Symposium

Arab and Jewish children in Israel singing together

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joy and exultation. It has the power to join those who are usually segregated or even hostile. Singing in a choir is the most accessible form of making music. Moreover, songs combine music and language, thus they open the door for a cultural experience of multiplied layers. In this Symposium we would like to share and discuss our experience and reflections on four initiatives of Arab and Jewish primary school children singing together.

Any activity shared by Arab and Jewish children is not a trivial matter in Israel, as Jews and Arabs learn in different schools and locations. The population is separated by the educational system which is based on different language (Arabic or Hebrew) and on religion. The purpose of all the initiatives was to bring together, through bilingual choral singing, children belonging to groups that are alienated and in conflict. In the symposium we will show videos, a live short presentation of the children singing, and will discuss difficulties, constraints, challenges, different perspectives and solutions.

Arab and Jewish children singing together: four initiatives

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The first initiative took place between the years 2015-2016 and was conducted in two schools (one Arab and the other Jewish) in a mixed city in central Israel with young children (third grade). In the Arabic school there had been no prior music education, and the third graders did not speak Hebrew while the teacher who taught them to sing did not know Arabic. Despite the communication difficulties they did learn to sing. At the end of the year we held a meeting in which each class sang in its own language and also a shared song that was sung together in both languages. The children in both classes said that the meeting made a strong impression on them.
The second initiative involved two school choirs from two different towns. At the Arab school the choir was established for the first time, especially for this project. The choirs met several times during the year of 2016-2017, singing together in both languages. At the end of the year, both choirs appeared together in a choral concert of the Ministry of Education, with great success.

The third initiative took place between the years 2017-2018 when we offered our program to an organization specializing in meetings between Arab and Jewish children. There was already a tradition of meetings that included various activities, but singing was introduced for the first time. We worked with two regular classes (5th and 6th grades), in each school, so as to have the same number of boys and girls in each choir, totaling together 100 children. At the end of the year we performed in front of the children's parents.

In the fourth project that took place between" 2018-2019", we worked again with the same teachers of the second project, but with new students.

In retrospect, it was the gap in music education between the Arab and the Jewish sectors, which posed the greatest obstacle and required arduous efforts in order to overcome it.

Christian and Islamic approach to music

Joseph Ouda
Al-Zahara Primary School Choir, Kalansawa and Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, Israel

Christian and Islamic approach to music, are totally different in Arabic culture. In the Arab Christian religion, special attention is given to music and singing. Therefore, there is a choir in every church and as a result, choral singing has developed beautifully, using multiple voices. In the Muslim religion there is a contradiction between religion and music. There is a controversy concerning this matter among many factions, and therefore choral singing has not developed.
Arab teachers are provided with the same training in choral conducting as any other future teacher. Because of the different traditions, I think it is very desirable to hold advanced training programs in choral conducting for Arab music teachers.

In former years there have been financial difficulties, combined with the lack of awareness by school principals that a music teacher can also be a choir conductor and play an instrument.

The present choral bilingual program had an immense contribution to mine choral conducting skills: lots of methods, rehearsal techniques, vocal warmups harmonic ear training. We normally sing in unison, and now I had to teach the students to sing in more than one voice. In the future I would like the program to start at the beginning of the school year and let the two choirs to rehearse together once a month.

My vision is to have such a program in every school, and to organize many choirs for high school students and adults, that combine Arab and Jewish singers together.

Bilingual choir singing: challenges

Orit Levy
Mamlachti- Alef primary school choir, Hod- Hasharon and Bar- Ilan University, Israel

In my presentation I will discuss the challenges and the ways we faced them through this project of a bilingual choir.

Language and communication between students and teachers were the first challenge we faced. While students in the Arabic school study Hebrew as part of their curriculum; students in the Jewish school neither study Arabic, nor speak it. The same challenge accompanied us in the selection process of the songs, and later, as we conducted joint rehearsals. In order to ease the language barrier, we used the aid of bi-lingual teachers who mediated between the two choirs.

Apprehension rose due to the cultural differences, in particular, the fear of “the other”- the one that I don’t know. We came up with creative ways to alleviate the tension and
"break the ice". Every rehearsal started with a social activity, and with time the walls were taken down. At the beginning of the project each choir was seated separately, but now, the students mix during joined rehearsals.

To further the connection between the students, we invited the students' parents to view the joint rehearsals and they were impressed to see the budding friendships amongst the students.

A project such as this requires funds: for busing the children to different towns and for the musical accompaniment in rehearsals and performances resources for rehearsals and performances. We were aided and supported by the headmistresses of both schools and by the musical supervisor of the schools as well.

The headmistresses held a crucial position in bringing this project to fruition. Time schedules were set to hold joint rehearsals, requiring a great deal of flexibility of both schools with the pre-existing curricula.