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ABSTRACT

This review of the role of music in public education in the United States begins with an account of the early developments of music education, and traces this role and its transformation throughout U.S. history. At first none of the arts constituted a substantial part of the materials of public pupil education. Music did not become part of the public school curriculum until the early 19th century. The initial role of music in public education was to improve singing in church by means of a scientifically reasoned curriculum, and subsequently to encourage this more musically literate public to join the singing and choral societies popular in the 19th century. This role was supported popularly by the belief that the study of music increased brain function and developed man's intellect. Educators maintained that learning the science of music notation demanded an orderly thought process that made music a mental discipline as intellectually sound as mathematics. Although the public school music curriculum nearly always was implemented by a specialist, near the end of the 19th century, this responsibility was being shifted increasingly to the regular grade teacher. This reassignment of teaching responsibility coincided with a movement psychologizing education and a focus provided by John Dewey. By 1950 music education was defined though concern with feelings and experiences and how artistic sensibilities could be developed and refined through musical training. Today a search for relevance defines the role of music in public education. Appendices include the resolutions, notes, and a 15-item annotated bibliography. (DK)

# *From Science to Aesthetics: Tracing the Role of Music in America's Public Schools*



Tim Brophy
MUSE 7403- Survey and Research in Music Education
October 13, 1992

# From Science to Aesthetics:

# Tracing the Role of Music in America's Public Schools

*"Music for every child; every child for music."*

-Karl Gehrkens, President, Music
Supervisor's National Conference, 1923

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# PREFACE

This research report has been completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements set forth by Professor Konnie Saliba of Memphis State University for the course MUSE 7403, Survey and Research in Music Education.

As is the case in all historical writings, this work is rather heavily documented. Each fact presented has been checked among several sources to ensure accuracy; in those instances where information was inconsistent from one source to the next (this was particularly troublesome with regard to dates), the information deemed to be accurate was that which was borne out by the most sources. Every attempt has been made to properly acknowledge each source when appropriate; endnotes are provided for the reader's reference.

It is understood by this writer that the conclusion of this paper is largely personal observation and not historical fact; after all, the discussion of the present state of the role of music in public school is a topic which requires such treatment. It is my wish, though, that the brief historical background which precedes this subjective commentary on current events in music education gives the reader a better understanding of the points made.

The two appendices have been added because their substance is valuable to the reader yet the inclusion of their entirety is not necessary in the text itself. The bibliography has been annotated by personal choice.

Tim Brophy
October 13, 1992

## From Science to Aesthetics:

## Tracing the Role of Music in America's Public Schools

It is a necessary step in any examination of an idea or movement in education to first bring to the reader's mind it's historical genesis; by so doing we are then able to turn our more knowledgeable and clearly focused attention to the present. To know where we are today, so to speak, we must first recall and reflect upon where we have been. Hence, this review of the role of music in American public education begins with an account of it's early developments, and shall, as the title suggests, trace this role and it's transformation throughout American history.

It is safe to say that for the first 150 years in our country's history none of the arts constituted a substantial part of the materials of public pupil education. The Singing-Schools of early America, which provided the primary medium through which the public of this period could obtain musical training, remained a completely private enterprise throughout it's existence.[1] Even the Revolutionary War, and the resultant inception of more liberal trends of thinking, had little to do with influencing public school education.[2] In early American

schools, the basic educational experience of students consisted of the study of reading, writing, and some arithmetic; music did not find a place in the public school curriculum until the early nineteenth century.[3]

To genuinely apprehend the course of events leading to the acceptance of music in the public school curriculum in this country, one must be cognizant of the influence of Johann Heinreich Pestalozzi (1746-1827). He was an innovative Swiss educator who was the first to emphasize direct sense experience as "the true foundation of human instruction".[4] He called for educators to formulate definite principles basic to instruction, and emphasized that the "science" of music should be a course of study in schools. He regarded education as a means to obtain more than what he termed "book knowledge"; he viewed the learning process as a vehicle through which a child's powers and talents could be developed.[6]

William C. Woodbridge, a Massachusetts native, studied Pestalozzian principles of education in Europe in the early 1800's. While in Switzerland, he witnessed the teaching of Johann Georg Naegli, who was applying Pestalozzi's principles to the teaching of music; he brought these ideas back to the United States in 1829.[7] Woodbridge was so impressed by what he had seen in Naegli's teaching that upon his return he began to advocate the teaching of music in America's public schools using the Pestalozzian system. He gave his first speech on this subject on August 24, 1830 at the inaugural meeting of the American

Institute of Instruction; this milestone address was entitled "Vocal Music as a Branch of Common Education".[8]

This address was accompanied by children trained in music under the tutelage of Lowell Mason, a well known Boston church musician who was widely regarded as a prominent teacher of singing.[9] Woodbridge was a devoutly religious man; Mason shared Woodbridge's concerns with respect to the poor quality of singing in the churches of that time. Woodbridge had related to Mason the Pestalozzian system of music education and his observations in Europe; after some initial reservations, Mason had then become convinced that these principles, if implemented in the public schools, would result in better congregational singing skills.[10]

Through his eloquence and determination, Mason was eventually able to convince a politically unstable Boston School Committee on November 14, 1837, to allow him to introduce music into the curriculum of the Hawes School in Boston, on an experimental basis, for the remainder of the 1837-1838 school year. He was so intensely dedicated to his cause and to the success of this experiment that he agreed to work without pay. On August 14, 1838, he presented a demonstration concert which convinced the School Committee that curricular music was a success; on August 28, 1838 the Committee resolved to make music a component of it's regular curriculum.[11] This landmark resolution came to be called the "Magna Charta of Music Education", for it was the first formal declaration of it's kind [see Appendix A].[12]

Music's initial role in public education, then, was to improve singing in church by means of a scientifically reasoned curriculum, and to subsequently encourage this more musically literate public to join the singing and choral societies popular during this era. Building upon the foundation laid in Boston, vocal music began to receive acceptance in public school curricula throughout the country; by 1874, cities and towns in 26 states had adopted music instruction as part of their required general studies.[13] This role was popularly supported by the belief that the study of music increased brain function and developed man's intellect; it was widely maintained that learning the science of music notation demanded an orderly thought process which made music a mental discipline as intellectually sound as mathematics. Horace Mann, the great early advocate of public schools in America, expressed this belief in his 1844 Eighth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Board of Education, when he stated that:

> "Music furnishes the means of intellectual exercises. All the musical tones have mathematical relations."[14]

While the nineteenth century experienced primarily a period of growth and expansion in public school music across the United States, the role of music in the curriculum remained basically unchanged. As public support increased for music education, so did the public's reasons for valuing music in it's schools; the public credited music with developing the health of the

student, aiding in the increase of sound work habits, instilling wholesome ideals of conduct, strengthening good citizenship, and even improving home life.[15]

As the nineteenth century closed, the delivery of public school music teaching was changing. In it's earliest days the music curriculum was nearly always implemented by a specialist; near the end of the century this responsibility was being increasingly shifted to the regular grade teacher. So dramatic was this change and so concerned was the United States Bureau of Education that John Eaton, Commissioner of the Bureau from 1870-1886, conducted a major survey in 1886 to assess this trend. The 343 responses he received revealed that 96 districts divided the task of music instruction between the classroom instructor and a specialist, while only 19 districts had music specialists teaching all of their school music.[16]

This prevalent reassignment of teaching responsibility coincided with the commencement of a movement toward the psychologizing of education. Child development pioneer G. Stanley Hall (founder of the American Journal of Psychology in 1883) became the first to formulate a psychological system based upon ideas to be used in the instruction of children.[17] It was the contributions of John Dewey (1859-1952), though, that most influenced educational practice at this time; it was he who provided this well-defined focus for music education in his 1916 treatise Democracy in Education:

> "They [the arts] reveal a depth and range of meaning in experiences which otherwise might be mediocre and trivial. They supply, that is, the organs of vision. Moreover, in their fullness they represent the concentration and consummation of elements of good which are otherwise scattered and incomplete. They select and focus the elements of enjoyable worth which can make any experience directly enjoyable. They are not luxuries of education but emphatic expressions of that which makes any education worthwhile."[18]

Dewey's practical and philosophical influence on public education originated primarily from the experimental methods developed at his famous laboratory school, the Chicago School of Pragmatic Instrumentalism, which was affiliated with the University of Chicago from 1896-1904. His fundamental and innovative philosophy was grounded on the concept of "child-centered" education; for the first time in the history of public education, children were acknowledged as having a unique existence both separate and different from adults. This approach led to increased curricular flexibility; it became acceptable for the school curriculum to reflect the needs and wishes of the students. In an atmosphere of growing recognition of this flexibility it was no longer necessary to define and defend music's role in public school on purely scientific bases. No longer did one have to suggest that music provided "intellectual exercises" or that "all intervals have mathematical relationships" to justify music's status as a course of study in public school.[19]

It is interesting to note that as a consequence of this philosophical change of direction at the turn of the twentieth century public school music instruction began to increasingly

include instrumental music as well as vocal music. While the earliest record of a high school orchestra being formed is at the High School of Aurora, Illinois in 1878, it was the early 1900's that witnessed the rise and spread of instrumental music in high schools. In 1913 the first instruments were purchased by the school board of Oakland, California; in 1918, Joseph Maddy instituted public school music in Rochester, New York with a gift of instruments from philanthropist and businessman George Eastman.[20] The high school band began to replace the more common town band during this time.[21] With Dewey's progressive educational theory receiving greater nationwide acceptance, vocal music no longer occupied it's singular place as the sole medium for American public school music education; by the 1920's, instrumental ensembles were well established as extra-curricular activities.[22]

This philosophical transition was also encouraged and expanded by the Music Educators National Conference; this professional association for music teachers was founded in 1907 as the Music Supervisors National Conference, and changed names in 1934.[23] In 1919, Osbourne McConathy, then president of the conference, presented this egalitarian statement at their annual meeting in St. Louis, Missouri:

> "Every child should be educated in music according to his natural capacities, at public expense, and his studies should function in the life of the community." [24]

In 1923, Conference president Karl Gehrkens introduced this now famous statement at their meeting in Cleveland, Ohio:

"Music for every child, every child for music."[25]

In these statements one reads a new, emerging role of music in public school- that being one to foster students' enjoyment and appreciation of music. One asks: what was becoming of the scientific reasoning for music's presence in public school that had so dominated it's role in public education up to this point? Naturally, this created a certain amount of philosophical struggle among the music educators of this critical time. The conflict between "child-centered" and "scientific" music education created a potentially divisive dilemma that demanded a solution from the Supervisors. This difficult situation is eloquently explained and resolved by Karl Gehrkens in his 1915 address to the Conference at their meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in which he was asked to give the opinion of the Conference on this crucial matter:

> "The ultimate aim of music teaching in the public schools is to cause children to know, to love and to appreciate music in as many forms as possible, and thus bring added joy to their lives and added culture and refinement to their natures.
> The specific means for accomplishing these aims may vary considerably in various places, but it is the sense of this body of music supervisors that the most direct approach is at present to be found in the expressive singing by the children themselves of a large amount of the best music available, and it is their belief that in this singing the art side and the science side of music need not necessarily be antagonistic, as some have seemed to assume, but may contribute something to the sum total of musical influence

> that we are seeking to exert upon the child. It is our belief, also, however, that when the science side is emphasized, it should always be as a means to an end and never as an end ir itself. In other words, that although skill in sight-singing, keenness in analysis in ear training, and some knowledge of theoretical facts may all be desirable, yet these technical aspects of musical study must never be allowed to interfere with the legitimate working out of those emotional and aesthetic phases of music which constitute the real essence of the art; in other words, that it is the art side of music with it's somewhat intangible influence which we are seeking to cultivate rather than the science side with it's possibilities along the line of mental training and it's more easily classified results." [26]

With this speech we see the Music Supervisors were beginning to chart a new course for music education, away from the purely scientific toward a new role of cultivating aesthetic sensitivity in all public school children.

The 1930's and 1940's witnessed the emergence of popular ideals that manifested themselves in public school music education. As music's role of aesthetic development expanded, the American public hoped that music could bring their children a feeling for ideal values, perhaps constitute itself as an independent and continuing interest, give children a demanding and disciplinary experience, bring students constructive and convincing democratic experiences (one must remember that these were decades of tremendous political and idealogical conflict throughout the world), provide them with a means of recreation that may last through their lives, and possibly lead to the discovery of talent. It was also believed that all schools should bring children at as early an age as possible into contact with

many phases of human life and culture.[27] During these decades of international hostility and world war, music's role of cultural preservation and intergenerational transference became increasingly recognized and important as a responsibility of the public school.

By 1950 the role of music in public education was clearly defined through it's concern with feelings and experiences in music and how these artistic sensibilities could be developed and refined through musical training. It was in this year that MENC adopted it's landmark resolution entitled "The Child's Bill of Rights in Music" [see Appendix B]. This declaration was a milestone in the development of music's role in public school; it expounded on such concerns as the "right" of every child to explore music to his fullest capacities, develop appreciation and knowledge through musical experiences, play instruments, and learn to sing. The sixth and final right firmly established music's newest role in public school, one which had been forming since Dewey's educational experiments at the beginning of the century. It reads:

> "Every child has the right to such training as will sensitize, refine, elevate and enlarge not only his appreciation of music, but also his whole affective nature, to the end that the high part such developed feeling may play in raising the stature of mankind may be revealed to him."[28]

In this proclamation we witness the philosophical dawning of music's role of developing in each student their maximum aesthetic potential. This emerging role was further clarified and substantiated

by the American Association of School Administrators in 1959, when they passed this resolution:

> "We believe in a well balanced curriculum in which music,...and the like are included side by side other important subjects such as mathematics, history, and science. It is important that pupils, as a part of general education, learn to appreciate, to create, and to criticize with discrimination those products of the mind, the voice, the hand, and the body which give dignity to the person and exalt the spirit of man."[29]

The early 1960's marked the beginning of renewed interest in individuality in education. Educators in general were reexamining their roles in public school; this new direction and it's manifestation in education is presented in this statement made by the National Education Association in it's 1961 publication entitled The Central Purpose of Education:

> "The basic American value, respect for the individual, has led to one of the major charges which the American people have placed on their schools: to foster the development of individual capacities which will enable each human being to become the best person he is capable of becoming."[30]

Applying this statement to music education, one can see that public schools were becoming concerned with how music experiences could enhance the development and growth of the individual so that he may in turn contribute to the culture in which he lives.[31]

Almost by necessity, this progression toward aesthetic education stimulated a great deal of philosophical thought;

suddenly, music educators found themselves immersed in considerable reflection with regard to their purpose and role in public school. Musical aesthetics came to be defined as "the study of the relationship of music to the human senses and intellect"; it was also referred to as "that branch of speculative philosophy which attempts a broad theoretical description and explanation of the arts and related types of behavior and experience."[32] Proponents of this approach proposed that public school experiences should be aesthetically oriented because aesthetic stimulation was a necessary fact of life. This viewpoint was further expanded to suggest that children of all cultures needed aesthetic experiences, with the child's culture determining how these aesthetic requirements were satisfied.[33] A new justification of music's role in public education emerged: since children required aesthetic satisfactions for normal development, and aesthetic satisfactions were achieved through the fine arts, then music was necessary in the public school curriculum because of it's unique contributions to the aesthetic experiences of students.

The ideal goal of the aesthetic educator, then, was "to influence the student toward free and independent [musical] functions."[34] One primary aesthetic role of music in education was, for example,

> "...to uncover, stimulate, and train students so that all will be exposed most fully to the products of the greatest creative minds of the past and present, so they will be led toward experiences of their own in creative acts and discoveries."[35]

This type of statement became typical of aesthetic music educators, creating at once a lofty and noble goal but presenting a pedagogical challenge with regard to it's implementation.

It is at this point we arrive at the present day. We have traced music's changing role in America's public schools since the birth of our nation and observed it's transition from a primarily scientific endeavor to an aesthetic necessity; yet, we have also noted that none of these transformations were without some degree of philosophical and educational controversy. It would be pleasant to report that all of these past disagreements have been resolved and that every music educator believes in one particular ideal role for music in the public school. Instead, the past twenty years have brought forth many differing viewpoints with regard to the case for and role of music in the public schools; this divergence has most likely resulted from the emphasis on individuality in musical thinking and experience so firmly set forth in the 1960's conjoined with the many cultural and aesthetic demands placed on music education by our pluralistic society. In other words, there seem to be as many different philosophical agendas in America's schools today as there are music educators to implement them.

One significant concern of music education in the past two decades has to do with the relevance of music to children in public school. Music education philosopher Bennett Reimer addresses this concern in his 1970 book A Philosophy of Music Education:

> "Music has a dual obligation to society...the first of which is to develop talents of those who are gifted musically, not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of society...the second is to develop the aesthetic sensitivity to music of all people regardless of their individual levels of musical talent, for their own personal benefit and for the benefit of society and for the benefit of the art of music, which depends on a steady supply of sympathetic, sensitive consumers. General education in music, then, consists primarily of developing the abilities of every child to have the aesthetic experiences of music...and to insure that general music education will be relevant both to music and to people."[36]

It is this search for relevance that is defining the role of music in public education today. Educators are seeking multi-cultural music experiences for their students; from these they hope to accomplish not only relevance but musical learning and creativity. The search for relevance has also led music into other disciplines; it is not unusual to find musical activities enriching a student's learning in such diverse areas as math, science, and language arts. Keith Swanwick, Professor of Music Education at the Institute of Education at England's London University, leads this approach into the 1990's with this declaration:

> "Music is not simply a mirror reflecting cultural systems and networks of belief and tradition, but can be a window opening to new possibilities."[37]

The most recent educational trend that is and will continue to affect the role of music in public school involves the decentralization of the administrative controls of American public school systems and the placement of the majority of educational decision-making in the hands of the principal and the school

staff. This administrative design, commonly referred to as "site-based management", affects each artistic discipline and it's place in the school curriculum by virtue of the fact that the arts' significance and importance as a course of study is subjected to reconsideration in light of that particular schools pecuniary condition and aesthetic philosophy. As we approach the twenty-first century music educators will once again to be called upon to contemplate the role of their art in public schools, and be required to justify it according to their own educational philosophy and design of implementation. The public will look again to it's public schools to ensure the intellectual and cultural continuity the our sophisticated society requires[38]; music educators will, more than ever, be responsible for the perpetuation of music in the school curriculum.

It appears, then, that this will be the challenge of music education in the coming decades: to accommodate, in a relevant manner, the cultural and musical differences our students bring to the classroom, while at the same time focusing on the central aesthetic functions music has acquired in it's history as a curricular subject. How this challenge is met by music educators across the United States, both individually and collectively, will decide the future role of music in America's public schools.

# APPENDIX A:

## The Magna Charta of Music Education

## THE RESOLUTION OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE, AUGUST 28, 1838

Resolved,- That the Committee on Music be instructed to contract with a teacher of vocal music in the several Public Schools of the city, at an expense of not more than one hundred twenty dollars per annum for each school, excepting the Lyman and Smith Schools, the teachers in which shall not receive more than the sum of sixty dollars per annum.

Resolved,- That the instruction in vocal music shall commence in the several Public Schools, whenever the Sub-Committee respectfully shall determine, and shall be carried into effect under the following regulations:
1) Not more than two hours in the week shall be devoted to this exercise,
2) The instruction shall be given at stated and fixed times throughout the city and until otherwise ordered in accordance with the following schedule...,
3) During the time the school is under the instruction of the teacher of vocal music, the discipline of the school shall continue under the charge of the regular master or masters, who shall be present while the instruction is given, and shall organize the scholars for that purpose, in such arrangement as the teacher in music may desire.

# APPENDIX B:

## The Child's Bill of Rights in Music

## THE CHILD'S BILL OF RIGHTS IN MUSIC

I. Every child has the right to full and free opportunity to explore and develop his capacities in the field of music in such ways as may bring him happiness and a sense of well being; stimulate his imagination and stir his creative activities; and make him so responsive that he will cherish and seek to renew the fine feelings induced by music.

II. As his right, every child shall have the opportunity to experience music with other people so that his own enjoyment shall be heightened and he shall be led into greater appreciation of the feelings and aspirations of others.

III. As his right, every child shall have the opportunity to make music through being guided and instructed in singing, in playing at least on instrument both alone and with others, and, so far as his powers and interests permit, in composing music.

IV. As his right, every child shall have the opportunity to grow in musical appreciation, knowledge, and skill, through instruction equal to that given in any other subject in all the free public educational programs that may be offered to children and youths.

V. As his right, every child shall be given the opportunity to have his interest and power in music explored and developed to the end that unusual talent may be utilized for the enrichment of the individual and society.

VI. Printed in it's entirety on page 10.

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