

Intergenerational Transmission of Romani Musical Knowledge and Skills in Klenovec and Kokava¹

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Abstract: *This article analyses intergenerational transmission of musical knowledge and skills, (i.e., methods of musical teaching and learning) in the community of Romani musicians in Klenovec and Kokava in Slovakia. With the help of theories on music education (Merriam, Van den Bos, Turino, etc.), it compares the Slovak institutionalized system of music education with traditional methods of musical learning and teaching inside the musicians' communities in Klenovec and Kokava. Specifics of Romani methods of acquiring music are discussed, with particular focus on how these specifics are manifested in actual music-making and music itself. The article is based upon ethnographic data collected during the author's own ethnographic research (2015).*

Keywords: *Roma, Romani music, music education, music apprenticeship, Slovakia.*

Introduction

Romani professional musicians from Klenovec and Kokava are well known all around Slovakia. Their names gained fame within the entire music world when they were chosen to record the soundtrack for the film *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* by the famous Hans Zimmer. It might seem surprising to some, however, that despite their legendary musicality a vast majority of local Romani musicians do not have any kind of institutionalized musical education. Some people consider this fact as conclusive evidence of Romani natural talent, i.e., talent inherited from father to son.

In this case study of musicians from Klenovec and Kokava, I approach the legendary Romani musicality from a different perspective – I do not consider the musical abilities and skills of the Roma a result of natural talent emerging despite the absence of any educational system, but, instead, a result of an independent and equal educational system which has not yet been academically scrutinized. This system is shaped by rules differing from the European standardized system of musical education, rising from the fact that the function of Romani music making has different aims. Therefore, Romani educational methods significantly differ and, consequently, they constitute Romani musicality in a different way.

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The aim of this article is to examine intergenerational transmission of musical knowledge and skills (i.e., methods of music teaching and learning) of professional Romani musicians in the Klenovec-Kokava region. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How could methods of intergenerational transmission of musical skills among Romani musicians in Klenovec and Kokava be described?
- 2) How do these methods differ from the formal system of musical education in Slovakia?
- 3) What are the particular inputs for emergence of advanced musical skills of Romani musicians (such as art of improvisation, key mobility etc.) that have set their musicality apart from average Slovak musicality?

This article will answer these questions on the basis of data collected during ethnographic fieldwork carried out during the spring and summer 2015. It will briefly summarize the results of contemporary research on this topic, introduce the communities of Romani musicians in the surveyed locality and then it will describe the specifics of the Romani system of musical education in comparison with the formal system in Slovakia.

Methodology

The main reason for which Klenovec and Kokava have been chosen for researching intergenerational transmission of musical skills and knowledge is the noticeable continuity in preserving the musical craft. There is a three-generational community of active musicians, horizontally and vertically interconnected. According to the locals, musicianship has been considered the most valued Romani craft for many generations.

I began preliminary fieldwork in Klenovec and Kokava in the summer of 2013, and continued it in the spring 2015 after securing funding for my research. I met with people I had befriended during my preliminary fieldwork and used the method of the snowballing technique for construction of the sample of participants. Consequently, I was in touch with 26 musicians from both Kokava and Klenovec and other informants (parents and relatives of musicians, members of folklore ensembles, town representatives, etc.) Then I chose participants (*judgment sampling*, cf. Marshall 1996), so that my sample was balanced in terms of musicians' age, their family background, the musical instrument played to account for a *maximum variation sampling* (cf. Patton 2001).

Finally, I set up interview sessions with 18 musicians, 17 men and one woman (this gender disproportion is caused by the fact that the music craft among Roma in Klenovec and Kokava is restricted to men); the oldest one was 69 years old and the youngest 13 years old. The interviews were semi-structured. I asked about their experiences in acquiring musical knowledge and skills. The interviews were highly informal and have various lengths.

Music Education of Roma in Contemporary Ethnomusicological Literature

Although the level of knowledge about the music of Roma in Slovakia – compared with, for instance, the flamenco of the Spanish *gitanos* or the music of Hungarian and Balkan Roma – is relatively low (cf. Jurková 2003), there are scholars who have systematically studied their music from both the ethnomusicological and anthropological points of view (ibid., pp. 96–99). However, research concerning intergenerational transmission of musical skills and knowledge among the Roma in central Europe has not been done so far.

There are several studies that touch upon this issue from the music-pedagogical point of view, implying that differences between Romani ways of acquiring musical skills and formal musical education do exist. Veronika Ševčíková (2003), for instance, made experiments during music lessons with mixed classes (i.e., Romani and non-Romani children) in selected Czech elementary schools. The results of her research have given rise to a new model of musical education for the Romani minority which has been subsequently applied in innovative educational projects run by the Czech Ministry of Education. She came to the conclusion that musical skills and abilities of Romani children were not at all higher than those of their non-Romani peers (Ševčíková 2003:118–145).

Ševčíková's work was criticized by Petra Gelbart (2010) for enforcing stereotypes about Romani children as those whose ways of learning music significantly (and naturally) differ from non-Romani children. Gelbart also dealt with musical education in the context of the Romani minority. She deconstructed the myth of Romani *temperament* on the basis of her own research data accumulated through interviews with educators, her own teaching experience, and observations of participants in selected classes in the Czech Republic. She concluded that the belief in the natural Romani temperament is a myth widely held by the general public, including educators. She suggests that a new music-education curriculum should be constructed; she provides ideas on how music should be taught for the Romani minority as well as for the Czech majority (pp. 280–309).

Both authors have pointed out that, firstly, the musicality of the Roma is regarded by the general public as a positive stereotype often explained by inherited talent; and, secondly, differences between Roma and non-Roma in how they acquire musical skills and abilities do exist. This article approaches the same issue from a different perspective – it compares the Romani methods of musical learning and teaching with the formal system of musical education in Slovakia as two separate, independent and equal educational systems.

Romani Music Communities in Klenovec and Kokava

Klenovec and Kokava are located in the Poltár district, Banská Bystrica county in Slovakia. Both towns have around 3,000 inhabitants and are only 11 kilometers apart; they lie literally over the hills from each other. Kokava and Klenovec have always been great rivals in all possible aspects. There are many jokes that are told in Klenovec about people from Kokava and vice versa. The rivalry is omnipresent and it can also be sensed between communities of Romani musicians.

This region has always been rather poor and employment opportunities have been unstable. This might be the reason that musicianship for the local Roma has always been the most respected craft. Musical activities, whether professional craft or free-time hobby, are something so common among the local Roma that Klenovec and Kokava are often regarded as a synonym for a region of musicians. Even the historical roots of the Romani settlement here are connected with music. As I was told by local representatives, in the 18th century, a Klenovec-based Hungarian aristocrat's house (family of Kubinyi), called several families of Romani musicians from Jánovce, giving them permission to settle in his manorial garden as it was very fashionable for the Hungarian nobility to have a band of Romani musicians to accompany various soirees with their music. Kubinyi's house still exists and so does his garden. Paradoxically, the place connected with noble soirees turned into a place of poverty – a settlement called *Dolinka*, where the approximately 200 poorest Roma from Klenovec live nowadays.

Romani families from Kokava have the same roots as those from Klenovec. Thanks to their shared surnames (Cibuľa, Oľáh, Radič), it is possible to track down original families of musicians coming here to practice their trade. The official number of Roma in the towns is unknown. The Mayoress of Klenovec stated that, at the time of the 2011 census, there were just three persons who declared themselves as Roma. Her unofficial estimate, however, is 800 Roma (including the 200 living in Dolinka) which constitutes about a quarter of all the inhabitants. The situation in Kokava is similar.

In both towns, there are well-known folklore ensembles: Kokava-based *Kokavan* (found in 1970) and Klenovec-based *Vepor* (found in 1921). Both ensembles deal with Slovak folk music and both have achieved many successes in Slovak national folklore music competitions. Considering the fact that both towns are rather small and not far from each other, it is remarkable that these ensembles have such historical continuity. Roma are traditionally (and almost exclusively) members of both ensembles.

Music Making as Business

Before discussing the system of musical education I will examine the aims of music making among Roma in Klenovec and Kokava as they determine the specific traits of their educational system. Ivry Gitlis, an Israeli violinist, makes the following remark in an interview about Romani musicians:

Roma are the truest violinists in the world. They are born with the instrument in their hands. I often encouraged my students to listen to them as Roma have their own way of living music. There are no violinists in the world, apart from the greatest ones, that could be compared to Romani violinists. Maybe they do not play Bach or Beethoven “in style” but there are different things: the expression which is bodily, original, organic and total (Antonietto 1994:104–105).

This quotation should make the reader aware of the fact that there is no such thing as a *globally shared model of an excellent musician*. The mention about “playing Bach and

Beethoven ‘in style’” illustrates the typical oversight in the discussion on the Romani “unexceptional musicality.” Musicality of Romani musicians is neither higher nor lower than others. Their musicality is *different* because the aims of their music are *different*. Therefore, their methods of acquiring musical skills must also be *different*. In this section, these differences in aims will be explained.

While formalized musical education in Slovakia is intended for the production of Western classical music, the ultimate aim of Romani music making in Slovakia has always been *business*, i.e., to have *maximum profit from music making*. Roma play what people who pay want to listen to. This is also the case of the Romani musicians from the surveyed locality.

Romani musicians in Kokava and Klenovec are considered as nobility with high living standards. Though I have not met a musician in Klenovec and Kokava for whom music making would be the exclusive source of living, for many of them it has always been a good source of extra finance. Most of my informants have also experienced busking around Europe. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, there was a great boom of Romani buskers going abroad to earn money. Some of them could have earned up to 40,000 Slovak crowns (around 1800 USD) per month, while salaries in factories in central Slovakia were just around 3,000. This difference was mostly caused by an imbalance between the weaker currency of post-communist Czechoslovakia in comparison to the strong currencies of Western-European states. Although nowadays the difference is not so high, many musicians from Klenovec and Kokava still go abroad to earn some extra money.

Honoraria for Romani bands from Klenovec and Kokava are often fluid and dependent on the actual performance of the band. That is why Romani bands have their own strategy of communicating with their audience in order to maximize their profit. The most important element of this communication is the *primáš*, the band leader, most commonly playing the first violin. One of my informants, a viola-player from Kokava, told me the following:

“There’s a great difference between a good and a bad *primáš*. With a bad one, you might earn just 25 euros for an evening, which is incredibly low. But if he’s a good one, then you can earn from 70 to 90 euros.” (Interview with L.F., May 12, 2015).

This kind of communication is also acquired through the process of musical learning, and ability of communicating with audience is regarded as important as ability of playing instrument. Musical education is thus determined and influenced by the fact that the primary aim of Romani music-making is to earn money, that is, to maximize the profit of the band.

Lack of Formality

Merriam (1964) divided the process of music-knowledge transmission into *education* and *schooling*, where *education* is defined as a directed learning system which accompanies an individual for the most part of childhood and adolescence, while *schooling* consists of those educational processes which are held at specific times, in particular places, for certain periods, by especially trained people. In addition to this, he added an important note:

It should perhaps be noted that while some non-literate societies lack formal educational institutions, this in no sense means they have no educational system. [...] The confusion [...] lies in the distinction between education and schooling; *the lack of formal institutions in no way suggests that education, in its broadest sense, is absent* (1964:146, emphasis added).

Berliner (1975:136–140) suggests there are always two parts to musical learning – *direct learning* (learning through direct observation and listening to a teacher play) and *indirect learning* (learning by independent practicing and by performing the music). These two parts are culturally universal, none of them omissible. The difference, however, lies in the different emphasis on these two parts of musical learning.

Slovak standardized musical education is highly formalized and places a great emphasis on direct learning. It takes specific time (lessons) in specific places (schools) and it is taught by specific people (teachers) who teach in a specific way (approved methodology). The time taken by students for indirect learning (i.e. home-practicing and performing) is controlled by a teacher and is always planned according to schedule, which is appropriate for the particular musical level of the students. This formality is enforced by methodical handbooks and, consequently, by law, especially by the so-called *Teaching Plan [Učebný plán]*, which is approved by the Ministry of Education (cf. Holas 2004:96–98).

In the case of Romani musicians in Klenovec and Kokava, there is greater emphasis on *indirect* and *informal learning*, which does not have the typical form of *schooling*. This simple fact has an important influence on how their musicality is being developed.

Due to this emphasis on informal and indirect learning, there are as many stories about learning musical instruments as there are Romani musicians in Klenovec and Kokava. As an example, I will mention a story which I was told by a Klenovec-based double bass player in his late fifties:

When I was young, I wasn't really keen on playing folk music. Here, there was a great boom of Beat music so I wore long hair and torn jeans. And soon I started playing guitar. My father wasn't particularly happy about it, but what could he do? Later on, I started playing bass guitar as we lacked a bass guitarist but I didn't mind as I found it similar. After some time, I was in Bohemia doing my military service. I remembered my father saying, "Tell them that you're a musician and your military service will be easy." One day, I was standing in a gathering when one of our

superiors was yelling at us: “Is there anyone who can play double bass?” There were three hundred of us and none raised their hands. So I hesitated. “None,” the superior yelled. So I finally raised my hand despite not ever holding a double bass in my life. First, I was shocked as they were no frets, so I had to stick little labels on the neck of the double bass. But in a month or so, I was able to play fast czardases with no trouble” (Interview with M.D., May 6, 2015).

His story proves the fact that a musician can acquire his ability to play an instrument without any education or even any preceding musical training. “Learning by doing” can lead to an emergence of musical skills which would otherwise have to be acquired through a long process of formal and direct learning.

Participatory Performance as an Educational Medium Acquiring Competence of Cooperation

Turino (2008) defines two general types of musical performance: *presentational* and *participatory*. He describes participatory performance as “a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions [...]” and where “primary attention is on the activity, on the doing, and on the other participants, rather than on an end product that results from the activity.” (p. 28). In contrast, presentational performance “refers to situations where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing.” (p. 26).

Turino considers European classical music as an archetypal example of presentational performance. The Slovak standardized system of musical education, mainly intended as preparation for this presentational performance, uses the *participation* as an educational method just minimally or not at all.

On the other hand, my fieldwork has discovered that informal sessions of musicians (commonly known as *bašavely*), where musicians do not perform for anyone in particular, apart from themselves, play an important role in music-skills transmission. The participatory performance here is an essential educational medium, where musical skills of Romani musicians are being transmitted and developed with the emphasis on *competence of cooperation*.

Most of this cooperative competence is acquired spontaneously during the informal musical sessions. Many of my informants, indeed, mentioned the role of these sessions as crucial for their music career. Opportunities like these are ideal for developing musical skills through listening and observing as well as for developing mutual listening, which is necessary for musical cooperation.

One of my informants, a 25-years-old primáš from Klenovec, told me that he was taught by his uncle, who insisted on playing in a group as if it were an important aspect of musical learning. The uncle gravely emphasised the importance of mutual listening of the band members and the primáš’ responsibility for the performance: “My uncle taught me that they must pay attention to me. If they played a bad note, I should turn to them and show them my upset face.” (Interview with J.R., May 19, 2015). This example proves that Romani musicians consider competence of cooperation of all members of the group as an essential part of Romani music making.

This cooperative learning very often takes place inside the family environment. That might be the reason for which no sibling-musicians in Klenovec and Kokava play the same instrument. The musicians' roles are always cast in order to fit into family needs, which allows for participatory playing within the family environment.

Analytical and Holistic Approach

Van den Bos (1995) constructs two prototypical models of music-educational methods – *analytical* and *holistic*. While the target of the analytical method is to acquire separate abilities to *play the instrument*, the target of the holistic method is to *play the music*. Each aim is reached in a different way.

Teachers teaching according to the analytical method rely on the separation of the main skill (i.e., playing the musical instrument) into many *subskills* (such as posture, rhythmical control, reading written music, music theory, etc.). Most of the know-how is transmitted by notation. On the other hand, the holistic approach does not split the skill into subskills but it deals with music as a whole in its *natural context*. Teachers using this method transmit their skills orally or just by showing them to their pupils, who imitate what they can see and what they can hear.

As pupils are not able to play the particular piece immediately as artfully as their masters, they learn the piece roughly first and, gradually they can add more advanced elements of performance (more musical ornaments, better musical expression etc.). That is what Van den Bos calls a *concentric curriculum*. The opposite of the concentric curriculum is the *linear curriculum* typical for the analytical approach. As for this method, pupils do not learn, so to speak, a *real repertoire* but a *pedagogical repertoire*. This special kind of repertoire is constructed for the methodological purposes, i.e., in the way that fits into the particular learning level of a certain pupil. The real repertoire is acquired later on, only when the pupil reaches the level needed for performing a certain piece.

The Slovak system of music-education tends to be *analytical*. The teachers are methodologists who have the progress of their pupils under their control. The aim of the education (i.e., playing a musical instrument) is reached by using linear curricula and a pedagogical repertoire. An important feature of the Romani music-educational system in Klenovec and Kokava is its tendency to a *holistic* approach; more particularly, to learn music in its natural context, to omit curricula and start directly with the *real* repertoire. A double-bass player from Klenovec told me:

I taught my son how to play double bass from the age of ten. But I tried to teach him those things I was unaware of when I started learning myself. So I precisely explained to him the basic things in order. But, you know, try to teach this a ten-year-old child. He soon started crying “Hey, father! I hate learning this. I wanna play songs! Real songs!” (Interview with J.O., May 18, 2015).

Omitting curricula might result in the inherent pleasure which motivates musicians to keep up with their development of musical skills that can grow into total immersion in playing. When I asked a Kokava-based guitarist in his late fifties how many hours a day he practiced, he replied: “Well, I would simply come home from a shift, sometimes I even

forgot to eat and I immediately had the guitar in my hands. I was able to play all night long when I was trying to find out how to play some complicated songs. Even until daybreak.” (Interview with L.D., May 7, 2015).

As has been outlined, music-educational systems are always appropriate to the aims of particular music. Musicians who want to play classical music in an orchestra must acquire mastery in playing their instrument, accuracy and, last but not least, the ability to read music in order to be able to produce music as it had been written by the music composer. Therefore, the formalized (and *analytical*) system of music education is seen as the only system which can help them to reach their goal. Similarly, the Romani musicians who need to sell their performance by fulfilling the wishes of the audience and by displaying fierce emotional expression need to have a different (in this case, *holistic*) educational approach.

Due to the holistic approach, there are several musical advanced skills which are regarded as proof of Romani inherited musicality. In the following two sections, however, it will be shown that these skills are the result of specific educational methods, which differ from the general Slovak methods.

Listening and Key Mobility

The Slovak system of musical education is *notation-based*, which means that the role of notation in transmitting musical material is almost exclusive. Among Romani musicians, on the contrary, musical material is transmitted exclusively without notation, i.e., by *listening* and *observing*. This is a very significant trait of Romani musicality, which results in the stereotype: “Look! They can play so well and even without notation!” In fact, we can rephrase this statement as follows: “They can play so well *because* they do not how to read notation.”

One of the results of omitting notation in the process of music-knowledge transmission is *key mobility*, i.e., the ability to immediately transpose to the key in which a song is being played. A Romani saxophonist from Klenovec told me: “Among Roma, you can’t say about yourself that you are a musician if you’re not capable of playing in any key.” (Interview with J.O., May 16, 2015).

Many musicians who underwent formal musical education tend to regard the difficulty of a particular piece according to the difficulty of its key. This is because their musical knowledge is tightly linked to the music stave: *the more sharps or the more flats, the more complications*. Nevertheless, for Romani musicians, neither sharps nor flats exist. Romani violinist, violist, accordionist, double bassist and (last but not least) cimbalom player can play a song in B major as well as F sharp major without hesitation, which an ordinary musician would find very difficult.

I have asked many of my informants how it is possible to obtain such a skill. Many of them just said: “You have to have it here,” pointing to their heads, hands, ears or hearts. But some of them revealed to me that it is not a matter of a miracle but rather of the specific educational system. For example, it is very common among Romani musicians to practice keys that cause trouble. A young primáš from Klenovec, for instance, told me: “I always

had difficulties with the open E string. So there were days I played just on the open E, just to make myself confident.” (Interview with J.R., May 19, 2015).

It is important to add that this musical trait is also a result of communication inside the band as could be seen in an example of the so-called *rondo*. A rondo usually takes place late at night at events such as weddings. People stand in a circle and, when it is their turn, a man or a woman sings his/her favorite song. The Romani band is supposed to accompany the singer without any previous negotiation of the key. A singer can sing the song in *any* key, and the Romani band is supposed to accompany him/her in this very key. It is common that audience members pay for their wishes by giving money for each of the songs (usually by slipping money into the *primáš*’ violin). Sometimes there are situations when the singer sings exceptionally badly and starts singing the song out of tune. Even in such cases, the Romani band has to keep up with the singer.

The ability to transpose immediately is definitely very useful in moments like a rondo. During these kinds of performances, however, there is always, inside the band, ongoing communication which is hidden from the ears of the audience members. A Kokava-based double bassist told me: “Sometimes you can’t hear the singer so you need to listen to the *primáš* [...] Accompanying instruments join after two or three tones. If it is a complicated key, the one who hits it first tells the others. It is very often a cimbalom player, because he can quickly try out various keys” (Interview with O.R., May 10, 2015).

Another double bass player from Klenovec emphasised the importance of a reference tone:

“You know, you just finish a song so you still have a tone in your mind. As soon as anyone else starts singing, you can judge whether he’s singing higher or lower than the previous song. [...] An important thing is that you don’t have to play the right key from the very first tone. So you’re trying. Sometimes you hit it, sometimes you are a semitone higher or a semitone lower. After three or four tones, you find the key.” (Interview with J.O., May 18, 2015).

He also stressed the importance of band mutual listening and communication: “In most cases, everyone hits the key right after a few tones. Sometimes it happens, though, that some of us are struggling with finding the right key. When he keeps playing badly, someone just shouts at him: ‘Dežo!’ meaning ‘It’s D minor!’” “So you have a special designation for each key?”-PN “Sure. E is Eva, F is Fero, G is Gejza, A is Adam and so on.” (Interview with J.O., May 18, 2015).

For an uninformed viewer, key mobility might seem like a miracle somehow related to Romani “inborn musical talent.” Nevertheless, there is a much more sensible explanation for this. The roots of this confusion lie in the majority’s unwitting comparison of Romani musicality with the commonly shared idea of “ordinary musicality.” The inability to read notes is not a handicap, as many people would think, but it might lead to the emergence of different advanced musical skills, such as key mobility and the art of improvisation. Improvisation will be the subject of the next section.

Creativity instead of Accuracy and the Art of Improvisation

Improvisation should not be considered as an antonym for the word *accuracy*. Music is never either purely improvised or purely accurate. Nettl (1974) suggests the idea of a continuum between *fixed* and *improvised music*. Particular music always lies somewhere between these two extremes. Obviously, music, which is rather improvised, demands different methods of musical education from the one which is rather fixed. The Slovak system of musical education aims at accuracy with very little space left for improvisation. On the other hand, improvisation is another significant trait of Romani musical performance, which sets it apart from the Slovak majority.

A tendency towards improvisation is an important aspect of music not only for the Roma in Slovakia. Pettan (1996), for instance, who dealt with Roma (Gypsies) in Kosovo, described their way of dealing with music as follows: “Gypsies handle a tune as raw material, out of which they tend to create a new product [...] In the process of molding the product, Gypsy musicians consider all musical features changeable [...] Their goal in music is not to imitate a tune, but to create a personalized version of it” (p. 56–57). Pettan expressed the commonly shared tendency of Romani musicians toward shoreless variability. The song will differ not only from town to town or from one musician to another but also from day to day or mood to mood of a particular musician.

When I asked a 60-year-old saxophonist from Klenovec to explain to me the matter of improvisation, he said: “I don’t know how to explain that. You know everyone has his own *šmik* or *šmuk*.” (Interview with M.D., May 8, 2015). These words, hardly translatable into English, could be compared to interjections following a performance of a magical trick. It illustrates that Romani musicians do not often think about improvisation but it is rather something immanently present in their music making.

Improvisation is significantly applied in the melodic part of the *primáš*. He decorates the basic melodic line with various ornaments, commonly known as *cifry* (sing. *cifra*). One double-bass player explained to me the matter of *cifry* as follows: “Every *primáš* has his own *cifra*. There are some typical for Klenovec, for Kokava, for Rimavská Sobota and so on. But there are also *cifry* which are like the personal secret of a particular *primáš*. [...] the better the musician the more personalized *cifry* he’s got” (Interview with M.D., May 6, 2015).

Improvisation, nevertheless, does not concern just the melodic parts but it is also present for the accompanied instruments, i.e., in the *harmony* part. Generally speaking, Romani harmony tends to be very dense. An accordionist from Klenovec expressed this density in the following words: “In the case of Roma, the music is much fuller. They do not hold one chord for the whole phrase but they play several of them.” (Interview with O.R., May 13, 2015).

This is especially typical for guitar players who use a number of chord-variants such as diminished, augmented, suspended or extended chords, for many of which even an advanced music theorist would probably have trouble to find an appropriate name.

To sum it up, both melodic and harmonic improvisation is a distinctive trait of Romani music. The ability to improvise stems from cooperative learning and listening-based methods of transmission, which are typical for the Romani music-educational system in Klenovec and Kokava.

Conclusion

This article deals with the specifics of the Romani music-educational system in Klenovec and Kokava in comparison with the Slovak standardized system of musical education.

The essential difference lies in the fact that, while the aim of the standardized music-educational system is *playing classical music*, the aim of Romani musicians is *to maximize profits from music making*. It has been pointed out that Romani musical education lacks any kind of formal structures; it places *emphasis on indirect learning* and it *does not take the form of schooling*. Also mentioned has been the importance of *informal musical sessions as an educative medium* capable of developing skills for *cooperative music making*, which are barely developed by the Slovak institutionalized system of musical education. Romani *listening-based transmission* (contrary to notation-based transmission typical for the standardized educational system) leads to the emergence of *key mobility*, while the lack of emphasis on accuracy leads to the emphasis on both *melodic improvisation and dense harmony*. The chart at the end of the chapter sums up the most significant aspects of the two music-educational systems (see Figure 1).

Nowadays, the unique educational system which has been described in this article is dynamically changing due to, i.a., change of lifestyle, change of musical genres and socioeconomic change in the region. The most notable change lies in the Roma's gradual adoption of the institutionalized system of musical education. There are Romani musicians who are proud of being musicians despite not having any musical education; there are those who are rather shy about it. Regardless of whether they are proud or shy, this lack has always been considered a significant trait of Romani musicianship in Klenovec and Kokava. However, this is quickly changing.

It is very common for the members of the last generation of Romani musicians in Klenovec and Kokava to attend classes within a formalized system of musical education. For instance, one of my informants, a 13-year-old primáš, enjoys playing classical music as well as reading notation. He is now preparing himself for the entrance exam to the conservatory in Košice. His biggest dream is to be a professional musician and to play in an orchestra. However, he is also being trained by older Romani musicians to become an experienced primáš-leader to earn great social and economic profit. He is an emblematic example of a musician in whose life two music-education systems meet. The youngest generation of musicians in Klenovec and Kokava are being influenced by both the Romani and the institutionalized system of musical education. This creates a unique set of musical abilities as well as an interesting environment for further research.

Illustrations

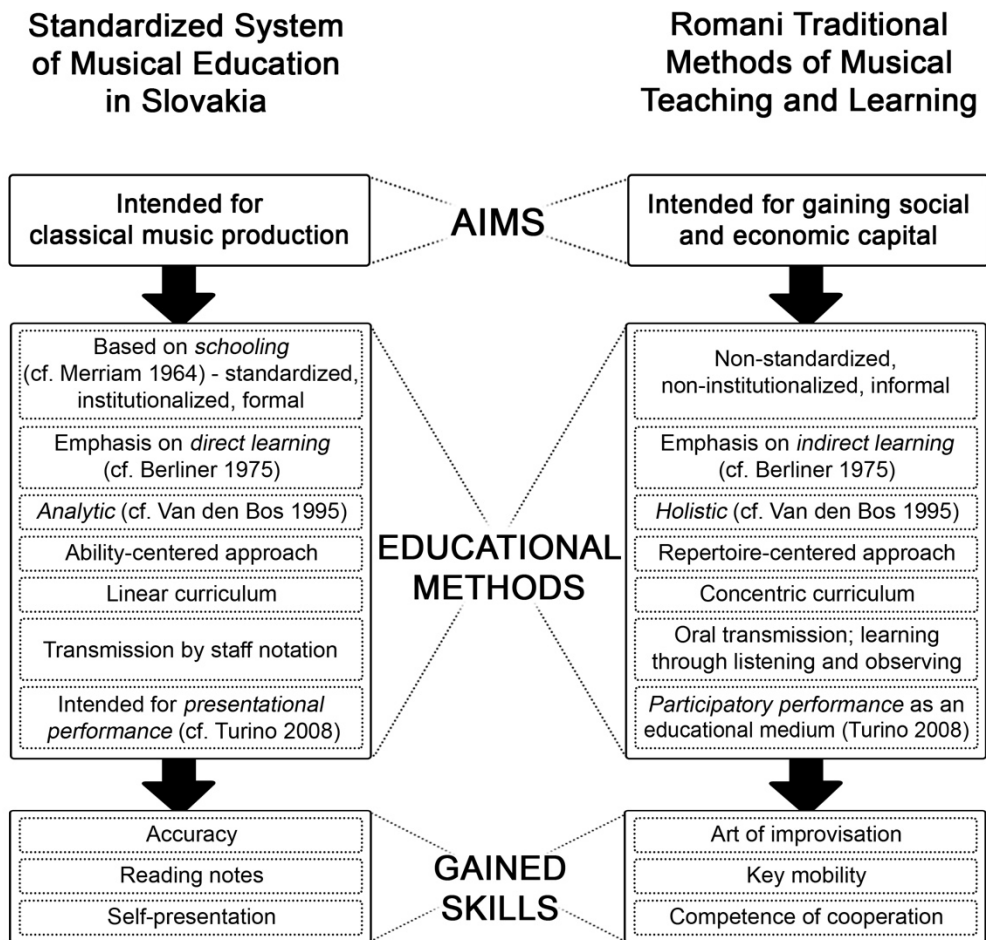


Figure 1: Comparison of two scrutinized music-educational systems.



Figure 1: Romani violin-players from Kokava.

Video excerpts

Crossing Bridges Between Generations – <https://youtu.be/-4v2rxvrZTs>

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