Spoken Paper

Boundary crossing pedagogy in Swedish folk music tradition: Communities of practice with implications for higher music education

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Traditional Swedish folk music found its way into higher music education in the 1980ies as a result of a national reform aiming at a more inclusive and democratic music teacher training. The introduction of folk music in 1992 at Malmö Academy of Music (MAM) was intertwined with the pop-rock profile and development of courses on intercultural competence in music education, such as the total immersion “Gambia course”. This wider palett of genres has resulted in pedagogical and didactic approaches from orally transmitted musical cultures, as part of the tool box that academic music students are developing during their university music teacher training. However, there is a parallel education path, open for all interested, where folk music pedagogy is developed in communities lead by traditional masters. For example, since 1978, approximately 15.000 folk musicians have been fostered at Malungs folkhögskola, situated at a remote village in Northern Sweden. Today these courses are organized as distance courses combining social media communication and intensive in situ learning periods, attracting participants of all backgrounds and ages, from all parts of Sweden.

This presentation is based on sensuous scholarship (Stoller, 1997) participant observations and interviews with the doyen of Swedish folk music pedagogy Jonny Soling, 73 years old, and the students, most of them 60+, at the distance course “Folk music violin”. Analyzing the data through the theoretical lenses
of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991/2011) the lifelong learning processes that flourish at Malungs folkhörskola are reviewed in the light of a conceptual framework that highlights sustainability potentials for societies with ageing and diverse populations.

The methodological inspiration for this study stems from interviews performed in Gambia (Sæther, 2003) where the questions in a sense were asked by the kora[1], played by co-researcher jali Alagi Mbye. In the interview with the ageing Kanuteh brothers, the ostinatos played on the kora, accompanying the conversation, skilfully guided the expert musicians to discuss and reflect on pedagogical and societal aspects within their own tradition. The younger master Alagi Mbye was concerned with widened participation, a music education for all, including children from non jali families, regardless gender. He had at that time already violated the “traditional curriculum”, by opening a school for all – much in line with Jonny Solings distance education “Folkmusik fiol”, open for all.

The guiding research questions is:

What are the components of current folk music pedagogy and what are the implications for higher music education of learnings from traditional masters?

[1]21-stringed harp lute, played in Gambia, Senegal and surrounding Mande areas.