

Dimitrakoulakos, Demosthenes; Hellberg, Bianca; Libbey, James

The benefits of student-moderated concerts. A practice paper in meaningful music education

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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipt.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Demosthenes Dimitrakoulakos,
Bianca Hellberg & James Libbey

The Benefits of Student-Moderated Concerts

A Practice Paper in Meaningful Music Education

Introduction

In this chapter, a student-focused collaborative project between the International School of Luxembourg¹, the Philharmonie Luxembourg² and the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg³ will be described and evaluated. A conclusion – with further implications – will also be presented for (future) music educators, concert halls and professional ensembles (not just orchestras) to consider. Moreover, it is hoped that the description of this project can act as a resource template for others to use in the future when doing a similar project.

Teachers at the International School of Luxembourg noticed that many secondary level students still had actually never been to an orchestral concert. Instead of trying to organize a “one-off” field trip for students to experience such a concert, teachers worked together in forming an idea for students to participate in a longer-term project with a professional arts institution and orchestra, in order to help students experience an orchestral concert in a more engaging manner. Within the framework of designing an interactive concert format which included students and an orchestra working together, we wanted to have our students participate in a music project that took place during an exploratory music course, in which students would devise a new concert format for a student audience.

With this in mind, teachers at the International School of Luxembourg collaborated with the Philharmonie Luxembourg and the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg to have students perform a moderated concert to other students from different schools

¹ For more information one can consult <https://www.islux.lu> [01.12.2022].

² For more information one can consult <https://www.philharmonie.lu/en/ope> [01.12.2022].

³ For more information one can consult <https://www.philharmonie.lu/en/opl> [01.12.2022].

across the country of Luxembourg, in order to provide them with a better informed listening experience, rather than just listening to the orchestra play a traditional concert. Just as one may take a guided tour around a museum for the first time, the idea here was for students to provide an engaging and interactive guided listening experience to student audience members. It is one thing to provide static program notes for audience members to read through and learn about the music they are about to hear, and it is a different experience if the music is explained to them live beforehand by a concert moderator, or a team of concert moderators, who also include the musicians in a guided listening presentation before the pieces are played in their entirety.

Project Overview

Students and parents were informed that there would be an opportunity to be involved in a collaborative project to learn about the composer Paul Dukas and his ballet *La Péri*, in cooperation with the Education Department of the Philharmonie Luxembourg and the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg. This project was directly related to the music curriculum at the International School of Luxembourg, which is aimed at helping students develop their musical skills holistically, through performance practice, musical theory knowledge/analysis skills (both written and aural), compositional techniques, and through contextual and historical-based research skills. Students then used this knowledge to develop their presentation for a moderated concert.

This project engaged students (n=20, aged 14–18) enrolled at the International School of Luxembourg, more specifically from the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)⁴ and the International Baccalaureate (IB)⁵ music classes, from 14 September to 21 October, 2021. Collaboration is a key element to the music classes at the International School of Luxembourg, but it often is limited to students within a particular class, or it occurs in beyond-the-classroom offerings such as large ensembles and musicals. One of the aims of this project was to combine students from different ages and classes to work together, which is something that ordinarily does not happen as these classes are scheduled at different times. Arrangements were made for students to be released from their other classes to make this project possible.

This project included two class visits (workshop-masterclasses) by members of the Education Department of the Philharmonie Luxembourg and the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, to help teach students about Paul Dukas and *La Péri*. In addition,

⁴ For more information on this program one can consult <https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-igcse-music-0410/> [01.12.2022].

⁵ For more information on this program one can consult <https://ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/programmes/dp/pdfs/dp-subject-brief-music-2020-en.pdf> [01.12.2022].

students received a backstage tour of the Philharmonie Luxembourg, which also included a viewing of a rehearsal by the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg. Students also learned about different career paths in, and connected to, orchestral performance.

The project culminated in five students volunteering to receive additional training onsite at the Philharmonie Luxembourg, from a professional animateur, Rachel Leach⁶, to plan the concert moderation. These students then worked with the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg and the conductor for this project Domingo Hindoyan⁷, for a final student-moderated concert on 21 October, 2021 (10:00–11:00 AM) at the Philharmonie Luxembourg. For visual contextualization, Fig. 1 below shows the student moderators participating in the culminating concert for this collaborative project.



Fig. 1: Students moderating the concert⁸

Workshop-Masterclass I

For the first workshop-masterclass, Bianca Hellberg, the Education Manager of the Philharmonie Luxembourg, visited the International School of Luxembourg and the agenda for this workshop-masterclass included:

⁶ For more information one can consult <http://www.rachelleachmusic.com> [01.12.2022].

⁷ For more information one can consult <https://www.domingohindoyan.com> [01.12.2022].

⁸ This photo was taken by one of the authors of this Practice Paper and permission has been granted for its use.

- (1) Students were provided with background information about the Philharmonie Luxembourg and the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg.
- (2) Students were informed what this project would entail and the following questions were addressed:
 - (a) What is a moderated concert?
 - (b) What is the purpose of a moderated concert?
 - (c) How can students contribute to a moderated concert?
- (3) Students provided one-minute presentations of what they already knew about *La Péri* (information on the composer, the programmatic story behind the music and the analysis of this piece).
- (4) Students then received a follow-up presentation about the composer and piece, uncovering aspects which were not previously discussed.
- (5) Students then divided into small groups (a combination of different ages in each group) to further explore the thematic material (through the elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, and any relation to form, style and context) in *La Péri* by working with the score and playing through the themes on their instruments. In addition to identifying where the themes were located and how Dukas was presenting them in relation to musical elements, students were also engaged with answering the following five questions:
 - (a) What new information would you like to share about the composer and context of the piece?
 - (b) What important musical instruments and information about the orchestra would you like to share? What instruments would you like to demonstrate the main themes?
 - (c) What do you want to discuss with the conductor? What questions do you want to ask him (either about his life, career as a conductor, or about his approach and preparation of the piece, or how he rehearses such a piece)?
 - (d) What do you want to discuss about the “storyline” of *La Péri* and important musical excerpts that will be used to demonstrate the moments?
 - (e) Do you want to discuss anything about the ballet *La Péri*?
- (6) In addition to learning about the composer and the piece, students had, at this stage, already started to think about what material should be presented in their moderation and how they would construct their moderation overall.
- (7) The session ended in a round table format where each group shared their new findings and understanding of the composer and the piece.

Workshop-Masterclass II

For this workshop-masterclass, Olivier Germani⁹ – the Oboist /cor anglais player from the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg – visited the International School of Luxembourg and the agenda for this workshop-masterclass included:

- (1) Students received a demonstration of the oboe and the cor anglais (similarities and differences).
- (2) Students heard various examples of the orchestral oboe literature performed.
- (3) Students learned about what it means to be an orchestral musician (from the training involved to having a career and the day-to-day life).
- (4) Students learned how Mr. Germani prepares for a concert, contextualizing his preparation with *La Péri*.
- (5) Students then had the opportunity to play various parts of the *La Péri* score with him.
- (6) The session ended with a question and answer session and a recap of everything students had learned to date about Dukas and *La Péri*.

Tour of the Philharmonie Luxembourg

For the tour, Bianca Hellberg, the Education Manager of the Philharmonie Luxembourg, first introduced students to the main architectural aspects of the building and the history of its design and construction. The concert hall was designed by French architect Christian de Portzamparc and it is a landmark building at the Place de l'Europe in Luxembourg City.¹⁰ For many students this was their first time entering this building and they were astounded by its design.

Students viewed the common areas which are open to the public, the main auditorium, the chamber hall, backstage areas, including rehearsal rooms where students were able to play the celeste for the first time. Playing the celeste was a highlight for our students. Another highlight of this portion of the tour was the viewing of the technical-sound box of the chamber hall, where students had the opportunity to speak with the sound engineer and lighting technician. Some students left thinking that this was a career they would like to pursue.

⁹ For more information one can consult <https://www.philharmonie.lu/en/opl/musiker/olivier-germani> [01.12.2022].

¹⁰ For more information one can consult <https://www.christiandeportzamparc.com/en/projects/philharmonie-luxembourg> [02.12.2022].

Students then observed a rehearsal of the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, in which they were preparing a piece for the *Rainy Days Festival*.¹¹ This festival focuses on contemporary music and students had the opportunity to hear new music. The tour culminated with a presentation about all the various career opportunities in non-performing roles that exist at the Philharmonie Luxembourg or other similar arts institutions. Examples discussed included, but were not limited to: artistic productions and operations, artistic planning, finance, marketing, human resources and technical divisions. This was enlightening for many students who are interested in working in the arts field but not necessarily as a performing artist. This session helped students better understand how they could utilize their musical knowledge in non-performing areas within the field of arts management.

Philharmonie Animateur Workshop-Masterclass

For this workshop-masterclass, students worked with British music animateur and composer Rachel Leach. Ms. Leach is the resident animateur for the London Symphony Orchestra and works with ensembles and schools all around the world. Students reviewed various resources and moderated concert examples from Ms. Leach's website before working with her in person.¹² As seen in Fig. 2 below, over the course of twelve hours, six on each day (Saturday and Sunday), students analyzed the piece together, figured out how the story behind the piece related to the music and then plotted everything out for their moderation. They decided which were the most significant musical elements to discuss in relation to the story as well as putting the piece into context of the composer's life.

Students then made their way to the stage to practise speaking the text that they created. One of the student moderators stated:

I had heard certain pieces by Paul Dukas before but I had never really learned anything about the composer himself, so that was very interesting. With La Péri, it was very interesting to learn about the whole backstory and it gave me a whole new perspective when listening to the piece. I now understand the story behind the piece, and how this is reflected in the music. I definitely was able to associate parts of the piece and little motifs to points in the story, mostly thanks to Ms. Leach.

¹¹ For more information one can consult <https://www.philharmonie.lu/fr/programm/festivals/katalog> and <https://en.calameo.com/read/00589598640ab2e49f091> [02.12.2022].

¹² For more information one can consult <http://www.rachelleachmusic.com/resources> [02.12.2022].



Fig. 2: An example of the students at work backstage with Ms. Leach¹³

Concert Week

During the week of the performance students had three additional rehearsals, practising both alone on stage and with the orchestra before their final performance. The impact of this project on students' musical development can be summarized in the following quotes from three of the five student moderators.

The biggest takeaway for me was the sheer amount of work and organization that goes into a final orchestral performance, both from the musicians, and the staff at the Philharmonie. (Student Moderator)

My biggest takeaways are that an orchestra is a lot more than just the musicians and each point in a given piece of music can be linked to a point in the story the composer is trying to tell. (Student Moderator)

I loved working with people I had never worked with before because they all turned out to be very nice and I wouldn't have worked with them otherwise. I also just really enjoyed working on this project as it gave me a whole new perspective on jobs in the music industry. (Student Moderator)

¹³ This photograph was taken by one of the authors of this Practice Paper and permission has been granted for its use.

Post-Concert

Online Learning Resource

After the concert, we had two goals. The first goal was to create an online learning resource regarding this project, Paul Dukas and *La Péri*, but unfortunately, we did not have time to complete this task. It was our intention that this resource would provide a short summary on Paul Dukas and *La Péri*, a summary of the programmatic aspects and the piece's significant musical features, musical devices and terminology relevant to this piece, and recommended further listening opportunities relating to the works of Paul Dukas. As we had students working across grade levels and missing other classes to participate in this project, we were not able to add additional times to enable students to work on this goal. In the future, this is definitely something we would want to better plan with our colleagues.

Our second goal was to conduct four surveys to gather as much information as possible relating to the effectiveness of this project; what succeeded and what could be improved upon. For this we surveyed the student moderators, the teachers working with the student moderators, the student audience members and teacher audience members. The following is a summary of our findings (successes, challenges presented, lessons learned and steps moving forward).

Surveys (Sources of Data and Treatment of Data)

The data and quotes presented below were drawn from a four-prong approach; collecting reflections from 1) the student moderators (n=5), 2) the teachers and other professionals who worked with the student moderators (n=4), 3) student audience members (n=29) and 4) teacher audience members (n=7), in an attempt to understand the perceptions of the participants and to provide a well-rounded set of perspectives relating to the project. As such, the methodology of our data collection was qualitative in nature. All four surveys were distributed to the participants in the moderated concert via Google form links and the participants were given a week to voluntarily complete the surveys. The surveys consisted of structured, semi-structured and unstructured questions ranging from open-ended, multiple choice and Likert-scale questions. The Student Moderator Survey focused on the extent to which students felt their holistic musical understanding was enhanced as a result of their participation in the project. The Teacher Moderator Survey focused on how the teachers planned the course, how challenges were overcome in implementing this course and advice they had for teachers wanting to pursue a similar project in the future. The Student Audience Survey focused around what students felt they learned as a result of attending this concert, to what extent they enjoyed the moderated concert format and whether or not they felt inspired to be a student moderator in the future. The final Teacher Audience Survey focused on takeaways they had themselves and also takeaways they observed in their students who attended this concert. All surveys ended with a question

allowing participants to share anything else they wanted which was not addressed in the other questions. While the Google forms produced statistical results (percentages of responses in graphic pie charts) for the structured questions, the authors of this Practice Paper manually thematically analyzed this data along with data from the semi-structured and unstructured questions in order to identify any recurring patterns and emerging themes. The findings are presented below.

Student Moderator Survey

For the five students who participated in this project, analysis of the data confirmed several emerging themes. First, the students stated that they developed their musical analysis skills and learned that there was much more to a musical performance than what they had previously understood. Second, students developed a better understanding of all the work an arts organization does behind the scenes to stage a particular concert, from the conductor's perspective, the musicians' perspective, and the administration's perspective (education department, marketing department, artistic planning, etc.). Third, students stated that learning with students of different ages enhanced their overall learning and collaborative experience. Fourth, students stated that they would recommend this type of experience for other students to pursue in the future. The following quotes support this analysis:

Before this project I had never analyzed a piece in such depth, so this was very intriguing and I think my understanding and skills on analyzing musical pieces improved a lot. (Student Moderator)

I think this project really expanded my understanding of orchestral music, especially getting into the depths of specific aspects of music theory, analysis and music history. I feel I've gained a greater appreciation of longer orchestral works, and the role which reoccurring themes can play in a composition. (Student Moderator)

Teacher Moderator Survey

The limited amount of instruction time required by the Cambridge IGCSE external program presented challenges for the four teachers involved in this project; nevertheless, analysis of this data showed that it was still possible for them to plan properly for this project. As no extra lesson time was available for this project, teachers did require students to do more studying outside of the classroom than would otherwise have been the case. However, the work completed for this project complemented the required Cambridge IGCSE curriculum and it was easy for students to make connections more holistically with their musical understandings. The only aspect teachers had difficulty regarding time was the creation of the learning resource previously mentioned, which was indeed a large task. The following quote supports this analysis:

This was the first time we did such a project and had our students collaborate with professional musicians in this manner. We often have students present pieces at concerts we hold at our school, to help inform the audience members about the music they will hear and the idea was to have students do something similar with a professional ensemble; in a holistic manner where they learned about a particular piece of music through performing and composing, and also learning musicological/research and theory skills, along with public speaking. We felt the students highly benefited from their participation in this project. (Teacher Moderator Member)

Student Audience Survey

For the students who attended the concert, analysis of the data confirmed the following emerging themes. First, students reported that they were happy to attend a live performance; to listen to music being performed in a world-class concert hall by a top-tier orchestra. The second emerging theme, closely associated with the first, was that students were very happy to see their peers collaborating with the musicians on stage. In addition, the students in the audience who had studied the piece beforehand in their music class enjoyed the ability to make the connections between the theoretical analysis and hearing the piece live. While we had only twenty-nine respondents for this survey, seventy-eight percent of the respondents stated that the moderation of the piece was helpful (3–5 in a 5-point Likert scale). The majority (seventy-one percent) stated that they found the experience inspiring and almost half of the respondents (forty-eight percent) stated that they could imagine themselves participating in such a project in the future. The following quotes support this analysis:

It felt like it passed very quickly. I thought we had only been listening for about twenty minutes when the music ended and it was over. I was upset that it was already done, and I wished that it was longer. Furthermore, I also got lots of feelings and emotions from the music. You can feel a lot more from music if it is heard in person. (Student Audience Member)

Personally, I don't really enjoy classical music, but I found this concert very interesting and engaging, and the students moderating the concert really helped. (Student Audience Member)

Teacher Audience Survey

Seven teachers participated in this survey and a few emerging themes were identified when analyzing the data for this survey. First, there were general comments stating that, initially, the teachers thought this field trip was about bringing their students to hear live classical music. However, in the end, they felt it was much more about inspiring students to develop their understanding of music and perhaps to be a moderator for a concert in the future. Second, some teachers admitted not having prepared their students for the concert

beforehand and, in retrospect, they wish they had taken the time to do so as they felt the positive impact of this experience could have been even stronger. The following quotes support this analysis:

Some students on the way to the concert said that they did not know what they were going to see and some preparation would have been helpful for the students. Nonetheless, having the story behind the music explained through the use of musical extract was very informative and it allowed the audience members to fully understand and appreciate the full piece of orchestral music which they heard. It was also inspiring to see this presented by student moderators to other students in the audience. (Teacher Audience Member)

The impact of the whole experience on the five students who presented was profoundly positive. I spoke to each of them in turn afterwards and they each described several ways in which they felt they had grown in knowledge, understanding, confidence and capability regarding the composition, performance and conducting of orchestral pieces. (Teacher Audience Member)

Further Implications

It was challenging to get responses to the student and teacher audience surveys from all the participants and we were not able to receive as much data as we were hoping; respondents faced link access and other technical difficulties, and some schools' firewalls prevented the Google Form from being shared. In the future, it could be worth exploring building in time at the end of the concert for all participants to provide exit feedback on the spot and also to include follow-up surveys, as some people may benefit from reflecting further upon the experience and discussing with others before providing feedback. This could be better coordinated in the future with schools that may participate in this project to ensure the surveys are indeed received and administered. We had hoped that a larger number of audience members would be inspired by this experience. However, the feedback provides us with the opportunity to reflect how we might be able to improve this outcome if we are to repeat this project, which is our intention. The project was intended to be repeated in February 2022 but, for Covid-related reasons, it did not go ahead as planned. When the project is repeated we will be able to gain further feedback and insight to the possible benefits of a student-moderated concert.¹⁴

¹⁴ At the time of this writing this project is underway under the same collaborating parameters with eighth-grade students (12–13 years of age), and the moderated piece is György Ligeti's *Romanian Concerto*.

For future consideration, if a school participates in external music examinations such as the IGCSE (which have prescribed pieces) or even if a school is setting pieces internally for learning assessment purposes (either selected by the teacher or student initiated), a student-moderated concert based around the “required” piece may help students further engage with the music, particularly if they have the opportunity to play the piece as well.

Conclusion

Overall, this experience had a powerful and positive impact on student learning in relation to music, public speaking, and in building collaborative skills – particularly in working with people of different ages. In this project, students had the ability to work with other students of different ages, as well as a variety of adults. Students who participated as moderators for the project felt that they not only developed in the areas mentioned above, but that they also developed their confidence levels and gained a wider appreciation for orchestral music. The following quote supports this analysis:

This experience has given me a better grasp of the way an orchestra operates and how they approach the pieces they play. It also has helped me understand just how difficult orchestral music is, despite the musicians playing it seemingly effortlessly.
(Student Moderator)

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