

Elementary Music School “Ordan Mihajlovski Ockata” in Prilep and the Cultural Policy of the Town

The elementary music school (EMS) “Ordan Mihajlovski Ockata” has existed in Prilep for decades. Even though the classes take place in an old building with bad working conditions, the teachers work in two shifts, enthusiastically transmitting their knowledge to the new generations of musicians and music lovers.

This school holds classes for the music instruments violin, piano, accordion, flute, clarinet and trumpet. The new section for solo singing has existed for four years. This school also has a choir and orchestra. Every school year, the EMS stages two concerts: in December (New Year’s Concert) and in June (End of the School Year Concert). Since the school does not have a concert room, the concerts take place in the theater or in the Hall of Culture. During the school year 2004/05 16 teachers were employed at the school with an average number of 22 classes (at the beginning of the school year some teachers even had 24). For all students (excluding those studying piano or accordion) there is only one piano accompanist (with a Faculty of Music degree in music theory and pedagogy) who also teaches solfeggio and piano.

The ratio of students who enrolled in EMS “Ordan Mihajlovski Ockata” or completed it within the past 10 years

During the past 10 years, a total of 553 students graduated from this school. The smallest number of students (42) graduated in 2002, and the largest (63) in 1996. **Table 1** shows how many students enrolled at the EMS in a particular school year (the number refers to all students – from the preparatory grade to the sixth grade), how many completed the year and how many graduated:

Table 1

School year	Enrolled	Completed the Year	Graduated	Discontinued their education	Discontinued %
1994/95	////////////////	////////////////	49	////////////////	////////////////
1995/96	493	468	63	25	5,07%
1996/97	387	357	62	30	7,75%
1997/98	458	430	57	28	6,11%
1998/99	445	407	57	38	8,53%
1999/00	430	402	52	28	6,51%
2000/01	349	327	48	22	6,30%
2001/02	297	287	42	10	3,37%
2002/03	330	319	52	11	3,33%
2003/04	341	316	51	25	7,33%
2004/05	333	////////////////	////////////////	////////////////	////////////////

The percentage of students who discontinued their education is lowest in the school years 2001/02 and 2003/03 – 3.37% and 3.33%. This percentage agrees with the low number of enrolled students which on the other hand is probably the result of the low birth rate¹ and also the strict selection and fewer number of teachers (20.81 students per teacher). The data shows that a significant number of students discontinue their music education before completing their final year.

During the 2004/05 school year a total of 333 students enrolled at the EMS (three of the students from the preparatory class already withdrew from the school). **Table 2** shows the number of students in 2004/05 according to their years of study (from preparatory grade to sixth grade):

Table 2

Year	Preparatory grade	I	II	II	IV	V	VI	Total
No.of students	65	69	69	52	38	24	13	330
Percentage	19,69%	20,90%	20,90%	15,75%	11,51%	7,27%	3,93%	100%

The decreasing percentage of students from the third grade to the final sixth grade is evident. Further on we will present our assumptions regarding this issue.

¹ The Bureau for the Development of Education in Prilep informed us that each year one class less enrolls at the schools when compared to the previous year. For instance, the elementary school “Goce Delchev” had 97 first grade students and 118 eighth grade students; in the school year 2003/04 there was a total of 1400 first graders, in 2004/05 only 1000 – even two classes less than usual, etc.

Do we want to become musicians?

“My entire childhood was marked by yearning. While my friends yearned for different toys, beautiful dresses and wanted to become doctors or stewardesses, I dreamed of becoming a musician. While the others played and sang children’s songs, I entertained myself by trying to play the accordion, by listening to classical music and singing... Whenever I passed by the music school my eyes filled with tears... until I turned 16... when the dream began to come true...” (Ivanovska)

Today, after two decades, I am teaching at three high schools in Prilep. I can testify of my talented student’s life stories, of those who wanted to become musicians, but because of different reasons did not go to the music school, which in fact is „an essential precondition for the professional and theoretical background of a professional musician” (Stojkov: 53).

When comparing the number of graduated students from the elementary schools and the number of graduated students from the elementary music school (assuming that they graduate from these two schools at the same time) in the school year 2003/04, it is evident that only 3.92% of the entire population of eighth graders completed elementary music school education. The realistic percentage is even lower, since not always do the graduation from the elementary school and the graduation from the elementary music school correspond.

A research project conducted in 2002 with the first year students of the high schools “Orde Chopela” and „Riste Risteski Richko” in Prilep shows that 280 (70.89%) out of 395 students gave a positive answer to the question *“Have you ever wanted to become a musician”* (**Table 3**):

Table 3

Have you ever wanted to become a musician?		
Yes	280 students	70,89%
No	115 students	29,11%

However, only 18 students – 4.56% graduated from the elementary music school (**Table 4**):

Table 4

Have you graduated from the elementary music school?		
Yes	18 students	4,56%
No	377 students	95,44%

Reasons for not attending or withdrawing from the elementary music school

“When I was a little girl I wanted to play the piano... my parents enrolled me at the elementary music school. I was very happy... In school our teacher wasn't very interested in music, he didn't teach us much and he didn't play any music. Then, in sixth grade I lost the desire to go to music school and I stopped going”. (“Me and Music” K. V. Second Year “Mirche Acev” High School – Prilep, 2004)

Some of the main reasons of not attending or withdrawing from the elementary music school are:

- being unable to buy an instrument because of the low financial situation;
- not receiving encouragement from the school teachers;
- insufficient encouragement from the parents;
- being unable to travel (for the students from the villages);
- the students' involvement in other school tasks, i.e. the lack of time to study and practice (for instance, in the seventh grade the students study 14 subjects and have 31 classes per week, as well as extracurricular activities);
- losing interest for working and regularly practicing;
- not having the opportunity to learn the desired instrument because of lack of teachers (within the past several years seven teachers have retired and only one has been employed).

The students show a large interest in continuing their education in a music high school, but the number of those who do so is small. From the students who graduated from the EMS “Ordan Mihajloski Ocka” an average of two per year continue their education in Bitola or Skopje (we have no information about the students who haven't graduated from the elementary music school and have enrolled in the music high-schools). The possible reasons for this are as follows:

a) subjective

- no desire on the behalf of the student to continue the music education;
- failing the entrance exam or not being able to enroll in the music high school because of a low elementary school grade average;

b) objective

- the inexistence of a music high school in Prilep (most of the parents do not have the economic capacity to school their children in another town or fear that their children are not mature enough to study alone in another town);

- the parents' negative attitude towards the “unappreciated” and “instable” profession. Parents are usually worried about two issues: 1) what future awaits their children in case they are not able to enroll at the University (most parents believe that their children will not be able to enroll at other faculties because of the music high school diploma) and 2) where their children will work after graduating from the Faculty of Music (the parents believe that music employment can be found only in Skopje, abroad, or in some “wedding” music group).

Future perspectives

The last reason is the greatest “inhibition” for many talented and successful students. However, there are doctors, mathematicians, engineers, teachers, lawyers and other intellectuals in Prilep who still regret not having continued their music education after graduating from the elementary music school. They remember and talk about the mistakes they had made... Or maybe they hadn't?

There are many institutions in Prilep where the musicians could find employment:

1. The seven elementary schools in Prilep have 14 music teachers three of whom are university (Faculty of Music) graduates, whereas the others have graduated from the College of Pedagogy. The number of students, classes and lessons decreases each school year. In this school year there is already a sense of lack of classes.

2. There is only one music teacher with a College of Pedagogy degree employed in the four kindergartens of Prilep. This is expected since there is a small number of music classes in kindergarten.

3. The five high schools in Prilep currently include three music teachers with a Faculty of Music Theory and Pedagogy degree. The situation is worse at the elementary schools because the number of classes is rapidly decreasing.

4. There are 16 teachers employed at the EMS (seven of them have a Faculty of Music degree).

5. There are no employed musicians at the Public Theater “Vojdan Chernodrinski”, and never have been.

6. There are no musicians employed at the Hall of Culture “Marko Cepenkov”.

7. The Radio and Publishing Center (RPC) has employed two musicians with a music high school education.

8. There are no employed musicians at the local radios.

Conclusions

The situation in Prilep has lead to the following conclusions:

- the profession “professional musician” is not a promising one in Prilep;
- the number of music-related jobs is decreasing;
- the jobs intended for academic musicians are taken by non-professionals or amateurs;
- there is a lack of classical music concerts (during 2004 the Hall of Culture “Marko Cepenkov” hosted only six concerts), so most of the academic musicians are not able to satisfy their aesthetic needs;
- even though the new generations of academic musicians attempt to improve the situation of the music life in Prilep, the main problem is still the lack of financial means to organize concerts;
- the town needs a management team which will find sponsors for organizing concerts and festivals of classical music, thus raising the music culture level of Prilep. The EMS could play an important role in promoting this aspect.

“the desire for good “live” music quietly persists...”

Bibliography:

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