

# Our Changing School Music Program

*The beginning and expansion of the American music education curriculum; recent developments and experimentation*

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**M**OST AREAS of the curriculum today have that atmosphere of excitement and unrest which permeate a period of change. In the field of music there seems to be, under the surface, something like a volcanic bubbling which erupts from time to time in response to certain pressures and which constantly threatens a really big explosion. The recent changes which have occurred have altered the outline of the music curriculum appreciably and the volcano is still boiling and forecasting more eruptions.

Every school curriculum has its own history of ups and downs and shifts in emphasis. These have resulted from changes in educational philosophy and from developments in our country and in the world. The periods that have occurred in the history of the music program are directly influencing today's curriculum, so it is important to review them here briefly. In this case, as the words above the National Archives building in Washington say, "What is Past is Prologue."

Music came into the American public schools as a direct outgrowth of the activities of the old-time singing schools. Singing as a group activity very early became an accepted part of what was considered a good elementary school curriculum. The first regularly organized program of music throughout a school system on general record was begun in Boston in the 1830s under Lowell Mason's supervision. During the years which followed, in addition to the elementary school singing instruction, the secondary schools sometimes included the activity of choral singing in the program. In a very few cases there were also instrumental music groups and even classes in music theory and history. The latter subject, of course, was usually taught entirely from a book, since phonograph records were not yet available and live concerts were few and far between.

This type of school music curriculum remained fairly constant for many years. It developed and it was implemented increasingly by the publication of textbook materials, but it was not changed appreciably until well into the first decades of the twentieth century. The growing acceptance of music in the schools during these years was probably fostered to a considerable degree by the musical interests of immigrants from European countries. Ac-

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ceptance seems also to have been influenced by the desire of westward moving pioneers to carry with them as much as possible of both their European and their eastern seaboard cultural traditions.

THE FIRST BIG CHANGES in the music program came during the period just before and within the 1920s—a time of change in many areas of life, and especially in education. Almost concurrently two apparently unrelated happenings had a resounding joint impact on music in this country. Progressive educators started talking about the child-centered school and called for increased emphasis on the importance of the individual in education and the necessity for flexibility in the curriculum in order to serve individual needs. And, at about the same time, the music instrument manufacturers of the country, with an apparent vision of things to come, began to provide an adequate supply of instruments designed in price and type to meet the needs of young players. Playing an instrument was recognized and widely heralded as an ideal means of taking care of some individual differences. To complete the picture, only the coming of the music contest, especially in the field of band, was needed. The school instrumental program had arrived.

Many other developments of this period influenced the music curriculum. The junior high school came into being and with it came growing attention to some special music teaching problems, such as the changing voice, and the general music class. Administrators began to schedule music classes during the school day rather than before and after school as had been usual heretofore. An increasing demand for school music teachers led to the development of courses for the training of specialists in the field. Here the United States broke away from the European tradition of confining such work to the conservatories and began to provide training for music educators in colleges and universities also.

Although it is dangerous to assign dates to movements which are as ponderous as most of those in curriculum development are, it would seem that the depression-ridden period of the 1930s left some very distinctive marks on the music curriculum. Verbal expression of a professional philosophy became more common and "Music for Every Child—Every Child *for* Music" became the motto of the music teachers. These were days of shortages of funds, however, and some communities considered music a frill which might well be eliminated from the curriculum.

One of the changes that often resulted in the elementary school music curriculum when the time allotted to the music teacher was cut, was a lessening of emphasis on music reading activities. The newly popular concentration on integration or correlation of music with an

academic subject, usually social studies, sometimes became a substitute for the more strictly disciplined music reading activity. The shortage of funds may also have helped to promote a relatively new plan of group instruction for beginners in applied music in place of private lessons. Today this is recognized as a standard, efficient way of teaching. The music appreciation, history, and theory classes in secondary schools were often discontinued during this period in favor of more and larger performing groups. Great festivals of bands, orchestras, and choirs were the order of the day.

✓ EACH HISTORICAL PERIOD, unless subjected to special outside pressures, produces its own normal developments in the music curriculum, most of which grow out of and supplement earlier programs. But few periods in life are allowed a so-called "normal" development.

The 1940s, for example, brought some curriculum changes which could normally have been expected and some others which resulted from the war. New applications of emerging educational philosophies which earlier had only a nominal impact on music, suddenly became household words in the profession, and new ideas flourished. The belief in the importance of self-expression in helping a child learn was implemented by an emphasis on what was familiarly called creative activity through singing, playing instruments, dancing, and creating tunes. Rhythmic activity became a highly respected part of the music curriculum. The movement of the human body in time to the rhythmic beat of music was recognized as valuable not only for free self-expression, but also as a means of laying a foundation for basic musical skills.

"Learn to do by doing" was a popular motto and one of the ways the idea was put into action in music was through the use of instruments in the classroom—rhythm, melody, and harmony instruments, which provided the children with a variety of independent learning experiences. This latter type of activity led directly to some of today's most interesting curriculum experimentation.

Folk music had been growing in popularity for years in our country, but it is probable that the influence of the war and our interest in trying to understand people on both sides greatly enhanced this popularity. The study of indigenous cultures became important and folk music became an essential part of the music literature used in the schools.

A shortage of music teachers during the war threw an increasingly heavy load of responsibility for teaching music on the elementary classroom teacher. One approach to the solution of this problem which represented an extreme view of the self-contained classroom philosophy, was the idea that though the elementary teacher had little or no music background herself, because she was with the children constantly, she would understand them better and therefore would do a better job of teaching the music than the specialist. This concept still continues to be a problem and has had a profound influence on the elementary school music curriculum. In schools where there is enough assistance for the classroom teacher by special music teachers to insure for the children a good, continuous, and well-balanced music curriculum, this idea works. But when unskilled classroom teachers are thrown almost entirely on their own resources without enough help in a field like music, the result is that boys and girls have little or no music experience of either

immediate or lasting value. However, this situation has inspired some excellent experimentation to improve the music instruction given to the elementary education majors in college. As yet, not enough attention has been given to research on how to give in-service assistance to the elementary teacher—what kind of help she needs, how much of it, and how often.

✓ THE CURRENT PERIOD has brought changes in the musical life of these United States which have continually and powerfully influenced the music curriculum. The concert world, after years of very gradual growth, has suddenly experienced a tremendous expansion. Fine professional concerts are heard live in every part of the country. A survey shows that there are over 1,200 symphony orchestras, most of them civic groups which include both amateurs and professionals. Because the orchestra boom has shown up a shortage of string players, schools and colleges not only promote string classes, but also develop activities to encourage continued participation—festivals, youth orchestras, and small ensembles.

Thousands follow the activities of the marching bands at football games every fall. Composers today are experimenting with new idioms; the public, while not necessarily liking the results, is more interested in listening than ever before. Opera groups throughout the land play to audiences which a generation ago had neither an understanding of nor an interest in opera. An emphasis on scholarly research activities, as contrasted with concentration on performance or relatively elementary music history and theory, has appeared in the college and university music departments. These and other changes like them are bringing important new areas into the present music curriculum at every school level.

One of the most interesting points of focus in the music curriculum today is the study of music as an academic subject, both for members of school performing groups and for consumers or listeners. For example, the Music Educators National Conference planned the general sessions for the 1962 biennial convention in Chicago around the over-all subject of "The Study of Music : An Academic Discipline."

The humanities courses being taught today in many colleges and in an increasing number of high schools often have this academic approach in mind as they relate music to various other areas. At Edsel Ford High School in Dearborn, Michigan, music teachers have been cooperating with teachers of art and English in a humanities course. The expressed aim of the course is to develop appreciation and enjoyment of the cultural richness of all of these areas. A similar high school humanities course at the campus training school at the State University College of Education at Albany, New York, includes masterpieces of music, literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture in its materials for instruction. The aims in this case are to develop not only wider artistic horizons, but also awareness of interrelationships existing between any of the arts.

Several years ago in the highly specialized professional field of music, the Juilliard School of Music inaugurated an experimental curriculum for teaching the literature and materials of music in a large block instead of many

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different courses in music history, form, harmony, counterpoint, literature, etc., as is common in most music departments. The emphasis is placed on the "oneness" of music as a complete discipline with the music of a period seen always in the light of the social, political, and cultural climate of that period. This course has become one of the most famous in the musical world.<sup>1</sup>

ALL THROUGH THE YEARS, music instruction in the schools has continually adjusted and readjusted its emphases to meet new needs and fulfill special objectives which were timely. But always there have been some specific aims which were constant and basic. One such aim has been to raise the standard of public taste. In November 1958, in a bulletin on the American secondary schools, the American Council of Learned Societies published a report of a music panel on the secondary school music curriculum.<sup>2</sup> One of the recommendations of this group was for a course which they called "consumer music education" and of which they said, in part, "Such a course should be humanistic in its approach, relating music to other subjects in the curriculum and other aspects of our culture. . . . Its objective would be the development of musical taste and positive attitudes toward music." Again and again in connection with stated objectives of this type of course in music is found the aim of developing good taste. It seems to be a general hope of the profession.

But there is more to developing good taste than just aiming for it. In the Gilbert and Sullivan opera, *Patience*, someone says, "You can't get high aesthetic tastes like trousers, readymade." People do not even agree as to what good taste is. In his book, *The Tastemakers*,<sup>3</sup> Russell Lyraes says of taste, "Unless I completely misunderstand the real reasons for having taste, they are to increase ones faculties for enjoyment. Taste in itself is nothing. It is only what taste leads to that makes any difference in our lives."

One of the big problems in music teaching today is to find out how to go about developing taste. Can a course in music appreciation, or history, or theory, or any related subject develop good taste in music? If so, just how is this brought about? Does it result from learning about the structure of the music, or about the composer's purpose, or the historical period to which the music belongs?

Kate Hevner Mueller, in reporting in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* on "Studies in Music Appreciation" says, "The training of audiences is as important as the training of performers and composers if music is to flourish in our society. Music appreciation must be taught not only widely but well, and must include any material, any approach which enlivens the music for the listener. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

If we are to help in some way to improve the public

<sup>1</sup>(The) *Juilliard Report on Teaching the Literature and Materials of Music*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1953.

<sup>2</sup>*Secondary School Problems*. Reprinted from the ACLS Newsletter, Vol. IX, No. 9 and Vol. X, No. 9. New York: American Council of Learned Societies, 1958.

<sup>3</sup>Lynes, Russell. *The Tastemakers*. New York: Harper and Bros., 1954.

<sup>4</sup>Mueller, Kate Hevner. "Studies in Music Appreciation." *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Spring 1956). Washington, D.C.: MENC.

taste through our teaching of music, we need to have more research than has thus far been done to answer some of our many questions. John H. Mueller in his article on "Music and Education: A Sociological Approach" in *Basic Concepts in Music Education* says of taste that: "Fundamentally, musical tastes are only very deeply ingrained habits of thought, supported by ethnocentric rationalizations." And further that, "These tastes are formed just as other forms of social behavior are set up."<sup>5</sup> They are influenced, he says, by many factors including social heritage or tradition, biological limiting factors, technological factors such as technical inventions and developments, and factors connected with social relationships. In connection with the latter, existing courses which include study of music theory and history, together with the variety of music experiences, direct and indirect, which a school student has today, must certainly have some impact on his musical taste—at least that type of taste which results from group or social approval.

Dean Marten ten Hoor, in speaking on "The Role of Music in Culture" defined the social approval idea in taste in very clear terms: "We cannot . . . easily dismiss the composite opinion of a great many people, either of a geographical area, of a nation, or of a substantial time period. For it is by this composite opinion that taste is formed. . . . There is a kind of . . . order of acceptance here: first by the individual innovator, then by the professional group and finally by the general public, or at least part of it."<sup>6</sup> In the case of development of taste in the student consumer of music, informal observation seems to indicate that general public approval is the aim in the beginning. The student usually wants to feel the backing of some of his peers as he forms his opinions regarding music. After some experience and knowledge have been acquired, his independence develops and his attitude often becomes one of more professional, critical evaluation.

A second and very interesting current subject—in this case a specific project—of great importance to the American school music curriculum is the Ford Foundation Young Composers Project. This program assigns promising young composers to selected schools throughout the nation on one-year grants as composers-in-residence, as part of the Ford Foundation program in the humanities and the arts. The grant to each young composer is commensurate with the annual salary scale of the school, plus a modest addition to help meet expenses connected with the program, such as the preparation of parts for performance. The composer has the opportunity to get well acquainted with the musical needs, abilities, and limitations of school singers and players of all ages, and to experiment in writing music for them. He also has the golden opportunity of hearing his music performed and being able to revise and rewrite it if he wishes. New, original music of excellent quality for use in the schools is being produced as a result of this program. Also the pupils, teachers, and the entire community in each case have a first-hand opportunity to get an understanding of music in the contemporary idiom. Horizons are definitely expanding—or perhaps it would be more correct to say

<sup>5</sup>Mueller, John H. "Music and Education: A Sociological Approach." Chap. IV in *Basic Concepts in Music Education*. Fifty-seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I. Chicago: Distributed by The University of Chicago Press, 1958, 88-122.

<sup>6</sup>Hen Hoor, Marten. *The Role of Music in Culture*. School of Music Studies No. 4. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Official Publication, 1961.

that tastes are becoming broader, more discerning and more sophisticated.

Last spring at the 1961 meeting of the Southern Division of the MENC in Asheville, North Carolina, a stunning program of high school band, orchestra and choir music composed by these grantees in four southern schools was performed by student groups.

A unique development in the field of music instruction is the work started by the German composer Carl Orff. Orff is probably the favorite living German composer, at least to the average music lover of that country. In the United States there is an unfortunate lack of contact between school musicians and most American composers. Breaking down that barrier which seems to exist is one of the aims of the Ford Foundation Project previously described. But in Europe no such barrier exists, and it seems perfectly natural to find a leading-composer developing new plans and materials for teaching music to children.

Orff started his *Musik für Kinder*<sup>7</sup> experiments in the 1930s after years of dissatisfaction with the methods and materials being used in teaching music to children. He based his system on the belief that the learning processes of small children follow the same pattern as the learning processes of the race. And so, just as primitive man has used free bodily movement in dance and also simple rhythmic drum patterns, he started children with drums suited to their physical size and skill and combined bodily movements with the beat of the drum. He also added rhythmic chants, synchronizing the spoken rhythm with the other movements.

Next came melodic experimentation. Many primitive peoples start their first so-called "musical" utterances by the use of only one or two pitches, and perhaps finally progress to the use of the five-tone scale. Using this same sequence, Orff started the musical experiences planned for little folks by writing songs with only two or three notes included, or at the most the five notes of the pentatonic scale. He only expanded the melodic vocabulary to include other steps after the children had had a great deal of experience with the very simple melodies. He also believed that boys and girls would best develop musical ears and a real understanding of intervals if each of them had a simple melody instrument to play. In order to assure absolute accuracy of pitch, he laid down strict requirements for the making of new schoolroom instruments most of which look like marimbas or xylophones. The bars can be removed from each instrument and the children can learn to play only one or two notes at a time as they sing, gradually adding bars as their melodic vocabulary increases.

Space does not permit description of the variety of activities Carl Orff included in his materials, but it is rich and fascinating. Because he did the original experimentation so long ago, probably no one is more surprised than he that so many European schools are now trying his ideas, and even a considerable number of music teachers in the United States are showing an interest in them.

ANOTHER SUBJECT of current interest in the realm of curriculum development is that of individual differences in education and the importance of training each child to the limits of his capacity, be he gifted, average, or handicapped. In music education as elsewhere this subject is

<sup>7</sup>Orff, Carl, and Gunhild Keetman, *Orff-Schulwerk; Musik für Kinder*. Mainz: B. Schott's Sohne. 5 vol. (Also New York: Associated Music Publishers.)

extremely important. One of the best recent publications of the Music Educators National Conference is a book entitled *Music for the Academically Talented Student*,<sup>8</sup> done jointly by the MENC and the National Education Association Project on the Academically Talented Student, with the aid of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

In these days of intensified academic activity for gifted youngsters, we in music are gravely concerned about two phases of this subject. First, there is the problem of the instruction of the child who is gifted in music and will probably become a specialist in some musical field: how to identify him; how to educate him. Second, there is the problem of the function of music in the life of the academically talented student—the one who is spending long hours of concentration in one or several academic disciplines and who has increasing need for the kind of relief from tension which music may be able to give him. Our problem where he is concerned is this: How can we see to it that this student has the opportunity right now to continue some musical activity if he enjoys it, along with his load of academic work.

Such students need time for sufficient activity, not only to give them relaxation and satisfaction now, but also to provide for the growth in musical skill and intelligence necessary to insure continuing satisfaction. I am not sure how many string quartets and informal musical groups are currently active among the faculty members of medical schools in universities, but there are usually several in any such professional (and many business) establishments everywhere. Gifted boys and girls should have stimulating performance opportunities if they are performers. And whether they are both performers and listeners or just listeners to music, they should have opportunities at their own intellectual levels to build a growing knowledge and understanding of music itself from a variety of viewpoints: history, form, periods, styles, scientific and mathematical bases, relationships to other areas, etc. Such experiences will lead not only to increased enjoyment but also to the formation of intelligent, discriminating taste. The subject of the book *Music for the Academically Talented Student* is the planning of a curriculum for these students as well as scheduling, implementing and enriching it. The Soviet Union has many special music schools to which musically gifted children are sent very young for continued intensive training. The fact that we have a different approach to educational problems in our country does not absolve us from responsibility for providing excellent training for gifted children.

Several practical approaches to the problem of the musically gifted youngsters are being tried in our country. Probably the best known project is the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan. For over thirty years it has provided summer instruction and inspiration for young people who are musically gifted, as well as for those who will be amateur performers and music lovers though not professionals. To further serve the needs of the musically gifted group, the Interlochen Arts Academy, a year-round high school will be opened in the fall of 1962."

A careful study of curriculum development and experimentation in the areas of the exceptional or handicapped child cannot be made here. There are two possible

<sup>8</sup>Hartshorn, William C. *Music for the Academically Talented Student in the Secondary School*. Washington, D.C.: NEA and MENC, 1960.

relationships of music teaching to this special area: (1) How to teach music to the exceptional child so that he enjoys it and learns to use it to his own satisfaction insofar as his capabilities allow; (2) How to use music to help overcome or alleviate this existing handicap. There are experiments in almost every division of both of these categories—with problems of mental handicap, speech handicap, post-polio physical therapy, hearing and sight handicaps, etc. One reason it is difficult to report on this area is that many of the projects are being carried on by dedicated teachers who have not the time, the money, or the skill in research to keep a complete record of their work. Their projects are labors of love designed to meet the needs of certain individuals and situations. There is, of course, considerable scientific and medical research of a highly technical nature being done, but a great deal of that which might influence the regular music curriculum is still of the informal, unrecorded type.

INVESTIGATIONS in the field of folk music form another large segment of research which is influencing the music curriculum. It would be difficult to list here the many projects which have been undertaken. An interesting project was the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) Public Schools program, in which children were encouraged to sing to teachers any folk songs they had learned from members of their families, adding, if possible, the geographical source of each song. A great wealth of music and of information was collected by the teachers involved in the program. Such a project, if carried through to completion, would be of interest also to social scientists and to collectors of folk songs.

On the subject of folk music, the type of folk song used in the schools and included in the school song books has changed greatly in the last twenty years. Previously the song literature usually included in the curriculum was made up almost entirely of a few familiar British or Western European songs, or American pioneer songs. Now our children are enjoying folk music of many types, some of it strange to our ears because it may be based on unfamiliar scales. This change has probably resulted from the great increase in the amount of international cultural exchange which is presently taking place. It may also have been influenced by the fact that many of these songs which might be difficult for the average teacher to teach, are now available on recordings for classroom use.

Of course there is a great deal of experimental activity related to the employment of electronic devices in the teaching of music, since many of these devices lend themselves very naturally to use in connection with music—phonograph, tape recorder, radio, TV, and even teaching machines. The National Educational Television and Radio Center (familarly known as NET) has as one of its purposes the evaluation of educational TV programs in all subject areas. Recently a research project done with the assistance of a NET grant, investigated a large sampling of education TV music programs—ways of using them and their acceptance by and values for different types of groups and individuals. Many of these programs are now available on film and have become an important part of the body of materials used in the music curriculum.

Closed circuit TV is the subject of considerable experi-

ment in the field of music teaching. Further, the airplane hovering over northern Indiana, sending out programs of the Midwest Council on Airborne Television Instruction, has music programs at two school levels as part of its curriculum. And radio, sometimes said to be dead and gone, is having a surprising revival in school music circles. From the University of Michigan campus a school music broadcast is heard each week by about 75,000 children. There are many such radio programs throughout the country. For some classrooms, these programs enrich the regular school music curriculum. For many they provide the sole source of instruction.

The emphasis on performance in the music curriculum of the average American high school has been receiving a steadily increasing amount of criticism. The American Council of Learned Societies report mentioned earlier included a statement regarding specific weaknesses in the present high school program, emphasizing the fact that in many schools the music curriculum is limited to the activities of performing organizations, thus automatically shutting non-performers out of musical contacts while in school. Further, the report seriously questioned the present strong emphasis on marching band activity and on competitive festivals and suggested that there is need for better use of rehearsal time, with more stress on developing musical skills and the understanding of musical style and historical and literary significance. So far not many results of this line of thinking are obvious, but the critical voices do seem to be growing louder.

AND SO, the examples of curriculum criticism, development, change and experimentation in music make a long and constantly growing list. Studies (some informal, others scientific) are in progress on various phases of the teacher education program in music, including in-service teaching; on the evaluation of teaching materials and tools; on the evaluation of students and of courses; on the ways of teaching creative composition for children; on team teaching in music classes; on teaching note reading; on teaching music skills such as piano playing to adults; on refining a college music entrance examination to make it valid for prognostication of success or failure as a student; on the use of time in instrumental class teaching, etc.

We in music education need other studies, some of which seem too expensive at present to undertake. We need, for example, more research in the academic areas of music instruction. It would be valuable to have experimentation on certain kinds of administrative procedures in music education. Interpretation of the music program and its objectives to the public and to the rest of the teaching profession needs serious study. The best use of units on science in the elementary general music class is an area which is in need of attention. And so it goes, on and on. The possibilities seem almost endless. Meanwhile, probably what the rank and file of the profession need most of all is to get acquainted with what has already been learned through research and to find out how best to use the results. And the curriculum in the field of music continues that volcanic bubbling and erupting which gives evidence of life and vitality—and music programs in the schools continue to grow, change, develop, and flourish.