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The Voice: Communicating, Creating, Connecting

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A total of 190 people from 37 countries gathered at the Orff Institute in Salzburg and online for the 2025 Convention. Contributions in the form of keynotes, presentations, practical sessions, and 'Come Togethers', offered by practitioners and researchers alike, demonstrated the diverse ways in which *the voice* can flourish within an Orff-Schulwerk practice.

The inspirational Keynote presentation from André de Quadros, *Heart and Soul, Skin and Bones: Reframing the Schulwerk,* offered contextualization for the convention through his questions, historical overview, and insights. He recognized the pioneer work of Orff, Günther, and Keetman, among others in their time, and challenged us to "take their excellent architecture and build something that fits our time and our planet." And, to do so, he asks us to reflect on the purpose of our practice; who do we teach, for whom is this done, why have we chosen this path, what does our teaching encompass, and how do we teach? De Quadros describes how his critical understanding of social realities *and* how these realities can be transformed was influenced by Orff-Schulwerk and by the Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* De Quadros describes the *Empowering Song* project, which he started a decade ago, *as "*subversive, disobedient, and transgressive, a way of knowing and creating that emphasizes personal expression, community mobilization, and dialogue". Furthermore, he states that "as arts educators, we have immense power to challenge, interrogate, console, inspire, and much more."

Indeed, the convention provided impulses and guidance to enhance, to challenge, console, and inspire our pedagogical practice. We heard from colleagues who shared specific, research-based practices for voice development and training. We recognized once again that we are complex beings - everything is entangled and connected. Alfonso Elorriaga explained that teenage voices develop alongside teenage physiology and psychology, so to understand and work with changing voices, we must consider the whole person. Cristiane Ferronato works with her teenage and young adult choir, encouraging them to sing with active, conscious bodies, and to reflect on why they are singing, the meanings and the stories behind the songs they sing, and knowing the people well with whom they are singing. Words, sound, and body contribute to the meaning they create in their lives, becoming the 'authors of their own existence'.

Founded in 2019, the choir Canto Abierto, led by Carmen Domínguez, is a Madrid-based project that strengthens the connection between culture and artistic education for people with different abilities. It responds to the needs of a group that has been historically excluded from mainstream musical practice, providing a normalized environment for an integrative, artistic practice; truly, for having a Voice.

Hastings Nyirenda's presentation situated the storytelling voice as a creative bridge for engaging teenagers in Orff settings. Across most of the African continent, music is intricately

connected to oral literature and Hastings contends that musical narratives convey emotion, history, and cultural identity across generations. Through storytelling, students develop a deeper connection to the music they study, and an appreciation of and connection to diverse musical heritages, in this case, of southern Africa. Stories in Jiti music, which revolve around family dynamics, relationships, and marriage, captivate his teenage audience: they are eager to learn the music, the song, to move, and act out the story. Their skills in areas such as phrasing, expression and interpretation improve, as does their critical thinking and empathy.

Sezgin Inceel's presentation focused on one person, the Turkish countertenor, Nuri Harun Ateş, with the aim of encouraging audience members to consider how power is reproduced or challenged in music education, artistic practice, and performance. Embracing inclusive models of music and movement education means accepting the concept of fluidity: fluid vocal registers, flexible constructs of music genres and gender norms, and identities that are neither monolithic nor restrictive. Inceel argues that such a practice creates space for critically engaged non-hierarchal dialogues. In this way, music education and practice can be at the forefront of openness and curiosity, and when necessary, defiance.

Education is inextricably linked to culture, and music education is inseparable from other human activities and endeavours. In her presentation, 'The Dance of the Continents', Elisa Seppänen argued persuasively that arts education must be at the forefront of developing an embodied ecological and socio-political awareness in response to the global environmental crisis. Activist educators intertwine pedagogy, ethics, and planetary advocacy. They encourage their students to engage with global challenges through imagination, knowledge, and understanding, and inspire them to become reflective agents of social and ecological change. Through active listening, song, visual images, and poetry, Seppänen offered her audience a variety of ideas for facilitating meaningful connections with one another and with the environment.

On Monday, the first day of the convention, Barbara Haselbach and Virginia Longo provided a clear and warm-hearted introduction to the Associated Schools and Institutions (ASI). All ASI presentations shared examples from their schools and institutions on various themes related to the voice.

The ASI member, Osan Kindergarten, represented by Sister Caritas, shared its work with kindergarten children as part of a larger environmental advocacy project concerning a threatened area of South Korea. The feedback from the children themselves, from teachers involved in the project, and parents, was articulate and moving. One parent wrote: "Now, I feel a sense of responsibility for ecological destruction" and another "Thank you for helping children to experience life and nature – not through textbooks but through their whole bodies and hearts."

Another example of an environmental focus comes from Krongtong Boonprakong and her ASI team at Jittamett Kindergarten in Thailand. They shared work honouring sensory perception, which enables children to understand the world around them and their own inner world. This understanding is evidenced through voice, body language and movement,

drawing, speech, and silent conversations they have with themselves. This project encouraged children to realise that living respectfully on our planet is our only option. These two ASI's offer clear examples of the leadership that teachers can exhibit in Orff-Schulwerk education to promote activism and awareness.

Representing the ASI International School of Bergamo, Virginia Longo and her middle school students engaged with Futurism, a largely Italian avant-garde movement. Emerging in the early 20th century, the Futurists broke with past traditions to embrace the technology, industry, and the energy of the modern age. The students explored the potential of the expressive voice through onomatopoeia, speech, singing, and the inherent dynamics of sound. Furthermore, graphic images from this period also suggested movements, thus providing a kind of score for both music and dance. The presentation proved to be engaging for the audience, with questions, discussion, observations and a great deal of laughter.

Thomas Rösch, the director of the Orff Centre Munich, the State Institute for Research and Documentation, delivered a captivating presentation on the role of human voice in the oeuvre of Carl Orff. Many of the compositions he spoke about, and the audio recordings he shared, were undoubtedly heard for the first time by audience members. Listening to these pieces in the context of Orff's artistic endeavours not only fostered a deeper appreciation for this legacy but also offered invaluable insights into his pedagogical approach.

In an interview with Barbara Haselbach, the theme of the *Voice of the Body* was discussed. The historical context of the Orff-Schulwerk pedagogical approach was clarified, and it was concluded that our personal and collective efforts will ensure that the voice of the body remains relevant in contemporary educational discussions and in the context of creative expression in an Orff-Schulwerk practice.

The short and engaging sessions called *Come Togethers*, offered all participants this year the possibility to connect through song, movement, and dance, whether live or online. We immersed ourselves in the melodies and cultural traditions of other lands and eras: we sang Ukrainian, Zimbabwean, Iranian, Thai, Turkish, Colombian songs, as well as an Italian Commedia dell' Arte piece and an impromptu by Franz Schubert. We sang echo songs, and we sang and danced to the melody and lyrics from a canon in the meter of 5.

This year the convention introduced practical sessions, topic presentations not specifically related to the convention theme, and special events. Two practical sessions, one with Elisa Seppänen and the other with Laura Facci, offered a space for participants to embody aspects of *The Voice* through singing, moving, dancing, connecting, listening, sensing, and discussing. Presentations without a specific connection to *The Voice* included a session on the publication series *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk,* and an introduction to the newly revised *IOSFS Recommendations and Guidelines: Orff-Schulwerk Studies.* Additionally, the yearly convening Presidents' meeting met on two days, engaging in intensive discussions to support Orff-Schulwerk associations. Lastly, *The Forum Looks Forward* summarized the works of the past year and the outlook for the coming year.

Bringing in the voices of research, hosted by the newly formed IOSFS Research Committee was a Special Event highlight. Two sessions were offered (one open to all convention participants, and one open only to presenting researchers) generating such interest that its place in future conventions is assured.

Two more special sessions inspired and animated all participants. A highlight of many past conventions has been the evening performance, and this year's was no exception. The phenomenal vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Anna-Maria Hefele carried the spellbound audience away with her amazing solo programme of polyphonic overtone singing, 16th century Italian songs, Mozart, and pop and folk songs as well as her own compositions. She accompanied herself on the harp, the Swedish nyckelharpa, and the double bass.

This year's convention concluded with a memorable musical finale featuring Sofía López-Ibor and Polo Vallejo. Theirs was a seamless collaboration. Drawing on their deep musical and pedagogical knowledge, as well as their profound respect for and connection to the music, Sofía and Polo shared a variety of songs with us, including work songs, play songs, and lullabies. They invited us into worlds that opened our voices, unleashed our imagination, and stirred our empathy.

We hope to see you in July 2026!