

New Books

LIBERAL EDUCATION AND MUSIC.

By Willis J. Wager and Earl J. McGrath. (New York: Institute of Higher Education, Teachers College, Columbia University), 1962. 209 pp.

As a whole, this work is so full of misinformation, illogic, bias, tokens of ignorance, and general mindlessness, that one hardly knows how to begin a review. I do have one recommendation to make to all who come in contact with the work and that is that they read it very carefully. Read carefully, the work can have some influence for good, because the implications of the findings as well as the actual recommendations more or less nullify the impression created by a casual glance at the introduction and first chapter.

I cannot undertake a page by page refutation of all the errors of fact and logic to be found in *Liberal Education and Music*. There are a few matters, however, that probably should be mentioned.

Neither of the authors made any attempt to consult with the Music Educators National Conference, the National Association of Schools of Music, the Music Teachers National Association, nor any other organization capable of bringing them up to date in matters concerning music in higher education.

The book as a whole is based upon a peculiar distortion of the normal meaning of words. The term "liberal education" is here taken to refer to all courses outside the field of music. Thus, the authors transform liberal subjects into professional subjects, and vice versa, at will. By this distortion nursing and engineering strangely become liberal subjects while music becomes professional and, thus, presumably, illiberal.

All the book is really about is the amount of non-music subjects taken by music majors. Even here the facts are distorted. The NASM has always required a minimum of 30 hours of the 120 required for the Bachelor of Music degree to be allocated to general education and at their 1960 meeting adopted 40 hours as the minimum number of hours to be taken outside the field of music. A recent study made by a friend of mine in the NASM and to which I have had access reveals that the average member of the National Association of Schools of Music already requires considerably more than 40 hours outside the field of music. Thus, the authors of the book reveal an ignorance of what the status of affairs in music actually is. As a matter of fact, one who reads the book gathers the im-

pression that Mr. Wager set out to show that musicians were not receiving a sufficiently liberal education but, rather, found out as he proceeded that the best musicians he talked to were, in fact, obviously well educated. As a result, the five recommendations with which the book concludes are remarkably mild.

Recommendation number one simply states that schools should make a study of the relationship between professional and non-professional components. Such studies have been proceeding for many years, and the NASM has recently completed such a study. The authors seem ignorant of this fact but could easily have discovered it had they asked.

Recommendation number two encourages students and faculty to "think about the over-all purpose of professional and liberal education so that they may have a considered awareness of what they are doing." Everyone in music and music education has been thinking about this matter for some time, as the articles in our professional journals reveal and as all textbooks in the field similarly reveal. I am sure that the remainder of this recommendation will strike the reader as it struck me, as particularly inane. No music educators of the 1920's or any other time under any influence whatsoever, whether of behavioristic psychology or anything else, ever came to the conclusion "that students could be conditioned, like Pavlov's dog, to enjoy music and could generally be well adjusted if they had fifteen minutes a day in the primary grades, twenty minutes a day in the secondary grades, twenty-five minutes a day . . . and so on." Not being so, this cannot then have represented "an advance over the demon of solmization who in the late nineteenth century no doubt marched in with his pointer and frightened half the children within an inch of their lives and drove the other half to achieve prodigious feats of note reading" (p. 203). How can one deal with nonsense such as this?

Recommendation three is rather interesting, in my opinion, representing it would seem the change in attitude Mr. Wager experienced after his first contacts with actual musicians. It begins, "Administrative officers, particularly those without direct personal experience of performing or teaching music, or of the way musicians feel or think, should avail themselves of the particular insights of the applied music faculty into the situation." Mr. McGrath himself should have read this recommendation in its entirety. Since I agree wholeheartedly with the whole statement, I do recom-

mend that everyone read it carefully. This, however, is not the recommendation that has been quoted in the public press nor anywhere else.

Recommendation number four begins with an allegation that "there is a tendency on the part of music schools to keep the non-music part of their curricula to the lowest possible limit permitted by their professional accrediting agency, and a tendency on the part of the music accrediting agency to set a lower standard in this respect than the accrediting agency in other professions." No such tendency has been found in a recent study made by the NASM of its member schools. The recommendation itself says only that everyone connected with higher education in music "should participate, to the best of its ability, in the development of an adequate philosophy of undergraduate education in music that will be generally acceptable." The rest of the statement goes on to deprecate the present leadership in music education including, presumably, my own. I cannot claim to be the equal of Lowell Mason, Eben Tourjee, or Karl Gehrkens. However, I have expressed myself in these matters as clearly as my talents permit, as have all of my predecessors. Mr. Wager does not seem to have taken the opportunity of reading my articles, published both in journals and in books, nor those of my immediate predecessors. At any rate, he does not quote them, neither for us nor against us.

Recommendation number five and the concluding statements are perplexing, to say the least. The recommendation is that the NASM "require the accredited institutions to meet their minimum standards in spirit as well as in fact." What is this supposed to mean? Certainly the NASM does everything within its power to require its member institutions to meet its minimum standards in spirit as well as in fact. That is one reason that the NASM sends visitors to member schools to spend one or more days on the campus. So far as I know, the NASM is very much interested in the spirit in which its regulations are maintained. I have never come across any evidence to the contrary. As I have stated already, the member schools tend to exceed the minimum requirements in general education. Neither are the NASM standards "timid, defensive, and ambiguous." Certainly also, they are backed up by a concept of the music graduate that includes dimensions far beyond the exercise of particular skills. With regard to certification, the authors seem to be entirely unaware of the tremendous progress

made in recent years toward the elimination of conflicting state laws. Since state laws govern all teachers, not just music teachers, most of the progress has resulted from NCATE efforts rather than those of the MENC or NASM, but the latter two organizations have carried their fair share of responsibility.

Since Wager and McGrath seem to make a good deal of the fact that the NASM-MENC recommended curriculums usually group courses in the history of music with the general education courses, I feel that I should say something in this regard. First of all, I should point out that most general education requirements are set forth in terms that include all of the important areas of human knowledge. Thus, a typical general education statement will say that students must take a certain minimum number of credit hours in languages and literature, science, social studies, and the arts. Most such statements go on to say that any work taken in the sciences, for example, can be applied to a science major. Some statements, to the contrary, say that work taken in the sciences cannot be applied to a science major but that a science major must consist of additional work entirely. Whatever the case, it is quite obvious that science should be a part of everyone's general education and that scientists will need to fulfill a science requirement in the same way that everyone else will. This will be true of any subject, such as music or science, which forms a part of everyone's general education.

There is an additional consideration. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education requires that schools require a common general education program for all prospective teachers. The general education program must be described in such a way as to include all subjects that may be taken under it. Consequently, the NASM, in describing a general education program, deliberately includes music in order to express its opinion that music should be a part of all general education programs. It is quite easy to distinguish music courses from non-music courses regardless of whether music is considered a legitimate part of a general education program and I fail to see why Mr. Wager and Mr. McGrath seem so concerned with such a minor point as this.

It seems to me that this book does not really deal with the subject of liberal education. The description of the liberally educated person contained in Chapter I is so general in nature that it hardly applies to what follows in the remainder of the book. For all that, no connection is made between the ideally educated person described and a certain number of credit hours outside of the field of music, or outside of any other field in which a person may major in college. By changing the definition of liberal arts in such a way as to refer only to subjects which the student will not teach at a later date, the authors turn music and other liberal arts into "professional" subjects. The theory behind this seems to be that if one studies a liberal art very intensively it becomes illiberal. I cannot



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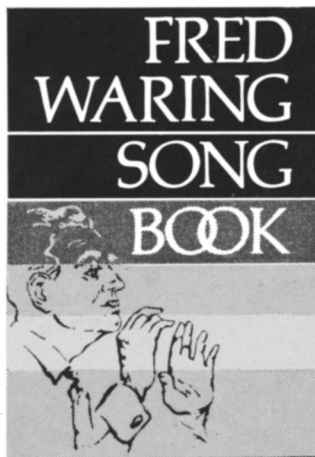
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follow this reasoning very well although I do see that the authors are arguing for a reasonable breadth in educational programs.

I am personally willing to argue also for reasonable breadth in educational programs, and, as a matter of fact, feel that both the MENC and the NASM have done everything possible to encourage such breadth. The authors seem to forget that all university students have come from a twelve-year program of elementary and secondary education, almost all of which is general in nature. For example, on page 107, we find an argument describing the benefits to the musician of some knowledge of physical science. "Certainly the experience of taking a course in chemistry would be *other than* the experience of taking more music courses. But whether it would be for that reason harmful or meaningless to a music student is a discussable subject. It is just possible that a student, becoming aware of the amazing recurrences in the table of chemical elements, would suddenly achieve a genuinely personal sense of what rhythm and periodicity means, not merely in music but in the whole of reality, and would then realize that music is a symbol-system for formulating that reality just as much as mathematics or chemistry is." Now, it seems to me that the junior high schools are teaching students the tables of elements these days, and, if not, then the high schools certainly will take care of this. At any rate, no student is admitted to the School of Music of the University of Michigan who does not present for admission a minimum of one full year of high school science, and experience shows that most of our students present three full years of high school science. I do not see how an additional semester of college chemistry would have any overwhelming effect upon the general conception of science and its place in the world held by our students. At any rate, to argue that students will know nothing of chemistry unless they take a course in college is to reveal either an unbelievable ignorance of what goes on in the American high schools or that the authors are not seeking to make sensible arguments.

In short, if the allegations in *Liberal Education and Music* were true, then those concerned with music in higher education might justifiably be charged with wretched incompetence. But they are not true, and the authors are doing music a great disservice by such irresponsible publication. Despite some good things (such as recommendation three), this peculiar work could never have passed the inspection of any doctoral committee on any campus with which I am familiar. Admittedly ignorant of music to begin with, the authors deliberately refused to avail themselves of appropriate sources of information, and so ended their endeavors little better informed than when they began.

—ALLEN P. BRITTON, Associate Dean, School of Music, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and First Vice-President of the Music Educators National Conference.