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ABSTRACT

This publication focuses on school music programs and music education. The document features information about performance; goals of music education programs; a broader role in the curriculum for music education; the role of contemporary music; and a description of four general music courses designed by teachers. An 18-item bibliography is included. (NL)

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CURRICULUM UPDATE
JUNE 1990

MUSIC EDUCATION: Experts Take New Look at Performance, General Music

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June 1990

Music Education:

Experts Take New Look at Performance, General Music

By John O'Neil

Prize-winning orchestras and choral groups, marching bands a hundred strong or larger—these are arguably the most visible signs of music's prominence in the school program.

Ironically, the success of such groups obscures, and may even contribute to, the field's Achilles' heel: the vast number of secondary students who never participate in any formal music study. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only one student in three ever takes a music course in high school, almost exclusively in performance classes that have been attacked as overemphasizing entertainment at the expense of their educational value. And while general music lessons are standard fare for primary and middle grade students, the limited amount of time devoted to music and the number of students who need to be served by each music specialist at those levels make a comprehensive, sequenced program of music learnings difficult.

"I think the biggest issue in the field is to convince people that music is more than entertainment—it's a legitimate part of the curriculum," says John Mahlmann, executive director of Music Educators National

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various musical styles and their own impressions of them after taking the class, she adds.

Gray's class, one of the subjects of a research project sponsored by the National Arts Education Research Center at New York University, addresses one of the key questions confronted by music educators nationwide: How can music strengthen its role in the general education of all students?

For a variety of reasons, experts on music education assert, the goal of musically literate graduates has been more strongly endorsed than supported in practice. Particularly at the secondary level, they say, programs have failed to adequately balance musical performance with strategies to help students think critically about music of different genres and styles, make sense of music history and theory, or become otherwise musically literate (see box, this page).

"I think we've still attempting to overcome the perception that the arts are either for the entertainment of the general student or for the serious study of talented students," says Richard Bell, national programs director for Young Audiences, Inc. "The great middle ground of kids—who may not be exceptionally talented but are not without ability or interest—aren't being served at all."

Window of Opportunity

While reaching out to more students and strengthening music's position in the core curriculum has been an ongoing struggle for music educators, several factors have converged to raise the stakes.

First, the school reform movement of the 1980s raised academic graduation requirements in many states, putting the squeeze on elective subjects such as music. The new mandates hit especially hard in secondary schools with a six-period day, where college-bound students, in particular, sometimes had to quit music groups for other mandated courses. As a result, music educators more than ever must seek to attract not only the most musically talented students, but also those who may have interest but no pre-

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nel, manager of information for the Music Educators Conference (MENC), says enrollments overall have not risen since the reform era, but attrition do exist, often 10-15% a day is the norm. Availability to music programs is improving, he says; but the talented students meant that music directors had to face "the 1st clarinet, the 1st saxophone and the 1st bassoon and maybe that was the only player you had." Moving to a public school day, says Charles G. Smith, professor of music at the University of Florida and MENC president, can "almost double enrollment in elective courses" such

as music. Another reason, also the offspring of the reforms, is the passage in many states of graduation requirements for the arts. In 1979, only two states required a course in the fine arts for graduation. Twenty-nine states now require a fine arts course, or will do so by 1992, according to a recent report by the National Endowment for the Arts. Some leaders in the music field are disappointed that these new graduation requirements count courses not as the core fine arts (music, theatre, and dance), there is a unanimity that the new requirements provide a golden opportunity to reach out to more

students. An issue framing the school movement's adding of academic requirements—deciding what core subjects or skills within each are most worth teaching—is pushing music educators to rethink their curricula. One result of this push within the field to improve offerings, by more clearly defining course objectives, learner objectives, student assessment, and evaluation methods (see box,

Other disciplines in the field of music does not seem to have a clearly defined, measurable outcome," as Gerald Corbett, chair of the National Association of Music Schools at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Only when

Continued from preceding page

comprehensive math program would you have, and what would you expect students to know by the end of the 6th grade?" asks Hunter March, associate professor of music education at the University of Texas and chair of MENC's Society for General Music.

Especially at the secondary level, music educators also must fight the perception that their programs are designed more to entertain than to educate, a byproduct of the pressure to perform publicly. Though outside forces have doubtless influenced this dilemma, numerous music educators admit that the field must share the blame for



sending the wrong message. An overemphasis on rehearsals and performances, fundraising drives and group trips to Disney World, the expanded number of performance groups and the opening up of musical repertoires beyond those considered traditional or classic, and the failure to attract the general student—all have contributed to a view of secondary music as more an activity than a basic subject.

Hoffer points out that music professionals strongly support the cultural and artistic outcomes of the discipline in making a case for enriching its position in the core curriculum. But those are sometimes being sacrificed to a beefed-up performance schedule filled by a dizzying array of school music groups. "In too many situations, especially at the secondary school level, the perception can be easily gained that the value of music in the schools is

John Froelich

to provide students a community

While a contribution as band, or ensembles educators rehearsing and (in some cases) divert attention

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history, for example, students away from both groups and the music needed to attract general thing that's going to turn us we're trying to reach is [story] course that starts Middle Ages and ends in the '60s," warns March. "to question some of the underlying the 'beyond '60s' movement," says Robert Coordinator of music education at the University. While but music history are of place in band, or choral courses, these do offer a chance to help analyze and critique their own works, thereby enriching their critical listening, he points

out. Another way of expanding the performance group is suggested by a recent high school group's spring concert that Cutietta attended. A different student preceded each selection by explaining to the audience what the group tried to achieve in performing each piece.

"Students in performing groups should learn the historical and theoretical bases of the repertoire they perform," concludes Paul Lehman, senior associate dean of the school of music at the University of Michigan. "All courses in music," including the traditional performance classes and general music offerings for the nonperformers, "need to do that to some extent. But when kids study band, they're doing it to play an instrument."

Continued on next page



Jack Messler

of Contemporary Music Questioned

English has its skirmishes between proponents of the "classics" and those pushing "motivational" literature. Social indicators have collided over the merits of historical study topics.

Some experts say, a similar thing waged over the extent of performance groups and music classes should study and jazz, blues, rock, and other contemporary genres. The popularity of rock has led to an expansion of big bands, swing bands, and vocal groups; and general music classes frequently stress contemporary music in an effort to lure students to the electives.

"I'd like to see good music in all genres," says March, chair of the National General Music of the Music National Conference. "The Beatles, for example, were pushed by academicians during their reign in the 1960s—but they are now beginning to show sophisticated" their March says. "We need to help kids find what's good" about a piece within a genre and to use that knowledge in their tastes.

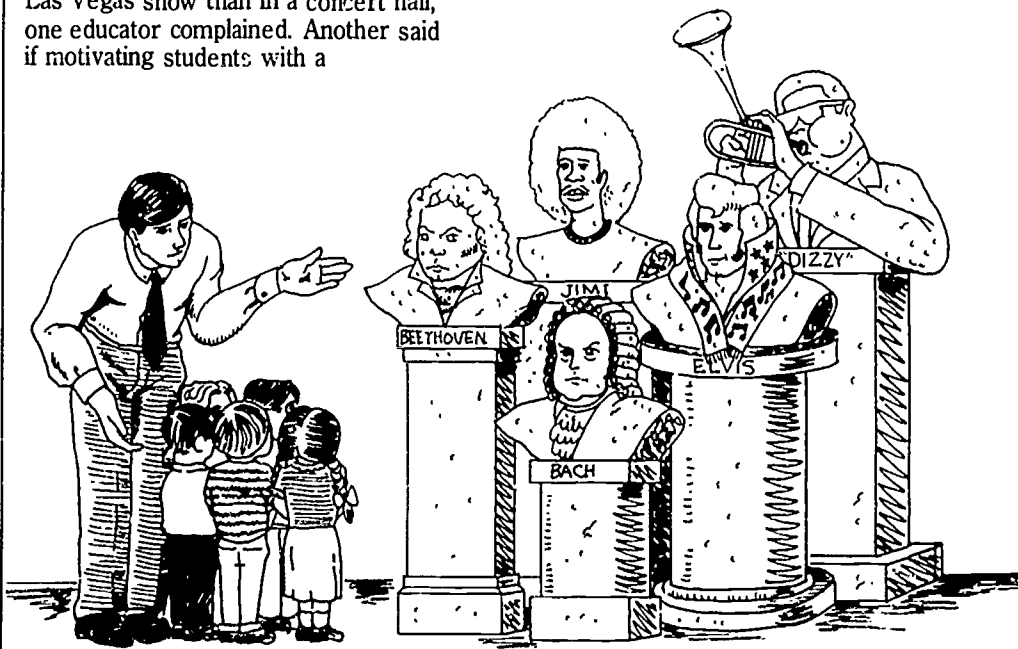
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adds Paul Lehman of the University of Michigan. "Music teachers teach a wide array of music," Lehman admits, however, that while exploring contemporary styles is a valid way to "get kids interested in music, . . . you can quickly run out" of serious lessons from it.

Several educators who asked for anonymity are even more skeptical. Some school performing groups, dressed in slinky outfits and playing the hits, would seem more at home in a Las Vegas show than in a concert hall, one educator complained. Another said if motivating students with a

contemporary songlist was a goal, "I don't think 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon' or 'Feelings' is going to cut it."

"Our students do not need help in learning popular music," chimes Donald Corbett, a music professor at Wichita State University. "I do not mean that music in schools should only consist of masterpieces, but I urge that we go beyond immediately understandable musics, like folk songs, jazz, and show tunes, to explore the masterpieces of our culture as well." ■



Simon Montesa

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Music

ing the role that performance, criticism, history, aesthetics, and topics should play in the music curriculum is equally important outside traditional performance groups. Band, orchestra, and chorus serve the majority of secondary students who take music, numerous educators stress that more needs to be done to provide some comprehensive framework of music education for the general student.

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elect a course to fill the new fine arts requirements, say, largely on the basis of success in the past or out to students who may learn about it but not likely join a performance group. Kids might say, "I like [music], do you like it?" asks Schulmann, executive director. "You can't

compete to everybody." In answer, some music educators focus on initiating or expanding a range of general music courses at the secondary level that capitalize on students' natural interest in music without requiring the time commitment of performance groups. The goal should always be [students] musically educated, whether in a performance group or not," says Burton, an education professor at the University of Hawaii and former president of the island's music education affiliate. He adds that, while 85 percent of secondary students are not enrolled in a music course, more attention is being given to music education today than at any time in the history of music education. The payoff from this interest is a number of unique general music courses aimed at broad student participation (see *Music Education*, p. 7). Marching band, the diverse array of instruments is a way of

Ann Bradford



Courtesy of Music Education

teaching rather than a focus on the history of study. General music educators, says, use a variety of methods to motivate students of diverse interests to build music skills through such activities as performing, analyzing, and composing. Teachers also attempt to help students "realize that basic musical concepts are present in all styles and genres that exist in music of all cultures and historical periods."

One trend having its roots in general classes is the use of applications of such technologies as personal computers, synthesizers, and electronic keyboards to produce music. Forman notes, "general music classes, with its only performance medium, have, at the cost of keyboards, how- ever, increased their popularity through availability."

Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) technology, for example, standardizes the output

General Music Courses Offer Diversity

By Scott Willis

Four selected general music courses highlight very different approaches to providing music learnings for all students.

The Great Works

Students taking Music Perspectives, a course offered in Baltimore County (Md.) high schools, study music from around the world and concert pieces from Bach to Bernstein. All high school students who do not elect chorus, band, or orchestra take the course.

Music Perspectives begins with roughly four weeks devoted to "music of the world's cultures," including music of Africa, India, and the Orient, as well as a variety of folk music. Then follow six units on Western art music, from the Baroque era to the present.

The course emphasizes music history and appreciation. "Every student should have some exposure" to great works of music, says Rebecca Silverstein, who teaches the course at Woodlawn High School. By studying pieces such as Handel's *Messiah* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, students learn about tone color, melody, harmony, rhythm, and polyrhythm. They also learn about the cultural contexts in which the works were created.

To keep students motivated, the course uses participatory activities. "We try to make it as active a course as possible," says James Wharton, who teaches Music Perspectives at Catonsville High School. For example, students act out the first scene of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in a translated, updated version before listening to the same scene in the opera.

The course is "going over very well," says Silverstein. While about half of her students, she estimates, are resistant to the musical selections at first hearing, end-of-course comments indicate that many of these students broaden their tastes.

Contact: Rebecca Silverstein or James Wharton, Baltimore County Public Schools, 6901 N. Charles St., Towson, MD 21204.

Computers and Rock

Students in Music Lab, offered at Shoreham-Wading River High School in Shoreham, N.Y., use computer music systems to create compositions in rock and top-40 music styles. About 12 percent of the school's students take the course.

Students who are interested only in contemporary music get "locked out" of traditional music courses, says Tony Messina, who teaches Music Lab. "I pick up the rockers."

In a dramatic departure from the "conservatory model" of teaching music, Messina's students work with computers, synthesizers, sequencers, and drum machines. They also learn to compose using this equipment—without first learning traditional music theory and composition techniques.

Messina requires his students to keep music journals, in which they write music and describe their reactions to music they hear. He tries to help his students become "more selective" in their musical tastes and stresses tolerance of others' preferences.

Some Music Lab students may parlay their new knowledge of audiotechnology into jobs in radio, television, or film. "I'm pushing [my students] to make serious job and career choices," Messina emphasizes.

While some parents only tolerate his efforts, Messina says, other parents are supportive. The students in Music Lab, he adds, love the course. In fact, many more students wish to take the course than can be accommodated.

Contact: Tony Messina, Shoreham-Wading River High School, P.O. Box 337, Shoreham, NY 11786.

Basic Music Skills

Music in Our Lives "gives students an avocation" by teaching them to play guitar, keyboard, or recorder, says Ann Trombley, who teaches the course at Monticello High School in Monticello, N.Y. Approximately half the school's students take the course.

Music in Our Lives emphasizes playing and composing music, although Trombley gives basic information about the historical and social dimensions of pieces she introduces to the class. The course includes listening, performing, composing, and evaluation activities to give students a wide range of experiences.

Trombley's students may not become proficient enough on their instruments to perform publicly, but they do develop basic music skills they can build on throughout their lives. "I put the emphasis on process," Trombley says.

Besides learning to play, students compose an original blues piece over the course of the year, so they have a "finished product" when the course ends. They also do special projects on topics of their choice and keep journals of their progress.

"Students are very positive" about the course, Trombley says. "They take pride in playing an instrument, and they like to hear their music performed." Many students wish to continue their musical studies, she adds. "They ask me if there's a second class they can take."

Contact: Ann Trombley, Monticello High School, Port Jervis Rd., Monticello, NY 12701.

A Cultural Blend

At Leon High School in Tallahassee, Fla., students who take Selected Musics of the Western Hemisphere study the musics and cultures of the United States, the Caribbean, and South America, and the role of African influences on them. "I'm trying to make music education relevant to all cultural segments of the school population," says Nancy Marsters, who teaches the course.

Through lectures, listening, and hands-on activities, Marsters' students learn how the fusion of three major cultures—African, Native American, and European—has given birth to the varied musical styles of the Americas. "All of it is a mix," she emphasizes.

In the course, students learn to recognize different instruments and styles, and to "listen with their brains," says Marsters. Students also learn about the peoples who made the music. "There is no way to understand the music without understanding the culture and the times" that produced it, Marsters explains. At the end of the course, students do research on music they like and then make presentations to the class.

Selected Musics of the Western Hemisphere capitalizes on the liking most students have for blues and reggae, but also expands their experiences and tastes. For example, many students develop "a great love of the music of the Indian peoples," says Marsters.

Contact: Nancy Marsters, Leon High School, 550 E. Tennessee St., Tallahassee, FL 32308.

Source: *Promising Practices: High School General Music*, Music Educators National Conference, 1902 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091; \$10 prepaid (\$11.20 for MENC members).

Continued from page 6

music students, who may be less motivated or musically talented. "Finding ways to teach the general student, for teachers who've been prepared to do something else, is a real challenge," says Mary Palmer, a music education professor at the University of Central Florida. "For some people, it may not be as satisfying and rewarding."

Despite a growth in interest in secondary general music offerings among educators, only 2 percent of high school students ever enroll in a nonperformance course—and some of these are students also taking performance courses. Some educators

complain that an opportunity to capitalize on new arts requirements is being squandered. "Everybody in music fought for those [fine arts] requirements," says Burton. "But once they were there, the band director said: 'I'm not going to teach that group.'"

An Uphill Battle?

Music educators are going to have to better resolve such issues, most experts agree, to strengthen the field's place in the curriculum. Approaches to teacher training, curriculum development, and the policy arena need to be enhanced; progress in these areas will help determine if music is

seen as a frill or a basic.

But while music may seem to be fighting an uphill battle compared with the support given disciplines viewed as more "practical" (for example, math and science), the ability of the arts to foster the human side of learning will always be in demand.

Lehman quotes John Naisbitt, who points out that every new technology ("high tech") introduced into society must be counterbalanced with a humanizing influence ("high touch"). "As society is increasingly overwhelmed by technology," Lehman asserts, "we feel an even greater need to express ourselves." Music, he says, is an ideal means for expression through participation. ♪

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