MUSICOLOGY AND THE FUTURE OF MUSIC EDUCATION

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AMERICAN EXPONENTS OF EDUCATIONIST THEORIES HAVE GENERALLY BEEN SO preoccupied with "the whole child," his level of aspiration and potential for achievement, that the academic formation of his teachers has received, at least until quite recently, relatively little attention. Worse than that, the all-consuming concern with problems of juvenile adjustment and psychological welfare has fostered some strange notions indeed, including the myth that a high degree of personal sophistication might interfere with a teacher's classroom effectiveness. The resulting intellectual poverty of teacher-education curricula and their eroding impact on the "educational wastelands," stretching from the 1930's to the immediate post-Sputnik era, are too well-known or rather too sadly-remembered to require further elaboration. Happily, the gradual reorientation of educational goals, characteristic of the last fifteen years or so, has brought in its wake not only the long-overdue socio-economic rehabilitation of teaching as a profession but also a hard new look at the intellectual standards of teachers and the quality of the subject matter they teach. Those responsible for this educational revolution-in-the-making were quick to realize, for example, that the "new math" would in the end be only as good as the men and women chosen to teach it.

Though obviously less in the limelight than the sciences and so-called language arts, school music, too, is currently subject to wide-spread reappraisal. But unfortunately, most attempts to do something about the pitiful state of musical literacy among our youngsters are somehow arrested at the semantic stage, whether in the form of pious pronouncements or timid admissions of past failures, and hence never face up to the real need for an entirely new image of music in the schools, an image that will have to be shaped by bright young artists fully aware of the totality of the world's musical heritage at all levels and from all cultures and historical periods.

Nearly thirty years ago the American composer and poet Paul Bowles remarked that the American people tended to regard music as a "form of decoration" rather than "a system of thought." If amazingly little has changed in this respect, it is largely because our music teachers have been similarly conditioned. Unquestionably, American education, controlled as it is by local boards, is often at the mercy of poorly-educated taxpayers footing the by no means inconsiderable bill. By the same token, the members of our supposedly free academic communities responsible for the artistic and intellectual preparation of music teachers have done shamefully little to counteract the whims of a citizenry accustomed to identifying music almost exclusively

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with commercial forms of entertainment. Instead of providing their students with the means necessary to break a vicious circle that operates to the cultural detriment of the entire nation, they have in many instances actually reinforced it by yielding meekly to the lowest possible common denominator, oblivious to the truism that in education at least the quality of the supply necessarily determines the nature of the demand.

As the general educational climate rapidly improves, however, a genuine desire for "the pursuit of excellence" is beginning to animate greater numbers of responsible music educators as well, even though their institutions, weighted down with vested interests, may seem distressingly slow in accepting desirable changes. Suspicion is still deep-seated, especially with regard to the potential role of musicologists (those egg-heads of the music world). And yet, where else could our young men and women find knowledge and understanding of music as a "system of thought" if not among the tangible products of those who have labored for so many decades to make available the musical treasures of the past and present, of simple people no less than of learned composers? How else, if not through the study of its history and ethnography, are they expected to become sensitive to the esthetic values and concepts related to music through the ages, let alone to its respective cultural roles in vastly different societies?

The frequently misunderstood function of the musicologist may be compared to that of the scientist engaged in basic rather than applied research. While he is the one whose prolonged agonies make ultimate application possible, he ordinarily pursues his work with little concern for its "practical" value. Such at least has been the general orientation of musicologists operating within the basic frame of reference inherited from 19th-century Europe. And it was this traditional orientation that designated them as virtual outcasts in the eyes of a society which tests human achievement as a rule by asking simply: "Will it work?" There is no need to expatiate upon the proven dangers of pragmatism as an educational or, for that matter, political philosophy. The daily newspapers are sufficiently instructive in that regard. But it may be worthwhile to reiterate that the present impasse of music education in America is largely the result of an attitude that evaluates even doctoral dissertations in terms of their immediate relevance to "problem-solving." Needless to say, the apparent non-relevance of musicology is intimately related to its emphasis on man's cumulative past, quite beyond the reach of social science studies directed to the here-and-now. In this respect, the counterweight provided by musicology can be of crucial importance in the formation of the "whole teacher" as well as of the "whole musician."

In this day and age, to be sure, musicologists are by no means unaware of their responsibilities to the present and future, as well as the past. As a matter of fact, relatively few of the young men and women sitting in our seminars today will ever be active as "research" musicologists. Many are seeking the background and equipment needed for the proper transmission and distribution, indeed popularization, of the very best scholarly products. Quantitatively, at least the "ivory tower" musicologist is rapidly becoming the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, once largely dedicated to the musical history of Western man, musicology now makes ever more numerous, extensive, and intensive forays into the musical heritage of all mankind.

Finally, the unprecedented concern with broad analytical issues, in response to recent technological developments, especially in the computer field, has given a significant boost to systematic musicology—musical theory in the true sense of the word (as opposed to the exclusive preoccupation with musical skills that is so often mistakenly identified with theory).

The suggestion that musicology become fully engaged in the complex and problem-ridden process of teacher preparation for the public schools is inevitably predicated on the idea that music education, whatever the level, aims for universal musical literacy—literacy, moreover, in the broadest sense of the term. Even verbal literacy is all too often limited to the mere ability to read and write (and that only passably), largely because an overriding concern with verbal skills obscures the principal purposes for which such skills ought to be acquired: namely an intellectually and psychologically profitable engagement in the study of man's intellectual heritage and the ability to communicate effectively in the realm of ideas. As envisaged here, education presumes to develop above all the critical faculties, in contrast to the prevailing ideal of training for the execution of prescribed practical tasks. If adequate verbal education imposes itself as a matter of virtual survival in the modern world, much the same goes for music which, altogether divorced as it is from concrete reality in its symbolic language, remains unmatched in the promotion of purely conceptual modes of thinking.

Admittedly, there is little in these views that has not been previously stated by other well-intentioned educators. But action has lagged indefensibly. In discussions of the need for curricular revisions in teacher preparation, those loath to change retreat time and again behind the bogey of certification requirements, even though our larger institutions of higher learning (especially the state universities) have both the power and the duty to promote certification reforms whenever changing cultural conditions seem to call for them.

Several years ago I had the good fortune to receive an invitation from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, to set up a music curriculum in accordance with its basically humanistic tradition and outlook. Unimpeded by the established grooves of educationist behavior, I was able to propose and implement an integrated three-year undergraduate program of music history, theory, and ethnology that covered the range of styles and structural procedures from chant to serial composition. Undergraduate students at The Hebrew University concentrate on two major subjects. Those wishing to teach music in the public schools may therefore choose a parallel course of study in pedagogy, which enables them eventually to teach in a manner suited to their individual temperaments and talents, yet which is centered on a common body of subject matter.

Of course, conditions in Israel differ considerably from those in the United States. Following the European example, Israeli high schools put far greater emphasis on languages, history, and literature than is customary in this country. Moreover, musically-inclined students often supplement their already rigorous high school studies with additional work at local conservatories of music. Thus, the freshman class had already gained a substantial musical as well as verbal literacy. American high schools too will eventually have to take charge of this type of preparation. In the meantime, the vicious

circle of a high school education, inadequate as a base for the intensive college program needed to produce teachers equipped to remedy the high school situation, will have to be broken from above, that is, at the college level.

Realizing this crucial fact, the University of Illinois School of Music, encouraged by a preliminary grant from the Ford Foundation, is now experimentally initiating an abridged version of the curriculum already operating in Israel. Beginning September 1967, a small group of volunteer freshmen of superior academic qualifications will be exposed to a two-year program of coordinated music history, literature, and theory studies, five times a week, two hours a day. A year later, when this first group enters the sophomore stage of the program, a second group, selected this time at random, will begin an identical course of study, permitting the eventual evaluation of results on a comparative basis. It is our hope that this experiment will set a pattern of team-teaching by composer-theorists and musicologists and will lead to the establishment of a basic curriculum in which all music undergraduates have a thorough acquaintance with music as a system of thought. It is gratifying that this project has the unanimous and enthusiastic support of the music education division of our school.

The potential benefits of the University of Illinois plan are easily imagined. For one, many a student having decided at first to major in music for no more compelling reason than that he enjoyed playing in his high school band may thus discover before it is too late that music as a serious activity fails to hold his interest. For another, prospective teachers who do not belong in any classroom may withdraw early in the face of such a high-powered initiation program. But the program will also permit qualified students who are prevented by current curricula from investigating specific facets of music in depth to do so in their junior and senior years. Having unlimited confidence in the basic soundness of mind and character of our undergraduates, provided they are given an opportunity to prove themselves, we expect considerable increases in enrollment in such advanced elective courses as Music in the Renaissance, Contemporary Music, and Music of the World's Cultures.

Far be it from me to suggest that this particular program of study deserves to be regarded as a panacea for the ills besetting music teaching in America's public schools. It will hardly improve performance skills or precipitate new methodological developments. But executed properly, it should make an invaluable contribution to the personal, intellectual, and musical growth of the individuals to whom our children will ultimately be exposed.[1]

For decades music educators have accusingly pointed to musicologists as self-centered and/or exclusively subject-centered academicians, unconcerned with the realities of the classroom. Today a new generation is not merely willing to extend a helping hand; it actually demands the right to be heard, as well as the opportunity to demonstrate that no gimmicks, no pedagogical tricks, and no commercial methods of production can replace thorough musical knowledge and the concomitant personal pride in the teaching of an art whose full educational potential remains as yet to be uncovered.

[1]For further ramifications of a musicologically-oriented music teaching curriculum, see Alexander L. Ringer, "A Re-Examination of Teacher Training in Music," *College Music Symposium* 1:61-75.