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The Creative Work of Women Composers in 20th-century Serbian Music in General Music Education

Extended summary

The curriculum for Music Education in primary and high schools includes the treatment of the teaching theme of Serbian music in the 20th century, both modern and postmodern. The composing opus of Ludmila Frajt, Ljubica Marić, and Isidora Žebeljan has left an indelible mark on Serbian music and has become part of the world’s musical heritage. Despite this, their creative work is not adequately represented in the teaching practice of primary and secondary schools, nor in the curriculum that prescribes and suggests the selection of compositions for singing and listening. A special emphasis is placed on their individual unique musical style, the preservation and interpretation of Serbian folklore heritage and spirituality within their creative work, and the focus on the educational and pedagogical potential within the framework of general music education. The prevalence of the work of these artists in teaching practice, the training of teaching staff for the practical implementation of these teaching themes, their attitudes, and motivation are the subject of the qualitative research presented in this paper.

The research was conducted through online surveys of seventeen Music Education teachers, i.e., members of the Association of Music Education Teachers of Serbia, using the digital tool Google Forms. The aim of this research is to determine the prevalence and significance of the creative work of female composers in Serbian music in teaching Music Education, as well as the availability of information on this topic, according to the opinions of teachers. Keeping in mind the stated objective and the analysis of the curriculum, namely, a review of

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the recommended content for listening, we have defined the following research tasks: (1) determine the prevalence of teaching units and works by female composers in Serbian music in the curriculum; (2) determine to what extent teachers and students are familiar with the creative work of female composers in Serbian music; (3) determine if and to what extent teachers have access to information about the creative work of female composers in Serbian music; (4) establish the significance of this educational topic – whether it influences the development of students and society; (5) determine the presence of compositions by Serbian music creators who are women in the public space.

After conducting the research and analyzing the results, it is clear that more respondents agree that the representation of teaching units and works by female composers in Serbian music in the curriculum is low. Teachers (and students) are less familiar with the creative work of female composers in Serbian music. This is supported by the fact that in the questions where they had to list female composers and compositions that they were familiar with, they mentioned only a few names, mostly those already included in the curriculum. It is interesting to note that, in the questions related to the presence of female composers in the public media space, teachers mentioned only four female composers. Textbooks and other available literature proved insufficient for teachers to acquire new, up-to-date information about the creative work of female composers in Serbian music. Moreover, a significant number of teachers did not provide additional literature that could serve them in the teaching process and for their own research. However, when considering whether it is necessary to devise specific approaches to the works of female composers, all teachers responded that it is not necessary, indicating that teachers believe that music itself does not recognize gender distinctions. It is particularly important to note that some teachers stated that they did not acquire adequate knowledge on the mentioned topic during their education, raising the question of whether the representation of female composers at all levels of education is low. To expand knowledge about female composers, it is necessary to collect biographical data, detailed information about their creative work, and gather multimedia materials in the form of video and audio recordings that both students and teachers could use in the teaching process. Considering all this, it is clear that the conducted research has shown significant shortcomings in the accessibility of knowledge about Serbian female composers. Therefore, it is necessary to devise methodological guidelines that will systematically and meaningfully guide the teaching process towards gradually exploring their work. In parallel with methodological guidelines, it would be necessary to revise and create a new, more adequate corpus of music for listening and analysis. Namely, it should be designed to correspond to the class and age of students and their abilities to perceive the given music and discuss it through various problem themes.

The paper will provide a summative and descriptive presentation of the survey results, which consist of a total of twenty-one questions. Considering the artistic, educational, and pedagogical significance of their work, the authors of the paper have articulated paradigmatic methodological guidelines for the implementation of this teaching theme, within the framework of educational standards and the Curriculum for Music Education, with a focus on the development of competencies and targeted outcomes.

Keywords: Serbian art music, women composers, 20th-century music, Music Education

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