

# From the Bottom Up

## On the Potential of a Festival's Music Mediation Programme in Innovating the Music Education Ecosystem in Croatia

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### Introduction

The *Music Biennale Zagreb (MBZ)* is a festival of contemporary music which has been located in the capital of Croatia since 1961. It has played a pivotal role in positioning Croatian contemporary music within the international scene. During the 1960s, and up until the 1990s, the festival offered a unique platform for renowned composers and performers of contemporary music to convene and showcase their works to a wider audience. From its inception, MBZ expanded beyond traditional festival boundaries. For instance, in 1971, it brought diverse programming to the streets. Prominent guest artists engaged directly with the community, exemplified by John Cage's memorable stroll through Dolac market with Croatian musicologist Nikša Gligo.

The festival is described on its website<sup>1</sup> as an “incubator of musical poetics, attempts, and excesses”, a “laboratory that affirms the ‘borderline’ by respecting its borderlines and upholding tradition by questioning its established concepts”, a “platform that brings people together”, and a “celebration of togetherness in sound and music”. The social perspective of the festival becomes obvious in the manifesto of the festival, which begins with the premise that “art should continually respond to the various aspects of culture and society, especially ecology as the current crisis point”.<sup>2</sup> By employing diverse collaborative approaches, ecologically designed artistic exchanges and residencies, and facilitating meetings between artists and scientists to reaffirm STEM as STEAM<sup>3</sup>, the festival aims to

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1 See <http://www.mbz.hr/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

2 <https://www.mbz.hr/en/2023/mbz/about-mbz> (accessed April 14, 2025).

3 STEAM is an educational approach that integrates “arts disciplines into curriculum and instruction in the areas of science, technology, engineering,

“pave the way for future generations and an inclusive ecosystem of the cultural sector that treats its resources in a responsible manner” (ibid.). To summarise the festival’s manifesto in three categories, it is evident that MBZ seeks to: (1) develop the ecosystem of the cultural sector; (2) cultivate openness and inclusion; and (3) create a dialogue that inspires and raises awareness. Within the last category, the manifesto states that the festival aims to “bring the adventure of contemporary music to younger generations of visitors and listeners, inspiring in them curiosity and openness to new and unexpected, experimental, critical, and bold listening, watching, thinking, and acting” (ibid.). This chapter aims to explore this statement further, demonstrating that the MBZ festival, through its programming, organisation, and production, impacts not only the cultural ecosystem, but also the music education ecosystem in Croatia.

My research on the MBZ festival focuses on the connection between the festival and the music education ecosystem, looking especially at the music school system, which has had a long history since the Yugoslavian era, progressing with a very clear path and a focus on Western classical music only. Conducted in the second half of 2023, the research explored the following questions:

- a) What are the specificities of music mediation offered by the MBZ Kidz festival?
- b) In what ways does the MBZ Kidz festival critically examine existing hierarchies and power relations, as well as mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion in the Croatian music education ecosystem, with a special focus on the music school system?

To answer these questions, I focus in this chapter on the MBZ’s *Festival for Children* and map the content of its innovative online music mediation platform MBZ Kidz<sup>4</sup>, which aims to engage children from the youngest age and not just biannually, during the live festival encounters, but during the whole year. To analyse how MBZ Kidz critically re-examines and expands the music education ecosystem in Croatia, I use an ecological approach to sustainability in music, covering key aspects of sustainability: systems of learning music, musicians and communities, contexts and constructs, regulations and infrastructure, and finally, media and the music industry (Schippers 2015; Schippers and Grant 2016).

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and mathematics” (Katz-Buonincontro 2018, 73). The concept has grown in popularity, but it still requires research and scholarship to be established as a discipline.

4 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

In the theoretical frame of reference, I refer to power dynamics and hierarchies within the music education ecosystem with a specific focus on understanding classical music as a genre, as well as the role of festivals as social innovators for fostering institutional resilience. In the following sections, I present research on the MBZ *Kidz*, based on the multimodal discourse analysis of its vivid online platform, and conclude with a critical view of the innovative potential of the bottom-up approach to initiate change at the systemic level.

## Theoretical Background

A diverse music education landscape today offers a manifold model of learning and participation in musical experiences, crossing borders between formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. Supporting learners in the lifelong journey of discovering their possible musical selves means taking into consideration all possible experiences and interactions that form their relationship with music (Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020). Living meaningful musical lives in changing societies requires removing disciplinary boundaries between music education in formal contexts, music mediation both in performance contexts and in community-based programmes, and self-directed learning. In this chapter, the focus is on connecting the festival's music mediation programme with the system of music schools, by using an ecological approach. Schippers and Grant (2016, 11) offer a framework of five interrelated domains that encompass elements of ecology common to musical practices and relevant to their sustainability:

- 1) Systems of learning music (balance between formal, non-formal, and informal contexts of music learning and participation, modes of transmission, institutional learning, and learning in the community, etc.);
- 2) musicians and communities (position, roles, and interactions of musicians within their communities);
- 3) contexts and constructs (social and cultural contexts of musical traditions – values, identities, gender issues, prestige, diversity, etc.);
- 4) regulations and infrastructure (places to perform, learn, practice, and compose, virtual spaces, rights, laws, etc.); and
- 5) media and the music industry (dissemination and visibility in media and community, connection with the music industry).

This framework can be applied to any music practice, as well as to any music genre (see Schippers 2015, 140f.), when approaching it as an organism rather than an artifact.

Viewing music education as part of an ecosystem raises questions about power dynamics and hierarchies within it. As well as hierarchies of value relating to a) wider social inequalities or differences (including gender, race, class, disability, nationality, sexuality, and age); b) status and role within the institution (e.g. level of study, status in the institution); and c) inter-personal or individual differences; hierarchies also exist within and between musical genres (Bull 2021). Western classical music has more often been approached and studied “as a text, rather than a contemporary cultural practice” (ibid., xiii). Understanding classical music genres as texts in relation to social practices often involves making internal divisions of the Western classical music canon based on different aspects, such as a gendered division of hierarchies of musical forms (e.g. symphony and concerto are more associated with the ‘masculine’ and the ‘public’), perceiving other musical genres (e.g. popular) as less prestigious and serious, positioning classical music from certain periods of time as being more important than contemporary classical music (e.g. Mozart’s and Bach’s music as the most important), etc. Bull and Scharff (2021) write about classical music as a genre associated both with universal identity and particular identities, with the top position in the hierarchy of all music genres, which is often produced and reinforced by the cultural and educational institutions, in interactions with musicians, and in relation to network-based labour practices. Analysing classical music as a genre and identifying its subgenres requires understanding of genres as relational, which implies that the relationship between subgenres within classical music is hierarchical. Genre hierarchies are (re-)produced in institutional settings, especially in (higher) music education institutions. Thus, in the case of formal music education institutions, it might be interesting to challenge exclusive and still-prevalent values and beliefs about e.g. classical music’s autonomy from social concerns, the pedagogical idea of long-term investment in practising to “get it right” (Bull, 2019) which does not make space for improvisation, as well as exclusive and elitist views of music education.

Perceiving music festivals as social innovations<sup>5</sup> could tackle injustices in music education institutions, creating opportunities for institutional change. Educational institutions (in this case, music schools) are today often affected

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5 Social innovations are initiatives in “an organisation, a practice, or an area of activity” in the society that can indicate a path for wider social change (Mangabeira Unger 2015, cited in Väkevä, Westerlund, and Ilmola-Sheppard 2017, 130).

by the silo effect, meaning that different departments and disciplines within the same institution operate in isolation from one another, causing a lack of dialogue and collaboration. On the other hand, designing institutional innovations can help expand the boundaries of a music school's system, making it more resilient by redefining its identity and purpose (Väkevä, Westerlund, and Ilmola-Sheppard 2017). Institutional resilience counteracts an institutional silo effect, which occurs when institutional systems reproduce social injustice by maintaining existing institutional culture and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion without questioning what could be improved. Music teachers can play a pivotal role in driving change within institutions and society, as shown in two Finnish cases of grassroots teacher-driven examples of inter-professional collaboration<sup>6</sup> based on civic professionalism (Laes et al. 2022). Mutual problem-solving involves the overlapping of different practices and expertise. This is why connecting music school teachers and festival music mediators through social and institutional innovations might be a gamechanger and also a challenge, especially in terms of the structural and organisational nature of their work. The intermittent nature of music festivals, as well as the lack of fixed structure, continuity and stable budget complicate their sustainable effectiveness. In this context, festival music mediators face numerous challenges related to working life. These include the absence of fixed production locations and their own ensembles, the difficulty of maintaining a balanced workload throughout the year, and the challenge of establishing stable relationships with collaborators and stakeholders from festival to festival. Conversely, the carnivalistic nature of festivals, their potential to reach new performance spaces and audiences, agile budgets, and the ability to focus on specialised themes, often position festivals as innovators within the music mediation landscape (Rademacher 2023).

The case study of the MBZ Kidz Festival presented in this chapter highlights the fact that positioning the festival's online music mediation platform as a social innovation, alongside the school's contemporary music ensemble as a bottom-up institutional innovation, can offer new perspectives on enriching music school curricula. By embracing repertoire expansion and integrating diverse learning and teaching approaches, these innovations demonstrate how curricular development can be advanced within the existing educational framework. Furthermore, as described in the continuation of this chapter, the innovative and miscellaneous festival's online platform makes its multimedia

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6 Inter-professional collaboration is “collaboration across professional groups (...) particularly necessary in institutional situations where institutional boundaries need to be crossed in order for the system as a whole to be able to respond to new demands and problems” (Laes et al. 2022, 20).

content accessible to its audiences beyond the time- and space-related boundaries of the festival and formal music classrooms, offering content that fosters the agency of the audience in various forms of engagement with music (listening, music-making, and creating processes).

## Music Mediation at the MBZ Festival for Children

### *The programme of the MBZ Festival for Children*

Although the MBZ has a history of providing musical pieces for children and collaborating on concerts with Jeunesses Musicales in past decades, the introduction of the MBZ Festival for Children took place for the first time at the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the MBZ. From February to April 2019, the new programme edition featured nearly 15 workshops, 5 concerts, and 4 performances of the theatre play *Queen Frog*. Since then, the festival has expanded its educational offerings to various community contexts.

In 2019, the festival produced a *Body Percussion Workshop*, catering to children aged 6 to 14. This workshop was facilitated by the percussionist and music educator Josip Konfic. Additionally, the festival featured a series called *Glazba u mom kvartu* [Music in My Neighbourhood], comprising interactive concerts for children aged 10 and above, moderated by the musicians Ana Batinica and Aleksandar Jakopanec. Another initiative, *Music, Space, Me*, engaged children aged 6 and above in creating their own music theatre within their classrooms. Additionally, the Festival introduced *Svirkaonica*<sup>7</sup>, a contemporary music workshop for children aged 4 and above, under the motto ‘Music for all’. *Svirkaonica* provided children with opportunities to improvise, compose, engage in body percussion, perform, listen to music and create instruments. Both formats are designed and facilitated by Lucija Stanojević, a violinist and music educator. Many of these workshops and concerts were developed in collaboration with Jeunesses Musicales Croatia.

Besides workshops for children, in 2019 the festival offered the format *Knapanje: zona za slobodnu kreaciju i izražavanje studenata* [Knapanje: the zone for free creation and interpretation of students], which gathered 120 students from all the Croatian higher music education institutions for a collaborative creation of music. The festival’s programme partner was Peščenica Cultural Centre KNAP. The programme was created based on the festival’s internal research and

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7 Probably a compound of the words *svirko* or *svirka* (“gig” or “jam session”) and *učionica*, the Croatian word for “classroom”.

the students' survey responses about their artistic needs and affinities, as well as their attitudes towards the content and the opportunities offered in higher music education institutions. In this way, the MBZ festival provided a space for future music professionals to access specific knowledge and practices in contemporary music, as well as the chance to collaborate with their peers and composers.

A noteworthy development from 2019 to today is the focus on producing musical works tailored for babies and toddlers. In 2019 MBZ Kidz featured repeated performances of the musical puppet play *Žabica kraljica* [Queen Frog], which originally premiered in the 2017 edition of the festival. Diverging from the familiar Grimm Brothers' tale, where the frog seeks a princess's kiss in order to transform into a man, this story emphasises the auditory experience – the prince proposes to the frog solely after hearing her sing, disregarding visual appearances and warnings from those around him. Directed by Rene Medvešek, the play challenges the deceptive nature of sight and its societal conditioning, encouraging its audience to engage in subtle and attentive listening. Musically, what distinguishes this piece is the combination of elements utilised by composer Sara Glojnarčić: it is composed for voice, piano, percussion, double bass, and puppet theatre. The recommended age for experiencing this musical puppet play is 4 and above.

In 2023, the MBZ festival took a significant leap forward by introducing the first Croatian opera designed for babies, titled *Opera Rosa*, in co-production with the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. This groundbreaking production, composed for opera voice, two violins, small percussion, and electronics, marked the inaugural festival's project in the *Palette Musicale* series. This initiative aims at putting on productions in cooperation with leading cultural institutions in Zagreb in order to introduce the youngest children to the world of sound, music, and movement through stage-works created exclusively for them. *Opera Rosa* is imagined as an interactive journey shared by babies and their caregivers. The performance, presented by four female interpreters, engages the audience through voice, movement, and instruments, creating a multisensory experience. The performers and creators of the concept, Ivana Đula (dramaturgy), Tena Novak Vincek (music), Irma Unušić (dance and choreography), Lucija Stanojević (violin and other instruments), Ivana Lazar/Mima Karaula (soprano) and Selena Gazda (costume and set design), envisioned the opera as a live installation that invites the audience to listen, discover, and play in a comfortable, gentle, and secure space reminiscent of the mother's womb.

In 2023, the festival introduced its latest offering, *Raspjevane priče* [The Singing Stories], presented as an encounter with children and adult audiences

through an audiobook and concert format. In terms of content, both formats feature musical adaptations of Ukrainian children's literature, including folk tales and works by authors, translated into Croatian and musically interpreted by composers from both classical and popular music backgrounds. Each musical story is uniquely shaped: *A Story about Bugs*, composed by Ivana Kiš for voice, violin, and vibraphone, integrates music with theatrical multisensory expressions. *A Drop*, composed and performed by Ivanka Mazurkijević and Damir Martinović Mrle, draws from popular music genres. Composer and singer Maja Rivić created *Ivasik Telesik*, experimenting with vocal techniques, colours and breath. In the concert presentation format at MBZ, the stories are narrated in both languages by Croatian and Ukrainian actors and professionals from various fields. This programme collaboration involves the Croatian Literary Translation Association, book&zvook app<sup>8</sup>, and Solidarna Foundation, with all proceeds from sales donated to Ukrainian children currently residing in Croatia due to the circumstances of the war in their home country.

The festival's commitment to community engagement is further exemplified by its specialised workshops for children, which are extended to the participation of general schools in remote regions, such as islands, through the *Backpack (Full of) Culture* programme. This joint national initiative, organised by The Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, provides support for arts curricula in schools and is recognised on a European level<sup>9</sup>.

### **The MBZ Kidz online platform**

The MBZ Kidz online platform was established and co-created in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic by Nina Čalopek, festival producer and programme curator of MBZ Kidz, and Lucija Stanojević, a violinist and instrumental music pedagogue. Besides the map of live programmes offered in different editions of the festival, the specificity of the music mediation online space includes three classrooms: a) Listening Room; b) Watching Room; and c) Classroom.

The Listening Room<sup>10</sup> comprises four musical pieces: (1) Igor Kuljerić: *U klaunovu vrtu* [In the Garden of the Clown], for flute, tuba, and piano; (2) Frano Đurović: *Kvartet za kraj radnog vremena* [Quartet for an Ending of the Working Time]; (3) Davor Branimir Vincze: *Šest minijatura za očajnu kućanicu*

8 <https://www.bookzvook.com/knjige/raspjevane-price--> (accessed April 15, 2025).

9 See UNESCO (2006).

10 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/slusaonica> (accessed April 14, 2025).

[Six Miniatures for a Desperate Housewife]; and (4) Sanda Majurec: *Šetnja gradom* [Citywalk]. Each musical piece is presented through several media: a recording of the musical composition, a textual introduction, a photo gallery and/or video and a worksheet.

The Watching Room<sup>11</sup> of the webpage features a series of six episodes: (1) *Pitalice* [Questions]; (2) *Od kamena do čipa* [From the rock to the chip]; (3) *Tjelofon* [Bodyphone]; (4) *Skladam* [I Compose]; (5) *Makov Nokturno* [Poppy's Nocturne]; and (6) *Igroglazb* [Playmusic]. The primary medium is video, supplemented by textual introductions and often graphic scores that it is possible for children to play. Additional interesting media include video tutorials for creating a music theatre in a box (similar to the Japanese *kamishibai*) and instructions for building instruments to create a soundscape for their theatre plays. *Poppy's Nocturne* is another example of connecting music and sound with storytelling. This educational music piece, created by composer Mak Murtić within the Festival's contemporary music workshops for children (*Svirkaonica*), is written for flute, viola, violoncello, and guitar. The video features visual stimulation of the musical content performed on the overhead projector, creating a holistic experience of image, sound, and words. The story is conveyed through musical, semantic, and visual languages, forming a unique experience. In addition, the video provides a graphic score, enabling children to play it themselves, as demonstrated by the pupils of Elly Bašić Music School, who performed and recorded it, imitating the sounds of birds, horses, rain, and more on their instruments. Almost all episodes of the Watching Room gather together children, *Svirko* (the animated mascot of *MBZ Kidz*), and visiting artists in dialogue and active musicianship. While the Watching Room is not primarily focused on repertoire, each video episode concludes with contemporary compositions such as *Dolce Furioso* by Dubravko Detoni, *Meko & Rahlo* by Gordan Tudor, and *Poema* by Ivan Josip Skender.

The Classroom<sup>12</sup> section features a collection of 18 materials linked to various parts of the Watching Room and Listening Room. Its primary focus is to explain terminology related to (contemporary) music in a child-friendly manner, with references to selected contemporary musical pieces and composers.

11 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/gledaonica> (accessed April 14, 2025).

12 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/ucionica> (accessed April 14, 2025).

## **MBZ Kidz Research**

### **Methodology**

The MBZ Kidz research design consisted of two phases. Since the only reliable source of data about the festival at that moment was the official website, the first stage of research involved collecting and organising data from the MBZ Kidz online platform with the aim of describing and analysing content and activities related to the festival's music mediation in various contexts. It was conducted using multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), an "approach to discourse which focuses on how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language" (Jones 2013, 1). MDA has made important contributions to education and literacy studies, particularly in how digital multimodal text affects the way we learn and teach (Jewitt 2006; Jones 2013). Specifically, the aims were to examine how different modes of communication are integrated within digital content based on contemporary music, and how the content and formats of mediation shape the identity of the festival within the community, with the emphasis on the music education ecosystem.

The analysis sought to understand how music mediation affects the entire music learning ecosystem in Croatia. A relational approach, rather than an analytical orientation (Jewitt 2011), was used to observe the multimodality, integration, and interplay of different senses and modes in the mediation of contemporary music. The relationship across and between modes and interactions on the MBZ Kidz website as a multimodal text is the central focus. The modes observed were aural, linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial, while the media observed were musical pieces, written text, images, videos, graphic scores, and worksheets. Multimodal data was represented using the technique of multimodal transcription. Since it is a selective and interpretive process, because it involves the researcher's transcription choices, the research is limited to aspects relevant to the main research questions. Using a social semiotic approach to MDA (Kress 2010), I analysed how the MBZ Kidz online platform uses sounds, music, words, images, and videos to guide and educate its visitors. Using a systemic functional linguistic approach to MDA (Van Leeuwen 1999), I analysed how MBZ Kidz online platform uses dialogue, narration, and sound effects to transmit contemporary music to children. Finally, using a critical discourse analysis approach to MDA (Weiss and Wodak 2003), I analysed how MBZ Kidz music mediation formats, in both online and live formats, challenge dominant discourses and power dynamics in the Croatian music education ecosystem. As sample units of research, multimodal representations from the website were used: the programme of the MBZ

*Festival for Children*, Listening Room, Watching Room, and Classroom. In the analysis, special emphasis is placed on the meaning-making and construction of knowledge created by the patterns of educational interaction (West 2011), which was particularly relevant for mapping and analysing data in the unit Classroom.

The second part of the MBZ Kidz research aimed to organise the findings from the MDA in order to answer the two main research questions. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology was employed, with an ecological approach to music sustainability. This approach, developed in the research project *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: Towards an Ecology of Musical Diversity* (Schippers 2015; Schippers and Grant 2016), comprises five domains essential to the ecology of most music practices: (1) systems of learning music; (2) musicians and communities; (3) contexts and constructs; (4) regulations and infrastructure; and (5) media and the music industry. Each domain was analysed using the set of questions and explanations proposed for each domain. A special focus for assessing the sustainability of MBZ Kidz was on measuring the vitality of its content and practices in relation to the state of the Croatian formal music education system. Results are thematically coded and organised in several different categories, following the logic of the five ecological domains.

## Results and discussion

### *Systems of learning music: exploring the sound of music*

MBZ Kidz reaches diverse audiences, both online and offline, and expands its programme to include families. It offers various ways to engage with music, such as live performances of stage works, workshops, audio-stories, video-tutorials for music-making, and listening activities. Analysis shows that the festival's music mediation incorporates both music pedagogy<sup>13</sup> and sound pedagogy in its activities, combining different types of music and an interdisciplinary approach. Contemporary music inherently intertwines with natural and social processes (e.g. background noise, bodily functions, environmental sounds, and industrial noise). The MBZ respects these intertwined categories of music and sound, systematically transcending “the boundaries of the institution, the festival, the performance, [...] the beginning and the end

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13 The term “music pedagogy” is used as a reference to the discipline, while the term “music education” refers to the ecosystem.

of the composition in which it is woven"<sup>14</sup>. As stated in its manifesto, the MBZ festival seeks to create a space for “imagining new forms of existence and social organization” by restructuring “the entire human sensorium”<sup>15</sup>. Transforming “auditory perception in the everyday life of the subject” (Tinkle 2015, 222) is the focus of sound pedagogy, an analytical framework in sonic arts with references to: (1) counter-pedagogies (e.g. Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy); (2) Raymond Murray Schafer’s concept of “ear-cleaning” (Schafer 1967, 1); and (3) John Cage’s idea of listening without carrying a cultural backpack filled with codes related to the learning of a music piece “4’33””, often mentioned as an example on the MBZ Kidz online platform, that transformed perception of auditory experiences in a musical way, and that was the moment when sound pedagogy emerged as an approach that opened “possibilities for broader and more immediate participation than in Western art music” (Tinkle 2015, 223).

For the purposes of listening education, Recharte (2019, 78) offers an “acoustemological, cultural production approach to music education” based on Steven Feld’s term *acoustemology*, conjoined from the words ‘acoustic’ and ‘epistemology’. The paradigm offered by Recharte is rooted in generating knowledge through and within the ecology of relations during listening practices in our everyday lives. Unlike the approach taken in Croatian music education, which is predominantly centred around Western classical music, based on learning by reading sheet music, the synergy between sound pedagogy and music pedagogy might cross the limitations of existing systems and open up new and multimodal ways of learning music. One of the ways might be to expand the established perception of the music literacy that is connected exclusively with music notation. In that sense, Paul Broomhead (2019) provides an expanded perspective on literacy in music, suggesting that reading and writing scores are not the only significant music resources. He argues that interactions with music notations – understood as resources that are negotiated and created – can be perceived as texts, and the ability to engage meaningfully with these can be termed literacy. Consequently, any meaningful interaction between a music learner and a music resource constitutes a music literacy event. Common texts in music are not just “instruments, surrounding sounds in an ensemble, conducting gestures, musical modelling, music scores, and musical presentations (live performances and recordings)”, but also “performing spaces, audiences and practice rooms” (ibid., 15).

Multiple literacies, multimodality, and the synergy between sound pedagogy and music pedagogy can be noticed in all digital classrooms within the

14 <https://www.mbz.hr/en/2023/mbz/about-mbz> (accessed April 14, 2025).

15 *ibid.*

MBZ Kidz learning platform, highlighted by the use of graphic notation, DIY culture, experiential learning, and peer-to-peer learning. In the Listening Room, the text that accompanies the musical piece invites children to engage with listening by linking familiar elements from their world to the complex nature of the compositions and contemporary music. All textual examples and worksheet tasks employ storytelling to engage listeners in a multimodal way, accompanied by questions designed to stimulate visual and aural imagination and innovation. For instance, in the first piece (*In the Garden of the Clown*) listeners are encouraged to imagine and draw their version of a clown, his behaviours, and a clown's garden, based on their listening experience. In *Six Miniatures for a Desperate Housewife*, listeners receive reflective questions about their music listening habits and tasks that prompt them to imagine their own method of preparing a piano. The composition contains quotations from examples of popular music, manipulated electronically to contrast with the piano, inviting listeners to rethink their spatial surroundings when they listen to the music. Another example of expanding the listening space is found in *Citywalk*. Composer Sanda Majurec, in the accompanying video, invites listeners to connect their listening experience with the soundwalk activity, encouraging them to recognise that the sounds in our surroundings can become music if we choose to perceive them that way. Both the text and video provide the composer's statements about the piece, inviting listeners to step into the composer's shoes and think creatively about compositional approaches. This promotes MBZ's idea that active listening and perception of music are "an exceptionally important socially engaged act". The piece also includes an excerpt from the graphic score as a visual element.

In each episode of the Watching Room, the protagonists are two children and Svirko, the mascot of MBZ Kidz. Svirko is an animated character who slips into various roles, such as facilitator, narrator, musician, etc. Despite having a male name, the character is voiced by an adult female, resulting in a gender-neutral perception. The only episode without children present is *From the Rock to the Chip*, which narrates the history of music. In this episode, Svirko acts as a narrator who awakens in the stone age as a sound researcher, inviting children to join the adventure. The video includes tutorials on creating musical instruments from various historical eras. Aurally, Svirko's voice changes to reflect different spaces and historical periods, illustrating, for example, the specific echoes in a cave and a church. Other episodes are recorded in a room filled with various instruments and objects, serving as both a sound laboratory and a playground. This space also functions as an animated whiteboard. For instance, in the episode *Questions*, Svirko appears as a musician and facilitator who answers children's questions. The children explore the space first, trying to define terms that appear as words in the air. They discover the term "cluster"

next to the piano, with a visual mark at the keyboard indicating how to play a cluster, after which Svirko explains its meaning. A similar process is used for the term “aleatoric”, with the term appearing in the room along with a corresponding object, such as a cube, to illustrate the concept.

In the video *I Compose*, the guest is conductor and composer Ivan Josip Skender, who uses the space as an empty canvas for writing a graphic score, which appears as animation. The children mimic his gestures, creating their own graphic scores, using geometric shapes, as well as drawing a comic strip. In the end, they perform their graphic scores using various sounds, learning in this way about sound effects. Graphic scores and the extension of the space are also evident in the video *Bodyphone*, where children perform by reading graphic scores through body percussion. This video features a guest dancer whose gestures, while performing the musical piece, create a visual echo.

The multimodal analysis of the content in the Watching Room shows that all modes explored are meticulously detailed. A special emphasis on knowledge production is given to the interactions between (1) the children and the sounds/music; (2) the children among themselves; (3) the children and Svirko; (4) the children and guests from different professions; (5) the collective interactions of children, guests, and Svirko. Although the audiovisual and textual mode are predominant, the creative use of space, showcasing the synergy of material world and the digital media (animated parts), makes these videos particularly engaging. Through interactions and the expanded vision of space, the festival's online platform becomes a playground, showing that learning and innovation occur in a democratic, collaborative, and supportive environment.

The Classroom section offers children the opportunity to learn approximately 80 terms related to (contemporary) music, explained in child-friendly language. Important words are highlighted in bold to emphasise their significance. The inclusion of pictures often depicts children and young people, highlighting the fact that contemporary music is not solely for adults and professionals. Throughout all the tasks and text, emphasis is placed on encouraging the child's agency and the connection of content with examples in their everyday lives. Terms are enriched with references to composers and contemporary musical pieces, fostering diversity by bridging the gap between Western classical music and popular music. Among the numerous contemporary music composers presented on the website, one prominently featured is John Cage.

To put these findings in the Croatian context, it is evident that using MBZ Kidz festival's content might refresh music school curricula still focused on the Western classical music canon, predominantly from the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic era. Although one of the advantages of the existing system of music

schools in Croatia is its deep dive into content related to Western classical music, it is worth noting its limitations, such as the lack of contemporary classical music repertoire and the related specificities and transmission processes (e.g. improvisation, graphic scores, extended techniques, etc.). The system is still characterised by its closed curriculum, with a traditional subject-hour system, outdated formal curricula, as well as the absence of a holistic approach to music, especially in terms of integration with other musical disciplines (Matoš 2018). Furthermore, the type of learning that occurs in Croatian music schools is learning by reading sheet music, which mostly includes classical music notation and rarely the graphic notation characteristic of contemporary music. In this sense, the holistic approach, contemporary music repertoire and expanded perspective on music literacy used in *MBZ Kidz* creates opportunities for the pupils to engage with music in a new way.

The audience can approach the festival's content in three different contexts of music learning and participation: (1) informal – on the *MBZ Kidz* online platform, at their own pace; (2) non-formal – by attending the festival's workshops in the city of Zagreb during the festival; and (3) formal – at workshops in general schools across Croatia (the festival's music mediation produced and financed through the *Culture Backpack* programme) and at the Elly Bašić Music School within *The Group for New Music*. Using simple language to describe contemporary music and its techniques, as well as different forms of graphic scores and creative ideas, *MBZ Kidz* online content is guided by the idea of a democratisation of musical repertoire. In this way, music learning and participation in the festival's programme becomes accessible to everyone, beyond the borders of the festival timeframe, the Elly Bašić Music School and the city of Zagreb.

### ***Communities of professional practice***

The content analysis of *MBZ Kidz* reveals that since 2019 the festival has developed a comprehensive music mediation programme both live and in online space. Currently, it is the only music festival in Croatia with a long-lasting tradition of music mediation, dating back to Yugoslavia and the festival's collaboration with Jeunesses Musicales Croatia. It is worth noting the importance of these facts, because music mediation as a field of practice and study does not yet officially exist in Croatia. Bearing that in mind, it is certain that the festival's music mediators could act as role-models for music teachers and musicians of all profiles, especially those who are still in training and interested in creating new formats for dialogue with their audiences. The festival has created the platform *KNAPANJE*, mainly for the students whose focus is on performing. It also offers internship positions to students of the

Academy of Music at the University of Zagreb, mainly for production and organisation purposes during the festival. In this way, through its bottom-up approach, the festival creates a chance for situated learning in higher music education. What remains open is the need to advocate for similar internships focused on music mediation in future editions of the festival, allowing the professional learning community of music mediators to expand and take the field of practice to new levels. Collaborative learning in the professional musical community might inspire music professionals to work differently on all aspects of the music education ecosystem in their future employment positions, using the festival's experiences and networks to expand and sustain contemporary music repertoire in institutions and society.

Both through its offline and online programme, MBZ Kidz offers composers of contemporary music the opportunity to meet and share music and ideas, as well as to join different communities (e.g. families, or workshops in schools across the country). In collaboration with professionals from different fields, innovative pedagogical approaches and formats of music mediation are being developed, reaching a variety of audiences, starting from the youngest. Through the festival's activities, professionals enter into the realm of everyday life, expanding the space of contemporary music performances both in the online and offline sphere. What might be improved in the future is to also offer music mediation activities for adults and elderly people, since they are audiences that are often hard to reach.

### ***Contexts of music mediation and music education in Croatia***

Through the MBZ Kidz programme, the MBZ festival offers activities during the whole year, which expands the time of the festival's biennial nature to everyday access, especially through its online platform. By expanding the time, space, and programme of the festival, especially in its music mediation formats, MBZ contributes to the diversity of the music education ecosystem in Croatia, offering innovative approaches that do not exist within the formal system.

Socially and culturally, music education in Croatia has a long tradition, both in general schools and in specialised music schools. It encompasses a diverse range of activities across the formal and non-formal learning continuum. State-funded formal music education remains predominant, marked by a long-standing tradition of music as a subject in general schools, alongside a wide array of musical subjects available in specialised music schools. In general schools, music education consists of two main subjects: Music Culture in comprehensive schools (elementary level – 8 years) and Music Art in post-compulsory secondary schools (4- or 2-year programme). Unlike previous curricula, the

current curriculum *School for Life* (MZO 2019) emphasises a diverse range of musical styles and genres, reflecting the multicultural nature of music. Previously, the focus was primarily on listening to Western classical music repertoire, but today the curriculum also includes traditional music, popular music, jazz, film music, etc. However, when looking into the changing school practice, it becomes evident that the Western classical canon continues to be regarded as the most important repertoire. Most likely, this stems from the education of music teachers in higher music education institutions in Croatia, where programmes are still focused solely on Western classical music and preparing future professionals for potential jobs in concert halls, orchestras and (music) schools, without any community engagement.

In addition to music education in Croatian compulsory schools, a well-established system of music schools has existed for several centuries, having grown significantly after the Second World War during the Yugoslav era (Kovačević 1974). According to statistical data<sup>16</sup>, approximately 4.7% pupils in Croatia attend music schools, funded by the state and divided in two levels: 6 years of elementary music school and 4 years of secondary music school. The programme is governed by the state regulations outlined in the curricula for music and dance schools (MZO 2006, 2008), as well as by the *Law on Arts Education* (2011), which in theory promotes open entrance to music schools for everyone, but at the same time has, in practice, a strict age limit, and only offers open access to children and early youth. According to data on the webpage of the Ministry of Science and Education<sup>17</sup>, “music schools are attended by students with pronounced abilities for musical expression. The goal of the music education system is to enrich society with musical art by nurturing and educating professional musicians of various profiles and occupations”. These statements clearly indicate that the focus of music schools is still on the specialisation of future professionals, which makes them quite exclusive in terms of access.

There is one exceptional music school in Croatia that stands out for its philosophy and innovative methodology, offering a comprehensive education from preschool through high school: the Elly Bašić Music School. Named after its founder Elly Bašić (1908–1998), an exceptional music pedagogue, ethnomusicologist, and researcher of creativity in childhood, the school

16 <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiZWE3YTE4OWQtOWJmNC00OTJmLWE2MjktYTQ5MWJlNDNiZDQ0IiwidCI6IjJjMTFjYmNjLWl3NjEtNDVky1lhOWYlLFRhYzYzZTk0ZTFkNCIsImMiOiJh9> (accessed April 14, 2025).

17 <https://mzo.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/odgoj-i-obrazovanje/umjetnicko-obrazovanje/glazbene-skole/465> (accessed April 14, 2025).

embodies her belief in every child's right to access music education and culture. Bašić, the inventor of Functional Music Pedagogy (FMP), advocated for holistic development and syncretism in music education, aligning her views with those of her contemporaries Carl Orff, Zoltán Kodály and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. She managed to establish her own school, whose curriculum is officially accredited by the Ministry of Education (MZO 2006 and 2008), as a counter-measure to the programmes in 'standard' music schools, in this way providing teachers from all over the country with legal possibilities to use this curriculum in their classrooms. The school's unique approach includes its own type of solmisation, an interdisciplinary and multimodal approach to learning music, descriptive assessment methods, continual professional development for teachers, existence of both an A-programme (for specialised professional focus) and a B-programme (for broader musical culture), etc. The curriculum is flexible, and the school does not hold admission exams, reflecting its inclusive philosophy (Letica 2014; Vasilj 2023). As the continuation of this discussion will show, this school is also special due to its bottom-up innovations related to MBZ festival. Although the Elly Bašić Music School already has improvisation in its curricula, as well as the Exercises in Composition as one of the subjects, forming *The Group for New Music* within the school shows that the festival can contribute innovation and encourage institutional resilience through a bottom-up approach.

### ***Bottom-up approach to regulations and infrastructure***

MBZ challenges the infrastructure of the music education ecosystem in Croatia by offering new offline and online spaces in which to perform, create, learn, collaborate, and share music. The establishment of the online platform has created a repository for contemporary music and its learning materials which is accessible to every music pedagogue. There is still no relevant research related to the real usage of online materials in classrooms, yet it is significant that the MBZ Kidz materials were recognised by the Ministry of Education in the school year 2021/2022, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The video *I Compose*, from the Watching Room, was included in the e-classroom<sup>18</sup> lesson about music professions in the curriculum for the fourth grade in the subject Music Culture at general education schools. Furthermore, the website offers didactic materials

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18 The e-lesson can be found here: <https://www.mbz.hr/en/news/mbz-kidz-program-is-recognized-by-the-ministry-of-science-and-education-and-included-in-e-teaching> (accessed April 14, 2025).

(e.g. an interactive poster with terminology explanations and digital games<sup>19</sup>) that might be used both in general education and music schools.

The festival's partnership with the Elly Bašić Music School has evidently had an effect on the music school curricula, but the question remains as to how it could potentially affect the infrastructural and policy aspect of the national school system in the long term. Since 2007, the festival has collaborated with the Elly Bašić Music School, where one of its teachers, Maja Petyo Bošnjak, with the support of the composer Berislav Šipuš, has established *The Group for New Music*. This ensemble specialises in performing contemporary music, making it unique within the Croatian music school system. In 2019, the group participated in the *D#connected* project, developed in collaboration with the composer Ana Horvat and the new media artist Miodrag Gladović. Leading up to the performances at the MBZ Festival in 2019, held at the Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall, Kino Europa, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, students engaged in workshops with Horvat and Gladović. During the performances, students utilised their smartphones and acoustic instruments, with the music generated through a mobile application specifically designed for the festival and played through Bluetooth speakers. This combination of acoustic instruments and technology enabled students to create music that could relate to or be disconnected from other ensemble members, giving them the opportunity to experiment with sonic performance in various spaces. The *Youth and Contemporary Music* project, which encompasses the *Group for New Music*, also includes subjects such as Exercises in Composition, with exercises typically taught by composers. Such a curriculum empowers students to develop and perform their own compositions. In addition, the school introduces concepts of graphic notation, fosters improvisation skills, explores artistic interpretation, demonstrates various performance techniques, and introduces the use of electronics. The Elly Bašić Music School therefore not only stimulates artistic growth, but also provides a comprehensive educational experience. The MBZ festival offers a platform to showcase the results of this education to a wider audience and further refine them artistically. Since MBZ is a biennial festival, it is to be noted that, today, the group also performs during the year, i.e. between two festival editions, demonstrating its autonomy and performing not just the musical pieces offered by the festival's composers, but also pieces composed by pupils attending the school subject Exercises in Composition.

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19 Memory game: <https://kidz.mbz.hr/games/memory/hr>, Poster: <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/novosti/interaktivni-poster-glazbenih-pojmova> (accessed April 14, 2025).

Thanks to its rich history of performing or presenting their own music within the context of one of the international hubs of new music, pupils frequently transition into professional musicians or highly successful amateur musicians. Even if they no longer actively engage with (contemporary) music, they maintain their enthusiasm for it. Most importantly, they develop into individuals who are receptive to progressive artistic ideas, integrating artistic versatility into other aspects of their daily lives. In this way, one of the ideas articulated in the festival's manifesto is realised: that contemporary music, despite its divergence from everyday life, undeniably belongs to it, transforms and enhances it.

### ***Media and the music industry***

What can be noticed on the MBZ Kidz online platform is that the festival is highly present in all types of media, including apps and podcasts, and that it tends to grow with each year. The pandemic clearly contributed to the process of re-thinking access to the festival. This is why the festival even expanded its live-performances and workshops throughout the whole year, disrupting the usual weekly form of the festivals, but also leading to the point where the festival started to co-exist with the city at different times of the year. Through the online platform and workshops, the festival crossed its borders and started to exist all over the country, especially in the form of workshops offered under the *Backpack (Full of) Culture* programme.

### **Conclusion**

Of all the approaches to strengthening the music education ecosystem's sustainability, festivals may not be the first examples that we see as relevant in achieving this task. However, MBZ Kidz presents a different story. Expanding its structure since 2019 to offer diverse live and online content throughout the whole year in different spaces and collaborations, as well as crossing the borders of its home city Zagreb, has made a significant change in terms of examining existing hierarchies and power relations, as well as the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the system. Live workshops and online pedagogical content offer an expanded view of the music classroom, which brings music and music-making back to families and everyday life. In this sense, the festival's focus on contemporary (classical) music and its mediation strengthens the vitality of the genre not just in the music education ecosystem, but also in society as a whole. Furthermore, a recent tendency of the Croatian school

system to make a transition to the whole-day school (still in an experimental phase) presents a potential threat to the sustainability of music schools, for technical and organisational reasons, so that continual collaborations like the one between the MBZ Kidz festival and the Elly Bašić Music School might help to open new bottom-up perspectives on how to proactively cope with the possible change.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many festivals were central catalysts of the revitalisation and vitality of certain music genres (Grant 2016). In the case of MBZ, the learning-based approach of the MBZ Kidz programme shows that a festival can be a significant and effective way to disseminate the knowledge and practices of contemporary music in a range of formal, non-formal and informal music learning contexts, which may contribute to the sustainability of contemporary (classical) music as an at-risk music genre. For example, Huib Schippers has written about the sustainability of the Western classical opera over the past 400 years, noticing vulnerabilities caused by the high demands in terms of infrastructure and the high-level training of the participants, but also about the fact that the genre unexpectedly survived because of the “carefully constructed prestige that inspires an elite community and associate markets” (2015, 146) to support it. In the case of the Croatian state-funded music schools, which are still elitist in terms of their Western classical music repertoire and career-path orientation, it does not have to be like that. Although the elite community might be inspired to preserve the music schools in their current form, what is suggested here (by presenting the example of the social innovation at MBZ Kidz and the institutional innovation at the Elly Bašić Music School) is that the system’s sustainability could be approached in a different way. Music education today needs to be relevant, accessible, and important to the children’s and the teacher’s everyday lives. The approach offered by the MBZ Kidz online and live formats, which combine sound pedagogy and music pedagogy in order to understand contemporary music as part of our overall soundscape, might be a good, bottom-up way to inspire not just the elite and professional musical communities, but also the community in general, to make it important in their homes and schools, and to bring it to other spaces where people spend their time.

What still needs to be explored is in what way the festival’s bottom-up examples of good practice at the Elly Bašić Music School, along with the innovative pedagogical approaches offered through the festival’s online platform, might affect long-term changes in the formal music education system. A similar bottom-up approach already exists in Croatia with Citizenship Education as an elective subject, expanding from one school in the city of Rijeka to many schools

across the country. In the context of the MBZ and music education, only time will tell. The most important thing is to keep our critical ears open and to listen.

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