

**The Music Experience and Taste of Elementary School
First Grade Students in Skopje
(pilot research)**

The study of the music culture of children is significant for the analysis and evaluation of the existing music culture situation in society on one hand, and for the planning of cultural and educational policy of the institutions and media on the other. We distinguished the following segments of music culture in individuals:

- the ability to perceive, interpret and produce music;
- music experience (audible and informational);
- preference of music (taste and attitude).

These segments are closely related and interdependent. Nevertheless, it is obvious that music experience and preference are of a social nature, reflecting the features of the music life of the internal and external environment.

With the goal of establishing the characteristics of the music culture of children, we will carry out a research project with the first grade students of the elementary schools in Skopje. This population group represents the transition between pre-school and school childhood. For the preparation of this project we conducted a pilot research with the aim of checking the instruments of determining student music experience and preference (i.e. taste). The following issues were of our interest:

- aesthetic evaluation of music based on the immediate reaction of the audible impressions (taste);
- recognition of music genres (informational experience);
- functional evaluation of music (audible experience).

Three tests were composed which included music samples and answer sheets with pictures. The task was to cross out one of the pictures.

The basic purposes in choosing the music samples were:

- defining the genre;
- choosing distinguished example for each genre that is easily perceived by this population group (we are conscious of the fact that the planned aesthetic evaluation of *genre*, in fact, is the evaluation of the *genre example*).

We chose the following genres and appropriate examples:

1. **Children's song:** "Shumsko oro" ("Forest Dance") – aesthetic evaluation; "Site majki" ("All the Mothers") – recognizing genre; "Dedo i baba" ("Grandpa and Grandma") – functional evaluation (audio cassette *Zlatno Slavejche '99* MP 25180)
2. **Classical:** P.Tchaikovsky. "Nutcracker" – Overture (CD: *P.Tchaikovsky. Suite from the Ballet "Nutcracker"* SUCD 10-00001)
3. **Church:** Stihira on Gospodi Vozzvah 1, 2, 3, 4 voice from the Macedonian Octoechos 1; (CD2 *Macedonian Traditional Church Singing* 2000 DRCD 1005/6)
4. **Folk:** Teshkoto/Buvchansko (The Hard One/Buvchansko) – Firfov Collection K-35/1 (CD *Firfov Collection Selection* Buzarovski – Firfov, 2001)
5. **Jazz:** D.Gjakonovski-Shpato. "Na igranka" ("At the Dance") for Big Band Orchestra (CD *Macedonian Music 7 – Instrumental & Jazz Music*)
6. **Rap:** Chingy "Holidae In" (Private Collection)
7. **Popular:** "Studena" ("Cold") – performed by Toshe Proeski, music by Phoebus, lyrics by Marina Tucakovic, translation by Miodrag Vrchakovski, arrangement by Manolis Vlachos (CD *If You Look Me In The Eye*, MP 42077)
8. **Rock:** Led Zeppelin "Immigrant Song" (*Led Zeppelin Greatest Hits 1969-1971* vol.1 KJF-31-867)
9. **Techno:** Eric Prydz "Call on Me" (Private Collection)
10. **Contemporary classical:** L. Berio – Symphony, movement 3 (CD *Berio Sinfonia. Endruke* 8573 89226 2)
11. **Ethnopolop:** "Neverna" ("Unfaithful") – performed by Blagoja Grujovski, music and arrangement by Mile Barbarovski, lyrics by Gjorgji Barbarovski (CD *Folk Fest Niza 2002 – Prilep*, 92 B 0207211256-18)

Being aware of the fact that music experience with this population group is mainly formed under the great influence of the media and contemporary sound carriers, we assume that the basic music experience "supply" will consist of popular music (domestic and foreign), children's "pop" songs, rap and ethnopolop. We included classical, contemporary classical, church, folk, jazz, rock and techno music with the goal of examining to which extent these genres are part of a first grader's music experience and what their functional and aesthetic evaluation would be.

The pilot research was conducted in the first grade class of the elementary school "Vojdan Chernodrinski" on 30.12.2004 in Skopje (16 students were present). Even though the number of examined subjects was too small to reach crucial conclusions, the results are still of great interest to our study.

The first test – "Aesthetic Evaluation of Music" consisted of a question regarding the above-mentioned music samples "Do you like this music?" with further

explanation such as “Will you be sorry when the music ends?” and “Would you like to own this CD?”. The answer sheet consisted of three versions in pictorial representation “I like it”, “I don’t like it” and “I don’t know”. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 1
Aesthetic Evaluation of Music

<i>Genre</i>	<i>I like it</i>	<i>I don't like it</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>Total</i>
Children’s song	10	3	0	13
Classical	7	4	3	14
Church	12	2	1	15
Folk song	10	5	0	15
Jazz	12	3	1	16
Rap	12	2	1	15
Popular	10	6	0	16
Rock	13	3	0	16
Techno	10	2	4	16
Contemporary	9	7	0	16
Ethnopol	7	8	1	16
<i>Total</i>	<i>112</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>168</i>

The difference in the total number of answers occurred because of the invalidity of some of the answers (crossing out several pictures in a row, or not answering the question).

The predominating positive answers are visible at first glance. We assume that the smaller number of positive answers regarding the classical music sample is among other things due to the low quality of the recording (its dynamic “ceiling” was too low for the large classroom, so the recording was not well heard after the loud children’s song recording). This assumption is also supported by the large amount of undefined answers. As opposed to this sample, the evaluation concerning the ethnopol sample was much more defined, with a large number of negative answers. On the other hand, the church, folk, jazz, rock, techno and even contemporary classical music samples received a large amount of positive answers.

Aware of the impossibility of making generalizations based on such a small number of examined subjects, we will make the assumption that the children of this age do not have a defined taste. They widely receive different music types without aesthetic prejudice and rely solely on a direct audible impression. The results of this pilot research show that in 12 out of 16 examinees the answers are positive. Out of

those, three gave only positive answers. In this context, this age is particularly suitable for teaching and directing the formation of taste and attitude of the child population.

The second test – “Recognizing genres” consisted of the same examples (excluding contemporary classical music, a term we thought was unknown for first graders). The answer sheet contained pictures-associations for each genre with writing underneath. All children were able to read, which alleviated the process of commenting and explaining the pictures. The question was “Which picture suits the music example best?”.

The results are presented in the table below:

Table 2
Recognizing genres

<i>Genre</i>	<i>Correct</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>Total</i>
Children's song	12	0	2	14
Classical	8	1	4	13
Church	13	0	2	15
Folk song	10	3	3	16
Jazz	9	5	2	16
Rap	11	2	3	16
Popular	10	4	2	16
Rock	4	8	4	16
Techno	3	5	7	15
Ethnopo	4	10	1	15
<i>Total</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>152</i>

According to this table, children's songs, classical and church music were easiest to define. Defining rock, techno and even popular music proved more difficult, the answers being diverse. The results show that there is intermingling of the pop, rock, techno, rap and jazz genres. In addition, this alludes to the extent of the genres' similarity in music means and purpose. Possibly, these similarities are the main audible impressions of the “open” listener. Also, the tendency of the examined subjects to confuse the genres of ethnopo and folk music is also interesting. This indicates that this population group needs a clear definition of these two categories, which is in fact one of the tasks of music education.

The third test – “Functional Evaluation of Music” was most complex in its task. The answers of this test were to show how the representatives of this population group experience music: as a fundamental object of perception or as “background music” (i.e. “music for listening” v.s. “music for communication”, etc.). The question

of this test was “What do you feel like doing when you listen to this music?” and the answers, like in the second test were presented with a combination of pictures and writing. The answers were formulated as follows:

- singing
- thinking
- listening
- drawing
- dancing
- reading
- talking to someone
- I don't know.

The answers “singing”, “listening” and “dancing” are the most common types of music activities that take place both individually as well as during the music classes. We considered the answer “thinking” (“daydreaming”) as the closest equivalent to “listening”, since we thought that this type of expression would suit the children’s age. The other activities such as “drawing” (a usual practice during music lessons) and “reading” suggested concentration and self-inspection. As opposed to them, the answer “talking to someone” suggests communication and the existence of the “other person”, implying the background function of music at the opposite scale of the “listening” state. We were conscious of the negative effects of the relatively short time the students had for filling in their answers while the music sample was playing.

The results of this test are shown in the table below:

Table 3
Functional Evaluation of Music

<i>Genre</i>	<i>Singing</i>	<i>Thinking</i>	<i>Listening</i>	<i>Drawing</i>	<i>Dancing</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>talking to someone</i>	<i>I don't know</i>	<i>total</i>
Children's song	9		2		4		1		16
Classical		5	4		1	1		5	16
Church	6	1	2		1	2		3	15
Folk song			1	2		1	2	7	13
Jazz	2		2	2	6	1		3	16
Rap	2		2	1	3	1		7	16
Popular	8	2			2	1		3	16
Rock	5		3	1			2	4	15
Techno		4	2		1	1	3	4	15
Ethnopop	2	1	1	1	3	2		6	16
<i>Total</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>154</i>

The answer “I don’t know” dominates this test (only three of the examinees who answered all the questions did not include this answer). This was expected, since the task and the circumstances under which it takes place are very complicated. Still, the remaining answers provide information which could be analyzed. The most common answers were the ones related to types of music activities – singing, dancing, and listening. The answer related to these activities follows – thinking, and the background activities such as reading, talking to someone and drawing take the last three positions.

The results of this research show that the clearest genre for these examinees, without a single “I don’t know” is the genre of children’s songs. The most “I don’t know answers” (seven out of 13) is seen in the folk music genre (the sample did not involve a vocal soloist or a particular dance rhythm). For some genres the *type of activity was predominant* (singing along with the children’s, church and popular music, dancing on jazz, thinking-listening on classical music). The dominating type of activity in these instances is one of the types of music activities.

In fact, this type of test fulfills yet another task: it is a possible representation of how the examinees interpret music characters, i.e. which music means of expression are easily detectable (the rhythm for the answer “dancing”, the vocal feature of the music for the answer “singing”, etc.). On the other hand, this test could illustrate the main component of the examinee’s music perception. However, these issues require special research.

At the end of this paper we will present the conclusions we reached:

- the instruments are comprehensible for the representatives of this population group;
- the choice of music samples proved adequate (excluding the “Nutcracker” sample due to the dynamic imbalance);
- the three subsequent tests were too difficult for this population group; they require to be taken at different intervals, or with breaks in between.

In conclusion, our pilot-research fulfilled its primary goals: testing the instruments and gaining initial results. The analysis of these results will direct us in perfecting our further research methods.