

GORDON'S AND REIMER'S VISIONS OF MUSIC EDUCATION - COMPLEMENTARY OR CONTRADICTORY

Many of us listen to and perform music as a temporary escape from the experience of reality. The aesthetic and comforting experience we seek may be, and often is, referred to as music appreciation. Regardless of how sophisticated the name or however we choose to describe and explain what for now we will call music appreciation, one simple fact remains: **music appreciation that goes beyond simple emotional reaction and mood swing requires some degree of music understanding.** You may then ask, Are music appreciation and music understanding inseparable? The answer is both yes and no. Let me talk a bit about the two terms and then I will explain my answer.

Music appreciation relates to the recognition of the value of music. Music understanding relates to the comprehension of music itself. To fully appreciate music, it must be understood. To that extent, appreciation and understanding are inseparable. It is possible, however, to understand music but not to appreciate it. For example, we can understand how prejudice may be acquired but not appreciate seeing it in action. Thus, appreciation and understanding also may be distinct. What is of prime interest, particularly for the purpose of this discussion, is to realize that to attempt to teach music appreciation without teaching music understanding as a readiness for music appreciation in my opinion is shallow pedagogical procedure, and to follow such a path suggests a lack of educational integrity and credibility.

To some, my use of the term "music understanding" may seem arrogant. Perhaps I am treading where minds far greater than mine have been known to encounter difficulty. Nonetheless, in the hope of softening your opinion, let me say that, for me, music understanding and meaning in music are one and the same. Then, one must ask, What is meaning in music? Over the years, I have pondered this question as a musician, performer, teacher, and researcher. Subsequently, I developed the concept of audiation and feel sure that it, **audiation**, embodies the essence of meaning in music.

Audiation takes place when we hear and comprehend music for which the sound is not physically present (as in recall), is no longer physically present (as in

listening), or may never have been physically present (as in creativity). In contrast, aural perception takes place when we hear sound that is physically present. Audiation must not be confused with aural perception. Audiation deals with musical events. Aural perception deals with sound events. Sound that is aurally perceived cannot be comprehended as music until audiated after it is heard. Because of its broader musical implications and requirements, audiation is to music what thinking is to language.

We audiate while listening to, recalling, performing, interpreting, creating, improvising, reading, and writing music. Though it may seem contradictory that we can be listening to and at the same time be audiating a piece of music, we know that as we are hearing words spoken we can be thinking about the words that were just spoken. Reflect for a moment, if you will, on what you are doing now as you are listening to me speak. If you are not remembering what I have just said, you will not be able to put in context nor understand what I am saying.

Music is not an actual language because it does not have a grammar. It, however, does have syntax, the orderly arrangement of sounds. Even though music is not a language, the process is the same for audiating and giving meaning to music and for thinking about and giving meaning to language. Consider this: a literate person has four vocabularies. They are 1) a listening vocabulary, 2) a speaking vocabulary, 3) a reading vocabulary, and 4) a writing vocabulary. During the first year or so of life, we listen to speech all around us. Although we engage in speech babble and can't actually speak the language we are hearing, we absorb it through informal guidance. The more opportunity we have for listening and the more words we become familiar with and retain in our listening vocabulary, the better we will learn to speak when we receive formal instruction. Listening becomes the readiness for speaking and all other communication skills we will be developing throughout our lives. The crucial importance of the development of a large and diverse listening vocabulary, particularly during the preschool years, cannot be overstated.

Then, when ready, we begin to speak. We begin with words and progress to phrases and sentences. We speak words we have heard, and that provides the ability to hear and to speak new words.

Next, our progress in learning to read is based on our ability to speak; speaking has become the readiness for reading. That is, we learn to read words with which we are familiar. We bring meaning to, not take meaning from, the printed page. Think, please, of the folly of trying to teach young children how to read words they do not understand.

Finally, we learn to write the words that we can read; reading has become the readiness for writing. The four vocabularies are best developed hierarchically: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in that order.

Now consider music. During the formative years, most children hear media music, but it offers little diversity. That is unfortunate, because all of us, especially children, don't learn what something is, we learn what it is not. It is our awareness of difference, not sameness, that contributes significantly to building the listening vocabulary. With the same tonal and rhythm patterns heard over and over again in major tonality and duple meter, it is obvious that young children are deprived of the opportunity for developing a broadly appropriate listening vocabulary in association with the senses of at least two or more tonalities and two or more meters. Given the realization of the fact that it is rare for a child to be fortunate enough to have parents and siblings who know a variety of songs and chants in various tonalities and meters and to sing and to chant them with adequate intonation and rhythm, the roles and responsibilities of the music teacher and school program come into clear focus.

Many linguists believe that words are the smallest unit of meaning in language. In analogy, I believe that tonal patterns and rhythm patterns, not notes, are the smallest units of meaning in music. Unfortunately, the most important time in a child's life for the development of a listening vocabulary of tonal and rhythm patterns, from birth to about twelve or eighteen months old, is typically dormant in our society. What is lost cannot be remedied. At best it can only be compensated for, and that is not the worst of it. The musical

deprivation of informal guidance typically continues until the child enters school and is expected to engage in formal instruction. The stark realization is that the great majority of children who are taught school music are taught out of sequence, if not backward. They are taught singing, reading, and theory before, and in many cases without, listening and audiation as readinsses. While it is true that many preschool and kindergarten activities include a panorama of song games, nursery rhymes set to music, and activity songs, concentration is focused on texts or the activities involved rather than on music listening, music awareness, or music skill development. Even if consideration happens to be given to music appreciation, can it be realistically accomplished without giving concerted attention to intrinsic meaning in music? Think too about the audiation-impooverished children who are deprived of singing and listening, and in the majority of cases begin with reading, when they learn to play an instrument. Under those conditions, the young instrumentalist can, at best, become only an artisan mechanic, not even an amateur artist.

I feel that I must labor the point a bit more. Consider the speaking of music as singing and chanting. Now recollect the sound of a group of typical children singing a rote song which too often, without a piano or recording to mask the sound, would not be considered a musical experience. Based on those performance experiences alone, children are soon asked to listen to larger vocal and instrumental forms and are expected to appreciate them. That is analogous to reading a poem to children who are unfamiliar with and cannot even speak the words included in the poem and expecting them to have literature appreciation. Nonetheless, such a process is undertaken in many music classes and called music appreciation, aesthetic education, arts education, or multicultural education. There is, perhaps, a relationship to music, but what about education. "Education" seems to have mysteriously disappeared from the concept of "music education." That is unfortunate because it is through education that we learn to educe, to bring out what is inside us.

In the third or fourth grade, whether they remain in a general music class or elect to participate in beginning instrumental music, students are exposed to

music notation. Many of us claim that we are teaching music reading. How can that be? If students can't listen, sing, and chant in a musical manner, how can they be expected to learn to read notation in a musical manner. Actually, they don't. They only learn to decode notation by memorizing facts associated with written symbols, and many of them unknowingly perform vocally and instrumentally with questionable intonation and rhythm. Because they can't audiate what they see, they cannot bring meaning to notation. It is as futile as someone who cannot audiate the style of jazz trying to learn the style from notation. As an unfortunate consequence, children must be taught music theory to assist them in their endeavor to take meaning from notation. That is like attempting to teach children the parts of speech before they can speak a language. And, as a consequence, the teaching of writing notation is virtually ignored.

We are talking about teaching music in the schools. As I have suggested, there are two very different ways of going about that. The first way is to emphasize music appreciation without direct responsibility for music understanding. That, I believe, is the common way, and I cannot refrain from saying that I am of the opinion that it unwittingly and tacitly gives a teacher permission and the confidence to continue to teach without concern for educational sequence. When teachers talk **about** music and don't teach music, they become metaphor merchants, traders in analogy, and perhaps worst of all, symbol mongers. The second way, which emphasizes music understanding, so that it may serve as a readiness for developing music appreciation, is the more demanding of the two. It encourages a teacher to engage in functional audiation and to accept the challenge of taking intelligent risks. I know what I am saying may be controversial. For that I do not apologize. I hope, however, that I am not interpreted as being negative when I urge that our profession devote serious thought to adopting a sequential approach of teaching music understanding so that music appreciation may indeed become a reality.

Allow me to add to what I have already said in support of my position. Understanding through audiation is a **process**, whereas appreciation is a **product**, or in educational terms, a goal. When students learn to appreciate music through

understanding, they are able to predict what will be heard in a piece of unfamiliar music and to anticipate with at least a modest degree of sophistication what will be heard in a piece of familiar music that is being listened to or performed. That becomes possible because they are able to give intrinsic meaning to music, that is, to give syntactical meaning to music in terms of audiating at least tonality and meter. Students are able to decide for themselves the music they desire to listen to and perform. A main goal of music education will have been accomplished: satisfaction through self reliance.

You may think I speak idly when I tell you that many "lovers" or "appreciators" of music, whether just listening or performing, musically educated or not, are unaware of the resting tone or tonic or of the location of the macrobeats and microbeats in the music to which they and their students are attending. The aesthetic joy associated with the expectation of a tonal or rhythmic modulation, for example, becomes virtually impossible. Under those conditions, can the goal of music appreciation be associated with anything more than external control of elemental emotion and mood largely associated with special occasions? Odd as it may seem, there are teachers of music appreciation who are able to spell a chord and to know what not to double in part writing, but they are totally unaware of the sound of the chord progression in which it is comprised.

Going even deeper into the heart and soul of this discussion, who can deny that music appreciation in its broadest form includes the ability to create and improvise music. Musical creativity and improvisation require musical understanding. True, it gives one great pleasure to listen to an artistic performance. But think of the great satisfaction that comes with creating and improvising, that is, performing without the aid of notation, one's own music in various styles in solo and ensemble. When that occurs, music belongs to the individual; it is the joy and property of the individual. Does that not at least equal the enjoyment of listening to an outstanding performance? Both creating and improvising on the one hand and listening to and comprehending an artistic performance on the other lead to the type of music appreciation that can be

acquired only through music understanding. Music understanding through audiation ensures that meaning resides primarily in the listener or performer, not in the music itself, and certainly not in the signs and symbols that we as a society have come to pay homage to as notation. **Notation teaches us nothing, it can only help us recall what we can already audiate.**

Unless musical meaning is in the students themselves, how can they ever be expected to generalize what they have been taught about music and to be able to cope with different types of contemporary music, and, I should mention, the music of other cultures, that they undoubtedly will be exposed to throughout their lives. Fashions may change but through it all, style persists. To do our jobs well, we, as teachers, must guide students in learning to become their own teachers so that they are able to identify and value style in the plethora of fashions.

Teachers teach, students learn. It is imperative that students learn to make inferences if they are to continue to appreciate music into adulthood. Eventually they will not have a teacher to help them decide what music has merit, and what they should or should not like. They will either rely on the self confidence that comes with the ability to audiate or succumb to the numbness of ritual and conformity which, I believe, contributes to the general discomfort of artists and the growing lack of respect for art in our society. The less music teachers worry about programmatic and extrinsic meaning and how music makes students feel and the more concerned they become with how students may best profit educationally from actual participation in music, the more they can stem the tide of culture giving way to societal sterility. **Most music is not meant to have external meaning, it is simply meant to be.**

I have already talked about the difference between audiation and notation, and the important sequence of learning audiation before notation. To further clarify differences that exist in teaching music in the schools, it seems imperative that I discuss other words that are popularly associated with music education and misconstrued as audiation. They are imitation, memorization, and recognition.

Audiation and imitation, both sometimes erroneously referred to as inner hearing, are often confused. Although imitation is a readiness for audiation, it must be remembered that many students are taught to imitate but, they do not learn to audiate. That is unfortunate. Just as it is possible for one to learn to say nonsense syllables or to repeat a phrase in a foreign language and not know the meaning of what one is saying, there are many students who are taught to sing rote songs and to imitate and memorize pieces on their instruments without giving musical meaning to their performance, that is, without understanding the syntax of the music.

To imitate is to be taught through someone else's ears. To audiate is to learn through one's own ears. Just as we must think for ourselves, we must audiate for ourselves. We imitate and memorize when we repeat what have heard or read. It is a reactive response. For all intents and purposes it is soon forgotten because what is imitated or memorized has almost no generalization value for learning something new. We audiate when we retain and tonally and rhythmically think about what was heard perhaps minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years ago. It is an active process that becomes a component of more complex audiation when dealing with both familiar and unfamiliar music. Audiation allows us to go beyond simple recall in memory. It provides the basis for enriching memory through generalization and creativity.

Compared to teaching the recognition of what is considered "good music," which is simply listening without performance, what is better about imitation and memorization is that they at least involve students in the performance of music. How many among us have been taught to recognize specific compositions as a graduation requirement and yet would be hard pressed to discuss the music itself, to go beyond the title, the composer's name and birth and death dates, perhaps a key or an opus number, and facts about the composer personal life? In recognition, imitation, and memorization, we live in the past. In audiation, the past lives in us.

I know something would seem askew to you if I were not to mention music aptitude and its important relationship to teaching to students' individual

musical differences. It is possible, though not always simple, to adapt music instruction in terms of audiation to students' musical strengths and weakness. I dare say that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to adapt music instruction in terms of music appreciation to students' musical strengths and weaknesses. The past tells us that in the latter case, academic intelligence rather than music aptitude becomes the instructional guide. Too often we teach a class as if all students are of average music aptitude. That we frustrate those with lower aptitudes is not the worst of it. We also bore those with higher aptitudes. All the while, sufficient contact is not being made with the typical student. They, and many with higher music aptitudes, seek and find music opportunities outside school music.

I am concerned that you may have concluded that I have little to say in defense of music appreciation and in particular, listening. As a matter of fact, I believe that listening is indispensable in all types of music instruction, be it appreciation or understanding. Performance, however, is equally important. Research in music learning theory indicates that one without the other, **aural without oral**, renders either of little educational value. What I have just said is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of fact. To teach both, which is a sign of educational enlightenment, is too important to be left to the arbitrary discretion of a teacher, supervisor, administrator, or professor.

In closing, I suggest that you give thought to the preposterous idea that math appreciation, physics appreciation, English literature appreciation, or even driver education appreciation be included in the school curriculum. Those subjects, as they are traditionally taught, are concerned primarily with understanding in their respective disciplines. That is not to say the teachers don't care whether their students enjoy what they are learning. But, rather than trying to convince those teachers to use the word "appreciation" in their course descriptions and for them to feel personally responsible if their students do not like what they are being taught even though they may understand it, would it not be more prudent to convince ourselves to use the word "understanding" in our music course descriptions? An immediate benefit might be that we, as a

profession, would cease chasing current fads that are constantly thrust at us, and even required in some curriculums.

Furthermore, music educators now have at their disposal well-designed tests. There are music aptitude tests that serve a multitude of purposes for improving music instruction, and there are also exceptionally good up-to-date music achievement tests that measure and evaluate the extent to which students' audiate and understand music. Rather than subjectively grading students in music on attitude and attendance, we, like other professionals in the school, are finally able to base our evaluations on objective information.

Think of the educational implications if we could teach multicultural musicianship rather than simply an overview of multicultural music, or bring developed music skills and meaning to the computer keyboard rather than trying to extract musicianship from it. CD's, flashy videos, and sophisticated computers can never do for children's music development what the combination of their own ears, intelligence, and music aptitude can produce when given a sequentially developed instructional program of listening and performing. A sequential program based on the development of audiation skills not only challenges students, preschool and adult alike, it also brings meaning to music as well as genuine education to music education.