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## Music With Meaning

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HARRY E. MOSES

IN THESE DAYS of practical realism, music teachers everywhere are trying to justify in their own minds what their work means to a general program of education. Educators agree that our school system should be flexible enough to meet changing needs. The war has clearly brought this home to us. In music education, the adjustment is particularly necessary. By and large, music has been isolated in the curriculum through the ivory-tower approach of the music teachers themselves. Today, through the use of radio, movies, and recordings, music has come to mean much to the layman. Through a meaningful music education in the schools, the music teacher can find his place and function in the modern world.

The important question of why we are educating children at all has to be answered in the methods which we ultimately choose. This constant exploring for objectives has resulted from

the appearance of two important developments in the social scene: (1) the effects of scientific developments on the whole field of music and (2) the policy of educating people up to the age of 16.

### *Juke Box Revolution*

The scientific aspects of music developed in recent years can no longer be ignored by music educators. The use of music in radio, movies, and recordings has completely revolutionized the average person's scope of learning. If the music teachers do not accept this challenge and if they permit the quality of the juke box to be the basic standard of our music culture, the indications for the future are not too promising. The mechanical culture reveals a basic need for helping the individual make a personal adjustment in the midst of an era when regimentation, force, and callousness to human needs are in order.

Since we cannot find out what to do with the juke box, the radio, and the movies, in some quarters it has been the policy to ignore them. Moreover, when creative individuals have tried to reach out to bring music to large masses of people, there were those who sought out the things which did not work too well and looked for the traditional results that we usually expect from traditional methods. An illustration of one such situation was the reaction to "Fantasia." Some decried the sacrilege

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*Music education gets more than its share of "kicking around" when a nation goes to war—sometimes even when that nation is at peace. Because we believe that music contributes to the good life, Educational Leadership is glad to bring its readers this discussion of music in general education by Harry E. Moses of the Dobbins Vocational School in Philadelphia. Mr. Moses explores the scope and methods of music teaching, giving particular attention to the influence of movies, the radio, and the juke box upon American young people and the significance for education of the advent of these popular musical outlets.*

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of reading a fancy story into the Pastoral Symphony of Beethoven, the hippo ballet of "Dance of the Hours," and other spots in the picture which weren't exactly according to tradition. It might be said that in "Fantasia" the combination of art, music, and science was unique. In it the student not only heard a fugue, but also saw it; and he not only saw it in line, but also in color. We might go so far as to say that Disney and Stokowski evolved a new art form. Through it they discovered ways of reaching large masses of people. The sensation of literally bathing in music, through the new developments in sound, put the picture in a realm by itself, and took it completely out of the scope of traditional entertainment.

The use of motion pictures in education is accepted today virtually everywhere. With the advent of sound movies it can safely be estimated that the whole concept of music appreciation will change. This will be brought about because large masses of people are being exposed to all types of music and ideas.

#### *What Standards?*

We are told by music educators, however, that the quality of music in the movies and on the radio is too low. By what standards? While it is commonly agreed that standards are relative, usually it is the musicologist or the teacher who sets the standard. Standards should be developed by the study group as it grows in knowledge and ability. By any standards, music can only be real and vital when people feel and experience it. The new education, therefore, advocates that we start teaching people from where they are. If the method is creative, how far we go can

be measured only by the needs, interest, and intelligence of the group.

It would be difficult for many of our music teachers to explain popular music in terms of the traditional cliches and appreciative aspects of the work. Since they are not a part of it themselves, they do not understand what it is and what makes people react to it in the way that they do. The problem is usually rationalized in terms of low standards. One factor which is responsible for a great number of "music haters" is this gap which exists between the teacher and students. When a class of grown boys asks if it can sing "Pistol Packin' Mama," its needs cannot be satisfied by singing "Welcome Sweet Springtime" by Rubenstein, or even "Stout Hearted Men" by Romberg. This is a vital and real problem and no teacher can honestly solve it by doing the traditional things.

#### *Shall Only the Talented Be Taught?*

We have said that the policy of educating the majority of the population in music has brought about a change in our objectives. While the wisdom of these changes cannot be questioned, the methods devised for achieving them should be carefully studied. We have been giving lip service to mass music education for a long time, but our methods are still designed for the specialist and the talented. Everywhere about us the questions of students reveal an insecurity created by former contacts with music and indicate that our methods are not designed for mass teaching.

Then, of course, there are technical problems to overcome. For example,

what is the music teacher's attitude toward the monotone? Is he permitted to sing in the group? If not, what arrangements are made to take care of his needs? In most cases a non-musical activity is substituted for singing. Such problems in mass music education are difficult to solve. In the first place, the average music teacher carries so large a student load that he has little time to individualize. Secondly, the average music teacher's knowledge of the human voice is too limited to include monotone correction. We do not criticize the teacher for either deficiency. The problem is one of objectives. Are we supposed to help these "untalented" students? Are they entitled to get something out of what we have to offer? We contend that each student has a right to learn how to make music more meaningful to himself regardless of his limitations. If we honestly believe this, methods can be found to solve the problem.

Music methods in the past grew out of: (1) a paternalistic desire to superimpose culture on large masses of people and (2) the need for specialists.

Its most important aim was to impart knowledge and "beauty" and, most of all, standard techniques. At best, it could provide for competent specialists. At its worst, it simply handed out information which was out of relation with life and the environment.

### *Let's All Make Music*

Parrot-like learning, with the stifling of initiate and creative expression, develops in people an unhealthy outlook on life. The study of music often regiments people into accepting things as they are without questioning their value.

From the standpoint of educational objectives, this approach would tend to develop negative values in people. We have seen within recent times that a people such as the Germans, who can boast of having received the best type of education along traditional lines, became more of a menace to civilization than any primitive or savage society. If the democratic form of government is to survive we must look toward a more creative and democratic type of education.

It goes without saying that the real joy of creating and recreating comes from making music, each person according to his own needs. This applies to every phase of music and every type of student. In the new education, therefore, training in music should have the following objectives:

1. To give practical understanding of the value of musical knowledge, sufficient to be applicable to the problems which people experience in their personal and social lives. Through this, there is developed an appreciation and love for music in all of its phases.

2. To provide an understanding of the place of music in the social scene. This will permit the great majority not engaged in musical activities to get together intelligently with those who are. In this way, both may be more able to appreciate, study, and understand the function of music in everyday life.

With these objectives in mind, we should no longer aim at getting across the great wealth of trivia accumulated over a period of several hundred years. In permitting the student to discover some things for himself we permit him to find his natural mode of expression and also his true self.

### *Understanding the Social Scene Through Music*

How, then, is the music teacher to bring about this change? The methods will have to be worked out by the individual teacher, in practice and experiment. If the music teacher is to bring about a closer relationship between music and life, his function must be enlarged to include a study of the social scene and the place of music in it. Implicit in this is the integration of music into a general social studies curriculum. Leaders in the field of social studies have been experimenting for some time with the use of music. In an article entitled "Cures for Intellectual Myopia" in *The Social Studies* of October, 1943, Richard H. McFeely says:

Few social studies teachers use music effectively in their classrooms, and yet music is one way to help students feel the emotions of other groups. Why don't we use music which is indigenous to the group we are studying, or which has been written or sung by members of that group? The Negro spirituals, the "New World Symphony" by Dvorak, folk music of the different lands, and the like are examples which come to mind. Recently our students were treated to several recordings of Chinese music including some of the war songs of the Chinese guerillas. These were played and interpreted by a Chinaman who was lecturing to them on the culture of China. Actually hearing the music certainly added to the meaning of what he said and made more vivid the concepts he had tried to get across.

Since culture records social trends, it is not difficult to use the cultural subjects in this way. If the study of music is to take its proper place in the educational system, it must be related much

more than in the past to the material and social aspects of everyday life and should be integrated throughout with other parts of the curriculum. This would tend to make a more difficult job for the teacher, but experience has already proved that this wider view of music teaching makes it vital and real and consequently easier to understand. Thus, by integrating music into the general school and community program, the education can become more meaningful. If the school orchestra and glee club are taken out to play and sing at war training meetings, civilian defense affairs, war bond rallies, and war plant concerts, a more positive function for these units is achieved and a better educational outcome results.

In striving for an effective music education course, we have in recent years come to the conclusion that it should vary more than in the past from decade to decade and from school to school. It must keep pace with current happenings and the scientific developments which affect the art. It is not alone because of the latest discoveries and techniques that people should learn these new things. Most earlier developments were of greater importance. The value of the new trend rests in the fact that historical events appear, not as a storehouse of accepted knowledge, but rather as something continually changing with the needs of man.

### *Railroad Building Set to Music*

There are healthy signs that these new trends are already in operation in many places. One teacher in the Philadelphia schools taught early American railroad and Erie Canal songs while the social studies department was devoting

a unit of work to the history of American transportation. In another instance, the music teacher taught the geography of Europe through a lesson of Czechoslovakian music. The use of counterpoint as a technique can be found and recognized easily in music, painting, and literature. These three subjects can easily be integrated.

The new developments in sound have created a wonderful opportunity for the integration of music into a general science course. One such illustration was a class that studied a recent recording by Enrico Caruso. Through the acoustical device of "interference," modern sound engineers have been able to dub out the old orchestration and dub in a new one. The singing voice of Caruso was maintained and the result is a miracle of modern science. The lesson motivated quite a discussion in class. Through it the study of "interference" was certainly more meaningful in the science room.

#### *Syllables or Songs?*

Discussions concerning the problem approach in the schools indicate that many people are using this technique. It will be necessary to learn more about its possibilities and limitations before we can with assurance accept it as a solution to teaching difficulties. The interest of the problem can best be judged by those attempting to solve it. It is far better that the problem—if it were always possible—originate with the pupils and come out of the conditions which are known and important at the proper stages of the pupils' development. Thus, when a teacher presents a problem in note-reading, it is less meaningful to the group than when a mem-

ber of the class says, "How does the tune go?" or "How do you read the notes?" or "What's the first thing you do when you read the music?" Note-reading should not be an end in itself. Most people can learn to sing simple songs without note-reading. If the class does not see the need for it, sight reading should not be attempted until the class is prepared to accept it as a problem.

The need for a well-rounded curriculum should not be superceded by this new devotion to the problem approach. The detail with which any problem may be studied could prevent whole fields of work from being covered. Problems should be considered as examples of how things work in similar situations. If the problem is not studied as an isolated entity, but is linked to related fields, it is possible to produce enough of a general outline of musical knowledge to take care of the students' minimum needs. For example, problems of the scale may be linked to those of intervals, triads, progressions, harmony, etc.

In the older methods of music education, where training of the most talented was the aim, it was considered necessary that everyone acquire the same set of techniques and use them in the same way. In most cases, there was a direct imitation of the teachers' technique. The boredom which resulted was often a deterrent to learning. Today we have learned that people acquire techniques to use them. Thus, when Johnny learns the scale, he sees the need of knowledge of the scale as a basis for making all music, or better still he sees the place of the scale in helping him solve an immediate problem in the read-

ing or writing of music. Drill on techniques for their own sake has been found to be a waste of time.

It should not be concluded from this that the teaching of techniques is undesirable. In order to express oneself in music intelligently, a minimum amount of technical knowledge is necessary. This, however, should be acquired as the student goes along so that from the beginning he does not lose out on the rich experience of just making music. Techniques must not be learned in the abstract. Understanding 4/4 time is as fundamental as knowing that two and two equal four.

#### *Music Can Satisfy Our Need for Emotional Security*

These new trends in music education are particularly left wide open for criticism, some of it prejudicial and some of it justified. By aiming at new things a more progressive curriculum suffers by being experimental. It is further exposed by occupying itself with the social implications of knowledge. The real essentials should be a combination of the practical techniques of the old school and the new concept of what music can mean to the individual who creates it and the group for whom it is created.

The new principles of music education reveal a trend which rejects the necessity for the frustration of the individual or the group in this mixed and insecure world where they live. This does not only imply economic insecurity. At the present time, with the machine age and mass production higher than ever before in history, the emotional and psychological insecurity is far greater. While our civilization has supplied us with trinkets and gadgets for almost everybody, it has also increased the number of frustrated and inhibited mortals who are groping for a way to express themselves. At work the machine does not permit this.

With the winning of the war— and peace—we can see the possibilities of a more fruitful and secure life for everybody; but the things that stand in the way are no longer solely material ones. The great internal struggle for self-expression must be nurtured and developed for the happiness of mankind. Music can help do it. If it can do it in the midst of this great crisis, it can surely do it later when the need for individualization will be far greater.

Music education is still a powerful force for the defense of our way of life. Integrated into a program of general living, it takes second place to none.



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