

INVESTING IN THE QUALITY OF TOMORROW'S MUSIC IN EUROPE



Statement of the "Polifonia" pre-college working group of the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) on the importance of pre-college music education.

The European Association of Conservatoires (AEC), representing more than 250 institutions in professional music training in 40 European countries, aims to promote European cooperation in the professional music training sector. This is being achieved through congresses, various publications, and European cooperation projects. The ERASMUS Thematic Network for Music "Polifonia" coordinated by the AEC was recently chosen by the European Commission as an "ERASMUS Success Story".

Within "Polifonia", the AEC has addressed pre-college music education, the phase in music education preceding the higher education level in music. As young people often start with musical activities at a very young age, it is not sufficient to address professional training in music through looking at the higher education level only. "Polifonia" studied this issue by forming a group of experts in this field from various European countries, realising a series of site visits to identify examples of good practice, producing a literature study on scientific research on the development of young musicians, completing a substantial mapping exercise of national pre-college music education systems in 26 European countries, researching current practice in relation to admission to European higher music education institutions, and by formulating a set of competences for the pre-college phase in music education.

Based on the above-mentioned activities, the following **conclusions** have been formulated:

- Common experiences in music education as well as research clearly indicate that music training should be started at an early age, especially for those wanting to become professional musicians.
- Music education is to be perceived as a continuum; it is therefore difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of professional studies and to conceptualise the different phases of education. Nevertheless, pre-college music education is a specific phase in musical education and needs to be recognised as such.
- A well-structured pre-college education leads to a higher professional standard in higher music education, and, as a result, to a higher quality in the music profession.
- Students are better prepared for higher music education when there is a well-structured and continuous system or curriculum with close connections between pre-college level institutions or systems, general education institutions and higher music education institutions.
- Music education at the pre-college level can also be of great value to young people without the ambition to become professional musicians: it helps young people to develop the participation in and the understanding of culture and the music and arts, develop creative, personal and interpersonal skills, and provide social cohesion and intercultural understanding, which is essential for an Europe built on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

Therefore, the “Polifonia” pre-college working group would like to make the following **recommendations**:

To local, regional and national governments and policy makers in education and culture:

- To acknowledge the importance of strong pre-college level music education as a vital condition for a highly qualitative musical landscape in individual European countries.
- To acknowledge the importance of strong pre-college level music education as a tool for the development of creative, personal and interpersonal skills, as well as social cohesion, for young people in general, not only for those having the ambition to enter the music profession.
- To therefore give sufficient structural and financial support to pre-college level music education in order to ensure that the musical culture in Europe maintains its high level.
- To support the establishment of creative partnerships between general education institutions at the primary and secondary level, institutions for pre-college music education, higher music education institutions and operators in the field of music for the development of inspiring and efficient learning environments that will support music education at this level.
- To encourage more European cooperation in this field while respecting cultural diversity with the aim to exchange examples of good practice and enhance existing provision;
- To introduce measures to strengthen the training of instrumental/vocal teachers that provide music education at the various levels.

To the European Commission:

- To support projects addressing pre-college music education through the various funding programmes during the “EU Year for Creativity & Innovation through Education & Culture” in 2009.
- To take note of the outcomes of this study in relation to the EU “Communication for a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world” and in particular when identifying issues to be addressed through the Open Method of Coordination, as suggested in the Communication.
- More specifically, to make use of the expertise of the AEC in this area, for example by consulting the AEC in the development of issues and indicators related to pre-college music education in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination.

For more information, visit www.polifonia-tn.org/precollege or contact Mr Martin Prchal, AEC Chief Executive, at aecinfo@aecinfo.org.