



Erich Katz and Carl Orff:  
A Story of Friendship and Pedagogy

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FAM 499: Senior Thesis in the Arts  
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July 27, 2018

One of the most beautiful things about music is the way it works to bring people together. Erich Katz, the man who spearheaded the effort to reform and revitalized the American Recorder Society, not only believed in the truth of this but put it into active practice with his work in music pedagogy. In an obituary article published in *The American Recorder* after his death, Martha Bixler, a prominent member of the American Recorder Society said, “His great mission in life, and it really was a mission, was to bring people together to make music.”<sup>1</sup> Through the study of Erich Katz’s life through careful examination of his archives housed in the Recorder Music Archival Collections at Regis University’s Dayton Memorial Library, it is easy to see that music was the sun at the center of his universe. Around that sun orbited an entire solar system of family, friends, colleagues, experiences, and an undeniable love of teaching and bringing people together through their shared art and accessibility of music. One of these planetary satellites was Katz’s friendship with fellow German composer and pedagogue, Carl Orff.

Using information about their teaching styles and methods, their friendship, and their educational legacy on the music world, it is both easy and fascinating to examine the ways in which these two musical and pedagogical masterminds reformed the world of modern music education.

The story of Erich Katz and Carl Orff’s friendship began with one small connection, a shared teacher, which then grew into a plethora of different connections until the time when the two men finally met. This teacher was Wilhelm Klatte, a composer at the Stern Academy of Music with whom Katz studied in 1921, and whose student, Heinrich Kaminski, was one of Carl

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Bixler, “Erich Katz: Teacher - Composer: 1900 - 1973,” *The American Recorder* (Spring 1973), 1.

Orff's composition teachers.<sup>2</sup> This mutual teacher (or grand-teacher, as is the case for Carl Orff) was also the foundation of both of Katz and Orff's love of early music.<sup>3</sup>

Within ten years of studying with Klatte, Erich Katz was delving into the world of music with his own musical creation and contribution: *Das Neue Chorbuch*, an anthology of accessible choral music composed by the best German composers of the time, compiled and edited by Katz.

<sup>4</sup> Erich Doflein recommended that Orff submit some works to Katz for publication in the *Chorbuch*, just as he had.<sup>5</sup> Katz chose four of Orff's submissions to be included in the 1931 first edition of *Das Neue Chorbuch*. He then wrote a letter to Carl Orff saying that he was "pleased to have established contact with you in this manner."<sup>6</sup>

As Katz's journey to publishing *Das Neue Chorbuch* continued (the process took several years, as you will note from his letter to Orff in 1929 and the *Chorbuch's* publication date then 1932), Katz and Orff communicated frequently via letter, asking each other questions about notation choices and composition decisions with regards to the music they were in the process of publishing in the *Chorbuch*.<sup>7</sup> Their friendship only grew after the publication of *Das Neue Chorbuch*, as they exchanged letters critiquing each other's work and ideas.<sup>8</sup> It is evident when viewing their correspondence that they held each other's knowledge, artistic abilities, and opinions in such high esteem that their letters often contained discussions and critiques of the

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Davenport, "Carl Orff: The Katz Connection," *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

works of other living composers, specifically those whose compositions were to be included in the *Chorbuch*.

Though the *Chorbuch* project was the point at which they established contact and from whence their friendship would later blossom, because of its importance in how the composers finally met in person, a connection must also be drawn between the work in music education and pedagogy that both Orff and Katz were doing during this time.

Prior to embarking on his editing and publishing adventure with *Das Neue Chorbuch*, Katz co-founded the Freiburg Seminary for Music Theory, a music school in a city that, though it was a major German musical hub, lacked its own conservatory.<sup>9</sup> Katz and co-founder Erich Doflein saw the need and quickly stepped up to fill it.

Establishing the Freiburg Seminary was no easy feat, and the experimental methods of education that Katz and his colleagues applied to their teaching were cutting edge for the time. They followed early ideas of self-instituted learning obligating students to take an active interest and an active role in pursuing their musical education.<sup>10</sup> As a result, this also placed great importance on the idea of having a student apply what they have learned directly to their art, in a concept referred to as “musical doing,” in which the lessons students learned in their classes on any given day were then quickly used in the music they were making or composing.<sup>11</sup> LaNoue Davenport, an American scholar and teacher, notes in his article “Erich Katz: A Profile,” that “the act of performing a piece of music is even more crucial to learning its essential qualities than hearing it... And having performed it, one can hear it more truly and deeply. Music [is] not

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Davenport, “Carl Orff: The Katz Connection,” *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

only learned, but made there [in that moment].”<sup>12</sup> The act of taking what one has learned and quickly applying it to the work one does not only cements that learned concept in one’s mind and gives one a firm connection with the concept, but it also allows one to gain a more profound understanding of what one is doing musically. That profound understanding is what allows a performer to exercise his or her ultimate ability to make music.

It is especially fascinating to note that these experimental and highly innovative educational methods that Katz and his colleagues put into place at the Freiburg Seminary for Music Theory, are very similar to a modern American educational concept of “Comprehensive Musicianship.” Dr. Mark Davenport, author of “Carl Orff: The Katz Connection,” refers to Comprehensive Musicianship as “a concept about teaching and learning of music based on the premise that all facets of music study should be integrated and related... [with an emphasis on] performing, listening, and composing.”<sup>13</sup> In a historical sense, this is fascinating because it truly shows that Katz and his colleagues were nearly half a decade ahead of their time when it came to the ways in which they chose to work with and share knowledge with their students.

While we have information about how music was taught at the Freiburg Seminary from several different sources, including from student accounts and even an article that Katz wrote for the *Deutsche Tonkünstler Zeitung*, “The German Newspaper for Musical Arts,” that details the progress of the Freiburg Seminary, it is much more difficult to examine Erich Katz’s personal educational theories because he never explicitly wrote them down. In fact, many students

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<sup>12</sup> LaNoue Davenport, “Erich Zatz: A Profile,” *The American Recorder*, Vol. XI, no. 2 (Spring 1970): 43.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Davenport, “Carl Orff: The Katz Connection,” *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 10.

believed that he simply improvised his courses.<sup>14</sup> Constance Primus, former president of the American Recorder Society, notes in her article “Erich Katz: The Pied Piper Comes to America,” that “Because Katz’s teaching was improvised - he never used textbooks or made up lesson plans - no concrete record of his teaching methods exists” except for a recorder method book that he published in the early nineteen-fifties<sup>15</sup>

Because of the difficulties in comparing and contrasting the minutiae of their teaching strategies, it proves to be much more efficient, but equally fascinating, to focus on the difference between the audiences that Carl Orff and Erich Katz hoped their work would reach. Specifically, Orff’s methods unintentionally became focused on introducing young children to music in a wholesome and efficient manner. Katz, on the other hand, wanted music and pedagogy to be for anybody and everybody who was interested, children and adults alike, and his methods remained as such.

While Katz was opening up many musical doors to the musicians of Freiburg, Germany and providing the general public with a handbook of choral music that was meant to bring people together in song, Orff was beginning his work on his famed *Schulwerk*, developed during his time at the *Guntherschule* in Munich.<sup>16</sup> The first edition of the *Schulwerk*, still used as a teaching method in schools all over the world today (but also not referred to as a “method”), was a collection of rhythm and melody exercised that Orff published in 1930, a year prior to the

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<sup>14</sup> Mark Davenport, “Carl Orff: The Katz Connection,” *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 10.

<sup>15</sup> Constance Primus, “Erich Katz: The Pied Piper Comes to America,” 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Karole Calvin-Campbell, “Supporting the Development of the Whole Child Through Orff Schulwerk, Montessori, and Multiple Intelligences,” (Info not available - need to dig deeper).

publication of Katz's *Chorbuch*.<sup>17</sup> It was not long before Orff's *Schulwerk* became one of the primary music education tools in schools across Germany, especially in Berlin, where it was considered the official method.<sup>18</sup>

The *Schulwerk* is based on the ancient Greek ideal of "*Mousike*," or the moment at which music, dance, and language meet and converge.<sup>19</sup> He saw this connection of music, dance, and language as a healthy, methodical, and well-rounded way to compose music, as is evident from many of his greatest works including *Carmina Burana*, an hour-long choral masterpiece and setting of long-lost poetry that, though usually only performed in concert today, was intended to be performed with dancers.<sup>20</sup> Orff also took the *Schulwerk* beyond that by stating that its goal was the "regeneration of music through movement... [and] through dance."<sup>21</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the *Schulwerk* was not originally intended for use by children as it is so prevalently applied today. In fact, its first application was in a classroom of adult women.<sup>22</sup> It quickly found its place in primary school music classrooms, because it fits in very well with the educational patterns of young children. Orff firmly believed that music is an essential part of providing a child with a full and well-rounded education.<sup>23</sup> Since it combines music, movement, and language, it allows teachers to work with students at their own pace of learning because

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Davenport, "Carl Orff: The Katz Connection," *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Doug Goodkin, "Orff-Schulwerk in the New Millenium" *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 88, no. 3, (November 2001), 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Karole Calvin-Campbell, "Supporting the Development of the Whole Child Through Orff Schulwerk, Montessori, and Multiple Intelligences," (Info not available - need to dig deeper), 76.

<sup>22</sup> Doug Goodkin, "Orff-Schulwerk in the New Millenium" *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 88, no. 3, (November 2001), 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

different student will have different rates of retention, different interests, and thus, different strengths and opportunities for growth as they progress through their music education.

Carl Orff's *Schulwerk* was developed with the intention of it being used as both a method and tool to be used for teaching children the basics of music with the hopes that it will provide them with a solid foundation upon which they could then deeply explore the theory behind the music and the instrument they are learning, and then ultimately apply their knowledge to the art of composition.<sup>24</sup> Scholar Daniel C. Johnson says of the *Orff-Schulwerk*: "Through self-criticism and self-evaluation, students direct their own learning using the resources and situations presented to them by the teacher."<sup>25</sup> Orff employed three different main tools to teach: the voice, movement, and then instruments.<sup>26</sup> Each of these tools build off of each other as the child develops technique, understanding, and a solid musical foundation that they can then apply to the art of improvisation. According to Isabel McNeill Carley, the first American honor graduate of the Orff Institute, "Such exercises in improvisation provide the best training in both technique and musicianship, since the students are learning to *think* the music for themselves."<sup>27</sup>

Knowing about their love of sharing music and the lengths to which both men went to educate others, it is not hard to imagine that they had a much to discuss once they did become friends after their initial connection through Orff's submissions to Katz's *Chorbuch*. it is their

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<sup>24</sup> Karole Calvin-Campbell, "Supporting the Development of the Whole Child Through Orff Schulwerk, Montessori, and Multiple Intelligences," (Info not available - need to dig deeper), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel C. Johnson, "Carl Orff: Musical Humanist," *International Journal of the Humanities*, Vol.3 (2005/2006), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Karole Calvin-Campbell, "Supporting the Development of the Whole Child Through Orff Schulwerk, Montessori, and Multiple Intelligences," (Info not available - need to dig deeper), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Isabel McNeill Carley, "The Orff Approach," *The American Recorder*, Vol, XXXVI, no. 4. (September 1995), 17.



correspondence, though, that shows exactly how close they became in their adventures through the world of pedagogy that were so similar and yet so different.

It was these similarities and differences that actually pushed Katz to invite Orff to the Freiburg Seminary for Music Theory to teach special courses, as many previous guest lecturers (performers and composers in their own right) had done before. That first visit included several sessions of improvisation that were significant because all were welcome and nobody had to have any previous experience with improvisation, theory, or even music in general.<sup>28</sup> In the correspondence between Orff and Katz in the time following Orff's stay at the Freiburg institute, it is easy to see that everybody involved enjoyed the project very much, and Orff even alluded to looking forward to more collaboration in the future. In the letter dated November 29, 1931, Orff wrote to Katz, "I hope that the Freiburg 'affair' will be the beginning of all sorts of joint projects. I had much too good a time there [at the Freiburg Seminary] not to want to come again."<sup>29</sup>

While the communication between Katz and Orff is limited in the Erich Katz Archives to the letters that he received from Orff, there are moments of great humanity and camaraderie shared between the two men in those letters. It is especially heartwarming to witness the transition of their correspondence from purely professional to a much more relaxed friendship based in a mutual love of education and music ("*Mein sehr Lieber Katz!*" or "My Dear Katz!").

The correspondence and collaboration between Erich Katz and Carl Orff continued for several years until the Nazi Regime created sufficient stress between their friendship, Katz being nominally Jewish and Orff not, that their correspondence was cut off around the time that Katz

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<sup>28</sup> Mark Davenport, "Carl Orff: The Katz Connection," *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 14.

<sup>29</sup> Orff, Carl to Erich Katz. 29 November 1931. Box 2-17, Erich Katz Collection. Recorder Music Archival Collections, Dayton Memorial Library, Regis University.

spent two months in the Dachau Concentration Camp in late 1938 and early 1939 and shortly after fled Germany to England and then America.<sup>30</sup>

Once Katz had re-established his life in America, successfully reforming the American Recorder Society and sharing his gifts by teaching in several schools in the New York area, he and Orff reconnected, and the second era of their friendship began. It must be noted though, that there was a gap of fifteen years between when they lost touch during the war (partially because of virulent Nazi propaganda) and when the second era of their friendship began.<sup>31</sup> This “second era” of their friendship extended well beyond their original connection through pedagogy, education, and composition, and developed into a genuine friendship based on mutual interests, family, adventures, and most importantly, music. It is very clear to anybody who reads the letters that there was an extraordinary amount of mutual respect between the two men, not only for their work but also for each other as people.

In a letter written by Orff to Katz on March 7, 1956, Orff regales Katz with tales of his misadventures on what was supposed to be a three week vacation in South America which became a three month excursion through the continent.<sup>32</sup> This would have been the first time that Katz and Orff would meet in person after the rift in their friendship that came as a result of World War II Nazi propaganda that set the two educators on opposing sides. Orff ends the letter:

What I am coming to is this: I will be back in New York, finally, on the 20th. Of THIS month. If I have not been altogether excommunicated for the reckless inattention to duty,

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<sup>30</sup> Mark Davenport, “Carl Orff: The Katz Connection,” *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 37.

<sup>31</sup> Mark Davenport, “Carl Orff: The Katz Connection,” *The American Recorder*, vol. XXXVI, no. 4 (September 1995): 37.

<sup>32</sup> Orff, Carl to Erich Katz. 7 March 1956. Box 2-17, Erich Katz Collection. Recorder Music Archival Collections, Dayton Memorial Library, Regis University.

I should like to meet with you as soon as convenient for you and try to make amends.

Warmest regards to all the deserving, but especially to you and Winnie -

Your

Carl

It was this mutual respect that fed into their educationally inclined vocation and the work that both Katz and Orff did to share that vocation with the world. Their collaborations, beginning with Katz's *Das Neue Chorbuch*, have become the foundation on which so much concerning early music and music education has since been built. Though not considered a "method book" by its creator, the *Orff-Schulwerk* is still one of the primary world-wide methods of teaching music. Likewise, Katz's Freiburg Seminary of Music Theory and the work he did to reform and reinvigorate the American Recorder Society after the Second World War opened as many doors for both amateur and professional musicians across Germany and the United States. In fact, it could even be said that since he championed Orff's *Schulwerk* through his reviews of it in a wide assortment of German journals (educational, musical, and otherwise) promoted Orff's musical legacy.

Orff knew and never forgot how much he owed Erich Katz for the success of his *Schulwerk*. It is in a eulogy letter to Erich Katz that Carl Orff wrote: "I owe you so much, your human and artistic understanding for my work, especially in the field of education, which you were one of the first to clearly recognize, and you made it as it were, your own mission - in the unforgettable days in Freiburg a long, long time ago."<sup>33</sup> One specific section of the above stated excerpt from the eulogy conclusively and comprehensively describes the work that both the men

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<sup>33</sup> Orff, Carl to Erich Katz. 25 September 1973. Box 2-17, Erich Katz Collection. Recorder Music Archival Collections, Dayton Memorial Library, Regis University.

did for music education: the phrase “... your human and artistic understanding...” “Human and artistic understanding” was the foundation of the work, and quite possibly both Erich Katz and Carl Orff’s vocations, that brought us the Freiburg Seminary, the *Chorbuch*, and the *Schulwerk*.

This is exactly what both men shared in their friendship and in the work they did together and individually: they used their gifts, education, and passions to bring music to the masses so that people could understand and grow in their own humanity from the art that they were able to share.