



College Band Directors
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A POSITION PAPER BY THE CBDNA MUSIC EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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What is the purpose of this document? It is to serve primarily as a tool for discussion. It represents a consensus view of the CBDNA which, when posted on its website and disseminated amongst its members and like organizations, will serve to further the conversation on music education.

THE CALL FOR PERSPECTIVES:

CBDNA CONTRIBUTES TO THE MUSIC EDUCATION REFORM CONVERSATION

The CBDNA wishes to join the call for a rigorous review of music education in the United States with a goal towards making a substantial experience available to every person engaged in music study. It applauds and thanks the College Music Society for bringing a sense of needed urgency to this most important topic. We see a vibrant conversation between CBDNA, CMS and other parties as the way to address the challenges confronting music education.

We wish to express ourselves as musicians first, music educators second and leaders of bands and wind ensembles third. In this conversation, it is our belief that all persons contributing to the conversation be committed to music first as an art.

In this document CBDNA proposes a set of departure points for the conversation. We do not attempt to respond to every point put forth in documents offered by CMS or others. Rather, we wish to address some of the fundamental issues that underlie reform. We choose not to argue for positions. Rather we ask questions, we offer and suggest, all in the spirit of collaborative dialogue.

Overview

This paper will address core issues in music and music education; the first of which being the role of music in society. It will address the remainder of its topics through the lens of undergraduate teacher preparation, addressing the issues which undergird both undergraduate and secondary school education: efficacy of teachers, the substance and cultural implications of musical materials, curricular decision making and finally, challenges for reform. The document will end with a considered view of large ensembles, as they constitute the core of CBDNA's mission.

The role of music in society

We believe that music is an art form that compels people to both think and feel and thus is a basis for human awareness and hence, social awareness. We offer that music's role in addressing social ills comes not from it being used as a tool crafted to solve or address specific issues. Rather, it is through music that a person develops sensitivity, active and sympathetic listening as well as a sense of both leadership and service. These traits produce a person who is ready to lead in constructive conversation.

Accurately forecasting the future is impossible. Thus CBDNA is reluctant to prognosticate who will be the ideal twenty-first century musician. It prefers to envision a nearer horizon beginning with an objective review of the present. Our present world is alive with many musics, including western art music and jazz. Some employ certain limited metrics and conclude that western art music and jazz are dying anachronisms. Yet there is ample evidence that around the world, from emerging Asia (1) to venerable Great Britain (2), that the future holds promise for these alleged anachronisms. If expanding parts of our global village are embracing western art music, should we not educate musicians to be essential citizens of that village? In our haste to embrace the diversity of the world's music, are we ignoring a twenty-first century world that is increasing its embrace of the western art music tradition?

There is a temptation to think the future is change sweeping as an immutable wave. The only possible response is to accept change and "adjust to the new reality." Is the future really this inexorable wave? Or is it shaped by the myriad acts and words of people? And is it not teachers who greatly influence those people?

Our organization believes that many types of musical encounters can create an epiphanal moment joining art and person, lifting someone from the world in which they live and taking them somewhere deeply intimate and unique. We are drawn to think that the teacher is very often the spark of this epiphany, and we take most seriously the central role of the teacher and what music they teach.

We offer that the undergraduate curriculum for music education majors is inextricably tied to the curriculum they will teach in the primary and secondary schools. Theory, composition, appreciation, history, and applied performance are central parts of the undergraduate curriculum and are mirrored in secondary education. How and what we teach and what values we instill in undergraduate education majors – including issues of world music, student directed learning, and the balance between creative and recreative music making – will be reflected in how and what they teach students in primary and secondary education.

The teacher and the teaching environment

*CBDNA offers that the rooms in which we teach should be considered **music** rooms. While activities identified discreetly as band, chorus, or orchestra meet there, and non-performance classes are taught there, each and all activities in the room should engage in a comprehensive view of music.*

This view compels an integrated concept of teaching which has an important place in the undergraduate music education curriculum, a pillar of the CMS ideal. The teacher employing this concept provides a rich and varied set of creative and engaging recreative experiences with which to lead students. These experiences develop performance skills and inspire imagination in the interpretation of one's own part as well as the exploration of improvisation/ornamentation and the creation of original music. The teacher engages certain students in leadership, while recognizing students who benefit fully from

playing supporting roles. Through all this, students develop their musical sensitivity while maintaining high standards of performance and creativity which manifest in the student the sense of valid accomplishment. This is not the way many ensembles or classes currently function and we join others in calling for reform.

The total music room approach demands a teacher who is highly creative, disciplined, aware and most of all, musically adept. It is with this awareness that:

CBDNA offers that a crucial problem in music education is not primarily the curriculum but the overall level and education of the teachers.

There are many effective teachers, including those with large ensemble programs, who nurture an environment of creativity and include composition and improvisation while maintaining a high level of performance. But studies on the aptitude of teachers (Corcoran, Evans, and Schwab, 2004; Hoxby and Leigh, 2004) prompts sober consideration of the potential performance levels of many teachers. We offer that the solution to the problem of uncreative music engagement is by educating more musically aware, skilled and engaged teachers. This requires a concerted commitment from all reform parties to revivify and reprioritize teacher education. We suggest building in each student first a foundation of essential musical skills and awareness, including composition/arranging and improvisation/ornamentation. After this foundation is secure, the base could be broadened to include more diverse musics and approaches to the role of music. This ensures that the means of teaching music or its extra-musical potentials don't take primacy over the thorough and complete learning of music itself. This new teacher – skilled, knowledgeable and creative – is prepared to adapt as each unique teaching challenge arises.

The unengaged student, the curriculum and materials:

CBDNA wishes to join in efforts to develop music teachers who are committed to engaging students in school who are not yet involved in music so that they may in an informed way benefit from music throughout their lives.

Curricular reforms based on diversity are sometimes offered as a panacea to the problem of the unengaged student. To wit: if the music education student were to have a more diverse, multicultural plate of undergraduate offerings, they would in turn teach their students from this plate, meeting the challenge of the unengaged. We ask: Does the search for more diversity in a vast and varied country, already replete with regional differences of musical traditions and priorities, compel the wrong curricular tool for the local task? Would a better musical approach be one that seeks more a source of *unum* amongst the *pluribus*?

The quest for diversity

CBDNA believes that a student learns from many places, not just in institutions. For generations young people have learned musical skills outside of school: in social settings, in houses of worship and in the home. Therefore, no curriculum should consider itself responsible for all musical encounters and experiences.

To entice or encourage the unengaged student, many advocate preparing teachers through a mix of ethnic and popular music as a means to connect students to core musical principles. Some propose further a curriculum heavily dependent, or fully made up of, these musics.

We support the thesis that exploring music from varied cultures might provide initial opportunities for the potentially unengaged student. However, after these initial encounters, might continuing to teach from many diverse offerings risk a shallowness of experience? To more deeply enrich the student's learning, what music should be next employed and in what proportions? Could one begin by looking first to western art music and jazz?

What might compel us to look at this music when it seems far from the American students' immediate experience? Could we be compelled by a parallel found elsewhere? – for example, in Pacific Rim countries or South America, western art music and jazz are embraced by students even though both seem far from the students' immediate experience. (1) In engaging with this music, do they find evidence of values intrinsic to their culture: the development of the individual, discipline for the inner person, a sonic embodiment of a culture's long held values? (1) Do not these values allow this music to both penetrate and transcend cultures – including a youth culture? Could we consider a larger view – that the "*alle menschen*" of Beethoven is not just a compelling text but part of a *music* which manifests not just a musical appeal, but a global appeal of values including unity and consonance?

As a student is educated with an increasing diversity of music, do these students proportionally lose their ability to understand and communicate *deeply* the music of their own culture? We suggest that a musical citizen's genuine musical contribution is cultivated in them by their culture. When they move to a new culture, they create their own sense of belonging by assimilating into the culture of the new home, musical and otherwise. Thus we ask: should our students, whose families either have long lived in or been recently drawn to living in, our pluralistic culture bound together primarily by western sensibilities and aesthetics, be then foundationally educated in western art music and jazz as a way of belonging to the whole?

We then also ask: might employing too facilely an approach to ethnic or popular music be itself culturally insensitive? Can teachers from the western culture in any deep way be expert or even comfortable in the myriad sub-cultures that exist in the first and second generations found in the United

States? Will the teacher from the dominant culture be trying to teach students music which a student, coming from another culture, already knows much better from their first-hand experience?

In the conversation of multiple cultures, often defined ethnically, one might ask: do not young people make up a youth *culture* of their own? Might we look at the music of youth culture as a way to consider the teaching the music of specific sub-cultures?

The pop/rock case

There is currently an enthusiasm towards rock/pop music as a primary teaching tool in institutions. Let us consider: For more than two generations an army of self-directed garage/rock bands have attained varying levels of success by employing musical creativity and entrepreneurship independent of adult supervision. Psychologists have increasingly acknowledged the need for a young person to engage in unsupervised “play” (3) and rock bands have filled this need in adolescence. Unencumbered by adult interaction these bands have been of great personal and musical relevance to young people. Being in these bands has in varying degrees meant to the musicians: independence, channeled defiance, adolescent freedom and emotional release. Adults have supported these activities from a distance but are often an awkward presence in this landscape. We ask, as regards popular music creation, do we in fact inhibit a young person’s creativity by an adult hand on a curricular leash? If the answer is to any degree yes, what other music created in homes and social settings loses its essence of freedom and personal meaning when consigned to the classroom?

This illustration above addresses the *activity* of adolescent self-directed rock/pop music creation. But what of the music itself: the music commercially available which students listen to and hear as their own? To what degree is this music valuable in itself and thus as a tool for learning? Determining the value of any particular music is a fraught endeavor. However, one could consider that one of the reasons an artifact endures is because it contains elements valued by successive generations. In contrast to that which endures, popular music has a short shelf-life; most popular music is unremembered by the next generation.

Temporality presents a practical problem for the teacher employing popular music. Is the popularity cycle of popular music too short for teachers to keep up with? Is the teacher thus ill-equipped to teach the music a student considers “relevant”?

CBDNA wishes to offer a perspective on the definition of *relevant*, a term used often in conversations about educational reform. The formal definition of relevant is: “closely connected or appropriate to the matter at hand”. It seems that many consider “the matter at hand” a temporal term implying a sense of the now, as in something that is *currently* at hand. This compels some educators to think of relevance as “what a student thinks or feels is important to them *now*”. We offer that relevance is not a temporal term, but rather a content term which has not primarily a sense of time, but of substance.

Student decision making and the role of experience

This *substantive* definition of relevance may conflict with students' more *temporal* definition. Educators sympathetic to the student view of relevance propose an expanded role for the student in decision making; shouldn't our students be more involved in deciding what educational path is relevant to them?

We ask in response to this idea: To what degree is a student's concept of relevance - and awareness of needs for their future - handicapped by their limited life experience?

Teachers, having more life experience and awareness, can direct with more chance of success what knowledge and experiences are important for students to have. Does not the enduring value of case law, case studies, or by employing Einstein's well-worn aphorism "Information is not knowledge; the only source of knowledge is experience"—securely buttress the argument for teachers' past experience being a guide for the future? No one suggests that every teacher in every moment will have wisdom or that students shouldn't have input into their education. But an aggregate of experienced teachers, given more (not less) responsibility to advise wisely, will likely better direct a student's learning.

Acknowledged earlier in this discussion was student disinterest (they see no relevance?) in western music and jazz. One could reasonably ask – how does one draw students to recognize this music which appeals to so many and then to become active in it?

One might look to situations where the question has been answered, where those presumably not attracted have become highly attracted. El Sistema or East Harlem Violin Program(s) employ teachers who are energized by western art music and fueled by skill and passion for that music, and who inspire underserved students to fulfillment. Might we ask ourselves, instead of assuming that certain musics are unengaging, how might we instill in future educators the skills and passions that have so vibrantly engaged the young people in these programs?

*CBDNA recognizes that a necessary partner in reform will be those who compose and distribute/publish educational music. We offer that, in the spirit of Bartók's **Mikrokosmos**, the materials should not simply be teaching tools but must give the teacher and the students musically rich experiences for musical growth, interpretation, and/or improvisation. Teachers eager to explore the music of other cultures will find pieces that are musically valid and substantive amongst these materials.*

Enabling reform

CBDNA asks that, in the pluralistic world of music education, all parties should acknowledge and respond to calls for reform and accept that reform is often a composite of ideas. Such an approach is the hallmark of a functioning culture made up of disparate values. Incremental and partial reform measures are not by definition, nor should they be assumed to be, superficial.

Time and capacity to learn and absorb

CBDNA applauds CMS for not wishing to “replace one type of hegemony with another”. CMS proposes to fundamentally change the curriculum while keeping some current elements. Would this mean more, and more disparate, material to learn in approximately the same amount of time? As with current thoughts about “deep reading”, we ask: do too many topics, lightly experienced, prevent deep learning? Will this expanded curriculum ensure, or impede, mastery of material by the student?

Will the expectations of time and effort demanded by the more broadly drawn curriculum address the many students still lacking instrumental or vocal proficiency when entering college? Will there be enough time to become proficient on their instrument or voice to adequately demonstrate, to *express*, the range of music demanded by the curriculum? Will the undergraduate be able to communicate skillfully their creative voice?

Resources to accomplish the task

Most would acknowledge that a major hurdle to reform is the allocation of too often limited resources. Even if all parties were to agree to wholesale changes, there would still remain the formidable tension between educational desires and the limited resources of space, time and teachers.

Consider just one item from a reform list: at the undergraduate level, the diverse musics to be studied would need experts to teach and perform these musics. Since students should be provided only quality experiences in music learning, where would the many institutions preparing teachers find the resources to hire the high number of *expert* practitioners and teachers of these many musics?

What of secondary schools? If reforms were to emphasize large numbers of students working in small groups, taught by the expanded team of teachers required by a curriculum of more and disparate types of music, where will be found the resources of time, space and teacher funding?

We are concerned that given the realities of many administrators’ indifferent views of music and its importance, reforms that would involve increased resources of any kind are problematic from the outset and reform is thwarted at the outset.

Reform through enhancement

Aside from the issue of sufficient resources, many school systems and communities fully embrace their current music departments and curriculum. Will the teacher whose education is comprised of certain reform tenets, be employable in a district where the teacher's education is out of line with the community's expectations? Would their skills and attitudes match the job market and the job itself?

We suggest the greater good might be served if the advocates of differing reforms were to agree on certain elements from each agenda and facilitate those reforms, using and enhancing current structures. One avenue (amongst others) might be to use the large ensemble structure currently in place. That more broadly and deeply developed teachers would modify its structure and activities to accomplish more of the reforms desired by all?

CBDNA suggests that the large ensemble is currently in a position to act as a trunk from which branches of an integrative approach - including smaller groups of musicians and individuals - grow outward in a wide reach of creative and recreative musical experiences.

The community of large ensembles

CBDNA believes the communal experience of the large ensemble is invaluable for students who contribute to something larger than themselves as both artists and people.

CBDNA views the large ensemble not only as a component in music education, but also as many composers have viewed it, as an expressive force capable of both intimate and powerful artistic expression. While composers in all genres write music for soloists and small ensembles, these same composers often look to the larger aggregate of musicians as a means to make statements of unique importance.

Equally important to those musicians who create/compose music are the musicians who creatively and sympathetically recreate that music; these musicians are equally essential to the art. Generations of performing artists – students through to professionals – have gained personal fulfillment by realizing a composer's vision through expressing their part in community with many. Twenty-first century large ensemble musicians join in a history of *collegia* and orchestral musicians: those who performed Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* or accompanied Clara Schumann in her concerto performances. The continued presence of community choirs, orchestras and bands, populated by adults inspired by their school experiences in large ensembles, testifies to the enduring value of the communal experience to each musician.

CBDNA offers more than a half century of vision through the work of its member musicians and teachers. As a creative agent, we have produced a deep catalogue of new music in styles ranging from the art music tradition to fusion/third stream and the ethnically inspired; all of which aims to broaden and deepen the experience of those musicians who bring that music to life. In that spirit of vision and creativity CBDNA wishes to join with all parties to expand a music room more open to all students. It does not seek to be the dominant voice in the creation of needed reforms but wishes to offer a collaborative voice in the reform conversation.

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