

Reflections on a Career in Music Education

By William D. Revelli

■ To educate means "to enlighten," to create an intelligent awareness of predetermined factors whereby life may be lived to its fullest extent. As music educators, our prime responsibilities extend far beyond the mere teaching of the rudiments of music, or the elements of artistic performance, or even the acquirement of a deep and lasting appreciation of worthy music literatures.

It is our responsibility to teach our students through the voice of music how to organize their thinking capacities so that their natural feelings, expressions, emotions, and ideas may be released and projected intelligently and effectively. If the ability to organize and stimulate thinking and to use such organization for the further enrichment of life is the true goal of educators, we must ask ourselves: are we truly "educating through music," or are we obsessed with the false philosophy that would emphasize the exploitation of our program at the sacrifice of its true purpose?

Is not the product of our teachings the results of our efforts? Are not the graduating members of our senior high school or college classes representative of our combined and collective ideologies and philosophies?

In general, the objectives by which we define all education can be categorized under three separate headings, namely: (1) the objectives of self-realization; (2) the objectives of human relationship; and (3) the objectives of civic responsibility. If we would give proper study to each of these objectives, we are certain to be impressed with their broad scope,

for they are all inclusive, purposeful, and they embrace human life in its every relationship.

Education in its broadest objectives has reference to the development of all the powers of man; in its restricted sense, it is concerned primarily with the training of people by means of schools, colleges, and universities. In reflecting upon my career as a music educator of almost four decades, I should like to begin at the beginning, which would seem to be both logical and realistic.

■ It was in September of 1925, in Hobart, Indiana; my title, Supervisor of Music; responsibilities, the teaching of vocal and instrumental music from the first to the twelfth grades. The daily schedule: 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; 30 minutes for lunch; 45 minutes for dinner; Saturday, 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; two trips to Chicago for lessons Monday through Thursday. The band rehearsals were scheduled at 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday; orchestra 3 p.m. daily; elementary instrumental classes 8:00 to 9:00 a.m.; vocal classes throughout the morning, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.; junior high school chorus 11:00 to 11:45 a.m. daily; high school choir 1:00 to 1:45 p.m., daily; junior high band 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.; madrigal chorus, Tuesday evening at 7:30; sectional rehearsals daily, 4:15 to 5:45 p.m. Budget? Not a cent!

The first Music Parents Club in the state, perhaps in America, purchased equipment, library, uniforms, and paid for all trips to district, state and national festivals and contests.

What glorious, exciting, eventful

years! What opportunities to learn, to give, and to receive. Ten years of *heaven on earth!*

With your kind indulgence, I should like to project a few pearls of wisdom, philosophies, and ideologies that have been a part of my credo for the past forty years, and which have played a major role in focusing my ideals as a music educator, teacher, and conductor.

- The quality of the program of music education is undeniably dependent upon its fundamental worth, leadership, and goals.

- The test of anything is not its age, but its value, quality, and use.

- True musical values are only so when they are true human values.

- No knowledge is worth anything at all merely for the sake of having it; no skill or talent, mental or manual, is in itself intrinsically desirable. No subject, however esteemed its traditional place in the curriculum, or however artificially attractive and plausible its claims may seem, has, in itself, or for itself any value at all. All these things are worth having insofar as they enable our youth and adult citizenry to live more worthy, satisfying, and happy lives, and only insofar as they provide release for our human and spiritual lives.

- No amount of ideology, philosophy, plans, methods, or organization is worth its salt unless valid results are achieved.

- Our good and our ill depend upon ourselves alone. The poverty of goods is easily cured; the poverty of the soul is incurable. It is the enjoyment, not the possessing, that makes us happy. There is no

use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk with our legs; and on the loftiest throne in the world, we are still sitting on our own rear. Our great and most glorious masterpiece is to live appropriately.

- An educator in the truest sense of the word will never impose his stamp on his students, but will bring out the stuff that is already latent in them.

- We can enjoy life, if we learn how to live; we can learn how to

live, if only we learn enough about life, our fellowmen, and, in particular, ourselves.

- Each person bears the entire form of human nature.

- To live happily we must not only know ourselves.

- The soul that has no fixed goal loses itself; for to be everywhere is to be nowhere.

- He who dwells everywhere, nowhere dwells.

- Every idle hour breeds wandering thoughts.

- To criticize my own faults in others seems to me no more unreasonable than to criticize, as I often do, others' faults in myself.

- Just as in agriculture, the operations that come before the planting itself are certain and easy; but when the plant comes to life, there are various methods and great difficulties in raising it. So with men: little industry is needed to plant them, but from the time they are born we assume the burden of the varied task, full of care and fear, in training them and bringing them up.

- Most teachers never stop bawling into our ears, as though they were pouring water into a funnel; and our task is only to repeat what has been told us. The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn.

- The gain from our study is to become better and wiser by it.

- Work hardens one against pain.

- There are some men so stupid that they go a mile out of their way to chase a fine word, or who do not fit words to things, but seek irrelevant things which their words may fit.

- There are some who are led by the charm of some attractive word to write something they had not intended.

The highly personal and subjective elements of expression in the art of music make imperative a serious consideration of the influence of the musician's attitude towards his art. The very nature of a medium of art which requires an intermediary re-creator in order to be presented to universal audiences of necessity requires *interest* in order to arouse enthusiasm in appreciation and performance; and, *ideal attitudes*, in order to assure the best possible performance. It is obvious that the beginning music student is not equipped to understand the principles of aesthetics or to appreciate the fine details of criticism of musical performance; yet, every educator is cognizant of the need for establishing, in the formative years of early childhood, the habits and attitudes which are expected to mature in young adulthood. Therefore, it behooves the music director to give very careful consideration to the



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establishment of ideal attitudes in his beginning music pupils.

Because the initial spark of interest in the child's imagination necessarily precedes the establishment of his consciously formulated attitudes towards music, it seems pertinent to discuss this phase of the teacher's responsibilities first. The child's interest in instrumental music may be the result of a consciously directed program of interest-stimulation, which should be planned for the elementary school by the instrumental director; or, it may be interest-inspired by hero-worship of a neighborhood cornet player, curiosity aroused by "grandfather's fiddle in the attic," the thrill experienced upon hearing the high school band in concert or on the football field, or by parental encouragement and pressure. Although the music teacher cannot entirely control the latter types of influences, they are valuable assets which he should realize in his initial acquaintance with each beginning student and they should be used to full advantage as motivating forces in the instrumental study. The planned program of arousing interest which, ideally, will be conducted by vocal and instrumental teachers in cooperation will seek to arouse the children's enthusiasm for enjoyment of music through participation in appropriate activities. In addition to stimulating interest in the general art of music, the program will strive to arouse a specific interest in each child with musical aptitude for the selection of a particular activity through which he may realize personal satisfaction.

After the interest of the students has been aroused sufficiently to encourage them to enroll in the music classes, the teacher's responsibility modulates to one of sustaining the interest and using it as a motivating force, not only during the pupil's immediate musical experience, but in the most far-reaching ramifications imaginable—a lasting interest in all music which will influence the individual throughout his entire life. The predominating factors here are the maintenance of the highest possible musical standards in the school music program and the selection of appropriate musical

materials. If the child is experiencing progressively the incomparable thrill of participating in inspired performances of beautiful music, artificial stimuli of interest will not be necessary.

The establishment of proper attitudes is of great consequence in the planning of the music director as he combines his interrelated functions of the teacher, instrumental instructor, and conductor of the potential high school band, orchestra, or chorus. The music

director, of course, will be concerned not only with teaching the basic instrumental skills, but must also be conscious at all times of his responsibility for promoting each individual child's personal growth and realization of his highest potentialities. The maxims so often reiterated—"education through music," "what music does to the child is more important than what the child does to the music"—are pertinent to a discussion of attitudes. The music teacher should



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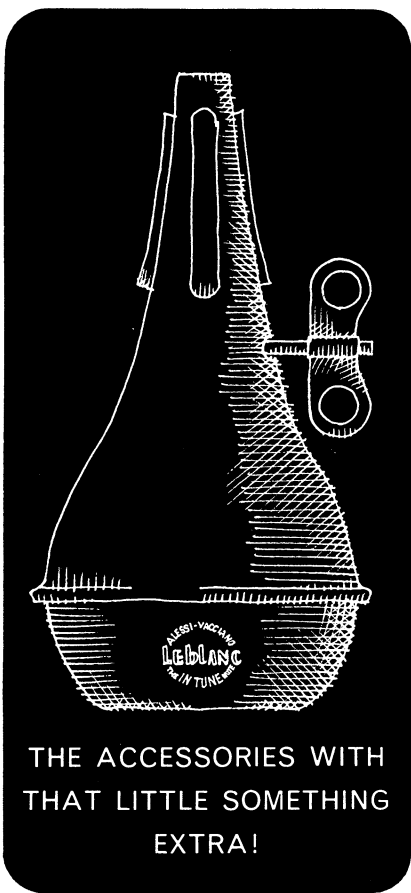
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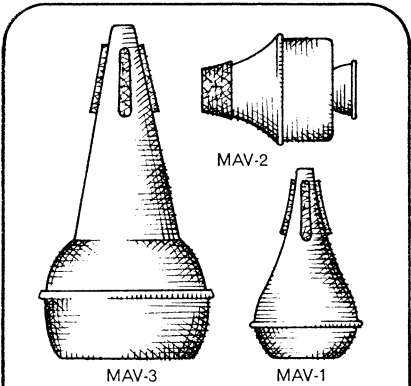
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endeavor from the very outset to assist the children in the realization that music may become a great moving force in their lives and will be of far greater consequence in the development of their personalities than the obvious surface results of any single day's playing and singing activity. The attitudes which are established in the music room will have untold consequences in the formation of habits and attitudes in all other phases of the students' lives. The power of the arts should not be limited to its most obvious instance, in Bobby's cornet lesson, Mondays and Thursdays at 10:20.

For a more specific consideration of beginners' attitudes, let us turn to the actual music class. In the guidance of the child's initial interest, the teacher will be directing him towards ideal attitudes concerning motivation for participation in music activities in such a manner that the child will be conscious of a stronger and more permanent urge than the more superficial attraction of a shiny brass horn in the store window. He will be led to appreciate the need for devoted effort in order to attain technical skills which will permit enjoyable musical performance. He will be prepared to accept the teacher's guidance in the study procedure, despite his childish feeling of impatience at seeing delays when he is eager to "finish the book this term."

The child must have a proper attitude towards the extreme care which must be exercised in the establishment of correct breathing habits, playing posture, and embouchure development, so that he will devote adequate attention to these basic problems. In fact, as each of the teaching steps occurs in the lesson procedures, the teacher will greatly expedite their accomplishment if he will take time to establish a favorable student attitude towards the relation of each phase of study to the final objective of artistic musical performance and enjoyment.

As the child begins to make progress with individual skills, he needs proper attitudes towards the acceptance of criticism. At this time, the teacher may begin also to teach favorable attitudes toward group participation in such a way

that the students will appreciate the importance of every member of the ensemble or class group, without developing undue "prima donna notions" in regard to solo chair positions.

Even the youngest fourth grade child can be led to realize that musical talent is a gift not bestowed on every one of his small colleagues; and, if he has been unusually blessed, he should be willing to share his gift by performance for others, particularly for correlative purposes in classroom study.

The full effectiveness of the influence of stimulated interest and attitudes in budding musicians becomes evident in the musical activities of their subsequent years of musical performance. Even the beginners will demonstrate the youthful enthusiasm which is generated by carefully stimulated and guided interest. Every time the child produces a single tone on his instrument or voice, the astute judge will be able to ascertain how much time and effort have been devoted to establishment of proper attitudes towards the art of music, the study of the chosen instrument, and towards educational growth and personal development. As stated in the introduction, the highly subjective character of music expression imposes undeniable responsibilities on the teacher for the encouragement of progressive interest and the use of proper psychological approaches which will induce the development of wholesome, ideal attitudes towards every phase of the child's participation in the world of music. If the music director is to have an outstanding music program which will wield a conscious influence over the lives of the young adults in the educational community, he must plant the seeds of that influence in the very first contacts with music, which are experienced by the intermediate grade children when they first become aware of an undeniable urge to "blow that horn," or sing a rote song.

How fortunate we are here in America to be blessed with our great program of music education. To those who would cast reflections upon it, I would point to our outstanding faculties, facilities, equipment, curriculums, adminis-

trative support and guidance. I would have them listen to the singing of our choirs, hear our bands and orchestras, visit our elementary, intermediate, and senior high school music classes; witness the parental interest, cooperation, and support of our music education program throughout this vast land. I would have them become aware of the tremendous impact and undeniable contribution that the MENC and its leaders have made in the past half century, and ask if such attainments have been realized in any other nation in this world.

Finally, if I could be granted a single wish, it would be to relive once again my life's work in the little Hoosier town of Hobart, Indiana, and the great University of Michigan, under identical circumstances, with those same wonderful children, men, and women, colleagues, administrators, and parents. And, above all, I trust the good Lord would permit me the same helpmate, my dear wife Mary, through it all.

The author is Professor of Wind Instruments and Conductor of Bands in the School of Music, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. This article was first presented as an address at the banquet held during the MENC Northwest Division meeting in Casper, Wyoming, in April 1963. Mr. Revelli is Honorary Life President of the College Band Directors National Association, an associated organization of the Music Educators National Conference.



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