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Boston University
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by Dan Rager

The Role of Music in Society Past, Present and Future

The role of music in the United States has changed throughout its history and continues to transform as new ideals and genres emerge. It serves various functions and is used by people of all ages in many ways. The purpose of this paper is to show the development and role that music portrays in society from its earliest beginnings through present time as well as its future.

For the first 150 years in our country's history arts was not a part of public education. Music was privately taught at singing schools that provided a medium through which the public could obtain musical training. In early American schools, the basic educational experience of students consisted of the study of reading, writing and arithmetic. Music was not considered part of the curriculum in public education until early in the nineteenth century. Society used music to sing in church (Brooks, Brown 1946). To understand the events leading to the introduction of music into the public school curriculum we must recognize the influence of Johann Pestalozzi (Mark, Gary 1992). He was a Swiss educator who was the first to emphasize direct sense experience as the true foundation of human instruction (Leonhard, House 1972). He wanted educators to formulate and define principles of basic instruction and emphasized that the science of music should be a course of study in schools. Pestalozzi believed that education should be more than book knowledge and viewed the learning process as a

vehicle through which a child's powers and talents could be developed (Leonhard, House 1972). These principles were quite different from those that supported the pedagogical presentations in earlier tune books (Mark, Gary 1992).

William C Woodbridge, a Massachusetts native, studied Pestalozzian principles of music education in Europe in the early 1800's. He brought these ideas back to the United States in 1829 and began to advocate the teaching of music in American public schools using the Pestalozzian system. Lowell Mason, a well known Boston church musician was widely regarded as a prominent educator and teacher of singing and composer of church music. Mason shared Woodridge's concerns with respect to the poor quality of singing in churches at that time. Both men discussed the Pestalozzian system of music education from Woodridge's experience in Europe and were convinced that these principles would result in better congregational singing skills (Sunderman, Lloyd F. 1971).

Through his determination, Mason was eventually able to convince a politically unstable Boston School Committee to allow him to introduce music into the curriculum at the Hawes School in Boston in the fall of 1837. This would be the first experiment of its kind and would be for one school year 1837–1838. Mason was so dedicated to the cause that he agreed to work without pay. On August 14, 1838 he presented a demonstration concert that convinced the school committee that music should part of school curriculum. This resulted in a landmark resolution that became known as the "*Magna Carta of Music Education*" (Mark, Gary 1992). This document was the first formal declaration of

its kind.

The initial role of music in public education during this time was to improve singing in the church and to encourage the public to join the singing and choral societies that were popular. Building upon the music foundation laid in Boston, vocal music began to be accepted in public school curriculum throughout the country. By 1874, cities in 26 states had adopted music instruction as part of their required general studies. The popular belief in teaching music was that it increased brain function and developed intellect because the learning of music notation demanded thought process which made music a mental discipline that created intellectual sound (Sunderman, Lloyd F. 1971).

While the nineteenth century experienced a period of growth in public 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 reasons for valuing music in the schools. It was credited as developing health, sound work habits, instilling ideals of conduct and improving life (Leonhard, House 1972).

As the nineteenth century closed, public school music teaching was changing. In its earlier days the music curriculum was taught by a specialist but by the end of the century responsibility was being shifted to a regular grade teacher. This change was so dramatic that it concerned the United States Bureau of Education. Its commissioner John Eaton conducted a major survey to address the change. He found from the 343 responses that 96 school districts divided the task of music instruction between the classroom teacher and a specialist. There

were 19 districts that used music specialists to teach all school music. The survey requested information from public schools throughout the United States. These are some of the questions in Eaton's survey:

Is music taught? In what grades? By special teacher? By regular teacher? By both regular and special teachers? Number of hours per week? What instrument is used to lead the singing? If different systems are used? Are there musical examinations, exhibitions or both? Is notation required in music books? (Mark, Gary 1992).

One of the progressive contributors to change at this time was John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey wrote a treatise in 1916 that he called "*Democracy in Education*". His philosophical influence on public education originated from experimental methods developed at his famous laboratory school known as the "Chicago School of Pragmatic Instrumentalism." The school was affiliated with the University of Chicago from 1896 to 1904. Dewey's fundamental philosophy was grounded on the concept of child centered education. For the first time in public education, children were acknowledged as having a unique existence both separate and different from adults. This approach led to increased flexibility in the curriculum (Leonhard, House 1972). For the first time, the curriculum reflected the needs and wishes of the student.

It is important to note that because of this philosophical change of direction at the turn of the twentieth century public school instruction began to include instrumental music as well as vocal music (Mark, Gary 1992). With Dewey's progressive educational theory receiving nationwide acceptance, vocal music no

longer occupied its singular place as the sole medium for American public school education. Instrumental music was becoming increasingly popular with the public as town bands increased in number and size. While instrumental music is beyond the scope of this paper I would add that people such as John P. Sousa and Herbert L. Clarke helped to propel it through national performances and published printed music that the public school systems and general public could buy and learn to play. In the following decades, new music genres progressed into what is known as the big band era that contributed greatly to society, student musicians and educators.

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 aesthetics expanded, the American public hoped music could bring their children a feeling for ideal values, continuing interest, a good discipline experience as well as a constructive democratic experience. In addition, they hoped it would provide them with a recreation that would last through their lives that could even discover talent in a child (Brooks, Brown 1946). During these decades of international hostility and world war, music's role in the preservation of culture and education increased.

Throughout the 1940's the MENC was developing materials for music education and in 1947 published the first "*Music Education Source Book*" which was a significant compendium of information on music education (Mark, Gary 1992). Eight years later another book was published entitled "*Music in American Education*." Published 1955 it reflected the role of music during this period.

Robert A. Choate, the president of MENC at that time had a new organizational design in place he called "*Music in American Life*." It presented ten new commissions which were:

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- 1) Basic Concepts in Music Education
 - 2) Standards in Musical Literature and Performance
 - 3) Music in General School Administration
 - 4) Music in Preschool, Kindergarten, Elementary School
 - 5) Music in Junior High School
 - 6) Music in Senior High School
 - 7) Music in the Community
 - 8) Music in Media of Mass Communication
 - 10) Accreditation and Certification
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In addition, there were four committees established to deal with music for exceptional children, music in international relations as well as organ and piano instruction in the schools. By the 1950's the role of music in public education was clearly defined through its concern with feelings and experiences in music. It defined how these artistic elements could be developed and refined through musical training. (Mark, Gary 1992).

The 1950's was a progressive time for MENC as they adopted the landmark resolution entitled "*The Child's Bill of Rights in Music*". This declaration transformed the development of music's role in public school. It gave every child a right to explore music to the fullest capacities, develop appreciation and knowledge through musical experiences, play instruments and learn to sing.

The early 1960's marked the beginning of renewed interest in individual or specific education. Educators were reexamining their roles in public school. This new direction in education presented in a statement by the National Education Association in 1961 entitled "*The Central Purpose of Education*" stated the following:

"The basic American value, respect for 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" (Hermann, Edward J. 1965).

By applying this statement to music education it showed that the public schools were concerned with how music experience could enhance the development and growth of the individual student which in turn contributed to the culture in which they live.

It seemed by necessity that aesthetic education stimulated a great deal of philosophical thought. Music educators found themselves reflecting on their purpose and role in the public school. Musical aesthetics came to be defined as the study of the relationship of music to the human senses and intellect (Sunderman, Lloyd F. 1971). This viewpoint was expanded to suggest that children of all cultures needed aesthetic experiences. A new justification of music's role in public education had emerged. Since children required aesthetic satisfaction for normal development and aesthetic satisfaction was achieved

through fine arts, it was necessary to have it in the school curriculum because it provided an aesthetic experience for the students.

As the 1970's came, educators again concerned themselves with the realities of teaching. The past decades brought forth many differencing viewpoints with regard to the support for and role of music in the public school. Now they thought about the relevance of music to children in public school. Music educator and philosopher Bennett Reimer addressed this concern in his 1970 book "*A Philosophy of Music Education*." Reimer describes the evolution toward aesthetic education as: "If music education in the present era could be characterized by a single word....one would have to say this field is trying to become aesthetic education. What is needed in order to fulfill this purpose is a philosophy which shows how and why music education is aesthetic in its nature and its value"

(Mark, Gary 1992). Reimer believed that music has a dual role in society. Firstly to develop talent for those gifted musically and secondly to develop aesthetic sensitivity to music of all people regardless of their musical talents. This in turn would benefit society and the art of music which depended upon an understanding public. In the search for relevance in the role of music in public education educators sought multicultural music experiences for their students to accomplish musical learning and creativity (Reimer, Bennett 2002)

In the decades following the 1970's music has changed in the way we listen, learn and teach it. The role of music in American Education has also changed. The arts are now part of other basic educational components. These include the language arts which is the teaching of music (theory, harmony, vocal singing,

instrumental), visual arts (drawing, painting, photography), Theater and dance.

The arts in addition to mathematics, physical science and social sciences make up the basic components of public education.

Over the past two decades other educational systems are competing with the traditional educational practices of the twentieth century. Private and home schooling has increasingly become popular. While there are many social and economical reasons for this, the trend will likely continue in the future.

There has been a dramatic increase in homeschooling in the United States over the past twenty years. While aware of this increase, “MENC is neither for nor against homeschooling”(MENC 2006). It is their content that children receive their education in a public, private, or parochial school, or at home, music education should remain a core subject. The MENC believes that adequate music education resources should be available to all students, regardless of how children obtain their education. The participation in curricular or extracurricular programs by homeschooled students is determined by state and local school district policy and policies vary from district to district. Within these limitations, the music educator’s role is to maintain a positive working relationship with all involved. This effort does not assume that the question of how music education is provided remains unaddressed. Homeschooling is not a music educator’s business, but music education is, regardless of where it takes place (MENC 2006).

In order to help preserve music’s heritage and history there are many

professional organizations that have worked to educate the public as well as students in school music programs. Music performances and music education have been a winning combination for orchestras around the country.

A vital area of musical education is the attendance of orchestra concerts. It has been demonstrated that such experience is linked with musical achievement (NCES, 1998). More importantly however, concert attendance can be a motivating factor in the study of music. When student ensembles are comprised mostly of beginners, a large cause of program attrition is the simple fact that the ensembles do not sound very good. Attending a concert by a professional group can serve to reinforce to the student how good an ensemble can sound, and motivate the student to work towards that goal. In many areas, attending concerts is difficult for many individuals, due to cost and lack of transportation. However, some professional ensembles have made tremendous efforts to ensure that quality music performances are available to everyone. One such group is the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra's Community Partnership Program.

This program is designed to bring quality musical performances to everyone, particularly those demographic groups under-represented in the typical orchestral audience. The orchestra has offered certain concerts at a reduced rate. Other concerts (over 300 a year) have been moved to venues in the downtown and metropolitan areas of the cities; most successful among these is the weekly "Tunes at Noon" midday concert series (Orch. and Ensembles for Youth, 2006). The St. Louis Symphony is also active in education programs similar to the ones outlined below offered by institutions of higher learning. These programs involve

master classes and individual lessons provided by members of the orchestra.

The chance for public school students to receive private instruction from professional musicians of such caliber is a wonderful learning opportunity.

One of the most unique programs of outreach combines the opportunity for education and concert attendance. Offered by the New York Philharmonic, this program is called the Young Composer's Forum. Students are invited to submit a sample of their work or a statement of interest to the Philharmonic's Department of Education. If accepted, the student is offered free tickets to concerts featuring work by contemporary composers. In addition, the student is invited to meet with the composer prior to the concert to discuss the works to be performed on that evening's concerts.

Another world renowned orchestra that contributes to educational outreach is The Cleveland Orchestra. Elementary students throughout northeastern Ohio take field trips to Severance Hall to hear concerts sponsored by the performing arts fund.

Since 1921, The Cleveland Orchestra Education Concerts introduced more than 30,000 students annually to classical music. These narrated, 60-minute concerts explore basic musical concepts while introducing students to orchestral repertory with distinct programs for Grades 1-3; Grades 4-5 and Grades 6-8, and are designed with the following goals in mind: (Cleveland Orch. 2006)

- 1) To present concerts of the highest artistic quality
- 2) To introduce students to the Orchestra and to its music, and to the role of the audience

- 3) To familiarize students with Severance Hall and its rich history
- 4) To encourage students to examine the nature, meaning and value of the arts in the community and in the world at large
- 5) To provide an opportunity for students to listen to, analyze and evaluate music performances in accordance with the National Standards for Arts Education
- 6) To serve as a resource for teachers in reaching the music benchmarks established in the Ohio Academic Content Standards for Fine Arts and complying with the federal No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) which recognizes that arts are core academic content

It is believed that students interested in music should not only listen to it but learn to play it on an instrument. This view is held by orchestras and educators. Providing an instrument to the students is also critical. It is the next step to musical achievement as assessed by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1998, Vol. 3, no. 2.). This article presents evidence of inequality in music education. The argument that all things are equal in the educational process is not true not just in cases where students live in low income areas. Although children select a variety of classes before graduating, the author shows that no two children from two different school districts will have the same musical experience or education. This difference comes from an array of varying circumstances involving the lives of each child. Many schools do not have good instruments to learn on or none at all. The NCES does not give solutions to educational problems; they only show us the problem in the system.

This situation must be addressed in the future if we want to excel music programs.

The future of music education including classical and jazz music has been a concern for many years. There have been several collaborative projects to discuss the situation. The Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP, August, 2005) assembled a cross-section of classical music professionals to brainstorm on the theme of change and opportunity. Think Tank participants gathered in San Francisco May 19-21, 2005, to wonder aloud with each other and discuss the following questions:

- Who are the existing audiences for classical music?
- Who are untapped or potential audiences?
- What do they need to feel welcome?
- How can we deepen their appreciation of the arts?
- How can our beloved art form flourish in an increasingly crowded cultural arena?

The intent of the Think Tank was not merely to air frustrations, or to raise more questions, but to capture some real answers that might provoke changes in programming, audience development, and community engagement.

During this discussion session, each participant briefly introduced a topic important to them. A number of troubling conclusions and changes were identified.

The first concern on everyone's mind was the decline of music education among K-12 students and the larger public across the country. Most

professionals in the music industry attribute the decline to financial cuts at the local and federal levels which show the lack of interest in music education.

Secondly, the slow-moving, conservative, even fundamentalist outlook within parts of the classical music industry establishment is still operating with the 19th century business plan. This is evident from the public's view of classical music. An overall cultural devaluation of the fine art and artists in society is not positive. The term classical music is dated and people who play it are out of touch.

(APAP, August, 2005) If Beethoven and Mozart are considered classical music, what is the music of John Williams, Steve Reich, John Adams and Philip Glass?

As we look to the future we must again address the role that music plays and its importance in education. We need to ask ourselves how we can engage with our audiences, each other, new media, schools and the community? They are tied together through education. Without music education there would be no music ensembles or orchestras to perform in nor orchestras to listen to. As this music that springs from the classical tradition moves into the 21st century, we all face a host of constraints. Happily, however, there is no evident lack of passion among classical music lovers or musicians. To this end, the industry needs to work with orchestras and orchestras should know and work with their communities, schools and governmental funding programs. Redefining music in today's world will take new approaches that include new technologies and devices utilized by those in the mass media. There is no shame in modernizing the presentation of classical literature performances as well as our music educational system to reach a wider audience. Many believe the mass pop

machine is nearing its own end with little to offer its young audiences in the way of aesthetics or music that will be a part of their lives as they get older. They will have little enjoyment in their musical future because the pop machine must continue to turn leaving them empty at middle age as it caters to the young. Classical music has an opportunity to redefine itself as the pendulum swings back but we must see the opportunity and take it and not watch it pass. The future of music education and music making is at stake and everyone involved needs to work as never before to hold on for all its worth. In conclusion, "music adds a special and beautiful element to a child's life, and it enriches that life permanently. Music is the gift of a lifetime" (Vervalin, Charlie 2003).

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