

Contemporary Slovak Chamber Music as a Tool for Innovation in Teaching Chamber Music at Primary School of the Arts

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Abstract The study focuses on the didactic potential of 21st-century Slovak chamber music in primary schools of the arts. It examines the extent to which newer chamber works can develop students' interpretive, cognitive, and creative competencies in the context of contemporary pedagogical approaches. An analysis of selected compositions by Ludo Kuruc and Jozef Hudák identifies structural, technical, and expressive elements that make them suitable for effective use in chamber music performance. The result is a proposal for methodological procedures that support the integration of innovative repertoire into the teaching process and stimulate the development of students' musical thinking through work with contemporary musical content.

Key words Chamber music, contemporary Slovak music, primary school of the arts, repertoire, methodology, music pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

Chamber music represents a stable and long-established interpretative discipline in the system of arts education at primary schools of the arts, fulfilling not only technical and artistic functions, but also important socialization and cognitive functions. In pedagogical literature, it is defined as a dynamic space for intense musical interaction, collective ensemble playing, and shared musical decision-making (Westerlund, Gaunt, 2013). Current research emphasizes that chamber ensembles create conditions for the development of creativity, flexible musical thinking, and the ability to respond to interpretation in real time (Lehmann, Sloboda, Woody, 2007). These processes have a significant social and aesthetic dimension that goes beyond the traditional concept of interpretive discipline. They are closer to a broader understanding of musical performance as a participatory practice (Small, 1998).

The current pedagogical paradigm of primary schools of the arts points to the need to reconfigure the long-prevailing model of chamber music, whose curricular and interpretative practice is based primarily on works from the classical-romantic canon. The development of a pluralistic and stylistically open repertoire is currently considered an essential part of education, as it promotes aesthetic flexibility in students and reflects the current musical reality (Burnard, 2012; Elliott, Silverman, 2015). Nevertheless, the chamber works of 21st-century Slovak composers are still used only marginally in practice, even though their rhythmic, sonic, and textural variability offers significant potential for modernizing teaching.

The aim of this study is to analyze the possibilities for the systematic and pedagogically appropriate integration of 21st-century Slovak chamber music into the educational process. The starting point is established theoretical-historical and pedagogical-methodological approaches (Elliott, Silverman, 2015), which are then applied to the chamber music of contemporary Slovak composers with an emphasis on its didactic value, technical demands, and interpretive potential. The text provides a synthetic overview of chamber works suitable for the educational environment of primary schools of the arts and formulates methodological recommendations that can support innovative approaches and reflect the current needs of music education.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND FUNCTIONAL ANCHORING OF CHAMBER MUSIC

Chamber music is defined in specialist literature as an aesthetic-artistic genre based on the principle of part autonomy, in which each voice has its own expressive and formative function (Taruskin, 2005). It represents an environment of intense musical collaboration, as the creation of musical meaning is conditioned by the collective dialogue of the performers. This process involves mutual listening, immediate response, and joint interpretive decision-making, which ties in with theories of experiential and cooperative learning (Small, 1998; Westerlund, Gaunt, 2013).

In psychological and pedagogical research (Lehmann, Sloboda, Woody, 2007; McPherson, Parncutt, 2016), chamber music is described as a discipline that integrates several dimensions of musical performance. Key cognitive processes include analytical thinking, anticipation of musical development, and working with structure. Perceptual-motor mechanisms, especially coordination, technical precision, and ensemble playing, play an equally important role. These components overlap with emotional and interpersonal aspects, including empathy and expressive adaptability, making chamber music an extremely effective tool for arts education. Chamber music represents a stable and long-established interpretative discipline

In pedagogical literature, the functions of chamber music are most often classified as artistic, social, and interpretive (Hopkins, 2018). The artistic function is related to deepening the understanding of musical structure and developing aesthetic sensitivity. The social dimension strengthens interaction, communication, responsibility, and the ability to cooperate. The interpretive level requires coordination between players, control of sound balance, and

adherence to stylistic appropriateness. These three areas form a framework that allows for a more precise understanding of the pedagogical potential of the contemporary chamber repertoire. The application of modern compositional approaches in the context of chamber music supports the development of technical skills, aesthetic sensitivity, teamwork, and creative musical thinking.

The next part of the study therefore focuses on the repertoire for string chamber ensembles, which provides an optimal environment for integrating contemporary Slovak works into teaching at primary schools of the arts.

3. CHAMBER MUSIC IN THE CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT

Chamber music has a stable position in European tradition as a space for interaction, collaboration, and the formation of musical thinking (Whittall, 1996; Taruskin, 2005). Its aesthetic, social, and interpretative pedagogical functions have long been emphasized in professional literature and form the basis of work with student chamber ensembles (Lehmann, Sloboda, Woody, 2007). These principles are also linked to the need to expand the repertoire to include contemporary Slovak works, which can offer new stimuli for the development of interpretative skills in the environment of primary schools of the arts.

Curricular documents for Slovak arts education conceive chamber music as an integral part of the comprehensive development of students' interpretive, social, and cooperative skills. The state education program for primary schools of the arts (ŠPÚ, 2015) explicitly emphasizes the development of intonation accuracy, rhythmic coordination, the ability to participate in collective interpretation, and conceptual musical thinking in an ensemble context. Nevertheless, as noted in pedagogical and curricular literature (Westerlund, 2008), the methodological frameworks of the subject remain largely general and do not contain systematic criteria for the selection of sheet music.

An analysis of the Slovak curricular framework indicates several areas that require more systematic development in the future. These include, in particular, the need for more clearly formulated recommendations for the selection of contemporary chamber works that would respond appropriately to current aesthetic trends and purposefully support the creative competences of students. In practice, historical compositions often dominate student ensembles, which naturally narrows the stylistic diversity of the literature used. The predominance of traditional compositional structures limits opportunities to become acquainted with the sonic, rhythmic, and textural characteristics of 20th- and 21st-century music.

The identified limitations are not entirely consistent with modern pedagogical paradigms, which emphasize the importance of collaborative learning, reciprocal interaction, and the development of cognitive-reflective processes (Vygotsky, 1978; Westerlund, Gaunt, 2013). Westerlund, Gaunt, 2013). This discrepancy points to the need to expand the chamber music literature used to include contemporary Slovak works, which can appropriately complement existing pedagogical practices and enrich ensemble practice at primary schools of the arts. Chamber music, thanks to its dialogical, intersubjective, and cooperative nature, provides an optimal environment for the application of contemporary works, especially in string chamber ensembles, which form a stable part of ensemble practice at primary schools of the arts.

4. CONTEMPORARY SLOVAK CHAMBER MUSIC AND ITS EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTION

As evidenced by music education and musicology studies (Small, 1998; Lehmann, Sloboda, Woody, 2007; Westerlund, 2008), learning through chamber music has an integrative, reflective, and participatory character, which allows for the effective use of the contemporary repertoire in the process of cooperative and experiential learning. From a pedagogical point of view, contemporary Slovak chamber music represents an extremely valuable repertoire resource that can develop students' technical, auditory, interpretative, and social skills in the context of modern educational trends. It is characterized by distinctive rhythmic and sonic invention, which appropriately complements the traditional repertoire used in primary schools of the arts. The characteristic features of these works include rhythmic variability, the use of polymetry and syncopation, the use of irregular rhythmic patterns, and the creation of colorful sound textures. In addition, they employ a combination of traditional and modern playing techniques, including *pizzicato*, *col legna*, and *sul ponticello*.¹

Such expressive and technical approaches support several areas of students' musical development. Rhythmic invention allows them to practice tempo stability and ensemble playing within multi-layered rhythmic structures. The tonal-modal techniques of contemporary music contribute to a more subtle perception of intonation, while diverse sound techniques develop a refined listening to tone color and work with texture within an ensemble. At the same time, modern expressive elements increase students' interpretive flexibility, which music education literature (Pazdera, 2008; Hopkins, 2018) identifies as key to the comprehensive artistic growth of young performers.

In this sense, contemporary Slovak chamber music provides a natural environment for the comprehensive technical and aesthetic development of students, which the traditional historical repertoire is usually unable to provide in the same breadth and diversity.

From a cognitive point of view, chamber music with a contemporary repertoire builds on the concept of musicking (Small, 1998), according to which musical activity is primarily a social act. In this model, musical meaning is not perceived as a static property of the work, but as the result of interaction between the players during the performance process itself. Research in music psychology (Lehmann, Sloboda, Woody, 2007) also shows that performance is an integration of motor, cognitive, and emotional aspects, with chamber music further enhancing this integration due to the constant need to coordinate individual performance with fellow musicians.

Contemporary Slovak chamber music in an educational environment naturally supports the process of collective construction of musical meaning, as its expressive and formal techniques (motif fragmentation and textural contrasts) require active interpretative discussion within the ensemble. At the same time, modern rhythmic and formal layering develops anticipation, self-regulation, and the ability to respond flexibly to changes that are characteristic of contemporary music. Working with sound material that often goes beyond traditional expressive models stimulates students' creativity and musical imagination.

All these aspects also support the social dimensions of chamber music, especially empathic listening, interactive sensitivity, and responsibility for the collective result. From a pedagogical point of view, these are elements of situated social learning that chamber music allows to develop naturally. They represent a key principle of

¹ *Pizzicato* – plucking the strings with the fingers; *col legna* – playing with the wood of the bow; *sul ponticello* – playing close to the bridge with a specific, sharper sound.

contemporary concepts of music education (Westerlund, Gaunt, 2013).

5. REPERTOIRE GAP AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SLOVAK WORK

An analysis of the repertoire used in the *Chamber Music* course at the primary schools of the arts reveals a significant imbalance. The classical-romantic repertoire dominates, while contemporary Slovak music is represented only marginally, unsystematically, and without methodological gradation. This situation is also documented by research (Csámpaiová 2025), which points to limited stylistic diversity, the absence of modern composers, and a lack of repertoire recommendations for working with contemporary works.

For this very reason, works by Slovak composers such as Ľudo Kuruc and Jozef Hudák are particularly suitable material for pedagogical practice. Their chamber music combines modern elements with didactic appropriateness, offering clear formal architecture and accessible sonority. It creates space for the development of creative interpretation, which 21st-century music pedagogy considers essential.

The works of Ľudo Kuruc and Jozef Hudák enable students to enter the world of contemporary music in a natural and pedagogically appropriate way. Their chamber compositions are not technically demanding, which greatly facilitates their inclusion in the repertoire at lower and intermediate levels of study. At the same time, they respect the developmental possibilities of students. They work with a clear form, legible motifs, and sound elements that are unconventional but still comprehensible to young performers. Thanks to this, they promote aesthetic openness and help develop modern musical thinking based on the ability to respond to innovative sound stimuli, work with unconventional tone colors, and understand music in a broader context. Their works fill a significant gap in the repertoire of the *Chamber Music* course at the primary school of the arts, where there is a lack of compositionally high-quality, modern, and pedagogically accessible compositions of appropriate difficulty.

Ľudo Kuruc created the cycle *Piesne stromov*, which contains several didactically valuable chamber compositions suitable for different levels of students. Representative examples include the compositions *Smutná vrba* and *Stará jelša*, which combine modern elements with pedagogical appropriateness. *Smutná vrba* works with a clearly structured phrasing and alternating arco/pizzicato techniques in the strings (e.g., bars 1–13), which facilitates the development of coordination and sound balance in the ensemble. *Stará jelša* is characterized by melodic clarity, subtle dynamic gradation, and transparent texture (e.g., measures 1–8; 17–26), which support work on phrasing, articulation, and tonal balance.

Equally significant is the work of Jozef Hudák, represented by the composition *Sushi alebo Halušky*. The work is based on distinctive rhythmic motor skills, ostinato patterns, and a systematic division into sections A–F. The rhythmic ostinatos in the double bass and percussion (especially bars 26–33) serve as ideal material for developing pulsing stability and ensemble playing. The alternation of pizzicato and arco in the string instruments (viola bars 5–7; cello bars 6–13) allows for pedagogically effective work on tonal flexibility. The melodic lines in sections B and C in the viola and violins (e.g., violin I: bars 17–24) provide space for developing phrasing and intonation confidence. The piano part (bars 6–13; 21–30) supports hand coordination and dynamic work in an ensemble context.

Hudák's style can also be represented by the work *Starý gramofón*, which is one of his most frequently performed compositions in pedagogical practice. The composition is characterized by a clear melodic line and dance-like pulsation, which creates a natural interpretative flow and immediate appeal to students. In this work, Hudák combines a regular metrical framework with small rhythmic shifts and syncopations, creating a pulsating, slightly "retro" stylization reminiscent of the aesthetics of early gramophone recordings. Formally, he works with short motivic structures based on progressions and repetitions, which makes the work coherent and easy to learn. Also typical are the contrasts between more lyrical passages and rhythmically accented sections, which support work on articulation, dynamics, and phrasing. The composition thus develops precise rhythmic coordination, a sense of stylistic character, and the ability to create expressive tension through short motifs.

The inclusion of *Starý gramofón* naturally follows Hudák's aesthetic line and complements his work with a more accessible genre, yet compositionally sophisticated model, which significantly enriches the range of contemporary Slovak repertoire suitable for primary schools of the arts. In combination with Kuruc's cycle *Piesne stromov*, represented by the compositions *Smutná vrba* and *Stará jelša*, a comprehensive palette of pedagogically suitable repertoire is created. While Kuruc's work brings a lyrical, texturally transparent, and sonically delicate approach to contemporary musical language, Hudák's works offer rhythmically pulsating, thematically distinctive musical material that is immediately accessible to students. The two creative lines thus complement each other and together fill an important gap in the repertoire of the *Chamber Music* course at the primary schools of the arts.

5.1 Educational application

The implementation of works by Ľudo Kuruc and Jozef Hudák into chamber music teaching creates space for a multi-level pedagogical process that reflects modern approaches to music education. Working with these compositions allows students to build on their analytical and perceptual skills through detailed examination of soundscapes, tone color, textural layers, and dynamic contrasts.

Interpreting works also naturally promotes the development of ensemble communication. Teachers can use techniques such as conducting from within the ensemble², which encourages sensitivity to the gestures of fellow musicians, the ability to respond in real time, and actively contribute to the overall musical concept. These processes develop not only the synchronization of movement and sound, but also the intersubjective understanding that is at the heart of chamber music practice.

Contemporary Slovak chamber music also creates suitable conditions for working with detailed dynamics and sound modeling. Students are encouraged to think of sound as a plastic, malleable quality that can be consciously shaped. Working with modern elements also promotes creative reflection and initiative among students, thereby developing their collective responsibility for the final interpretation.

The works of Kuruc and Hudák are becoming a practical tool for modernizing chamber music teaching: they allow traditional disciplines (intonation, rhythm, ensemble playing) to be combined with elements of creative interpretation. They provide teachers with

² "Conducting from within the ensemble" refers to a method of leading an ensemble without an external conductor, in which one of the players (usually the concertmaster or another leading voice) takes on the conducting role. Through visual, breathing, and movement signals, they direct the tempo, entrances, phrasing, and expression, while actively playing their own part.

reliable repertoire material that meets the requirements of current music pedagogy.

5.2 Methodological recommendations for implementing current creation

Following professional recommendations in the field of pedagogical repertoire selection for student chamber ensembles (Pazdera, 2008; Hopkins, 2018; Lehmann, Sloboda, Woody, 2007), it is possible to define a set of criteria that enable the effective and didactically appropriate inclusion of contemporary Slovak chamber music in teaching. A key prerequisite is appropriate technical difficulty. The composition should respect the developmental possibilities of the students, provide them with space to master basic chamber skills, and at the same time motivate them to discover diverse sounds. Equally important is a clear, transparent texture that facilitates orientation in the musical material and supports coordination within the ensemble.

From a pedagogical point of view, it seems most effective if the composition contains one dominant element of newer musical creation (e.g., specific sound color, rhythmic pattern, or modality) that can be the subject of deeper didactic analysis and pedagogical elaboration. The selection of repertoire should also take into account the adaptability of the composition for different instrumentations, which is especially important in primary schools of the arts, where personnel and instrumentation conditions are variable. It is essential that sheet music and, if possible, recordings are available to simplify the process of preparation, analysis, and interpretive reflection. Criteria conceived in this way enable teachers to select a repertoire of contemporary Slovak music that is didactically meaningful, aesthetically valuable, and fits organically into the overall structure of chamber music teaching.

Effective implementation of contemporary Slovak chamber music requires a methodical approach that combines analytical, perceptual, and creative learning strategies. The starting point is listening to and decoding soundscapes, in which students learn to identify tone color, texture, and the dynamic proportions of a composition. This is followed by an analysis of rhythmic layers, which is particularly important in works that use polymetry, syncopation, or irregular forms.

Pedagogical practice recommends alternating work in sections with rehearsals of the whole piece, which promotes detailed practice of the score and overall ensemble stability. An important element of the methodological process is also joint reflection, based on Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning, where students interpret their experiences, identify problems, and formulate solutions. Contemporary music offers an ideal space for creative tasks, such as creating short musical miniatures based on motifs from the works being studied. This promotes aesthetic sensitivity, compositional-improvisational thinking, and a deeper understanding of the musical language of contemporary composers. This methodological framework represents a comprehensive and functional model of work that is in line with modern trends in 21st-century music pedagogy.

6. DISCUSSION

The implementation of contemporary Slovak chamber music into teaching at primary schools of the arts faces several systemic and methodological limitations that need to be addressed. A significant obstacle is the fear of teachers of modern compositional languages, which are often perceived as interpretatively or theoretically

demanding. This attitude is also related to insufficient knowledge of the repertoire, as many teachers do not have access to up-to-date databases of works, practical methodological materials, or sample interpretations.

Another limiting factor is the lack of methodological recommendations that would help teachers incorporate contemporary music into their teaching systematically and with conceptual gradation. The absence of clear repertoire strategies means that contemporary works are used sporadically and randomly rather than as an integral part of the curriculum framework.

The article therefore points to the need to create a stable pedagogical infrastructure that would include collections of recommended works, methodological sheets, teaching materials, and available recordings. The introduction of contemporary Slovak chamber music into teaching can thus be not only an aesthetic and interpretative contribution, but also an impetus for the modernization of the entire chamber music teaching system, in line with European trends in music education.

7. CONCLUSION

Contemporary Slovak chamber music represents a significant potential that has been underutilized in the pedagogical practice of primary schools of the arts, but which could be purposefully applied in the modernization of the subject of chamber music. An analysis of theoretical-historical, curricular, and didactic contexts shows that this repertoire meets the demands of contemporary pedagogical paradigms. It supports creative, participatory, and reflective learning, develops students' technical and auditory skills, and at the same time strengthens their aesthetic openness to musical phenomena of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The works of Ludo Kuruc and Jozef Hudák, presented in this article as examples of good practice, highlight the possibilities that modern Slovak music offers for the educational environment: accessible technical difficulty, clear formal structure, appropriate modern language, and sonic inventiveness suitable for the development of chamber music skills. At the same time, their work responds to an identified gap in the repertoire and provides compositionally high-quality works that can be systematically incorporated into the progression of chamber music instruction.

The methodological recommendations defined in the text offer teachers a specific framework for working with the current repertoire, from selection criteria and analytical-perceptual strategies to creative activities that support active engagement with musical material. Their implementation creates the conditions for establishing a modern and didactically sophisticated approach to chamber music that respects European trends in arts education.

Modernizing chamber music instruction at primary schools of the arts through contemporary Slovak compositions is therefore not only a matter of aesthetic updating, but above all a matter of methodological and curricular relevance. The introduction of such a repertoire represents a systemic step towards more open and reflective arts education that develops students' interpretative autonomy, creative flexibility, and cultivated musical thinking.

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