

The Development of Courses, Resources,

by Allen P. Britton

■ Before advancing some specific suggestions for improving the quantity and quality of music instruction available to American youth, it may be wise to devote some attention to certain historical peculiarities of American education. There is not now and never has been any unified control of the instruction given in American schools. Whether or not music is taught at all, for example, is dependent entirely upon the individual opinions of 28,738 independent school boards currently responsible for instruction in American elementary and secondary public schools. No state or national law says that music must constitute a subject of instruction in secondary schools. A few states provide that some kind of music instruction be given in elementary schools. The music teachers themselves are organized in a wonderfully complex association known generally by the title Music Educators National Conference. The organizational structure of this association is still amazing even to one who has served as the national president. The Music Educators National Conference can and does exert a tremendous influence upon American music education. However, this influence is that generated by American music teachers themselves and represents a kind of distillation of their thought and experience. But the MENC cannot require any single school district to hire any single teacher of music or to offer any particular kind of music instruction.

It must be quite obvious, then, that any general improvement in the quantity and quality of American musical education will result from a general improvement in the quantity and quality of American music teachers. To effect such an improvement rapidly is not possible. Rather, improvement can only come slowly as college departments of music attract better musicians, give them better musical education, and send better music teachers out to teach.

To argue for improvements of this kind is somewhat like arguing for improvements in human nature itself or for better driving habits, greater care with firearms, having a physical check up twice a year, and so forth. Improvement can be made, but it takes time and effort, and there is probably no simple gimmick to be found that will solve all the problems of music education any more than we can find one to solve any other problems that stem from the general cussedness of things or the intransigence of human nature.

Nevertheless, in my opinion there are several things

that we can do now, or at least begin to do now. I shall mention each briefly, not in any presumed order of importance, nor in any particular logical sequence. It is my hope that this section may find one or more of the following points worthy of more detailed discussion.

► We need to begin seeking the establishment of publicly supported conservatories of music, or their equivalent, for the instruction of children of kindergarten through high school age. Whether such conservatories are patterned after those to be found in Europe, or after the model provided by the Interlochen Arts Academy, or by providing public school systems with artist teachers requires careful attention. At any rate, a nation such as ours should not plan to continue indefinitely with the casual and informal system of music instruction now available. Competent instruction on instruments is available to children of public school ages only under private auspices, and for the most part, only in our largest cities. In all probability the Federal government would have to finance any such system of musical instruction, since none of the 28,738 independent school districts can be expected to provide for national rather than purely district problems, in my opinion. To attain support of this kind will undoubtedly take years of difficult and frustrating effort, and so the effort must begin as quickly and as vigorously as possible.

► We need to restate the purposes of high school performing groups, so that they will be conceived as means to the study of significant musical literature. Although the basic health of our system of music education lies in its attention to the living sound of music, we can no longer remain complacent concerning our failure to place the sound of music in an appropriate intellectual setting. There is no reason that students graduating from public schools, having studied music for from twelve to thirteen years, should not be fairly sophisticated musicians. We cannot justify carrying on instruction which seems to have for its purpose only the development of mechanical skills. To the extent that the music we perform in public schools is not representative of the best in the history of Western culture, at the very least, then obviously we are dealing with mere skill rather than with artistic considerations. The restatement suggested is already being made, as evidenced by increasing numbers of articles

and Activities for Performing Students

on the subject in our journals. However, considerable additional thought needs to be given the matter.

► We need to get along quickly with the organization of high school music courses in the history of music, its composition, and its analysis. In all probability also, most large high schools should offer courses in "music theory" such as are now offered in most colleges. Instruction in music generally is now offered only in our elementary schools, our junior high schools, and our colleges. There is a hiatus at the senior high school level, and this hiatus should be eliminated immediately. The Music Educators National Conference has had a committee at work on this problem for several years, and we hope to have a publication soon. However, the problem requires the attention of all the musicians interested in education. We need dozens of publications and hundreds of teachers institutes. In short, a massive effort on the part of the whole world of learning in music may be said to be our minimum need.

► We need to do everything we can in every organization of which we are a member and across the whole breadth of the nation to raise the prestige of music and the arts generally. We are not an unmusical people, nor are we inartistic, nor do we fail to spend vast amounts of money for art and beauty. And yet, because of our peculiar political traditions, whereby artistic affairs as well as educational affairs have fallen outside the province of our national government and, to a large extent, of our state governments, there are not as many persons in these governments interested in such affairs as might be hoped for, to say the least. Furthermore, the very fact that no tradition exists for the Federal support of artistic affairs in itself makes the whole idea appear heretical to many. Why it should be heretical to support the teaching of music but not the teaching of agriculture is only a historical accident. Our Federal government has spent untold fortunes to save the railroads, the tobacco industry, the airlines, even to improve instruction in science and mathematics and modern languages. Unless similar efforts are made on behalf of artistic matters, the latter are bound to suffer. And, due perhaps to the importance that monetary and business affairs have acquired in our national life, whatever is well supported financially *ipso facto* has prestige. Thus, we raise the prestige of the arts to the extent that we raise the financial

support given them. We should work for Federal support of opera, symphony orchestras, conservatories of music, the education of music teachers, and so forth.

But it is not only in political quarters that music and the arts enjoy less prestige than they deserve. For example, we should seek to eliminate an attitude prevalent in conservative academic circles that musical performance is hardly a fit subject for study in schools. Many of our finest institutions of higher learning, while offering instruction in the history and theory of music and even in its composition, refuse to offer instruction in the actual creation of music, that is, its performance. In these schools one can study the history of violin playing, but not the violin, the history of keyboard music, but not the piano, in other words, one can study about music, but one cannot study music. The intellectual influence of these institutions is very great, and, in my opinion, has been less than helpful to the cause of music.

There is still another area in which musicians should interest themselves. We should work generally at all levels to increase the financial support of education so that the best people can be attracted into teaching. For example, many fine young musicians go into medicine, law, business, and other nonartistic pursuits out of purely financial considerations. What sense does it make that a fine violinist must work for wages less than those paid attendants at gasoline stations if he pursues a performing career? He can better himself to a small extent by accepting a teaching position. Fine young violinists and other musicians should be as much in demand as fine young mathematicians and scientists. Orchestras and schools should be bidding for their services. The so-called shortage of violinists that symphony orchestra conductors complain about today is actually a shortage of violinists who want to play for very low salaries. I do not believe that there is a shortage of violinists who will play for high salaries. At any rate, were high salaries offered, whether by schools or by orchestras, one can be sure that high quality personnel would soon be available.

► We need to put as quick an end as possible to the intellectual and musical *apartheid* of music educators, musicologists, composers, performers, private teachers, and of each of these groups with the wider worlds of humanistic learning, science, politics, and the American general public. The Yale University Seminar on

Music Education was itself the beginning of the end, and pointed out exactly how the end must eventually be reached. If school music is to be improved, then all musicians must interest themselves in it. The school musician should feel himself to be a part of the professional world of music, and the professional musician needs to feel that he has a stake in the educational process.

All of us need additionally to work together attempting to reach some basic agreement on the ends and means of music instruction. Strangely enough, although music educators are pretty well agreed upon what they would like to do if they had enough time and money, what they would like to do has been arrived at more from tradition than from any thoroughgoing analysis of the situation. The fact is that musicians have not reached any real agreement among themselves as to what music is or what it should be, whether the only music is the art music of Europe produced during the past three hundred years, or whether jazz is music, or Hindu music is music, or folk music is music, or electronic music is music. How much of whatever is music should be introduced into the schools, when, and how remain unexplored questions also.

Perhaps all musicians could agree immediately that we should join together in attacking the occupational hazard of music teaching, that is, the pitfall of almost

all music teachers some of the time, and of some of them all of the time: that of concentrating attention upon the mechanics of music rather than with musical creativity and spontaneity. The tendency to devote too much attention to the mechanics plagues the private studio as well as the public school room. The result is and always has been the production of many people who "hate music" and who divorce in their minds the learning of music from the enjoyment of music.

The Music Educators National Conference has recently embarked upon an elaborate project with Ford Foundation funds the object of which is to investigate musical creativity and how it can best be stimulated. The beginning of wisdom in this matter is probably an admission that no one already is in possession of the answer to the problem. All of us undoubtedly want to develop as many musical people as we can, people who love to listen to music as well as to perform it. But how to do this, indeed, what music to listen to and what music to perform, needs considerable discussion. To the extent that we can reach any substantial agreement upon this matter, we shall have advanced the cause of music and music instruction.

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The Latest Thing in Musical Instruments

The Garden Hose Clarinet

■ A scientist at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, who has been "playing" a clarinet for two years with the air stream from a vacuum cleaner, has just fashioned himself a new clarinet from a length of plastic hose.

John Backus, an inquiring physicist who is also a musician, can't call his new instrument a "licorice stick" because it isn't black; it's transparent. And it isn't a stick because it bends like any old garden hose.

Fitted with a conventional clarinet mouthpiece and reed, the unconventional clarinet sounds just the way a clarinet should when physicist-musician Backus blows into it. From the open end of the five-eighths-inch tubing come nice round, mellow tones.

Strange as all this may seem, the work of Mr. Backus, supported by two grants from the National Science Foundation, is serious research into the physics of musical instruments, with a view to making them simpler and more reliable.

Scientifically studying what it is that gives the clarinet its tone, Mr. Backus became convinced that the material from which a clarinet is made is unimportant to its tone. The garden hose clarinet was made to prove his point. Displayed and played at a meeting of the Acoustical Society of America in Ann Arbor, Michigan, recently, the plastic clarinet caused quite a stir.

Using a wide range of modern scientific instruments and techniques in his research, the USC associate pro-

fessor of physics has studied the conventional clarinet, observing the vibrations of the reed and of the air column inside the instrument. Measurements have also been made of the manner in which sound radiates from the instrument and of the harmonic structure of the sounds themselves.

None of these studies convinced Mr. Backus that all clarinets must be made from wood. Neither is he sure that you can't make pipe organ pipes out of wrapping paper, instead of lead or tin, or that flutes must be made from metal. "After all, the earlier flutes were all wooden; now they're mostly metal," Backus points out.

Plastic garden hose isn't the ideal material for clarinets either, Mr. Backus admits. Principal imperfection is the limber characteristic of the plastic. It is difficult to maintain proper lip pressure on the reed to produce a good tone. The "give" in the instrument also does not permit positive finger control.

The experimental instrument has another deviation: no bell. "Except for the two lowest notes of which the clarinet is capable," says the USC scientist, "the bell is purely ornamental and not at all functional."

"The argument over the effect of material on instrument tone has been raging for a century or longer," says Mr. Backus. "Many scientists believe that the material is not important in the case of wind instruments. Musicians think it is. And the latter group does not take kindly the idea of change, or even simplification of musical instruments."