



# LEADERSHIP

## Advocacy at the International Level

By Jacquie Schrader, Annapolis, Maryland

It is very rewarding to take my place in the long line of American teachers who have advocated for Orff Schulwerk around the world. Our first AOSA President, Arnold Burkhardt set the model for this international teaching in the early 1960s and 1970s. Many other gifted American teachers followed through in the 1980s and 1990s, sharing ideas with teachers from around the world. But it was not until the summer of 2000, at the International Symposium in Germany, that Frau Orff asked AOSA to join together with the Carl Orff Foundation in a more formalized way; one which would directly support international teacher training. In 2001, when Hermann Regner sent AOSA a check to begin this partnership, he said that he "hoped this would enable a start to be made in making the exemplary work and the rich experiences with Schulwerk found in the United States, known beyond the boundaries of America." This vision gave birth to what we now call AOSA's International Outreach Committee.

I was fortunate enough to receive the first scholarship given by this AOSA-sponsored group, and in doing so, received the opportunity to teach at the first international course in Nitra, Slovakia in the summer of 2001. In preparing for this course, I learned that I would be advocating for Orff Schulwerk in a part of the world where most music teachers had rare, if any opportunities for professional development. In fact, many had never been away from home before, and most had never traveled outside of their previously Communist-occupied country. Over 70 teachers arrived for this week-long course, hailing from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Germany and Austria. They spoke seven languages; my first task was to quickly discover who could translate for whom!

I remember trying to sleep on the first night; my mind was filled with doubt. What would the needs of these teachers be? How could I get to know them without being able to speak their languages? What were the needs of the children they taught? What might an American teacher have to offer? How could I be a team builder, drawing on their strengths to let them shine? How would I navigate through and share the best of the Schulwerk as I know it?

When the morning light appeared, I jumped in with two feet and a racing heart. We sang. We moved. We played. I was energized by their hunger to learn, by their inherent musicality, by their smiles. So many of the teachers were interested in hearing about American children, pedagogy, materials and ideas. I did my best to answer all the questions. I tried to communicate that there isn't one "American" way of teaching and learning, but rather, here in the United States, just as in any classroom anywhere, each teacher brings the sum total of all of her gifts and experience in that very moment, to each child. As the days went on, it was clear I was learning even more than the teachers. I discovered that a simple gesture goes further than 50 words, that high quality music and movement brings people's hearts together, and that laughter and playfulness transcend any language.

One of my favorite memories was playing mallet games. Just for this one activity, I asked the teachers to sit in small circles according to their homelands. I gave them the task of choosing and then speak-

ing a children's rhyme and creating a mallet/body percussion ostinato to accompany it. I will never forget the sound in the room that day, as teachers were chanting rhymes from their homelands, with the added element of a rhythmic ostinato. It was such joyful chaos as they not only performed for each other, but then spontaneously began running from circle to circle translating and learning each other's rhymes and borrowing each other's patterns. Not so very different from what happens when I ask a group of children in my school to share their ideas.

But the part that reduced me to tears was when my translator whispered to me that she overheard the group from Poland saying, "Yes, we can really do this with our children in our schools." During the break after this activity, there was a wave of energy and support, much like what happens between teachers during a break at a chapter workshop. People were connecting and I knew that they were building and strengthening the network they would need in order to feel less isolated when they returned home to their school environments.

When it was time to pack my bags and leave for home, I felt proud: proud of AOSA for beginning (and since continuing) this important program of reaching out to teachers around the world, and helping them to discover and advocate for the Schulwerk. I know that what I experienced in Slovakia was not unique. I had similar experiences when teaching in Taiwan, Poland and China. And I am hardly alone. Other gifted and articulate AOSA members/teachers who have since taught abroad, such as Mary Helen Solomon, Steven Calantropio, Janet Robbins, Rick Layton, Doug Goodkin, Julie Scott, Rob Amchin and Dan Johnson, have shared similar feelings.

I feel privileged to have witnessed first hand just how powerful the work we do every day really is. Beyond our own classrooms, beyond our local chapters and our wonderful AOSA Conferences, I can say for certain that the identical work that we do is equally powerful and soul-moving all around the world. Where there are teachers, there are children. And where there are children, advocating for Orff Schulwerk can change lives.

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