



From Around the World

A Farewell to Giovanni Piazza: His Original Orff-Schulwerk Legacy

Checco Galtieri

The Orff-Schulwerk community in Italy salutes with affection and gratitude Maestro Giovanni Piazza, one of the pillars of Italian and European music education in the last 60 years, re-elaborator of the methodology for Italy and founder of the Association Orff-Schulwerk Italiano (OSI), who left us last April.

Life

Son of Faenza physician and poet Ugo Piazza, Giovanni graduated in French horn at the *Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia* in Rome with Domenico Ceccarossi, studying composition with Gianluca Tocchi, Armando Renzi and Virgilio Mortari. He followed the Conducting Course, held by Franco Ferrara, at the Accademia Chigiana and in Venice. In Berlin, he studied conducting with Richard Kraus and discovered the practice of *Gehörbildung* (ear training), totally unknown in Italian conservatories. In the library of the *Musikhochschule* he found the books of the German Orff-Schulwerk that conditioned his didactic and pedagogical-musical choice after meeting Carl Orff in person and led him to spread the Orff-Schulwerk in Italy.

He taught at the Experimental School of Composition at Santa Cecilia. With the *Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza*, together with Franco Evangelisti, Giancarlo Schiaffini, Ennio Morricone and many others, he produced music and musical montages, for theatre and for multimedia and dance performances. He has collaborated with the Rome Opera House (1980-85), with RAI (1982-89) and with the Ministry of Education (since 1998).

The Italian re-elaboration of the Orff Methodology was realised by Giovanni Piazza starting from the early Seventies, characterised by a completely new type of approach to the Orff instruments that is still highly topical from a psycho-pedagogical point of view: "The Italian choice is oriented, in full agreement with Orff, not towards the realisation of an anthology of music for children..., but towards the exposition of a methodological outline that gives an account of its origins, its presuppositions and possible paths. An exposition that aims to indicate how to structure a lesson, a teaching project, rather than to provide materials for use To provide, in short, what is lacking - obviously from a Schulwerk perspective - in the training and experience of the music educator of the time, with the aim of contributing to the growth of a creative teacher figure, capable of autonomously developing a project line and a personal approach. It is, therefore, a true ad hoc reworking of Schulwerk material, and not an anthological 'translation' of the German originals."

After having founded the national courses on Orff-Schulwerk methodology and practice with the *Scuola Popolare di Musica Donna Olimpia*, he founded the national association 'OSI- Orff Schulwerk Italiano' in 2001.

He has published numerous essays and books for EDT, Schott Music, Amadeus, MKT and other publishers.

The Importance of Giovanni's Work

After more than thirty years since our encounter with him, we can say that his thought, his didactic action, has profoundly changed our cultural project: we continue to try to make our own every day the motto #DoingToUnderstand, in fact, *'from practical experience the child derives knowledge, information about music and derives skills. Thus, Fare per Capire, not starting from theoretical abstraction thinking that from that the child can understand anything'*.

We are increasingly convinced that *'the child is not a container into which notions are poured, but is the subject, the protagonist... everything must be done according to their needs'*.

The indispensability of ensemble music, the intertwining of generations and styles, the continuous adaptability and transformation of classroom pacts, research into the quality of teaching materials, the ability to get involved... the topics on which we have been enriched in this profession, but above all, human confrontation would be endless. There would be countless anecdotes and stories of his life in the round: his meeting with Carl Orff; his trip to Berlin in 1968 and his adventure at the Opera House; his study, together with colleagues of the calibre of Riccardo Muti, of conducting with Maestro Ferrara; his adventure at *Nuova Consonanza*; his incursions into the RAI; his extensive production of books and essays; his civil commitment in the *'girotondi'*; his path in the institutions (thirty-two years as a lecturer at S. Cecilia) not without unexpected slaps he received for his sensitivity to what the territory produced from below. As he himself wrote in a polemical letter in 2010: *I like to quote Franco Frabboni when he says: "The great Italian popular pedagogy (Montessori, Malaguzzi, Ciari, Lodi,...) did not originate in the Academies, but from associations"*. And again, his ability to play and get involved in the last few tiring years has marked us: from the time when he presented in German and English at the Mozarteum in Salzburg the innovations of the Italian Orff-Schulwerk (Carl Orff's didactic work that he reworked and the Association OSI as part of the Forum) he willingly accepted to lend himself to a pantomime playing tennis with sound tubes, to the amused and ironic incursions in the period of the pandemic during webinars and online transmissions.

Music is inseparable from other expressive activities (language, gesture and movement, dance): musical activity is collective, open to the practices of improvisation and elemental composition, characterised by that "elementarity" that is found both in the musical models and in the instruments used.

We approach music by making music with the voice, with the body, with instruments, and not by starting with learning notes, which are merely the graphic record of our sound inventions, and as such are a consequence and not a premise. The first learning of music, including the initiation into reading and writing notation, according to Giovanni Piazza, always springs from musical experience and therefore stems from an exploratory and experimental approach, not from abstract and theoretical premises.

In short, the heritage he has handed over to the entire world of Italian education over the years is enormous, and we would need infinite space to recount it. Continuing his action in an open manner (as he taught us), that is, reworking and personalising his thought, making it current and up-to-date is the task he left us and that many of us are ready to continue.

Thank you, Giovanni!



From left to right: Giovanni Piazza, Barbara Haselbach, Arianna Forneron, Checco Galtieri and Andrea Sangiorgio



*Giovanni Piazza conducts a rehearsal of the performance Spettacolo MetamOrffOsi.
Auditorium Parco della Musica – Rome, March 2004*

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