

INTEGRATION OF BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ'S CORRESPONDENCE INTO SECONDARY GRAMMAR SCHOOL TEACHING

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Abstract

This article explores the integration of Bohuslav Martinů's correspondence into secondary grammar school teaching as an interdisciplinary approach that combines history, music education, French language, and literature. By analyzing the composer's letters, especially those written to his wife Charlotte after World War II, students gain insights into Martinů's personal life, artistic career, and the socio-historical context that influenced his work. Through hands-on activities, such as dramatizing letters and composing fictional responses, students develop critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper understanding of historical sources. The interdisciplinary nature of this curriculum encourages students to synthesize knowledge across disciplines, connecting personal relationships, artistic expression, and historical events. The article also suggests how such an approach can enrich educational content and engage students in exploring the connections between culture, language, and history.

Keywords

Bohuslav Martinů – interdisciplinary teaching – secondary education – correspondence analysis, music education – critical thinking – French language

Introduction

The Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů is one of the most important musical personalities of the 20th century, who also became famous on the international stage. His work, which includes symphonies, operas, chamber works, and other musical forms, is admired for its originality and its ability to reflect contemporary events. Martinů lived his life in several different countries, including his native Czechoslovakia, France, and the United States, which greatly influenced him not only musically but also personally. His work was strongly shaped by historical events such as the First and Second World Wars, political changes in Europe, and his many years in exile.

In addition to his vast musical legacy, Bohuslav Martinů also left potential researchers an enormous amount of other sources. These include his vast correspondence, which currently comprises over two thousand available letters in which the composer communicated with family, friends, or the performers and publishers of his works. Given the number of recipients and the composer's frequent travels, it is likely that the number of letters preserved is not finite. Although several thematic editions of Bohuslav Martinů's correspondence have recently been published, most of the letters remain unpublished.

Recently, several thematic editions of Bohuslav Martinů's correspondence have also been published, and edited by Vít Zouhar and his colleagues at Palacký University in

Olomouc.¹ The editions are systematically treated employing a diplomatic transcription, i.e. in the form as close as possible to the original, always preserving the specifics of the composer's French language, without any corrections or adjustments. For the eventual publication of letters in French, I count on a transcription in French without errors or typos. The editors then comment on all the information in an extensive note-taking apparatus, which compares the composer's correspondence with letters to family, friends, performers and the recollections of the composer's wife Charlotte Martinů. In addition to these comparisons, the information is always grounded in historical context, the current state of research and fieldwork. The individual volumes are published in Czech-English form, thanks to which it is possible to gain a better understanding of the composer's life and open up other research topics in an international dimension.

Correspondence after the Second World War

The main objective of my thesis was the edition of the previously untreated set of letters written by Bohuslav Martinů to his wife Charlotte Martinů in 1946 and 1947. With this thesis, I continued my research devoted to Martinů. Indeed, as part of my master's thesis, I edited a set of twelve French letters dating from 1926 and 1927 as well as a diary by Charlotte Martinů from 1945, including the appendices.² My thesis followed this edition not only chronologically, but also thematically, as the common element of all the sources treated was the composer's wife, Charlotte Martinů.

Of the letters I have studied, about half are handwritten and the other half are typed. The typed letters contain no diacritics and have many typos. This shows that the composer was in a hurry or tired when writing them, and gives us an authentic insight into the conditions under which they were written.

The correspondence I edited revealed many twists and turns – this was the period after the Second World War, when the couple was living in the United States. At this time, Martinů was also teaching at Berkshire Music School and continuing to compose works.

The correspondence of Bohuslav Martinů is interesting for several reasons. First of all, it gives us an insight into the composer's personal life, revealing his experiences, relationships, and life situations. His letters are not only a testimony to those times, but also a valuable source of information about the cultural and historical context in which Martinů worked. The letters between Martinů and his wife Charlotte, which are full of mutual feelings, concerns about the future, discussions about artistic intentions, and reflections on everyday life, are a key source that introduces students not only to the composer's personality but also to the circumstances of the time.

I decided to incorporate this correspondence into the secondary grammar school curriculum because it offers students an opportunity to better understand the connections between personal life, artistic creation, and historical events. Working with authentic letters allows students to discover not only the historical context but also the cultural and social changes that impacted the life and work of Bohuslav Martinů. The letters also

¹ <https://www.martinu.cz/cz/martinu/bibliografie/monografie/>.

² https://library.upol.cz/arl-upol/cs/detail-upol_us_cat-0360401-Edice-pramenu-k-zivotu-a-dilu-Bohuslava-Martinu-z-let-19261945-fialky-na-stole-a-rizek-v-trezoru/.

provide important linguistic material that is ideal for developing reading skills and critical thinking.

Context and importance of correspondence

During this time Martinů communicated not only with his wife, but also with a number of important figures in the music world, including conductors, musicians, composers, critics, and friends such as Charles Munch, Serge Koussevitzky, Karel Šebánek, Rudolf Firkušný, and Arthur Honegger. This communication gives us an insight into the composer's artistic career, his relationships with important musicians of the time, and his views on artistic and cultural issues. The letters also show Martinů as a man who intensely experienced his successes and failures, reflected on historical events, and sought comfort and support from his wife Charlotte.

I decided to integrate correspondence into the secondary grammar school curriculum for several reasons. Correspondence offers authentic material that can be used effectively to link several subjects such as music education, French, history, and literature. This interdisciplinary approach not only provides students with a more comprehensive understanding of the period and the personality of the composer but also the development of skills across different areas. Students have the opportunity to analyze the letters from a historical context as well as from a linguistic or literary perspective. They can also reflect on the musical works Martinů composed during the events in question and discuss the connections between the text of the letters and musical expression.

The correspondence of Bohuslav Martinů also provides rich material for creative activities such as dramatic elaborations of the letters, the creation of fictional responses or the linking of the letters with the composer's musical works. These activities encourage students' creative thinking and develop their ability to perceive and interpret historical sources and works of art.

Linking several disciplines in working with correspondence offers students a unique opportunity to develop their ability to synthesize knowledge and think critically.

Historical context

During his lifetime, Bohuslav Martinů experienced tumultuous historical events that influenced his work and personal life. He was born in 1890 in Polička during the Austro-Hungarian period, where he spent his childhood and early adulthood.³ This period marked the formation of his national consciousness and his relationship to Czech culture, which he later often reflected in his music. The First World War and the subsequent independence of Czechoslovakia were events that profoundly influenced Martinů. His musical output from that time reflects not only the hopes of the newly established republic but also his desire for cultural identity and the search for new artistic paths.

³ <https://www.martinu.cz/cz/martinu/zivot-v-datech/1890-1902/>.

With the advent of the Second World War, Martinů found himself in a difficult personal situation. At that time he was already living in France, where he had taken refuge in 1923, and where he experienced the rise of his international reputation as a composer.⁴ With the rise of Nazism and the outbreak of war, however, it was vital for him and his wife Charlotte to seek safe shelter. In 1940 they decided to emigrate to the United States, which marked a fundamental change in his life and work.⁵ This move and separation from his homeland is reflected not only in the letters Martinů sent to family and friends but also in the musical compositions he composed at the time.

The Second World War, emigration to the USA, subsequent returns to Europe, and political changes in the world – all this is reflected in his correspondence and compositions. In the United States, where he arrived with Charlotte in 1941, he found not only new friends and artistic collaborators but also an audience interested in his work. In the US, Martinů became a key figure among European exiles who sought to maintain contact with European culture and fought to preserve it during the war.

In his letters from this period, he often refers to his feelings of separation, insecurity, and loss of home.⁶ But he also expresses his gratitude for the support and friendship he received in America. His compositions from this period, such as *Toccata e due canzoni* H 311 and *Symphony No. 5* H 310, reflect this mixture of feelings – nostalgia for home, anxiety about an uncertain future, and gratitude for new opportunities.

Interdisciplinary links

An interdisciplinary approach in teaching links different subjects and offers students the opportunity to understand knowledge in a broader context. During history classes, students are encouraged to learn about key historical events that influenced the life and work of Bohuslav Martinů. They focus on the study of the Second World War, the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, the emigration of Czech artists, and the post-war political situation recognizing the impact of these events on individuals, including the composer. In this way, they gain an understanding of the wider connections between historical changes and their impact on artists.

In music education, students then focus on specific compositions that Martinů composed at different stages of his life. They analyze how the composer reflected his personal experiences and events in his music and how he used different musical devices to express emotions. Students discuss the influence of emigration and other life events on his work and how his music reflects his feelings of loss, hope, or nostalgia.

In French classes, students also focus on the linguistic analysis of Bohuslav Martinů's letters. They work with authentic texts, which allows them not only to understand the composer's French but also to gain a deeper insight into the cultural realities of the time. Students examine grammatical and stylistic features, analyze linguistic errors, and discuss how the composer's language evolved. Through this approach, they enrich their language skills and gain a better understanding of how language influences communication and cultural influences.

⁴ <https://www.martinu.cz/cz/martinu/zivot-v-datech/1921---1930/>.

⁵ <https://www.martinu.cz/cz/martinu/zivot-v-datech/1940---1950/>.

⁶ Letter MarC 1947-04-14.

Linking different subjects allows students to gain a deeper understanding of historical, linguistic and cultural contexts. Within this approach, students learn to analyze letters not only as texts but also as historical documents that reveal personal stories and social realities of the time. This way of teaching promotes critical thinking and the ability to connect different areas of knowledge.

The interdisciplinary approach leads students to synthesize knowledge from different disciplines and develops their analytical and interpretive skills. Students gain a more comprehensive view of the life and work of Bohuslav Martinů and learn to understand the relationship between historical events, cultural influences, and the composer's personal experiences. This approach also enables them to better understand the interconnections between artistic creation, language, and historical context, which contributes to the development of their ability to work critically with different types of sources and texts.

Creative and practical activities in classes

One of the goals of integrating Bohuslav Martinů's correspondence into the curriculum is to develop students' creativity and critical thinking skills. This goal is achieved through a variety of hands-on and creative activities that link text analysis with creative writing, dramatic production, and musical interpretation. This form of teaching not only brings the material to life but also allows students to delve deeper into the subject matter and better understand the broader historical, cultural, and artistic context.

Dramatic treatment of letters

The dramatic treatment of the letters offers students the opportunity to combine the content of the letters with music and theatrical production. In this activity, students work in groups to create a short skit or "mini-opera" based on selected letters. This activity aims to enable students to better understand not only the content of the letters themselves but also the atmosphere and emotions they evoke. Students are asked to select key passages from the letters, create a script, and incorporate music that matches the mood and content of the text.

This approach allows students to better understand the connections between the text, the music, and the historical context in which the letters were written. Students learn to link their theoretical knowledge to practical activities and develop their storytelling skills through music and drama. One of the major challenges in dramatic performance is finding an adequate musical interpretation that can capture the emotional charge of the texts. This activity thus develops not only the ability to work with the text but also the musical feeling and sense of expressing emotions.

Dramatic letter writing is also a great opportunity for teamwork that promotes communication and collaboration among students. In creating scripts and productions, students learn to listen to others, present their ideas, and work together towards a common goal, skills that are important not only in the school environment but also in their future professional lives.

Writing fictional letters

Another creative activity is writing fictional letters, which combines historical and literary elements with creative writing. Students work in groups, with each group tasked with writing a fictional letter to either Bohuslav Martinů or his wife Charlotte. This assignment allows them to put themselves in the composer's or his wife's shoes and reflect on how they would react to different life events. As Charlotte Martinů's responses have not survived, students can think about what Charlotte might have written. They can infer some details from the context of Bohuslav Martinů's answers, but they have to work out some aspects for themselves. This activity thus provides space for a truly creative representation of the emotions and relationships between the couple in a historical context.

Writing these letters allows students to connect their knowledge of historical events and the personal life of Bohuslav Martinů with creative writing. This activity also promotes their ability to analyze texts and think critically, as they must take into account the realities of the time, the personality traits of both the addressee and the letter writer, and the historical context when writing the letters. Writing letters also requires reflection on language style and tone, which supports the development of their stylistic skills.

Creative activities such as writing fictional letters help students develop empathy and the ability to put themselves in the shoes of others. They learn to think about the life situations in which Bohuslav and Charlotte Martinů found themselves and to reflect on their emotions, reactions, and attitudes. This process develops not only their literary skills but also their emotional intelligence.

Developing critical thinking and creative expression

Creative activities such as dramatic letter writing and fictional letter writing not only allow students to better understand the historical and cultural context but also to develop their critical thinking skills and creative expression. Students learn to approach texts from different perspectives, reflect on their meaning, and analyze how texts communicate with readers.

At the same time, these activities provide students with the space to develop their creative skills, which is crucial for their personal and academic development. Students learn to present their thoughts and ideas in a way that is not only understandable but also creative and inspiring to others. This approach enriches them not only with new knowledge but also with skills that are important for their future education and professional life.

The integration of Bohuslav Martinů's correspondence into the curriculum not only enriches students' knowledge of this important composer and his time but also supports the development of their ability to analyze texts, think critically, work creatively, and collaborate with others. This approach creates space for a deeper understanding not only of cultural and historical contexts but also of the importance of artistic creation and personal relationships in each of our lives.

Analysis of musical means

The listening activity includes not only an analysis of musical devices such as rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, and instrumentation but also a discussion of how music can express a composer's emotions and reactions to historical events. Students are encouraged to pay attention to specific musical elements that the composer uses to express emotion, such as a sudden change of tempo or unusual instrumentation, as they listen to the piece.

During these lessons, students discuss the meaning of each section of the piece and analyze how music can reflect feelings of loss, despair, or hope. Listening and analysis thus provide an opportunity to connect their knowledge of music theory to historical events, developing their ability to interpret a piece of music in a broader context. Students have the opportunity to consider how a piece of music can reflect not only the personal experiences of the composer but also the collective memory of tragic events, such as the composer's fall from the terrace at Great Barrington Castle in July 1946.

Developing critical thinking and understanding

Listening activities in the music classroom contribute to the development of students' critical thinking by leading them to consider how musical works are influenced by historical events and personal experiences. Students discuss how composers such as Bohuslav Martinů reacted to events that affected them and how they translated these reactions into their music. This process helps them to better understand not only the works of art but also the historical and cultural context in which they were created.

At the same time, this activity promotes students' ability to interpret music not only as an artistic expression but also as an expression of human emotion and experience. Students realize that music is often a response to the world around them and that artists communicate their feelings, attitudes, and opinions through music. This approach allows them to look deeper into the work of Bohuslav Martinů and understand how he reflected the events of his time and his own life experiences.

Extracurricular research

Teaching is not limited to the school environment. This interdisciplinary project offers visits to key institutions such as the Bohuslav Martinů Institute in Prague or the Bohuslav Martinů Centre in Polička. These institutions play a vital role in researching and preserving the composer's work and offer students a unique opportunity to see original letters and other documents related to the composer's life. For students, a visit to the institute is a valuable experience as it gives them an insight into the archives and an understanding of working with historical sources. They can see not only the letters, but also manuscripts of the composer's works, photographs, and other archival materials that bring them closer to the life journey of Bohuslav Martinů.

This approach allows them to better understand the context and importance of working with sources. Students learn how sources are preserved, sorted, and interpreted. They gain practical experience in analyzing archival material and become aware of the importance

of context when working with historical sources. The tour of these institutions contributes to the development of their ability to work with sources, analyze them, and interpret the information obtained from them.

Cooperation with experts

Collaborating with experts such as musicologists, archivists, and exhibition curators allows students to gain new perspectives and deeper insights into the subject. During these meetings, students have the opportunity to learn about current research being conducted by experts on the works of Bohuslav Martinů. Students meet with experts, discuss their analyses, and receive feedback, which helps them develop their critical thinking and scholarly skills. This kind of interaction with the world of professional research motivates students to approach their work more rigorously and with greater responsibility.

Experts often impart to students not only their knowledge but also their enthusiasm for the subject, which has a positive impact on their further studies. Students are encouraged to think about new questions, to critically assess the information they have gathered, and to find new ways of interpreting sources. This type of collaboration encourages their interest in further research and helps them to realize the importance of scholarly work in the humanities.

Visits to concerts and expositions

The project also includes visits to concerts and expositions, which provide an authentic experience for students and connect their theoretical knowledge with the real world. For example, attending a concert where a Bohuslav Martinů composition is performed allows students to better understand its musical structure and emotional charge. Through these visits, students perceive a piece of music not only as theoretical material to analyze but as a living artistic expression that has the power to influence and evoke emotions.

Concert visits are complemented by follow-up discussions where students reflect on their listening experiences and compare their impressions with their analysis of the texts and musical works they have discussed in class. This process links theoretical knowledge with practical experience and helps students to better understand the musical language and emotions that music can evoke.

In addition to the concerts, visits to exhibitions dedicated to the life and work of Bohuslav Martinů, such as the Bohuslav Martinů Centre in Polička, are an important part of the program. The exhibitions, where original letters, manuscripts, photographs, and other personal items of the composer are on display, help students to form a more comprehensive picture of his life and work. Such visits allow them to perceive historical and cultural contexts not only through texts but also through visual and material sources, which enriches their overall understanding of the subject.

Lidice Memorial

In music education classes, students focus on specific compositions by Bohuslav Martinů, which often reflect historical events and the composer's personal experiences. In this way, they have the opportunity to connect their knowledge of history with their understanding of musical expression and to gain a deeper understanding of how music can respond to social change. This approach helps them to see musical works not only as artistic expression but also as a testimony to the times and circumstances in which they were written.

One example that students analyze is the composition *Memorial to Lidice* H 296, written in response to the 1942 massacre in the Czech village of Lidice. In 1942, the American Federation of Composers invited several artists to create works inspired by the war. At the same time, the Czech government-in-exile in London approached Czech composers with a request to create a new national anthem and a commemorative composition that would preserve the memory of the horrors of the war. Bohuslav Martinů responded with a roughly eight-minute orchestral composition, which he completed on 3 August 1943. According to Miloš Šafránek, a Czech diplomat at the time, the composition was to be the middle movement of an intended triptych, the other parts of which were never written. In his notes, the composer described the work as “a religious chant built on the contours of prayer and response”.

Before I reveal the title of the song to the students, I first play it for them without any information. Their task is to listen to the music and try to feel the emotions that come from the song. Since the song is relatively short, students have time to focus on their feelings. Sometimes I give them a piece of paper on which to draw what the music evokes in them. I often find that students describe the piece as gloomy and heavy and use the color black, reflecting their perception of the piece and the emotional charge it has conveyed to them.

In addition to technical aspects such as harmony or rhythm, students also focus on interpreting the emotional and historical context of the work. For example, they discuss how different musical elements, such as dark harmonic progressions or dramatic dynamics, can evoke an atmosphere of anxiety, sadness, or hopelessness. They also explore what the composer's intentions might have been in composing the piece and how his perception of events influenced his choice of musical devices.

Music education plays a key role here in that it links historical events to musical works and develops students' ability to interpret music in a wider cultural and historical context. Students are encouraged to think about how music reflects social change, while also looking for parallels between the composer's reactions to events and his or her expression through music. This approach encourages students' analytical and critical thinking and develops their ability to understand works of art not only from a technical perspective but also from an emotional and contextual one.

Linguistic analysis and development of Bohuslav Martinů's French

One of the key benefits of working with letters is the ability to focus on linguistic analysis. Bohuslav Martinů wrote his letters in French, even though it was not his native language. His relationship with the French developed during his long stay in France, where he arrived in 1923 and where he lived until he left for the United States in 1941. During this period his ability to use French developed and deepened, as reflected in his letters. French became his

language of communication not only in his professional life but also in his relationship with his wife Charlotte, who was a native speaker.

For students, the analysis of these letters presents a unique opportunity to observe how Martinů used French, how he acquired different linguistic structures, and how his written expression reflected not only his linguistic skill but also the influences of his environment and the situations in which he found himself. Through authentic texts, students have the opportunity to gain insight not only into the composer's life but also to gain valuable experience in analyzing historical documents written in French.

Working with authentic texts

The authentic texts of the letters are a rich source of linguistic resources, which students analyze and discuss. They focus, for example, on the grammatical errors that Bohuslav Martinů often made as a non-native speaker. However, these mistakes are not only an example of the difficulties experienced by non-native speakers but also reflect the composer's efforts to adapt to the French language environment and to communicate at a level he considered necessary for his personal and professional life. By analyzing these mistakes, students not only improve their language skills but also learn to see language as a dynamic tool that adapts to situations and speakers' needs.

In addition to errors, students focus on stylistic peculiarities and specific expressions that Martinů used in his letters. They observe how the composer expresses his thoughts, emotions, and reactions to different situations. Martinů often used simple and direct sentence constructions that were adapted to his ability in French, but at the same time, he enriched his language with specific expressions that he adopted from his French environment. This process of analyzing authentic texts allows students not only to improve their understanding of French but also to better understand the personality of Bohuslav Martinů and his relationships with the people with whom he communicated.

Comparison of letters from different periods

In addition to analyzing individual letters, students also compare letters written at different times in the composer's life. This approach allows them to trace the development of the composer's language and to explore how the changes in his life were reflected in his written expression. For example, letters written while in France often differ from those Martinů wrote after emigrating to the United States. In these letters, not only does the composer's vocabulary and stylistic devices change, but also his tone and the way he expresses his emotions. Students can observe how Martinů adapted to his new surroundings and how his language adapted to new situations.

By comparing letters from different periods, students can realize how important the environment is to the development of language and how language skills change depending on cultural and social context. This process of analysis allows them to better understand not only the language but also the dynamics of the relationship between Bohuslav and Charlotte Martin and how historical and personal changes affected their communication.

Discussion of language nuances

The linguistic analysis of the letters includes a discussion of how Bohuslav Martinů expressed his emotions and thoughts in French. Students consider how the composer used language to express his feelings and attitudes. They discuss, for example, how his nostalgia for home, concern for his family, and longing to return to Czechoslovakia are expressed in his letters. They also analyze how the composer's tone and language change in the letters depending on to whom he addressed the letter – whether he was writing to family, friends, or his wife Charlotte.

This discussion allows students to better understand not only the relationship between Martinů and his wife but also the broader cultural and historical context in which the letters were written. Students learn to see language as a means of expressing personal emotions as well as a tool through which the composer reflected his feelings and opinions about contemporary events. In this way, they develop the ability to analyze texts in terms of linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts.

The linguistic analysis of Bohuslav Martinů's letters is therefore not only about identifying grammatical errors or specific expressions but also about understanding how the composer perceived and reflected on the world around him. This approach allows students not only to improve their language skills but also to gain deeper insight into the composer's personality, his relationships, and the cultural environment in which he lived.

Conclusion

The correspondence of Bohuslav Martinů and his wife Charlotte is not only a valuable source for understanding their personal lives and the composer's work, but also a powerful tool for developing interdisciplinary skills in students. The letters give us a comprehensive picture of the composer's personality, his relationship with his wife, friends, and colleagues, and his perception of the times and the world in which he lived.

Connecting music, history, literature, and language allows students to think in broader contexts, discover new perspectives, and deepen their knowledge. By examining personal correspondence, students can better understand the impact of historical events on the composer's life and work and learn to analyze not only the texts themselves but also the context in which they were written. This interdisciplinary work contributes to their ability to think critically, develop empathetic skills, and better understand works of art.

One of the main benefits of working with Bohuslav Martinů's correspondence is the opportunity to link different disciplines and develop students' skills across subjects. Students learn not only to analyze historical sources, work with authentic texts, and interpret musical works but also to relate this knowledge to a wider historical and cultural context. In this way, they learn to understand how different events, personal experiences, and cultural influences affect artistic production and how art can be interpreted as an expression of human experience.

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