

Polifonia Pre-College Working Group

Site visit report
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Please note: a national description of pre-college music education in the Czech Republic can be found at www.bologna-and-music.org/countryoverviews.

In the framework of the national education and training system of the Czech Republic, the following institutions offer music education at various levels: the basic art/music schools, the conservatories (secondary level institutions without higher education status, but offering professional training), music academies (higher education level) and pedagogical faculties of universities (mainly for music teacher training).

To receive information about the secondary level conservatories in the Czech Republic, which clearly play a vital role in the preparation for admission to higher music education in the Prague and Brno academies, members of the Polifonia Pre-college Working Group visited the Prague Conservatory on 15 June 2006.

Welcome and presentation by Prof. Ales Kanka, deputy director Prague Conservatory

Conservatories in Czech Republic are vocational training institutions that train students to become professional musicians. They provide music education at a very high level, combined with general education. The conservatories do not offer academic training (at Bachelor or Master level).

Students can enter Conservatories from 15 years of age after they have passed an entrance exam. There is no preparatory class. The national curriculum includes many music related subjects and some general education subjects as well. It is therefore difficult for students to study any other subject than music in higher education. The music related subjects include instrumental tuition (one-to-one), theory subjects and orchestra and ensemble lessons. Some schools have a Jazz Department. Conservatories do not only train instrumentalists and vocalists, but conductors and composers as well.

The curriculum takes 6 years. It is possible to switch to a University or Academy of Performing Arts/Music after 4 years of studying. Graduates go on to study further or enter the professional field. Graduates that have taken pedagogy classes receive a diploma which allows them to teach at Basic Art Schools.

State conservatoires are free of charge.

The Prague Conservatory is the oldest Conservatory after Paris (* 1808), which has been lead by famous directors, such as Smetana and Dvořák at the end of his life. It is funded by the town of Prague and has a curriculum that is established and controlled by the Ministry of Education. The school aims to produce not only outstanding artists but also well-rounded human beings; the curricula include a programme of studies in theory, language, and general education.

The conservatory has 550 (mainly Czech) students between the age of 15 and 22 (with some exceptions). In 2006 the conservatory received 90 applications but the number and the level is decreasing. The decreasing numbers of applicants can most likely be explained by the large number of conservatoires in the Czech Republic (14 Conservatoires for 10 million inhabitants), as well as changes in society that favour other interests, such as sports and the internet. To increase the interest for studying music, teachers of the Prague Conservatory visit elementary music schools to give lessons.

220 part-time professors work at the Prague Conservatory in 3 departments (instruments, theatre, voice – opera and folk music), some of them also teach at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. The institution does not have an early music or jazz/pop department.

The education is free (with the exception of non-diploma students) after strict entrance examinations which include a vocal/instrumental test, music theory and sight reading. The curriculum includes a rather modest amount of general education (e.g. no math or science, but with languages, citizenship and gymnastics), 3 x 45' instrumental lessons per week and pedagogy (for teaching in elementary music schools).

The conservatory is very active in the local and national cultural life and organises 250 concerts a year. A serious problem is the lack of practise rooms in the current facilities.

After graduation 1/3 of the students continue studying, 1/3 enter the profession, 1/3 switch to other fields. The institution does not keep track of its former students. The interest of the former students in the institution seems to disappear 2-3 years after graduation, but as the musical life in Czech Republic is small, it is usually known what students do in their professional life.

As the institution is not formerly recognised at the higher education level, it cannot participate in ERASMUS, but professors organise their own international exchanges.

The Bologna 3-cycle structure is currently being discussed: the conservatories explore the possibility to offer a BA through agreements with local universities. However, this may result into more overlapping with the university level music academies in Prag and Brno which could lead to tensions. Mr. Kaňka is a bit sceptical about such a reform, because of a lack of need, courage, power and interest.

Discussion with Mrs. Jarmila (Jarka) Kotůlková, Head of the Music Pedagogy Department, president of the Orff Czech Society and active member of ISME

Since more than 20 years Mrs. Kotůlková is teaching music pedagogy and psychology at the Prague Conservatory which she also attended as student. She is very much devoted to the school with its atmosphere of "one big family".

The pedagogical curriculum lasts 2 years and includes general psychology and pedagogy as well as socio-psychological games to enhance creative thinking and to get used to the general psychological language, methodology, and instrumental didactics. Besides writing and defending a final dissertation, all students have to take an examination in arts pedagogy. The curriculum aims at ensuring a balance between music performance and teaching. Not all students appreciate that because in their opinion the competitive atmosphere does not stimulate the pedagogical aspect of the education.

Mrs. Kotůlková is worried about the decreasing role of music in general education and the tension between extreme competition and social abilities. In her opinion the economic point of view prevails and music education is blamed to be the most expensive form of education.