 2007.
- Evaluation report on WMC. 2002. [http://internet.aardasem.dk/fag\\_prak\\_mus/fagene/musik/assets/ressources/materiale/wmc\\_rapport\\_webudgave.pdf](http://internet.aardasem.dk/fag_prak_mus/fagene/musik/assets/ressources/materiale/wmc_rapport_webudgave.pdf)

## Online Reference

World Music Center, <http://www.worldmusiccenter.dk>

