

Karen Benson – President, American Orff Schulwerk Association (AOSA)

“You make spaghetti sauce. I make spaghetti sauce”. This is how a friend of mine describes situations when two or more factions are working toward a common goal yet having distinct variations on how that goal is approached. Basic elements appear in each version, but the flavor, style, and appearance are formed through the unique characteristics of the people involved, the ingredients at hand, and the experience and background of the producers.

To continue this analogy a bit, I pondered the comparison of making spaghetti sauce and being an Orff Schulwerk teacher. What is elemental to each of these ideas? To begin, some consumers buy a jar of sauce, others follow a recipe, still others cook using what’s in season or available in the pantry.

Just as there are many brands and flavors of spaghetti sauce, in music education, there are many ready-made products available and books that provide directions for replicating lessons. When choosing a sauce, some go for economical and thin, others go for rich and thick. As educators, what are we offering our students? It’s a matter of taste and there are many different tastes for various appetites and stages in life.

Some teachers work best when developing their own lessons based on the needs and characteristics of the students and resources available to them. In comparison, some cooks like to develop their own recipes or create gourmet sauces that offer unique combinations and fusions of flavors. Ironically, a basic marinara sauce is often chosen and favored by those at the table. Music teachers may provide well-loved movement and music experiences that are based in the purest forms of the Orff media: speaking, singing, moving and dancing, body percussion, and instrument playing. However, occasionally blending these experiences with a new or special ingredient may enhance the experience for both children and teacher thus broadening the musical perspective. We each have our personal preferences but diversity provides interest and growth.

What is really important to remember though, is that if you want them to eat, you must make it taste good!! Students, of any age, need to enjoy and like what they are doing in our classrooms. Our charge is to facilitate this without lessening integrity or quality in our teaching. Give the students the best musical nutrition possible!

For many of us, elemental music provides the nutrition in our classrooms. Consider your personal definition of what is elemental, both musically and educationally. The concept and definition of what makes music elemental has been considered for many years. A standard explanation may be as elusive as choosing the best spaghetti sauce. However, in a collection of essays recently published by the Orff-Schulwerk Forum, Wilhelm Keller summarized Elemental Music as *“an instance of time, fulfilled without constraint and thus lived to the full. This music had to be discovered, not composed.”*¹

1. Wilhelm Keller, “Elemental Music—an Attempt to Define It” in *Texts on Theory and Practice of Orff-Schulwerk, Basic Texts from the Years 1932-2010*, ed. Barbara Haselbach, trans. Margaret Murray (Mainz: Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, 2011), 118.