



## Teaching Music Taking into Account Pupils' Age Characteristics

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### Abstract

The total cycle of education in music performance class, as well as difficulties associated with age characteristics peculiar to pupils faced by educators are analysed in this article. An important task of musical educators is concern for developing in pupils skills and needs in organizing and improving their learning style, which is encouraged by studying characteristics of psychological development of children, based on principles of its periodization, as well as on the succession of types of leading activities. In music performance class, optimum psychological and pedagogical conditions are created, necessary for developing intellectual, moral, social, and personal qualities in primary schoolchildren. In music performance class, pupils' leading activity is personal communication within learning and creative process, as well as within participating in socially significant activity. All these serve as a ground for new psychological formations, peculiar to pupils of this age. Defining work on developing and improving professional and personal potential of each pupil as a main task in work with multiple-aged music collectives, educators take the following age characteristics into account: development of the nervous system and mentality; the degree of sensibility and personal development in music classes; development of the skeletal and muscular system on the whole, as well as the muscular apparatus of the player. Democratic principle of communication observed by teachers in relationships with teenage pupils results in positive influence on developing moral and social qualities in pupils.

The total cycle of pre-professional education is conventionally classified into two stages: primary school age (1st-4th grade) and teenage (5th-9th grades). The authors of this paper determine regularities of shaping conscience and worldview peculiar to each age group separately.

A principal direction of music educator's work is to study in depth special features of pre-professional music education, taking into account how to teach pupils of different personalities, abilities, stages of training, and age peculiarities. The authors analyse research papers by Vygotsky and Leontiev on age peculiarities of psychological development, the theory of sequence of leading activities suggested by Elkonin, as well as other psychologists' opinions on the issue raised in this article [1]. For instance, Petrovsky supposes that at each particular child's age the psychological development of the child (and child's personality) is not determined by one concrete leading activity, whereas in terms of forming personality each age period is characterized by "activity-mediated type of interactions which are formed between the child and the most important referent group/or person"[2]. Davydov VV commenting on the above-mentioned issue in his research "Theory of Developmental Education", specifies that "these statements do not object the relevance of the existence of leading factor in child development[3]. According to the theory of system development, any complex object is developed under the influence of a range of interrelated factors among which there is one constituent factor (it can also be named leading, dominating, main factor)" [3]. The prominent psychologist Uznadze shares this point of view. Based on this opinion we define the main factor in developing each subject of instrumental performance class as pupil's interrelations and interaction with peers and educators in the process of studying music.

**Keywords:** Educational and up-bringing process; Music performance class; Professional and personal potential; Shaping conscience and worldview; Music educator; Pre-professional education; Classification of human life stages; Age characteristics; Multiple-aged class; Referent group

### Introduction

Educational process in classes with instrumental tuition in children's music schools and children's schools of arts is associated with complex and multifaceted dialectical process of developing pupils' professional and personal capabilities.

### Methodology

From the very beginning of development of pedagogical science, the latter has been concerned with the problem of classification of human life stages. There is a range of periodizations of human development, and their number is constantly increasing. Undoubtedly, physical, biological, and psychological aspects of child's development are important components of pedagogical periodization, covering life and development of the schoolchild; meanwhile, conditions in which the child is educated are not less important factor than above-mentioned components. Comenius formulated and

substantiated the principle of “education according to nature” under which education must be organized in harmony with stages of development. He supposed that education had to be consistent and timely, considering this the only condition for inculcating moral values in the person and securing complete assimilation of truths, which the person is able to understand. Consideration for age characteristics is still a main pedagogical principle, conditioning the choice of forms and methods of educational work, as well as assisting to determine learning load, to select and arrange school subjects properly, to plan a daily routine, regimen of work and rest.

The first stage of learning - primary school age (6-10 years). According to Amonashvili, for successful advance of children in their cognitive activity, 6 year olds must be “sat at desks to create the most favourable conditions for timely development of their inclinations” which start emerging in this age [4]. “Primary school age is a very important period of school childhood, which determines development of intellect and personality, desire to learn and learning capacity, confidence in one’s abilities” [5]. Transition to school age is a serious milestone in children’s life associated with global changes in their activity building new relations with school staff, classmates and carrying out diverse pupils’ duties. Davydov pays attention to the fact that during this period the foundation of theoretical conscience and thinking are formed in children, therefore, child’s learning is becoming the leading activity during this stage, afterwards continuing across all school years [3]. The following Vygotsky’s observations are quite precise: “school age starts with critical or crucial period which was described in literature as 7 year old crisis [1]. It has long been known that during the transition from pre-school to school age the child changes greatly and becomes more difficult to discipline than before. This is a kind of transitional period: the child is not a pre-schooler anymore, but not yet schoolchild yet either”[6]. Primary stage of learning at school is a sensitive period in terms of forming and developing such personal qualities of the child as intellectual, moral and social characteristics, as well as problem solving skills necessary for learning. Psychology postulates the idea that there are two driving forces at the heart of developing primary school children’s cognitive processes: cognition and feeling. Ushinsky drew teachers’ attention to special characteristics of primary school children’s thinking which develops from emotional and image thinking to abstract and logical one: the child thinks in terms of shapes, colours, sounds, sensations, therefore, pedagogical science should rely on these very characteristics of children’s thinking [7]. Consequently, at the first stage the main condition for proper organization of educational process is to apply the principle of developing and maintaining stable motivation for learning, using various methods of optimization of educational process for this purpose. Under conditions of ongoing pre-higher art education this difficult task can be solved through imparting to primary school children life priorities peculiar to the creative individual, among which spiritual values dominate; there is also the need for self-expression in music calling to constant self-improvement. Senior pupils of music performance classes help teachers a lot in this respect, inspiring younger pupils by their enthusiasm

and showing them example of interesting creative life which is an alternative to way of wasting time which is empty and lacks substance. An important factor determining the success of tuition is to maintain special emotional and psychological atmosphere at lessons, which stimulates optimum assimilation of learning material. Averin points to the principal role of emotions like interest and joy which are directly and “most closely associated with cognitive activity of the child. Intellectual success is impossible if the child does not experience these emotions intensively”[8]. Izard regards interest as inherent emotion dominating among others (Izard, 1993). According to Tomkins, development of thinking would be impaired without interest; interest is closely associated with the emotion of joy. Averin supposes that “their interaction is peculiar emotional basis of child’s creative activity. That is why, emotional atmosphere is so important for cognitive activity [8]. Thereupon, we should add that interest is the most widespread form of positive emotions. If there is positive emotion, as a rule, any actions are accompanied by interest. Thus, educational significance of positive emotions in children in learning process has become obvious” [8].

It is known that primary school children do not have abstract thinking and have limited capacity for analysis and making logical conclusions due to age characteristics, therefore, child starts going to school with relatively weak intellect and more developed functions of perception and memory. Vygotsky emphasizes that at the initial stage of teaching one should follow empirical direction of cognition, excite children’s inquisitive curiosity and initiative, develop their sensational and emotional qualities: fantasy, imagination, open-mindedness [1]. We follow this direction working with young musicians – giving theoretical knowledge and training reflective skills, we have an effect on children’s senses, trying to make children have emotional experience by means of bright image associations. Organising complex integrated classes is very useful in this respect; teachers create and apply diverse educational technologies, original forms of tuition, enabling them to immerse children in imaginary space during those classes quickly enough. According to Savinkova’s opinion “actions directed at experiencing, animation, comparison, assimilation, comprehension and analysis of events happening, seen, and heard” play the special role here [9]. Therefore, one must take into consideration that procedural memory is prevalent in primary school children, consequently, it is especially important for better assimilating and memorising musical score to develop abilities to analyse and comprehend learning material in pupils.

## Results

Senior pupils of music performance class can also provide assistance to primary school children in terms of solving the problem of assimilating difficult for understanding theoretical questions by the latter, without which it is impossible to perform music. Assisting teachers in group classes they are more capable of maintaining emotional contact with younger pupils because of less age gap.

First elements of reflection on one's own psychological reality emerge in primary school age, when the child is open to experiencing catharsis. If classes take place in the atmosphere of creative uplifting and have a purpose of creating musical and artistic images (of course, comprehensible to children), necessary knowledge and performance skills will be successfully assimilated and will remain in pupils' conscience. Thus, the degree of pupils' interest directly correlates with dynamics of their professional development and their success in assimilating the material of educational programme.

While working on developing reflex skills, one must take into account characteristics of biological development of a child peculiar to particular age: the skeleton ossifies (this long process starts at the first stage and continues up to the end of school age), muscular system develops intensively including small hands muscles, what results in gradual increase in technical skills and emergence of improved finger technique. According to the famed pianist Marguerite Long "the lower parts of our upper extremities, i.e. their hands and fingers are not just muscular organism, they are fascinating organs of sense, endowed with their own senses, I would say, with almost a gift of creativity. They often obey the mind, but much more frequently than they seem to, they mobilise our mind" [10]. While training primary school children' in technical skills, teachers should stick to moderate regimen of physical exertion considering the weakness of pupils' physiological system; teachers should also control muscle relaxation which is not only necessary condition for successful development of playing technique, but serves for the prevention of professional diseases as well.

At this age, the nervous system of children continues developing, various functions of brain improve, the weight of brain achieves the weight of adult brain. Intensive development of the nervous system leads to changes in balance between excitement and inhibition; despite the fact that the latter gradually becomes stronger, the former still dominates. If the process of conscience development in personality of the primary school child happens in conditions of educational and creative group, the pupil quickly forms such elements of social feelings as collectivism, responsibility, spirit of mutual aid as well as moral qualities and positive character traits. This is facilitated by constant communication with personally and professionally developed senior pupils and music educators having true established authority in classes.

Moral development of primary school children is very special. Kharlamov notes, that "it occurs predominantly under the influence of inspiration to observe established at school and in classes rules of conduct and those imperatives which one may learn from teachers' daily demands and instructions [11]. Assessing their peers' behavior, they mostly notice what one must not do and rush to tell teachers about violations, at the same time, failing to mark their own misconduct" [11]. Children's actions and deeds are mainly of imitative character. Music educators use special methods to train and consolidate forms of standard behavior (keeping silence in class, especially while listening to music, mutual aid, spending rest time in peaceful atmosphere and others).

## Discussion

Children who chose to study music as the main subject should have sensitive and delicate souls, receptive to emotional influence. The powerful means of educating musically gifted children is a valuable object of learning itself: classical music which is represented in the curriculum by masterpieces of famous composers: Haydn, Glazunov, Saint-Saens, Shostakovich, Fauré, Tchaikovsky and others. This music is able to affect pupils' souls deeply, developing and elevating their conscience. As primary school children are unable to perform difficult musical compositions, they can be active listeners in group classes and at concerts where senior pupils perform pieces of music, demonstrating their achievements in front of younger pupils. It is worthwhile that from time to time teachers themselves, following the principle of visualization, should give an example of bright performance of musical composition from educators' repertoire, which always greatly impresses all pupils and especially younger ones.

The second stage of studying is adolescence (10-15 years old). Many educators and psychologists consider learning the leading activity of schoolchildren and, in particular, teenagers. However, Davydov specifies that teenagers should be saturated not only with knowledge, but also with the substance of different kinds of socially significant activities. Learning will be the kind of this activity, having principal importance for optimum psychological development [3].

Elkonin and Dragunova suppose that at this age stage pupils' leading activity is personal communication between pupils within learning, organizational, artistic and working activity. Teenagers feel strong desire to participate in socially significant activity, to become socially important, they learn to build relations with peers based on established rules and norms. According to these scholars, the principal psychological achievement of this period is appearing in teenagers feeling of adulthood as a form of their self-conscience, enabling them to compare themselves to and identify with themselves with adults. Davydov also notes on this issue that teenage communication is impossible to analyse separately from the total set of collective kinds of activities: learning, working, social, organizational, artistic and others, as "exactly these kinds of activities acquire the most significant role in developing communication between teenagers. They pay higher attention to their success and achievements in activities, whose results get some assessment from the society"[3]. Teenagers establish new relations with each other, while participating in collective activity and realising social significance of their own contribution to this activity; the results of such activity are properly estimated by the collective itself. In the process of socially significant activity in musical performance classes, children of this age form creative attitude to collective activities, mutual aid, social activity; they learn estimating business and moral qualities of their comrades, adequately assess their own abilities compared with their peers' ones. Thus, all above-mentioned facts enable us to make a conclusion that teenagers' communication in the process of carrying out socially significant activity, rather than intimate personal communication between them, serves as

the basis for developing new psychological properties, peculiar to this age.

The principal complexity of the second stage of studying is its concurrence with difficult period in children's lives: transition from childhood to adolescence. Transition age is characterised with overall intensification of life activities and changes in the body caused by active growth. The process of developing cardiovascular and nervous systems as well as ossification of the skeleton go on; bones become more solid. Muscular strength increases. Unbalanced growth of internal organs, especially the heart, and retard in growth of blood vessels result in abnormalities of body functioning. Besides, starting sexual maturation disturbs internal balance, brings new feelings. Schoolchildren's behavior during this stage has such properties as abrupt movements, excessive gestures and poor coordination.

During transition age the role of conscience and self-control capabilities increases, however, such typical syndrome as hyper excitability is the evidence that the processes of excitement still dominate over the ones of inhibition. That's why; a lot of educators consider this stage being a period of very difficult crisis. Sometimes teenagers express their feelings too energetically and even affectively; "the disease of growth" causes abrupt changes in their moods, expressing itself in sudden emotional conditions and overreactions, capable of disrupting normal relations with those around them. But, as Bogoslovsky notes, it is necessary to take into consideration that "all emotional states, no matter how subjective they are, are always determined, caused, though the person does not always realise the reason of her state" [12]. One who works with teenagers should take into account accentuations of personality traits: "excessive expressions of certain personal characteristics or their combinations, defining selective vulnerability of an individual to some psychological influences and good or even raised resistance to others" [13]. Psychologists regard them as prerequisites of behavior deviating from moral norms of social life, making teenagers especially difficult objects of child-rearing. The task of music educators is to provide pupils with adequate real help based on knowledge about characteristics of crisis and transition stage of their development; that is why it is unacceptable to apply authoritarian pedagogical methods when teachers work with teenagers. Expression of negative emotions must be smoothed down, closing the way to conflict. Makarenko's reasoning about relations between the collective and the individual, expressing disagreement, misunderstanding or protest are of interest in this respect: "Defending the collective in all points of its contact with person's selfishness, by this means the collective defends each personality and provides the most favourable conditions of development for its every member" [14]. Optimum pedagogical means of solving the problem of disagreement in musical performance class is to keep pupils increasingly occupied. This can be intensive work having creative prospects in the form of concert and touring projects, important recitals, video- and audio-recording, conferences, participation in competitions and festivals; special tasks on mentoring younger students raising senior pupils' degree of responsibility; diverse events involving

collective activity. The head of musical performance class uses well known from Psychology rules of resolution of conflict emerging in the collective: 1) discussing the pupils emerged conflict, a teacher leads them to opinion about the necessity to recognize the existence of problem which they must formulate themselves; 2) all event participants must have a chance to express their points of view about what have happened (the teacher does not share her opinion, but does not tolerate attempts by discussion participants to humiliate other people's human dignity); 3) common search for options of problem solution; 4) justification for found solutions using analogies from experience; 5) formulation of plan of actions agreed upon by all the participants.

A main thing striven for by music educators is to build support and trust in relationships with pupils enabling teachers to insensibly affect pupils' conscience in favourable way. Democratic principle of communication observed by teachers in relationships with teenage pupils, ability to really "captivate" them with creative process; all these lead to positive influence on developing moral and social qualities, as well as cognitive, aesthetic, and communicative personality components in pupils [15]. Passion for music, sense of inseparable bond with teacher and peers, true respect for teacher and expressed natural desire of growing teenagers to mentor younger pupils of multiple-aged class-all help to go through difficult transition age smoothly. Growth problems are solved easier in robust collective in which not only leader's role is strong, but creative and active members' roles are strong either; they drive and direct all in common activity towards the chosen aim. When children are eager to do something they like, being a part of group of friends, when their life goes in accordance with the noble idea of devoting themselves to the service of the art, then all their capabilities, thoughts and motives are focused on desire to achieve the goal- to realise themselves in music in optimal way.

Teenager's perception becomes more stable and organized, but it is still not completely stable. Attention is specifically selective: only issues included in the sphere of personal interests can attract it. Thinking becomes more systematized, ability to think in the abstract appears. The second stage of studying is sensitive period in terms of developing creative thinking, as well as moral and social personality formation, but worldview and moral ideals are not yet completely stable. During this very life period within the process of education teenager must be provided with socialization, which involves assimilating new realities, preparation for financially independent life, forming the basic level of cultural outlook. Critical attitude to reality is peculiar to pupils of this age. Significant transformation of worldview takes place – it gets more independent; earlier imparted by teachers information was unconditionally accepted by pupils in straightforward way and with full trust; now data must be supported by arguments of logical justification. Empirical method of cognition to a considerable degree gives way to rational learning.

Higher degree of personal organization peculiar to this stage of development involves new level of emotional perception and experience, increasing individualism, more sophisticated

range of images and emotions, ability to understand romantic feelings and subtle moods. Educators should develop this sphere for children's performance of music to achieve high creative intensity and to fill with deep inner content. Exactly at middle school age the purpose of integrative classes is to lead the pupil to understanding art as a form of artistic and image understanding of the world, developing one's own creativeness as a method of self-realization in art, and personal perception of art.

Senior adolescence, pubertal and the most important age for the future of personality falls at 8th-9th grades. Podurovsky defines it as an age of self-definition, building character, "gradual and active psychological and physiological evolution towards maturity"[13]. Typical properties of this age are ambivalence, paradoxically of teenagers' psychological life, expressing itself in sudden change of moods and behavioral patterns.

Many pupils at this age are struggling to choose future profession and referent group of people and the very lifestyle, being directed by their life situation. Referent group of people represents necessary condition for personal self-assertion as its common practical activity has a common goal, the latter defines and forms organization and the nature of communication. During this period value-oriented activity, associated with aspiration for autonomy and the right to be oneself, acquires the principal role. Adolescence is final stage of maturation and forming pupils' personalities, when their structures of self-consciences and the level of ambitions are being formed, personal reflection develops, life plans and prospects are being realized.

Buhler calls transition age a "positive phase of psychological puberty", which is characterized by increasing receptivity to positive aspects of the environment [16]. Conscious experiencing of the beauty is the most important joy opening in the face of teenagers. This is exactly the incentive for successful art mastering. At this stage self-concept is enlarging and people acquire the feeling which separates their self-concept from other people's ones through socialization. Educators must take into consideration that feeling of anxiety often emerging at this age directly correlates with dynamics of self-esteem. The higher and more adequate the self-esteem is, the less anxiety and more self-confident the person feels. The sources of aggressive behavior, emerging in some senior teenage pupils and representing their immaturity, are hidden in low level of personal development, which has been persuasively proved in the body of research by Russian psychologists, Averin in particular [8]. In the course of developing self-conscience the level of aggressiveness decreases and the latter becomes more controlled and regulated.

Important components of psychological development of pupils include increasing intelligence and moral development, in the course of which, according to Kohlberg, teenagers evolve from selfish worldview to more flexible position when they rely on their own criteria, what leads to intensification of creative activity [17].

Long process of physical development of the body is peculiar to regarded age stage: growth and skeleton ossification are finishing, muscular system is shaping, physical power and ability to endure large exertion is increasing, blood pressure stabilizes, endocrine glands start working in more balanced way, initial stage of sexual maturation is finishing, simultaneously functional development of brain is going on and overall maturation of the body is continuing.

Worldview is shaping; beliefs and character are becoming stronger in senior teenage pupils. This is the period of self-assertion, search and hopes, time of identity formation and changes in value orientations: if physical force was highly estimated in early adolescence, now professionalism in all its representations is prioritized: intellectual development, erudition, ability to be sensitive to problems, skills involving fast understanding during learning process, resourcefulness and other qualities. Harmoniously developed personalities become teenagers' ideals, therefore, many teenagers consciously seek self-development. This process acquires stability and purposefulness: moral and social qualities form. At this stage, music is an active factor of socialization. Competency in professional issues becomes especially significant for teenagers; its presence in a teenager promotes increase in her sociometric status. During this "sensitive period of moral maturity", as Podlasy defines it, moral notions are becoming more distinct, ethical beliefs are growing stronger, conscious motives of behavior are deepening. But music educators must take into account that developing in children ability of perceiving, as Likhachyov exactly noted, "understanding, feeling human spiritual and moral beauty simultaneously with shaping their own moral and ethical spirituality; this process is complex, specific, uneven, dialectically controversial, depending on age characteristics and concrete social and psychological conditions" [18].

The process of moral education associated with assimilating moral ideas, becomes possible only if a pupil is engaged in multifaceted spiritual activity, defined by Sukhomlinsky in the following way: "creative work, intensive social activity spiritual because of the noble goal it pursues. Spiritual activity is reflection of social relations including labour in people's inner worlds, in their predilections and aspirations, as well as in their desires...Only she becomes a real person in whom noble desires emerge and assert, which stimulate behavior, give rise to passions and acts in which the person again self-asserts, which again generate new desires. This complex process is what we call idea-driven life of a person..." [19].

Teenagers typically demonstrate selective attitude towards disciplines included in the curriculum. Their perception is single-minded, attention is stable, thinking is capable of abstraction, developed critical judgements. Many teenagers seek to form their own opinion about everything, give their estimation of events taking place, stand up for their opinions; educators should not judge immature inferences of young people too strictly, as it will inevitably lead to conflict. High variability of interests is peculiar to value orientations of teenage pupils. As all participants of musical performance class for a long time are connected by common interests and

are all in the situation of studying music seriously, what can develop their creative capacity in best possible way; unsurprisingly, music has become their favourite occupation and a lot of them consciously choose the profession of a musician.

We see purposefulness of working consistently with teenage pupils on developing their intelligence, analytical thinking abilities, broadening professional erudition and mental outlook, developing strong will and artistic characteristics in them, acquiring initial pedagogical skills by them. Familiarity with elements of technique of playing a musical instrument can be very useful during this period, as it can finally become an additional incentive of optimisation of professional development. At the initial stage of training and at the beginning of the second stage pupils' performance activity intensifies: solo performances are augmented by combined music-making: ensemble and chamber orchestra (according to the curriculum, ensemble classes start in second grade, orchestra classes commence in fifth grade). Collective creative work makes each pupil spiritually richer, learning process significantly intensifies. From this perspective the technique of social interaction between educators and pupils based on methods of analysis of musical forms looks interesting [15].

Skills in performing music acquired during the first stage of studying are developed and improved at this stage, achieving higher professional level and polishing up due to more difficult musical material. This is a new step in mastering art of music. The presence of famous musical compositions of various genres in pedagogical repertoire of the second stage of studying makes performers regardless of their age take care of increasing their professional and personal potential; without such activity an attempt to interpret music sophisticated in terms of form and substance can be fruitless, which will result in creative failure of performers.

## Conclusion

Considering all above-mentioned facts, one may conclude that an important task of musical educators is concern for developing in pupils skills and needs in organizing and improving their work, which is encouraged by studying characteristics of psychological development of children, based on principles of its periodization, as well as succession of leading types of activity. At primary school age which is critical and crucial for beginning pupils, it is necessary to develop in them intellectual, moral, social, and personal qualities which is feasible under optimum psychological and pedagogical conditions, created in performance class. Teenage pupils for whom instability of world outlook is peculiar and whose age is sensitive period for developing creative thinking as well as moral and social personality formation; these pupils are provided with early socialization by the children's collective which implies assimilating new realities, preparation for professional activity and independent social life. For 9-year cycle of pre-professional studying music to be completed successfully, it is necessary at all stages to take the following age characteristics into account: working at developing intelligence, as well as images and emotional aspects of

personalities, one should consider the nervous system and mentality; in musical professional development educators should take care of the degree of sensibility and personal development in music classes; working at performance techniques teachers must take into consideration development of the skeletal and muscular system, as well as the muscular apparatus of the player. The peculiarity of the educational and creative collective implies that each school-child who joins it at once becomes a member of the community of like-minded musicians within which interactions between diverse-aged pupils take place; senior pupils' mentoring over younger ones occurs; everybody is being respected as a creative personality; all these factors encourage solution of adaptation problems, issues of growing teenagers and so on. Thus, environment is created which is favourable for developing communication and suggestive skills, as well as teenagers' self-conscience. System of true values is seamlessly formed in pupils in the atmosphere of learning and creative activities of music performance class, due to which motivation to learning music and spiritual self-improvement is being maintained. Having gone through all stages of studying music, alumni are capable of independent interpretation of complex but comprehensible musical compositions, which indicates their full-fledged professional and personal development. We see studying approaches to teaching pupils within the system of pre-higher visual arts education as a promising direction of future scholarly research.

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