

Eurhythmics on the airwaves

The history of Maria Wieman's radio music programmes

Summary

This publication presents the history of Maria Wieman's music education radio broadcasts aired by Polish Radio between 1948 and 1976. Initially, they were intended to provide temporary support to kindergartens in this important area of child education, but became a permanent fixture in the schedule and were broadcast for almost thirty years. These broadcasts supported the musical education of the youngest children and, to a significant extent, created and enriched the teaching and methodological skills of nursery school teachers.

As indicated in the research conducted, the programmes not only implemented the content and tasks of musical education specified in the applicable curricula, but also expanded on them and influenced their modification in subsequent years. The creators of the radio programmes used all forms of musical activity for children, except for creating music, which, especially in the early years of broadcasting, should be considered innovative. Until World War II, music education was mainly associated with singing, and the introduction of movement with music as a musical activity for kindergarten children was considered by Maria Przychodzińska-Kaciczak to result from the creative work undertaken by Maria Wieman and Maria Cukierówna.

Maria Wieman consistently used the eurhythmics method in her programmes; moreover, she named her most important and popular series of programmes 'Rhythmic Games'. Today, there can be no doubt that she was a populariser of this method and a pioneer in using eurhythmics in radio programmes and music education in kindergartens. In all her pedagogical endeavours, she applied Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's principle: "through music and for music". In doing so, she ensured that the material she prepared had educational value. She was further aware that only the knowledge and experience of educators could guarantee the quality of teaching; consequently, they had to be excellently prepared, both in terms of substantive content, methodology, and didactics. Her well-known motto was 'The youngest should be taught by the best'.

The idea of integrating teaching content implemented by Maria Wieman positions her as a modern educator who cared for the harmonious development of children and aimed to nurture their musical dispositions based on topics familiar and close to them. The article seeks to highlight this guiding principle of the programmes by reviewing

the topics of the songs used in them. Another educational issue present in the programmes was broadening children's knowledge of their homeland, native culture and customs. The turn towards Polish folk culture can now be interpreted as a specific sign of the socialist era. However, this is an extremely important value, also present in Carl Orff's concept, who considered elementary music to be an important area of musical education and shaping a sense of cultural identity. Holistic thinking about child development and subjectivity (agency) in teaching were inseparable features of the broadcasts. It is worth noting that the programmes were precisely ordered in their structure and sequence, which facilitated reception, but simultaneously created strictly defined frameworks for this remote didactic tool. It must also be clearly emphasized that the Polish experience of teaching eurhythmics via radio is absolutely unique on the European continent.

The regular broadcasting of music education programmes meant expanding the repertoire material. The radio station became a kind of patron of children's culture. The best lyricists and composers were engaged, who utilized their talents for the benefit of the youngest listeners. This led to the creation of a canon of kindergarten songs that is still valued to this day. Some of these songs were published in separate collections, such as *Lubimy śpiewać* (We Like to Sing) and *Już śpiewam* (I'm Singing Now), and *Radioowe piosenki przedszkolaków...* (Radio Songs for Preschoolers...), but some were only published in print in the monthly journal "Education in Kindergarten" (*Wychowanie w Przedszkolu*). The radio repertoire was also included in Maria Wieman's publications. Her legacy in the form of methodical books covers music teaching for children from 3 to 14 years of age. Both the books, as well as the scripts and articles published in "Education in Kindergarten" bear witness to her knowledge, experience, and teaching skills. Reading Maria Wieman's publications confirms the great need she felt to cultivate a love for music in young children.

An important task of music education programmes was to equalise educational opportunities for children from different backgrounds. The same professional message reached all radio-equipped kindergartens, unifying the content of education, which at that stage was certainly a phenomenon deserving the highest praise. Surviving accounts and descriptions of listening to radio programmes in kindergartens allow us to conclude that they were received with great enthusiasm. Contact with the radio brought joy and excitement. For teachers, the programmes were an important teaching aid, expanding the repertoire of nursery songs and dances. However, there are no studies assessing the musical competence of children before and after listening to the annual series of programmes. It is therefore impossible to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the educational mission undertaken by Polish Radio.

The radio programme outlines used as a source of information in this work were published in successive issues of the monthly journal "Education in Kindergarten", and thus constitute publicly available material. They contain over a thousand lesson plans for music education activities, including descriptions of rhythm and music-movement games, with a substantial number of them also including sheet music for songs and dances. These resources undoubtedly deserve attention and can serve as valuable material for contemporary nursery, eurhythmics, and music teachers. As indicated in the research summary, Maria Wieman's collection of rhythm exercises and the catalogue of

more than thirty regional folk dances for children she developed could form the basis for a separate publication.

The records of 212 radio broadcasts represent material with significant methodological potential due to the richness of ways in which children could engage with music, the inclusion of all forms of musical activity for children, and the diversity of music repertoire. Each broadcast serves as a model for conducting a proper eurhythmics lesson in a nursery setting. The recordings, together with the programme outlines, can be used as resources in teaching methodology courses for eurhythmics specialisations at both higher and secondary musical education institutions. According to the author of this book, these materials should be compared with current trends in music education, which frequently rely on quick and uncritical reproduction of ready-made solutions. This results in teaching that lacks consistency and clearly defined goals, characterised by a random selection of material, with little attention to the aesthetic value of the song, both in a literary and musical sense. In this context, the material presented here has the value of a didactic and musical compass, even though the subject matter of the broadcasts is far removed from the present day. Without a doubt, Maria Wieman's radio broadcasts remain a valuable source of methodological and musical knowledge today.

In 2015, as part of a project funded by the National Institute of Music and Dance (NIMiT), a grant titled "Sound and Movement. Maria Wieman's Broadcasts: An Attempt at Reconstruction" was carried out. The project was conducted by the TRES Foundation and was led by Teresa Nowak and the author of this publication. Within this project, six-year-old children constituted the audience of those radio broadcasts, just like their peers sixty years earlier. Difficulties with concentration, understanding instructions, and carrying out the tasks contained in the broadcasts significantly affected the course of these activities. However, through an extensive series of sessions, the participants became accustomed to this type of work; the result was a film documenting the course of four broadcasts along with methodological commentary. It is the only available visual record of the course of the old broadcasts, echoing Maria Wieman's concept. The material was shared with the main centres of music education in Poland, and the substantive results were presented at the Krzysztof Penderecki European Centre for Music in Luśławice during the national conference "Festival of Exchange of Ideas" in May 2015.

In concluding this work, it is hard not to address the experiences brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, which required all teachers, including those teaching music and eurhythmics, to implement remote education. Even though it was carried out using the most modern means of communication, including video calls, online transfers, and simultaneous music-making, it demonstrated how difficult it is to teach remotely while also maintaining an appropriately high quality of instruction. Although the experience of the pandemic was episodic, it has permanently changed the educational reality. Maria Wieman's experience, on the other hand, lasted thirty years and was grounded in credible knowledge, educational intuition, a sense of humour and discipline, and delivered in beautiful language. This legacy must not be lost.

Translated by Rob Pagett