Developing Foundations of Instrumental Music and Collaboration

Through the Orff-Schulwerk Approach to Music Education

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Abstract

The Orff-Schulwerk approach to music education focuses on teaching children music through movement, repetition, and learning to play instruments. Educators who utilize the Orff-Schulwerk approach often teach students through child-sized instruments, including recorders and percussion instruments. A strong foundation of instrumental music, achieved through the usage of the Orff-Schulwerk approach in elementary music classrooms, can accelerate the learning of students as they pursue more advanced instruments and skills in band or orchestra classes during their secondary education. The accompanying composition, *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare*, was composed to facilitate collaboration between an elementary Orff ensemble and a secondary concert band to bridge the two age and skill levels of ensembles.
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Through the Orff-Schulwerk Approach to Music Education

Introduction

The Orff-Schulwerk [Orff School Work] approach to music education focuses on teaching musical concepts through movement, singing, and playing instruments. This approach, created by Carl Orff and further developed by Gunild Keetman, is used in many elementary schools to teach music. Orff-Schulwerk teaches music “elementally,” meaning in a way that is natural for children, similar to the way that they naturally learn how to perform other life functions such as speaking and walking; students learn through experience and by being able to explore the music.¹ Orff-Schulwerk can be used in elementary, middle, and high schools to teach and promote principles and foundations of music to students in a way that helps the students to retain the information and to learn it successfully. The Orff-Schulwerk approach to music education can help develop a strong foundation of instrumental experience in elementary school that promotes success in instrumental ensembles as the students develop as musicians.

The Orff-Schulwerk Approach to Music Education

History of the Orff-Schulwerk Approach to Music Education

Carl Orff was born in Munich, Germany on July 10, 1895. He was born into a military family that was also musical; both of his parents played the piano, and his mother is believed to be responsible for teaching Orff the foundations of music, harmony,

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and piano technique. Orff’s early musical experiences also included serving as a conductor at several Munich opera houses while studying composition. His early compositions appear to be influenced by the compositional styles of Claude Debussy, Richard Strauss, and Arnold Schoenberg. His most well-known work is the combined orchestral and choral piece set to medieval poetry, Carmina Burana; it was well-received by the audience at its 1937 premiere in Frankfurt, but did not receive positive reviews from the Nazi press. Orff was the only German composer of the Nazi era whose reputation became known internationally.

Orff, along with Dorothee Günther, a physical education instructor who studied the work of Rudolf von Laban and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, founded the Güntherschule in 1924. The school, which accepted female students from the ages of eighteen to twenty-two, was based on principles of movement. Co-creator of the Orff-Schulwerk approach, Gunild Keetman, a skilled musician and dancer, was one of Orff’s students at the Güntherschule. The Güntherschule offered classes that mixed music and movement and

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6 Ibid., 879-880.


8 Ibid., 15.

9 Ibid., 67.
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promoted the principles of music that Orff endorsed. His vision was to emulate the Grecian idea of “Mousike,” which combined language, music, and dance into one art form.\textsuperscript{10}

Orff and Keetman believed that “music education should, above all, develop students’ musical imaginations and creativity.”\textsuperscript{11} Orff’s approach to music education is one that teaches children in a way that is natural for them, similar to the way that children naturally learn how to speak.\textsuperscript{12} One of his principal tenets was that “all learning is the result of doing.”\textsuperscript{13} The ultimate goal of the Orff-Schulwerk is, “development of individuals who are comfortable with active music making— they can sing, move, play instruments, use speech in rhythmic and dramatic contexts, improvise simply in all of these areas and combine materials into original forms.”\textsuperscript{14} His approach begins with the drum as the pulse of all music, releasing the innate sense of rhythm that is found in humans; starting with rhythm only allows for the development of a simple foundation of music without adding complexities of pitch and intonation.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Orff17} Orff, 17.
\end{thebibliography}
typically used for elementary-aged children, it can also be used for younger children as well, including toddlers and preschoolers.\textsuperscript{16}

The principles found in the Orff-Schulwerk approach are extremely adaptable and can be as simple or as complex as each individual music educator deems appropriate. In its simplest form, Orff-Schulwerk focuses on using the human body as an instrument. Music educators can teach students to use their voices, along with clapping, snapping, jumping, and stomping as means of creating music. Conversely, the Orff-Schulwerk approach can be a complex musical process depending on the resources that a music educator has available. Some music programs are well-equipped to provide a thorough Orff-Schulwerk music education due to availability of resources, such as collection of Orff instruments, sheet music, funding for music educators to become Orff-certified, specifically-devoted class time, and time for after-school Orff ensemble rehearsals.

\textbf{Orff Instruments}

Standard-sized musical instruments are designed to be played by adults and many require adult-sized hands or adult heights to be played properly. Due to children having smaller hands and stature than adults, Orff designed a series of instruments that are child-sized. These instruments are smaller-scale versions of larger percussion instruments, and enable children to be able to grasp the instruments properly while learning proper playing

techniques. By playing these Orff instruments, students are able to refine their listening skills and fine motor skills that can translate to future instrumental playing.17

Orff instruments are portable, allowing for educators to easily reconfigure the seating of children and instruments within the classroom. These instruments are also much smaller in size than typical idiophone mallet instruments such as full-sized glockenspiels, xylophones, and marimbas. Orff instruments are also able to be placed on the floor or on a table, allowing for more flexibility in seating arrangements in the classroom. The smaller size allows for easy storage of these instruments in cabinets or on shelves while not in use, particularly since they are not large instruments on frames and wheels like their full-sized instrumental counterparts.

Orff mallet instruments are designed to be flexible for varying musical needs; certain pitch bars on the instruments can be removed when necessary when a limited range of pitches is needed for the specific song or piece of music. An example of when removing pitch bars would be necessary would be if the class were rehearsing a piece that consisted only of notes in the C pentatonic scale (C, D, E, G, A, and high C), the pitch bars for F and B could be temporarily removed since they are not at all present in the given piece. Students can be taught proper care and handling when taking a bar off of an Orff mallet instrument so as not to damage the instrument. Learning proper instrument care in elementary school is an important foundation for proper instrument care in middle school band or orchestra.

While Orff mallet instruments are the most well-known instruments that are used in Orff-Schulwerk, other percussion instruments and recorders are also used as Orff instruments. There is no standardized orchestration for Orff pieces that are played in Orff classrooms and Orff ensembles; educators can create their own arrangements based on the supplies and funding available for their own classrooms and music programs. Students may also create their own instruments from household or inexpensive items, such as fashioning their own rhythm sticks from dowel rods that can be purchased at any hardware store. Orff instruments can be used and shared by all the students in a given school, since the instruments are not assigned to one student only, such as in the cases of school laptops or textbooks. Educators with even the most limited resources can use Orff-Schulwerk in an effective and meaningful way to provide an excellent music education for their students.  

Levels of Certification and the American Orff-Schulwerk Association (AOSA)

Music educators can obtain levels of certification in teaching Orff-Schulwerk through the American Orff-Schulwerk Association. Founded in 1968 in Muncie, Indiana, the AOSA publishes a quarterly journal, The Orff Echo, and hosts yearly professional development conferences for music educators. The AOSA states that its threefold mission is “to demonstrate the value of Orff Schulwerk and promote its widespread use, to support the professional development of our members, and

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to inspire and advocate for the creative potential of all learners.” Trainees attend sessions and are able to become certified in Orff-Schulwerk instruction at three different levels. The first level of certification is available to those who are not yet full-time teachers, such as senior undergraduate music education majors who are in their student teaching semester. All three levels are recommended to be completed within a three-to-seven year period for the sake of continuity; educators can enroll in Master’s level classes after they have completed the third level of Orff certification.

### Music for Children

The work of Orff and Keetman can be found in five-volume set of musical instruction books titled *Music for Children*. Published in the 1950s, each volume focuses on different musical aspects in increasing musical complexity. The first volume focuses on pentatonic (five-note scale) melodies, the second volume focuses on major tonalities with drone bass and triads, the third volume focuses on major tonalities with dominant and subdominant triads, the fourth volume focuses on minor tonalities with drone bass and triads, and the fifth volume focuses on minor tonalities with dominant and subdominant triads. The first exercises in the first volume begin with melodies that feature only the pitches *sol* and *mi* and accompanying lyrics with nursery rhyme subject

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21 Goodkin, *Play, Sing, and Dance: An Introduction to Orff-Schulwerk*, 1.


23 Ibid., 2-3.
The exercises in *Music for Children* increase in complexity from the beginning to end of each volume; included are parts for Orff instruments along with vocal parts.

**Orff Implementation in Elementary Schools**

Orff-Schulwerk is used by many music educators around the world. Founded upon principles of speech, movement, song, instruments, imitation, exploration, and improvisation, Orff-Schulwerk allows students to learn music in a variety of ways. Orff-Schulwerk differs from other traditional music education methods in that Orff did not create a detailed “method” for educators to follow; Orff created an approach that is adaptable for any music educator in any school. Orff intended for music, dance, and improvisation to be fully integrated with one another to create a holistic style of music education for the students; however, many music educators believe that the principles of improvisation are no longer integrated in many classrooms in the way that Orff intended. Orff’s original intention of including improvisation in the Orff classroom allows children to explore the instruments and the sounds that they are creating.

Imitation is the predecessor of improvisation; teachers are able to play short melodies on an instrument or sing them and the students can repeat them back, learning to critically listen. The ability of the students to improvise will depend on their previous

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26 Browning, 106.

27 Ibid.
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musical experiences and age, along with physical and cognitive development. Improvisation can begin as simply as the teacher clapping a four-beat rhythm and the students clapping that same rhythm back; students can also create “body percussion” exercises themselves that their classmates will then repeat. Body percussion exercises involve the students using their own bodies as percussion instruments to reinforce principles of rhythm, imitation, and improvisation. One student stands in front of the class and creates a rhythm involving snaps, claps, stomps, jumps, and pats that is then repeated back by the rest of the class; students can also expand the aforementioned motions by creating their own unique motions or sounds that can be imitated by the class. Body percussion allows students to “compose” in front of their peers while learning proper rhythmic pacing as well.

**Orff Implementation in Middle and High Schools**

Orff can be used in band or orchestra rehearsals to help students further develop their skills of “understanding advanced rhythm patterns, exploring beat and meter, enlarging melodic and harmonic vocabulary, and improvising.” Principles as simple as reading rhythms can sometimes be neglected in upper level instrumental classes; students may fumble through reading rhythms, or wait until they hear the rhythm before being

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able to perform it. Orff rhythmic principles can be part of the ensemble’s daily warm-up; the director can give the group a rhythm, and the entire ensemble can play the rhythm on one pitch or clap it to practice rhythmic accuracy. Continuing to use Orff-Schulwerk can be beneficial in instrumental ensembles of all levels.

Composition is another facet of Orff-Schulwerk that is beneficial for middle and high school students. Students can be given parameters in which to compose a piece of music, allowing them to be creative without being overwhelmed by the sheer amount, duration, or instrumentation of parts that are involved in many compositions. In order to compose, students may use music notation software such as Finale® along with a MIDI keyboard controller to input pitches. Composing digitally allows students to revise their work with greater ease than a handwritten composition, and allows them to instantly hear their compositions.

**Developing Instrumental Proficiency**

**The Orff Ensemble**

Orff ensembles are instrumental ensembles, usually for elementary students, that focus on playing Orff instruments and learning the principles of Orff-Schulwerk. Some may be offered as an after-school extracurricular option, while others are available during the school day. Music educators organize these groups and create, or purchase, arrangements specifically for an Orff ensemble. Orff ensembles are more appropriate for students in upper elementary school, as their fine motor skills and abilities to properly play an instrument have increased to a further developed level. Examples of Orff

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31 Feldman and Contzius, 60.
ensembles of varying sizes and instrumentation can be found on YouTube, such as the Jenkins Orff Ensemble at Jenkins Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas; the students in this Orff ensemble were selected to perform at the Texas Music Educators Association conference.32

Students in Orff ensembles can play warm-ups just as more advanced instrumental and choral ensembles do; this allows the students to focus on their technique without as much concern about playing incorrect pitches.33 Playing warm-ups in the Orff ensemble also accustoms students to warming up each time they play an their instruments, an important principle for success in later instrumental endeavors. Upper elementary school may be the time in the students’ development that they begin to feel less comfortable singing in front of their peers due to changing voices and increased levels of self-awareness. The Orff ensemble may allow students to feel more comfortable performing music on an instrument than they would feel singing.34

**Benefits of Playing Instruments at an Early Age**

Unless students have had the opportunity to take private lessons on an instrument outside of school, many students may have their first encounters with playing instruments in band or orchestra, usually around 4th, 5th, or 6th grade. Each instrument requires specific instruction in assembly, how to hold the instrument, the fingering or slide

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positions for each pitch, how to produce sound, how to adjust intonation, and how to properly disassemble and clean the instrument at the completion of practicing or playing. An elementary music education experience rooted in Orff allows students to have the opportunity to learn how to play an instrument while learning the tenets of proper playing technique and care of instruments.

Children often do not have the opportunity to play instruments when they are younger due to the expensive and fragile nature of many instruments. Orff instruments are sturdy and will not be easily destroyed by the students; these instruments give the students a chance to play instruments, better preparing them for a future experience with playing an instrument in band or orchestra during later years of schooling. Learning how to properly care and gently care for sturdy instruments can help students to learn how to properly care for more fragile band and orchestra instruments in the future.

The Composition Process: Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare

The composition, Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare, is intended to be a collaborative effort between an elementary Orff ensemble and a middle or high school concert band. The piece is written in the key of C, the key in which most Orff mallet instruments are pitched. It is scored for soprano, alto, and bass Orff mallet instruments, along with Flute 1-2, Oboe, Bassoon, Clarinet in Bb 1-2, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone 1-2, Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone, Trumpet in Bb 1-2, Horn in F 1-2,

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35The term “concert band” refers to the ensemble accompanying the Orff instruments. At some schools, groups with this instrumentation go by different names, such as “Wind Symphony” or “Symphonic Band.” For the sake of clarity, “concert band” is used in this thesis to describe the ensemble accompanying the Orff Ensemble, even though the ensemble actually performing the piece may have a slightly different title.
Trombone 1-2, Euphonium, Tuba, Bass Drum, and Percussion 1-3. There are fewer split parts for the same instrument than some concert band pieces, allowing wider accessibility for bands that may not have enough players to cover many split parts per instrument.

The piece begins with all Orff mallet instruments, which are divided into three categories based upon pitch: soprano, alto, and bass Orff instruments. The first eight measure phrase of the piece features the Orff instruments alone. The soprano Orff instruments play a simple melodic line, which is harmonized in the same rhythm by the alto Orff instruments. The bass Orff instruments serve as the chordal foundation of the melody, playing half notes to reiterate the tonality of the opening section.

The second eight measure phrase of the piece includes the first entrance of the concert band. The Orff instruments repeat the melody that is present in measures 1-8, while the wind ensemble plays melodic lines that weave around the melody that is present in the Orff instruments. The rhythmic complexity of the soprano and alto Orff instruments increases, as the rhythm begins to include a higher frequency of eighth notes than the rhythms in the first eight measures of the piece.

In measures 17-24, the woodwind section is featured, along with the Orff instruments, whose parts feature the minor melodic line. In measures 25-32, the same eight measures are featured in the Orff instruments, with the brass section of the concert band as the featured instruments. The brass melody features more syncopated rhythms with wide intervals, which contrasts the sweeping, stepwise motion that is found in the preceding woodwind parts. At measure 33, the woodwind and brass sections combine once again to embellish a new eight-measure melodic line that is present in the Orff
instruments. This section features bold and regal melody lines in the trumpets. The two phrases in combination from measures 33-36 and 37-42 deviate slightly from the form that has been present thus far in the piece due to the two phrases being ten measures total as opposed to eight. All wind instruments diminuendo into the improvisatory section.

Orff was a proponent of improvisation to allow children to explore the music and the instruments. At measure 43 in *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare*, a new section allows the students playing the Orff instruments to improvise; this section can be repeated as many times as necessary. One player per part in the concert band sustains a C chord at a piano volume, allowing for one Orff student to play an improvised solo. For the best sound projection, the students should play solos on metal Orff mallet instruments, such as metallophones or glockenspiels. The wind players can stagger breathe as necessary due to holding notes out for prolonged amounts of time. Also present is a snare and bass drum ostinato, along with low brass instruments and the bass Orff instruments playing a steady tonic and dominant pulse to keep constant rhythms while the Orff students perform their improvisatory solos. This section can be divided into four measures for younger students to improvise, or remain as eight measures for older, more experienced students who are more comfortable with improvisation.

Due to the construction and tuning of Orff instruments, which contain the pitches found in a C major scale, and the tonality of the piece, whatever the student plays during an improvised solo will not sound “wrong.” This allows the students to be creative without the fear that they will make a mistake in front of their peers or an audience. This improvisational section is optional, and for the students who choose to do so, they will
receive valuable experience performing an improvised solo with a supporting ensemble. Solo improvisational experience as an elementary student helps acclimate students to the eustress that most musicians experience to some degree during a performance and to learn how to overcome it.

At measure 51, the improvisational section ceases and the entire band re-enters with moving melodic lines. The harmonic structure is slightly varied from previous harmonic materials with the inclusion of a minor three chord, a chord not previously present in this piece. The main melodic line is present in the Alto Saxophone 1-2 and Horn 1-2 parts, then transferred to Flute 1-2, Oboe, and Bb Clarinet 1-2 at measure 59. The other wind instruments play supporting and embellishing harmonic roles below the instruments who have the main melody.

Measure 67 is the sound climax of *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare*. During this section, the wind instruments have staggered entrances to produce a building effect into a D diminished chord that resolves to a C major chord. This staggered chord appears once again in measure 74, followed again by a resolution to a C major chord. The C major chord is sustained for seven beats before a cut-off, the final notes of the piece for all the traditional concert band instruments. The original eight-measure melodic line that occurred in the first eight measures of the piece returns at measure 77, once again featuring only the soprano, alto, and bass Orff instruments. There is a gradual ritardando in the final two measures of the piece, resolving to a final C major chord that is allowed to ring and resonate.
Benefits of *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare*

*Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare* is intended to facilitate a collaborative effort between elementary students who have had instruction in playing Orff mallet instruments and students in a middle or high school-level concert band. The primary purpose of *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare* is to give elementary Orff students the opportunity to see the instrumental possibilities if they were to continue playing an instrument in middle or high school band in the future and to give them a chance to perform with an older, more advanced ensemble.

The collaborative aspect of *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare* gives elementary and secondary music educators the chance to combine their ensembles in a new and exciting way for the students. The piece is also a collaborative effort between elementary and high school (or other upper-level ensemble) players. By playing in an ensemble setting with older and more experienced musicians, the elementary students are able to seek guidance from the older students and observe principles of proper playing technique and rehearsal etiquette. Due to the soloistic nature of the Orff parts, older students could also play Orff parts alongside the younger students on Orff instruments or full-sized mallet instruments to help increase confidence and to decrease performance anxiety.

Elementary students are able to see the musical possibilities and opportunities that could be in their futures if they are to continue in a music program into middle school and high school. Some elementary students may not be aware of the available musical opportunities in middle or high school, but collaborating on a piece such as *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare* gives the student insight into at least one available ensemble, the
concert band. Being a part of an upper-level ensemble in both rehearsal and performance allows the younger students to have an experience typical of what they could experience in the future.

**Conclusion**

Orff-Schulwerk is effective in developing rhythmic proficiency, instrumental proficiency, compositional skills, and improvisational abilities in students. The principles of the Orff-Schulwerk are flexible and adaptable for music educators in any school, regardless of size or allocated budget. The principles of Orff-Schulwerk can be applied beyond elementary school with principles of rhythm, movement, composition, and improvisation being beneficial skills for middle and high school students as well. Orff’s principles help students to develop a life-long love of music and learning. Collaboration between elementary and secondary instrumental ensembles strengthens both groups, promotes cooperation within the school district, and helps students become aware of instrumental opportunities that exist.
WORKS CITED


Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare
for Orff Mallet Instruments and Concert Band

Felicity Jenkins
Instrumentation

CONCERT BAND
Flute 1
Flute 2
Oboe
Bassoon
Clarinet in Bb 1
Clarinet in Bb 2
Bb Bass Clarinet
Eb Alto Saxophone 1
Eb Alto Saxophone 2
Bb Tenor Saxophone
Eb Baritone Saxophone
Trumpet in Bb 1
Trumpet in Bb 2
Horn in F 1
Horn in F 2
Trombone 1
Trombone 2
Euphonium
Tuba
Snare Drum
Bass Drum
Auxiliary Percussion

ORFF ENSEMBLE
Soprano Orff Mallet Instrument
Alto Orff Mallet Instrument
Bass Orff Mallet Instrument
Program Note

I composed *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare* as part of my Senior Honor Thesis during my undergraduate Instrumental Music Education coursework. I have loved the principles of the Orff-Schulwerk since learning about them in my music education classes, and knew that I wanted to incorporate Orff when it was time to write my Senior Honors Thesis. The idea was then born for *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare*, a piece for Orff mallet instruments and concert band; it is intended to be performed by an elementary Orff ensemble and a middle or high school concert band to promote collaboration between the two types of instrumental ensembles.

The piece begins with the Orff instruments, playing a simple eight-measure melody. The Orff instruments then repeat this melody, but this time accompanied by the concert band. After this section, the Orff instruments begin playing a new eight-measure melody line, accompanied first by the woodwinds and later by the brass section; the entire band then joins together for a bold and majestic section. One of the key components of Orff’s approach to music education was allowing the students to improvise; *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare* features a section where the concert band sustains a C chord, and the students playing the Orff instruments have a chance to perform an eight-measure improvisatory solo. The remainder of the piece alludes to the “fanfare” aspect of the title, with sweeping woodwind accompaniments and bold brass melody lines. The eight-measure melody featured in the beginning of the piece in the Orff instruments appears once more to bring this piece to gentle close.

Younger students have the chance to perform with an older, more advanced instrumental ensemble through playing *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare*. This gives younger students a glimpse into the rehearsal process of a secondary ensemble, giving them a chance to see the possibilities available to them if they continue playing in instrumental ensembles in the future. *Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare* also gives the music educators who direct both ensembles the chance to collaborate in a new and exciting way.

Composer Biography

Felicity Jenkins hails from southern Ohio, and will receive her Bachelor of Music in Instrumental Music Education from Liberty University in 2020. She has taught high school band camps in Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia, and is passionate about teaching marching band in particular. Jenkins plays saxophone and piano primarily, but looks forward to developing her skill in other instruments as she looks toward her future as a music educator. She served as a field commander of the Liberty University Spirit of the Mountain Marching Band and saxophone section leader of both the Liberty University Wind Symphony and University Band during her college career. She is excited to graduate and become a music educator, and gives the glory to God for His guidance and calling on her life to pursue the wonderful profession of music education.
Of Radiant Felicitous Fanfare
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