

Where Wild Flowers Grow: A Costa Rican Adventure

BY DANIEL C. JOHNSON

Many of us know Carl Orff's famous reference to wild flowers when describing the Schulwerk. It is a beautiful analogy to describe the adaptability of the Orff approach, connecting cultures and transcending languages. I recently came to a deeper understanding of this analogy when I was fortunate enough to present international outreach workshops for teachers, college students, and children from a number of Central American countries.

I arrived in San José, Costa Rica, on a humid July evening. The airport was crowded but the people were friendly, and I was eager to begin my Costa Rican adventure. This trip was four years in the making. I originally met Guillermo Rosabal-Coto, an associate professor of music education and chair of the Music Education Department, on my first trip to Costa Rica during an international conference of the College Music Society. At that time, he invited me to present an Introduction to Orff workshop for his college students and area teachers. After an intensive e-mail exchange, his university secured the funding and purchased a set of barred instruments to complete their instrumentarium. We scheduled the workshop without delay.

Nestled in the heart of Central America, Costa Rica is a magical place. From its literal Spanish translation, "rich coast," this country is well-endowed with many natural resources. Possibly because it was one of the latest landmasses to form in the region, it boasts one of the greatest geographical diversities for its size on the planet. Volcanoes still rumble and glow, creating an impressive landscape. Subterranean magma fuels hot springs throughout the country, which



Ensemble-playing: Four participants create an ensemble piece.

contrast with the lush vegetation, colorful wildlife, and breathtaking vistas.

Despite its rich ecological gifts, I quickly discovered that Costa Rica does not have as hearty a tradition for music education. Because the undergraduate teaching system is based on a European conservatory model, the teacher preparation program is most heavily concentrated in classical performance skills. Instead of understanding and applying educational theories of child development, pre-service teachers spend considerable time with traditional music theory and history courses before they gain field experience. To balance this part of their teacher preparation, I was glad to introduce university students and area teachers to Orff Schulwerk.

At the invitation of the University of Costa Rica (UCR) and the Costa Rican Forum of Music Education (FOCO-

DEM), I was able to present the first workshop one summer and return the following spring for a second workshop. These workshops were the first of their kind, providing introductory experiences and knowledge about the Schulwerk for approximately seventy-five participants from four Central American countries: Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. The second workshop was supported in part by an AOSA International Outreach Grant. Thanks to the expert assistance of Ana Isabel Vargas on behalf of FOCODEM and Guillermo Rosabal at UCR, these introductions to the Orff approach were both positive and practical experiences for all participants. Ana and her family were wonderful hosts during my visits to their country. Not only did Guillermo arrange for the instrument purchase

"PAPOOSE"

Use of Open Strings / Em chord
The melody can be played on guitar

American Indian (USA)
Arr: Wheatly
Guitar Arr: Natalia Esquivel

Sottly
mm=104

SR
Lull-a-by lit-tle Pa-poose Lull-a-by lit-tle Pa-poose
A-tru-ru ni-no Pa-poose A-tru-ru ni-no Pa-poose

AR

Guitar 1-2

Guitar 3-4

Guitar 5

Xylophone

Drum

5

Moth-er is near you Noth-ing can harm you Lull-a-by lit-tle Pa-poose
Es-toy muy cer-cu. No ten-gas mie-do A-tru-ru ni-no Pa-poose



Recorder-mallets: Participants play soprano recorders and barred instruments.

and workshop schedule, he also provided the simultaneous Spanish-English translations during my visit.

Most of my time in Costa Rica was spent at the university where the Introduction to Orff Schulwerk workshops took place. I was glad to be hosted by the University of Costa Rica (UCR), where they have a wonderful instrumentarium complete with barred instruments and unpitched percussion. There I presented daily workshop sessions for music teachers, university professors, and college students. Although just an introduction to the Schulwerk, the workshops inspired remarkable creativity. All participants quickly took to the movement, speech, instrumental, and singing activities. Despite my poor Spanish skills, the participants easily moved between discussions of the Orff approach and active music making. The workshops included a balance of movement, percussion instruments, recorders, and speech activities. In addition, readings

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and explanations provided participants with an understanding of the Schulwerk and also served as a basis for workshop discussions. Each workshop concluded with a sharing session highlighting the participants' own arrangements and improvisations. As an added bonus, students in a simultaneous guitar course joined the first workshop to play several arrangements for guitar

and barred instruments, arranged by the guitar clinician, Natalia Esquivel. The next summer, she traveled to North Carolina and earned her Level I Orff certificate in a professional development course I led! We performed Natalia's arrangement "Papoose" as an example of the minor pentatonic, based on a Native American Indian melody. Through this piece, she highlighted the many possibilities of using Pan-American music to teach binary song form and pentatonic scales.

Beyond the university, I was glad to extend my music making by working with elementary-aged children. At a local elementary school, I stepped into a crowded classroom where fourth-grade Costa Rican children eagerly awaited my arrival. Here, language was no barrier, and they readily participated with some movement and body percussion activities. Using "la flauta dulce" or soprano recorder, they quickly followed my lead by echoing pentatonic melodies and improvising

"HARVEST TIME-MAY RAIN"

Traditional
orchestrated, Daniel C. Johnson
Spanish lyrics, Guillermo Rosabal Coto

Gently

The musical score is arranged for two voices and several instruments. The instruments include Glockenspiel, Tenor Trombone (Tbn), Alto Saxophone (AS), Bass Trombone (BT), Violin I (V1), Violin II (V2), Guitar (Gtr), Tambourine (Tamb), Alto Saxophone (AS), and Bass Trombone (BT). The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes the vocal parts and the Glockenspiel, Tbn, AS, and BT. The second system includes the V1, V2, Gtr, Tamb, AS, and BT parts. The lyrics are in Spanish and English. The tempo is marked 'Gently'. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, time signatures, and dynamic markings.

body percussion patterns.

My Costa Rican adventure was wonderful. From the eager children to the appreciative teachers and college students, I could tell I had made an important and lasting difference to promote music education in this region. Although they had few instruments in their home schools, the teachers and students immediately took part and saw the benefits of the Orff approach. Teachers were especially glad that I had not taught them typical American songs and dances. Imposing only American culture would limit opportunities for creative music making, and risks disregarding the native culture and rich musical traditions of my host country. Because I was able to travel to another country and share the magic of the Schulwerk, I was able to experience first-hand what Carl Orff himself described in the famous wild flower analogy. In a 1963 speech, he said, "I should like to describe Schulwerk as a wild flower.

I am a passionate gardener so this description seems to me a very suitable one. As in nature plants establish themselves where they are needed and where conditions are favorable, so Schulwerk has grown from ideas that were rife at the time and that found their favorable conditions in my work. Schulwerk did not develop from any preconsidered plan—I could never have imagined such a far-reaching one—but it came from a need that I was able to recognise as such. It is an experience of long standing that wild flowers always prosper, where carefully planned, cultivated plants often produce disappointing results."¹

For example, I taught the haunting melody to the folk song "Harvest Time." This minor, two-part echo song celebrates the gold and brown colors of the autumn season in this country. In Costa Rica, we adapted this piece to suit the beautiful rainforests of the region and created "May Rain." That title provides a seasonal parallel

to the harvest time and welcomes the long-awaited beginning of the Costa Rican rainy season, similar to spring in North America.

"Lluvia de Mayo"

*Oye las gotitas al caer.
Suave en el prado sin cesar.
Plantas y floritas por doquier,
Árboles y aves cantarán.
Oye las gotitas al caer.*

"May Rain"

Hear the droplets as they fall.
Softly and relentlessly in the prairie.
Plants and flowers blossom all around,
Trees and birds will soon sing.
Hear the droplets as they fall.

Another wonderful connection was using Latin American proverbs in Spanish for speech activities. Especially as a non-native Spanish speaker, learning the natural rhythm and inflections of these sayings was enlightening. Participants really enjoyed experiment-

ing with tempo, vocal expression, and musical form while speaking these sayings:

Perro que ladra, no muerde.

A dog who barks doesn't bite.

Cada uno lleva su cruz.

We all have our own cross to bear.

No todo lo que brilla es oro.

All that glitters is not gold.

A mal tiempo buena cara.

Look on the bright side.

It was wonderful to read the exit surveys based on the AOSA levels course evaluation, and to hear anecdotal reports following the workshops. All participants said that the workshops fulfilled their purpose—to introduce participants to the importance and practice of Orff Schulwerk. The areas the participants found as most useful included: improvisation, student ensembles, using percussion instruments, corporal expression, incorporating spoken words, and “sound before sight.” All participants reported that they planned to use the Orff activities in their lessons. They wrote that the Orff approach “gives freedom...to create...to practice all the areas of music, is useful for all the students, [and] is dynamic...”

To my surprise, the participants presented a trio of *bombas* to bring the workshop to a memorable and musical conclusion at the final sharing session. *Bomba* is a musical form originating from West Africa, related to the cultures of Ghana and Haiti.² Perhaps because of the migration of planters from Haitian, Louisiana, and other Caribbean locations in the mid-nineteenth century, this form is quite popular in Costa Rica. This style is highly rhythmic and uses onomatopoeia.³ Therefore, *bombas* are usually enjoyed as much for the content as for the inherent rhythm and sounds of the words. The students presented these *bombas*—one honoring my teaching and the other acknowledging Mr. Rosabal and all his work during the workshop.



Movement-levels: Participants show direction and levels with locomotor movement.

LATIN AMERICAN PROVERBS

Orff Workshop, University of Costa Rica
Transcribed by Daniel C. Johnson

Pe-ro que la-dra, no muer - de. Pe-ro que la-dra, no muer - de.

Ca - da u - no lle - va su cruz. Ca - da u - no lle - va su cruz.

No to-do lo que bri-lla es o - ro. No to-do lo que bri-lla es o - ro.

A mal tiem-po, bue-na ca-ra. A mal tiem-po, bue-na ca-ra.

“Trabaja el abogado, el contador y el que estudia tecnologías. Muchas gracias, don Daniel por enseñarnos su metodología.”

“The lawyer works, so does the accountant and the one who studies technology. Thank you very much, Mr. Daniel for teaching us your methodology.”

“Es músico el que toca, el que baila y también el que disfruta... Pues muchas gracias a Rosabal por educarnos de manera astuta.”

“Musician is he who plays, he who dances, and also he who enjoys... Well, many thanks to Rosabal for educating us smart.”

*Este es el final de este taller
Muchas gracias le damos, Daniel
Esperamos que vuelva otra vez
Y sus enseñanzas aprender.*

This is the end of this learning experience

We give you many thanks, Daniel
We hope that you will return again
and that we will learn from your teachings.

I also hope to return to Costa Rica for follow-up workshops in the years to come. Similarly, I would encourage other AOSA members to offer their time and share their own music making as a way to broaden the horizon of their own understanding of the Schulwerk, and to begin what is truly a life-long adventure of musical learning. For more photos and information about

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these workshops, visit <http://people.uncw.edu/johnsond/costaricanorff.htm>.
In the meantime, my international out-

reach adventures continue with similar workshops at the Changsha Normal College in Hunan Province, China. There, I expect even more wild flowers will grow! ■



Daniel C. Johnson, Ph.D., is an associate professor of music education at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. He teaches international Orff Schulwerk professional development courses and co-authored "Research Studies in Orff Schulwerk." A frequent speaker at national and international conferences, he has published research in numerous journals. A multi-instrumentalist with over fifteen years of teaching experience, Dr. Johnson also serves as the chair-elect of the Alliance for Active Music Making.

1. Carl Orff, "Orff-Schulwerk Past and Future," In *Orff Re-Echoes*, trans. Margret Murray (Cleveland: American Orff-Schulwerk Association, 1977), 3.
2. James McCoy, *The Bomba and Aguinaldo of Puerto Rico as They Have Evolved from Indigenous, African and European Cultures*. (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1968).
3. Jorge Duany, "Popular Music in Puerto Rico: Toward an Anthropology of Salsa." *Latin American Music Review* 5.2 (1984): 186-216.

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