
EDITORIAL

John Paynter does a great service by his contribution as author to this Issue of the *BjME* in reminding us that music is both 'event' and 'idea' and by bringing out very clearly the educational centrality of musical thinking, music as thought. In the editorial I shall focus on this.

In a general sense the concept of *idea* has coloured editorial judgements throughout the fourteen volumes of the Journal. We share the same disquiet over the content of articles which may contain facts but do not engage us in thought, papers which may contain information but are not 'in-forming'. And though we indeed have published such pieces we tend to respond more positively to those contributions which engage the mind.

Recently I happened to be working for a few days in the Sibelius Academy of Music in Helsinki and one evening found myself at a reception in my hotel for some of the guests who had been invited by the management to their monthly 'reception'. The small group consisted mainly of business travellers, especially from Nordic and other northern European countries. I fell into conversation with a friendly Finn. She had a combined degree in economics and chemistry and was working from Sweden for a company which makes and sells flavourings for food and drinks. She spoke Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, English and more recently had begun to learn Estonian – where she believed a promising new market was opening up.

Eventually I asked what her theoretical position was as an economist and she told me that she believed essentially in market forces. I wondered aloud how very young children and very old people fit into a world where they seem to have nothing to offer in the 'marketplace' but she maintained that we all have *ideas* to sell. For example, her grandmother tells her of the history of her family and how things were in 'the war'. So even people who are very ill or those who can hardly communicate at all can teach us something about being a human being. I was impressed. This was obviously a market not only of material products but also where *ideas* and interpersonal *relationships* were commodities at least as valuable as apples and potatoes or motor cars and apartments. And these transactions take place in a world where we are all responsible to some extent for maintaining and enhancing the *quality* of human living.

What can music teachers make of this? Presumably if we have goods to trade with others then we also are part of the market system. There are some obvious things towards which we might turn to demonstrate the value of our 'products'. Musical activities may enhance the profile of a school, they can keep young people off the streets, they sustain many industries, generate employment and so on. But none of these things by themselves are enough to justify music in the education system or to provide a rationale for the private teacher. So many other activities might also make similar claims: making and selling gambling machines, trading in cocaine, hand-guns or instruments of torture, prostitution. Why should not a training in some of these

occupations be in the curriculum, at least as electives? The usual answer is that although they are indeed goods or services, objects of trade, they do not reliably augment the quality of human life, nor do they contribute to the world of ideas. They do not facilitate what Oakeshot calls the skill and partnership of 'conversation'. They do not enhance our understanding of ourselves and the world. They do not lead towards the light.

Music maintains a foothold in formal education not because it gives some kind of direct sensory pleasure, or enhances the public image of a school, or because some few students may eventually earn a living in music-related occupations. It persists in our educational systems because it is a form of human discourse as old as the human race, a medium in which ideas about ourselves and others are embodied in sonorous forms, ideas that may be simple or complex, obvious or enigmatic. And insight into these ideas – as into any significant idea – can be intrinsically rewarding. Musical experience can be so powerfully insightful that participation may become celebratory. This is why music is often interwoven with ceremony, ritual, healing and other special events.

Of course it may not often be appropriate to justify time and space for music in education in such an elevated manner. The everyday justification consists in making and presenting music in such a way that it is perceived as both meaningful and eventful. If not then the whole thing becomes a boring irrelevance on the edge of life and this, unfortunately, is how music in formal education is sometimes regarded. The status and value of music is not problematic until education is formalised in schools and colleges, until musical learning becomes institutionalized. If we want to strum a guitar, understand the plot of a Wagner opera, play a sitar or sing in a chorus, then finding a teacher, reading a book or joining a performing group is all we need to do. There is no need to form a curriculum committee, produce a rationale or declare a list of objectives. The informal music 'student' can copy jazz riffs from recordings, ask friends about fingering or chord patterns, learn by imitation – 'sitting next to Nelly' – or watch TV, listen the radio, explore record shops. But in school and the instrumental teaching studio things can so easily go adrift causing music to lose its human significance and become an uneventful chore.

How then are we to resist drifting into the margins of education? Firstly we must recognise that music is a big player in the marketplace of ideas, it always has been so. Secondly we need to understand something of the processes of making and responding to musical ideas so that we become aware of what it is we are teaching (or trading). Thirdly we have to make sure that participation in music education is continually eventful.

Over the history of this Journal there have been several seminal articles which have contributed more ideas than usual to the field of music education with the potential to influence future educational transactions. The first article in this Issue is probably one of these.

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