

Bajram ÇUPI, Agona ÇUPI
**CHORAL SINGING AND SOLO SINGING IN THE CONDITIONS OF
THE SOCIETY AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF OUR SCHOOLS**

***Abstract:** Choral singing is the highest level of singing and artistic collaboration of more people. The beginnings of this kind of singing started in the first human societies. It is thought that before singing in groups, man began to sing alone as an individual. Therefore, solo singing and choral singing are closely related to each other. General music education in schools also includes systematic work in school choirs. Choir teachers and leaders (conductors) should plan not only to learn songs and compositions, but also to learn and practice vocal singing. In this way students would be trained in solo singing and choral singing. In primary schools, there is an opportunity for the development of amateur choirs, from which future singers for amateur choirs often emerge. The cultural and social mission of amateur choirs lies not only in the massification of music, but also in social and cultural development, and strengthens the discipline of a collective work and wider cooperation.*

***Keywords:** choral singing, solo singing, amateur choirs, musical education.*

Introduction

Topics that address issues of importance and forms of implementation of singing in education and society are quite complex, as it includes several different musical disciplines. They have been continuously studied and continue to be studied separately. But it is often necessary to elaborate on these research issues in short historical chronologies on the development of choral singing and solo singing, giving an overview of the changing roles of importance sometimes of one discipline or the other, until both take their proper place in musical arts. Although two different disciplines but very closely related to each other they are constantly treated as such by analyzing mutual influences.

From this point of view, an attempt has been made to highlight the importance of singing as a form of musical expression in human life, whether it is solo singing or choir singing. The organized implementation of singing in the school education system starts from primary education, to continue in secondary education. The didactics of musical education have justified this by placing the real foundations of musicality in the child, from the genesis of its formation and continuing with its development. If people are properly educated on musical art since childhood, then the access to this part of education will be much easier. Thus, this activity would continue with the formation of amateur choirs of older ages, and with this their view on music and singing will have a different direction. Amateur choirs occupy a significant part of musical activity in the education system because they are very important. The cultural and social mission of amateur choirs lies not only in the massification of music, but also in social and

cultural development and strengthens the discipline for a collective work and wide cooperation. Amateur choirs, tends to develop human's love for humans, as well as the most humane meanings and treatments of the individual and society.

Solo and choral singings are important in our development as beings. What we all need is awareness of the importance of the presence of music in the life of each individual and singing as the closest and most natural form that man possesses.

A brief history of choral and solo singing

If we take a historical overview of choral singing, we will see that its roots are in the early human societies. Nowadays the same singing is done by more people, but of course, the artistic level is higher. There are many definitions of choral singing, such as: according to Krstic (1992): "Choral singing is the oldest type of organized musical interpretation which is widespread throughout the world and in all cultures."

Before humans started to sing in groups it is thought that at first they began to sing alone. Although initial this singing generally included the life of the earliest (primitive) man. It (music) contains poetry, offers fun during rest and work, encourages and calms (Sachs, 1980, p.46). This view leads us to the conclusion that solo singing is the first form of singing, while choral singing is the most elevated form of human vocal expression. It is understood that the beginnings of choral singing in primitive times were simple, mainly different forms of one-voice (unison) singing in groups. Even in the earliest civilizations, collective singing continues to be present, but in this case it is closely related to the process of production work, with various games and ceremonies. From this moment we can see that singing and especially group singing began to be reserved for more special occasions, continuing to be unison.

The term "choir" was first used in ancient Greece for group singing as part of the Greek Tragedy. In the Christian period, the emergence of another need for singing began, which was necessary during the services, which resulted in the formation of the first schools for the education of singers. The IX and X centuries are the centuries during which the repertoire of Gregorian chants developed. Later in the Renaissance new forms were born such as the madrigal and the ballad.

From 1250 until the maximum development of two and three voice motets, the rise of singing with many voices, respectively choral singing begins, following the development of the style of polyphonic composition. The excellent results that this style gave influenced the suppression of solo singing, thus solo singing passed into the background. This great impetus for new techniques of composing and the birth of many new choral forms made choral music to take the most important place in musical art from the 11th to the 16th century.

Around the 1600s polyphonic singing culminated in its development, during which time came the first opera (1597) and the formation of musical drama. The rapid development of opera again gives priority to solo singing, not neglecting choral singing, which finds its place in the art of opera singing.

In this period and later, solo singing and choral singing, sometimes one or the other lead, and so in the history of music these two branches of the art of singing, have the same importance and are insurmountable in the art of music.

Choral and solo singing in education

Involvement in different music activities can give strong experiences that affect people in different ways. Such experiences can be experienced in childhood or later in life, at home, at school, or in other contexts (Gabrielsson, 2008). That is why choral singing is an integral part of music education curricula in primary and secondary schools. Although the importance of this kind of singing is the most appropriate way of mass music and its distribution, in everyday life we encounter obstacles. These obstacles have been created because it is not understood how much music is globalized and it is often said that only professional musicians should be involved in this work, leaving in second place the mass education of adults and children.

If choral singing should yield the expected results in primary schools (and not only), although realistically achievable, the approach to choirs in these schools should definitely change. There are times when the hours provided for choral singing are not used as intended, but are used as a spare time to pass between teacher and student. Many school choirs do not even have the basic conditions for the development of this activity; they lack rooms, time, instruments, and many basic elements for this type of singing. For these reasons, students do not come willingly to these classes, but avoid these activities unless they are required to. When students withdraw from, or are excluded from, choral music during middle school or in the transitions into and out of middle school, the impact on them significantly outweighs the student's loss from the school choir because the person may leave choral music permanently. Choral music educators must ensure that all students have opportunities to participate and experience success in choral music. (Freer, P K. 2006)

In the context of general music education, systematic work in school choirs is the highest level of musical education. At first the student should be well versed in elementary music theory and solfeggio. In the later stages while singing in the choir, these elements develop and perfect.

The conditions of music education in most of our schools are at a low level. There is a lack of musical instruments, so choral singing is almost the only way to participate in music art activities. Here we must keep in mind that vocal music with good lyrics enables children to feel their creativity more directly than those who practice instrumental music. Choral singing

awakens and develops students' creative tendencies, and also creates satisfactory conditions for the aesthetic perfection of other cultural behaviors.

Choral singing ranks among the actions which, in parallel with the development of aesthetic and intellectual abilities, develop in children a sense of belonging to human society and responsibilities towards it. Frequent contact with a large number of singers affects their approach as well as the common choice of collective obligations. These activities affect the development of the awareness of the necessary social cooperation and joint actions, so we can freely say that choral singing has its role in the functional development of social education. Research has shown that music and other forms of the arts have a positive impact on pupils' academic performance, as well as on the social climate in schools (Spychinger, 2001; Gooding, 2009; Parker, 2011).

It would be very important if in all schools, choral singing rehearsals were a regular lesson in music education classes, with a special schedule for these activities. In this way we would avoid irregular and harmful work for children, who would like to know and learn more about musical activities. Therefore a regular choral singing schedule would increase children's interest as well as their development.

Knowing the importance of solo singing raises the question of how can it be included in the education system. Teachers or conductors and choir leaders should plan not only to learn songs and compositions, but also to learn and practice vocal singing. Thus, the children of the highest grades during the four-year singing in the school choir will also learn the basic knowledge on the anatomy and physiology of the vocal apparatus as the main musical instrument. This will help keeping the body and organs of the vocal apparatus right, enable singing, as well as master the right way of breathing during singing, the right attack of tones, will unify the sound register by achieving control of a pure intonation. Thus, during this strategy of organizing music education, it is of special importance to acquire the elementary and basic knowledge of vocal technique which they would continue to cultivate and develop. Successful directors know that they must choose repertoire, design rehearsals, and plan performances to continually meet the needs of their young adolescent singers, many of whom come to our classrooms following positive choral experiences at the elementary level (Freer, P K. 2006).

Primary and secondary school students, prepared in this way, would be the main bearers of youth choirs, whose members, after reaching the appropriate age, would pass into adult choirs. Many researchers here see the kindergarten preparing music groups for adults and outside of school activities. In this way, it would be possible to flood the members from the youth choirs to those of the adults, enriching them with new singing voices, so that the choirs would be permanently refreshed, where the membership consists mainly of singers of advanced

age and at the same time it would be possible the massification of singers in general. Choral singing is an ideal way to engage large groups of students to participate in music (Spahiu 2019).

We often call the choir a musical instrument. But it would be fairer to call it a musical organism, because that way the complicated work with them is better clarified (Kostic 1992). We call it a musical organism because it consists of people and the instrument in this case it is their own voice (whether in solo or choral singing). Since in singing the instrument, that is, the vocal, is a living matter, it normally represents a more complex and sensitive work for vocal teachers or conductors. Given that this process starts in primary schools, through youth choirs to those of adults, it is necessary for a serious work of solo singing and choral singing in order to achieve good results. This enables the creation of an unbridled line of young singers, as well as their qualitative improvement. Such a vision of the development of choral singing seems very ambitious, not to say unattainable, in our conditions. But this does not mean that we should neglect an insistence on successful development, looking for ways and forms to achieve these goals.

The formation of amateur choirs and their importance in society

In contemporary society, amateur choral singing is a significant cultural component. Everyone who has natural musicality, with average vocal qualities and good will, has the abilities for active and collective music, especially for choral singing. Due to these favorable circumstances, thousands of amateur choirs operate in the world today, whose mission is cultural, social and very valuable. For these reasons, amateur choirs are increasingly playing an important role in contemporary society, in almost all countries, regardless of their economic and cultural development.

The analysis of this phenomenon that emerges from amateur choirs has its roots in music education since primary school. As noted above, people who show talent or have musical potential to be part of a choir in the future should, as a rule, be educated in primary and secondary schools. Their education should first and foremost include the ways and techniques of solo singing and then collective, choral singing. But in a large number of cases as we have all seen, such a thing is not done at all or it is in a very small percentage. This lack of vocal education later reappears the moment an amateur choir is formed. In amateur choirs, the singers are not technically trained musicians; thus, they do not have the necessary skills to consistently and reliably produce the sounds requested by the conductors while avoiding vocal injuries (Smith 2013). In these choirs, the conductor is usually the only member with musical training. Many choristers make rehearsals their only source of knowledge on vocal techniques (Smith 2013).

The leader or conductor of amateur choirs is important to first deal with, if not individually, small groups of people (3-4 people in a group) and teach them the same singing technique by practicing vowels in simple technical exercises to the whole choir before they

begin to learn different parts. Otherwise it will be difficult, almost impossible for the choir to have a formed collective sound or a unified color. It is very logical that different singing techniques or, to be more precise, different ways of singing unfairly slow down the process of unification of such a large group of singers.

The first ambition of a leader (choir) should be to create a good ensemble. But here it is necessary to have good instruments, that is, good voices, before his choir learns songs (Lissfelt, 1938). Therefore the only thing that can make the sound of a homogeneous choir is the education of the singers of this choir with the same concept of sound production. It is certainly a difficult process, but it is a process that has proven to yield better results. This approach of the conductor (leader) in this case is also his opportunity to fulfill what the teachers or conductors have not done in school and a second opportunity for the singers who have not received a proper education for his voice.

The cultural and social mission of amateur choirs lays not only in the massification of music, but also in social and cultural development as well as strengthens the discipline for a collective work and wide cooperation. Amateur choirs also enable the development of human love for man, the meanings as well as the most humane treatments of the individual and society.

Due to all the advantages mentioned above, nowadays all cultured peoples understand the amateur choir and very seriously dedicate it the proper care and time. This is shown today by the massive participation of amateur choirs in events as well as in international festivals.

Why is choral and solo singing important?

From the beginning of this research it was mentioned that man began to sing himself as an individual, that is, solo singing was the first form of singing. Many scientific studies show that during human evolution, the ability to express oneself as a means of communication has increased. The mechanism used to create tone when speaking is the same which is fully activated while singing. Some philosophers in their latest findings have concluded that humanity suffers from "phonasthenia" - the weakening of the voice due to not using all the muscles of the singing apparatus, these muscles which are activated during singing (Flatau, T. S. 1909). Analyzing the anatomy and physiology of the singing apparatus we can conclude that singing develops our vocal apparatus to the highest points

If we analyze the right position of singing that is standing upright, with the arms back and the chest open, we can also say that singing also affects the regulation of our upright posture. If during the time of singing we consciously maintain the right position of the body, after a period this kind of attitude will become a habit. Several studies conducted at the University of Frankfurt claim that singing also strengthens the immune system. Research on the effects of music listening on immune system and emotional stress are receiving increasing

attention in behavioral medicine (Pratt and Spintge, 1996). These are some of the benefits of singing in terms of the physical aspect of man.

In addition to the physical benefits, singing affects a person's psychology and emotional world. Singing in many studies is seen as a very effective anti-depressant, while singing it creates a sense of satisfaction and helps to distract from everyday life and problems. The Greek philosophers were among the first in the Western culture to speculate about specific effects of music on body chemistry, and subjective feelings (Levman, 2000). During singing, the level of stress also decreases because when we sing, our muscles relax. When we sing, the blood circulation improves and as a result more oxygen can penetrate the brain, which improves mental health. Singing also has a positive effect on many social aspects. It expands the circle of society by meeting new people and experiencing beautiful moments with them. Performing beautifully, having a successful presentation increases the level of self-confidence in individuals. Choral singing has also given some of the pupils a feeling that they have evolved individually. This involves increasing self-confidence in singing and in other areas (Lyndell 2010).

All these that we have mentioned so far also affect choral singing, adding that choral singing adds even more benefits, mainly more in the social aspect. As we mentioned before, it strengthens the discipline for a collective work and wide cooperation, enables the development of human love for man, the meanings and the most humane treatments of the individual and society. It is not only the enjoyment of singing but also the social reasons that make students attend a choir (Conway & Borst, 2001). Nor can we ignore his role in the professional development of a singer. Choral singing as a collective form of music has a very significant role in the development of human musical predispositions (Plavsha, 1961, p. 182). A choir singer is initially trained to control his vocal apparatus, develops the ability to listen harmoniously as well as to follow polyphonic lines, raises collective awareness and does more group work to achieve a common goal. All pupils, including those who like to sing solos, describe singing together with others as one of the most positive experiences in connection with attending a choral class (Ehriln 2016).

From what has been said above, it is easy to conclude that the benefits that a person can have from singing, whether solo or choral, are enormous. In the first place they affect the formation of personality. What we all need is awareness of the importance of the presence of music in the life of each individual and singing as the closest and most natural form that each person possesses. A popular saying goes: "Whoever sings badly doesn't think."

Conclusion

As we pointed out at the beginning of this paper, choral singing and solo singing are two disciplines that have been studied extensively and from different perspectives. What we first saw is that they are seldom studied by juxtaposing or paralleling each other. Since the focus of this paper was not on the comparison of these two disciplines, we can say that it is an initiative that creates space for other studies in this direction.

What we tried to bring to the surface are different ways and approaches that help to involve a larger number of pupils or students in musical activities which are mainly related to choirs, whether school or amateur. From previous and current studies we saw that the obstacle to the development of choirs starts from the lack of working conditions, the wrong approach to music lessons, the influence of the teacher / conductor in music education, etc. If this obstacle is overcome and the students, who have the desire and potential, reach a choir (amateur or professional) or follow a more profiled path for the study of singing, then we can say that the school education system has successfully completed its mission. And of course an important point to note is the importance and various benefits that singing brings.

References

- Conway, C., & Borst, J. (2001). Action research in music education. *Applications of Research in Music Education*, 19(2), 3-8.
- Curt, S., (1980). *Muzikastarogsveta*. Beograd: Universitet Umetnosti. 46.
- Ehrlin, A. (2016). A case study on pupils' perceptions of attending a choral class: You get to know one another and reach a community. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 17(32).
- Flatau, T. S. (1909). XIX. Recent Observations concerning Phonasthenia. *Annals of Otology, Rhinology & Laryngology*, 18(1), 200-204.
- Freer, P K. (2006). Adapt, Build & Challenge: Three Keys to Effective Choral Rehearsals for Young Adolescents. *Choral Journal*. 47 (5), 48-55.
- Gabrielsson, A. (2008). *Starkamuskupplevelser: musikärmycket mer än baramusik*. [Strong experiences of music: Music is much more than only music]. Stockholm: Kungliga Musikaliska Akademien.
- Gooding, L. (2009). Enhancing social competence in the music classroom. *General Music Today*, 23(1), 35-38.
- Kostić, S., and Milosavljević, R., (1992). *Elementi Horskog Zvučenosti*. Nish. 10 -17.
- Levman, B. (2000). Western theories of music origin, historical and modern. *Musicae Scientiae* 4: 185-213.

-
- Lissfelt, F. J., (1938). *Basic Principales of Artistic Singing*, E.C. Schirmer Company. 47.
- Lyndell, H. (2010). The enhancement of musical and other learning for both teachers and students through a weekly choir session. *Australian Journal of Music Education*. 1, 58-70.
- Parker, E. C. (2010). Exploring student experiences of belonging within an urban high school choral ensemble: an action research study. *Music Education Research*, 12(4), 339-352.
- Plavsha, D.; Popović, B., and Erić, D., (1961). *Muzika u shkoli*. Beograd. 182.
- Pratt, R. R., and Spintge, R. (Eds.) (1996). *Music Medicine*, Vol. II, MMB Music, St. Louis, MO.
- Smith, B., & Sataloff, R. T. (2013). *Choral pedagogy*. Plural Publishing.
- Spahiu, S., (2009). *Metodika e mësimittëmuzikës*. Prishtinë. 246.
- Spychiger, M. B. (2001) Music education is important – why? In G. Matell, & T. Theorell (Eds.), *Musikens roll i barns utveckling*, 110-124. [The role of music in childrens' development]. Stockholm: Institutet för ppsykosocialmedicin. Avdelningen för stressforskning, Karolinska institutet.