

Oral Tradition in Music Education Methodology

Keywords: methodology, mugham, raga, oral tradition.

Oral tradition is one of the key methods in musicology, regularly studied by researchers and developed by pedagogues. The historical development of oral tradition in music education methodology is directly related to mugham, raga, gagaku and similar types of music. The role of oral traditions in these types of music is so prominent that even the expression of traditional oral music is used instead of the expression mugham or raga music.

The types of music, which have been passed down from generation to generation through oral traditions in a master-student relationship, is namely taught in such an irreplaceable way in modern times as well. Over the centuries, oral traditions have always remained indispensable in this genre, despite the simple notes of the masters of music that we find in historical sources, as well as the notes that have been improved after introducing the notation system. It is through oral techniques that the feelings and excitement of ragas, mughams and similar types of music can be more clearly expressed and transmitted to the other side.

I would like to draw attention to the experience of the world-renowned performers in the application of oral traditions in the teaching of mugham and raga, and some of the points I have encountered. The world-famous mugham singer Alim Gasimov said in one of his interviews: “I was going somewhere, I was singing, I was sitting, I was singing. There were no modern devices then. There were big tape recorders which were hard to carry. The teacher would say and I would repeat it over and over again on the bus so I wouldn’t forget”. Undoubtedly, in order to form the auditory memory mentioned by Alim Gasimov, first of all, one needs to know a correct way of listening, which is an essential part of the oral tradition in the classroom, which is nowadays referred to as active listening in music education methodology. As a student, Alim Gasimov mastered the oral traditions and used this method so skillfully enabling him to master the secrets of mugham even without modern recording devices. With this example, A. Gasimov manifested the crucial

role of oral traditions in music teaching. When listening to Alim Gasimov's students, it is impossible not to notice Alim Gasimov's melismas and vocal techniques performed by his school in general. This stems from the fact that Alim Gasimov passed on to his students the methods he learned from his teachers as a student, as well as the techniques he developed. Another example is Arkut Kannabhiran (A. Kanan), a prominent raga performer in Indian music, who gave such advice to his students in one of his master classes: “The oral tradition remains a unique testament to the capacity of the human brain to absorb, remember and notation reproduce structures of great complexity and sophistication without a system of written.” Indeed, in one sentence, the master rendered the significance of the oral tradition in an utmost way. In the following example, I would like to highlight another importance of this method. As is well known, most methods require some training and basic knowledge, but there is no age limit in the application of this method, as the oral tradition is the first and concurrently, the basic stage of music education methodology. Examples of this can be found in many genres of music such as Mozart, a renowned figure of the European classical music, playing the piano professionally from the age of three and composing his first piece of music at the age of five; or from current times talented musicians as Justin Schultz and Joey Alexander who rose to fame in jazz at the age of eight or ten. Each of them developed their talents under supervision of their teachers through oral traditions not only before they learned music notes, but also before they learned to read and write. Indeed, Mozart’s professional piano debut at the age of three, writing his first composition at the age of five, and composing his first opera at the age of 11 is inconceivable. Man wants to travel to that time and follow Mozart. I've always thought about it, and fortunately, I came across a similar scene at the Carnatic Conservatory of Paris, where I studied the Indian music in France. While I was in the vocal class of my teacher Bhavana Pradyumna, it seemed to me for a moment I was hearing the echo effect of the acoustic sound of the room, and the repetition of it in Mrs. Pradyumna’s every pause could not make me think of other nuances. Soon

a 3-4 year old girl came out of the next room, and then the echo effect in the room was no longer audible. I still could not understand what was going on until the 3-4 year old girl started imitating what my teacher, her mother, was performing. Mrs. Pradyumna's oral tradition techniques has led her 3-4 year-old daughter to master active listening at a high level. I couldn't hide my surprise at that moment, and while discussing it with my teacher, I found out that her 8-year-old son was performing like her daughter when he was 3-4 years old. Subsequently, although her son was 8 years old at that time, he could perform and explain 72 ragas in the melakarta system. This happening was for me a vivid example of the effectiveness of oral traditions at an early age.

As we have already mentioned, oral traditions have been widely used throughout history in the teaching of music such as mugham and raga by masters, gurus and teachers. Oral traditions have been applied not only in genres such as mugham and raga, but have also been improved and developed in our time thanks to the exceptional contributions of a number of musicians. Dealing with the prominent scholars who systematically apply oral traditions to modern music education methodology as a result of their research, we can mention the names of such figures of music as Orff, Dalcroze, Suzuki and Kodaly. Oral traditions play a key role in each of their method. Of these educators, it is particularly important to mention Professor S. Suzuki. Being named after its author, the Suzuki method is based on oral traditions. As already mentioned, the benefits of oral tradition to children from an early age have been studied using the Suzuki method and is still being applied. Thus, although there is no age limit for starting the Suzuki method, the ideal age is deemed to be under five years. Since at this age children can handle multiple tasks simultaneously, Suzuki regarded important not to lose this period of age and put them in the right direction and treat them with love and attention.

The Suzuki method refers to the concept of "mother tongue approach". According to this concept, it is recommended that children learn music in the natural sequence, just as they learn their mother tongue orally before learning the letters.

“Nobody teaches a baby to talk by starting with printed letters and words. The natural order is to teach letters and reading after a child learns to talk. In the same manner, in teaching preschool children, we do not use printed music, but rather have them learn new songs from listening to the record and showing them how to play”(Suzuki, 2007). Another part of the Suzuki method that is closely related to oral traditions is group lessons. The group lessons we find in the teaching of music genres such as mugham and raga are also applied in the Suzuki method. During group classes, the student gets acquainted with the performance of students from both his own class and those above or below him. In this case, the student enhances his knowledge by listening to various performances, and also develops as an active listener.

SUMMARY

Oral traditions are considered to be one of the high level methods in music education methodology. This method is fully applied in the teaching of the magnificent music that has existed for centuries, such as mugham and raga, as well as in various forms in the teaching of a number of modern, newly emerging different genres. The application of this method in various forms in any genre has always been the key subject of research of musicologists studying this field. Therefore, oral traditions have always maintained their relevance in music education methodology. Certainly, music education methodology will be constantly enriched with many newly emerging methods based on oral traditions.