

## A NEW EMPHASIS

The passing of Howard Hanson has deprived us of one of our foremost spokesmen and signals the end of an era. The era I speak of began in Boston in the 1830's. At that time Lowell Mason was a dominant figure in music education. He was a singing school master and he conducted the renowned Juvenile Choir. His main intent was to have music introduced into the curriculum of the Boston, Massachusetts, Public Schools. Though not without travail, Mason was successful. He convinced the members of the School Board that the teaching of vocal music in the schools would enrich the students intellectually, morally, and physically. He would have jeopardized his plan had he put emphasis on the value of music for developing aesthetic understanding. Nonetheless, Mason was able to dissuade his contemporaries from the popular belief that only the "talented few" should receive instruction in music. With that humble beginning, music became an accepted part of the curriculum in schools in other parts of the country. Before long, most major cities employed special music teachers to teach vocal music. Although the Boston School Board submitted a favorable report for including music in the curriculum in 1837, music was taught only in the grammar schools. At that time grammar schools were like middle and junior high schools today. It was not until 1864, under the direction of Luther Whiting Mason, that music was taught in the primary schools in any organized manner. Eight years later, music in the Boston schools had been introduced at all grade levels when Julius Eichberg supervised the teaching of music in every high school in the city. And, as we all know, instrumental music became a recognized part of the curriculum from the elementary school through the high school shortly after World War I. Performance groups had established themselves as the core of music education.

As we have just heard, Howard Hanson intended to speak to us about his vision of a new emphasis in music education. He understood that, almost one hundred fifty years after the introduction of music into the grammar schools of Boston, the teaching of music to children in the primary grades, kindergarten through grade three, has become

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as important as performance groups and that ~~it~~ is probably the most important responsibility facing our profession today. In too many school systems, the music program in the primary grades is regarded by school boards and administrators as merely an adjunct to the so-called core disciplines, as recreation or a change of pace in an otherwise structured day, as a process for developing good attitudes toward music for later life, and perhaps most frequently, as a vehicle to provide union-required free periods for classroom teachers. As a result, the support and staffing of elementary school music programs have become inordinately diluted, and the limited funds that are available for music have increasingly shifted to sustaining performance groups in the junior and senior high schools. No one would deny the value of performance organizations to music education in the schools and to the community at large. However, as professionals, we must assume the role of leadership by questioning the value of music performance organizations in the junior and senior high schools if these experiences are not a continuation of a strong elementary school general music program. We must ask if music performance organizations function in music education in as dubious a manner as spectator sports function in physical education. <sup>ALSO</sup> We must ask whether students can profit to their fullest potential from participation in music performance organizations in the upper schools without first having appropriate music education in the elementary schools, not to mention preschools, to provide the necessary readiness. Current research findings tell us that they cannot. Moreover, for the majority of students in the schools, those who do not elect to participate in music performance groups, the loss of what they should have had the opportunity to learn in a strong elementary general music program is irreparable. I would like to use the remainder of my short time with you to summarize the more important current research findings which bear on those issues and on a new emphasis.

During the first half of this century, and to some extent today, it was commonly believed that music aptitude (the potential for music achievement) is innate. That is, many music educators took the position that music aptitude is a God-given gift, and

that one is born either with it or without it. However, shortly before mid-century, some psychologists advanced the idea that the level of music aptitude is determined solely by environment. The nature/nurture issue, as it was called, persisted for only a short time. The facts consistently supported the nature position: that music aptitude is innate. It was not until the last five years that more factual information was brought to bear on the issue. This information is directly related to what I have been referring to as the new emphasis. Briefly, music aptitude is a product of both innate capacity and informal environmental influences. It appears that if one is born with a high level of music aptitude, his informal environment must be favorable or his aptitude level will fall. On the other hand, if one is born with a low level of music aptitude, quantity and quality of informal environment will have no effect on raising that level of aptitude. What is of particular importance for us to recognize is that the interaction of informal environment and innate potential takes place only until one reaches the approximate age of nine. That is, music aptitude is developmental up through age eight, and at age nine, give or take a few months, music aptitude becomes stabilized. After age nine, <sup>NEITHER</sup> informal <sup>NOR FORMAL</sup> environmental activities will in <sup>ANY</sup> ~~no~~ way influence the level of aptitude. What I am telling you is that the quantity and quality of music education a child receives in preschool and the early grades (including kindergarten) determine the level of music aptitude he will possess at age nine and throughout his life. After age nine, a child cannot formally achieve in music beyond his level of music aptitude. What I am also telling you is that the most important time in a child's music education, if not in the preschool years, <sup>is</sup> in kindergarten through grade three. And what he learns in kindergarten is more important than what he learns in grade three. What he learns in the primary grades determines what he will be able to learn in his adolescence and adult life.

Perhaps an analogy will help illustrate the point. A child goes through a language babble stage from birth to about fourteen months. Without that language babble stage

to serve as a readiness, a child would not adequately develop language skills. How a child develops language skills from birth through age three remains a mystery. What is being discovered is that a child also goes through a "music babble" stage. However, music babble is less a mystery than language babble. In regard to tonal elements, the child's babble stage begins with the development of a sense of pitch center, and it ends with the development of a sense of tonality. In regard to rhythm elements, the child's babble stage begins with the development of an awareness of the pairing of beats, and it ends with the development of a sense of meter. Fortunately for them, children pass through the language babble stage before they enter school. Unfortunately for them as well as their music teachers, most children do not begin to pass through the music babble stage until they enter school. This is not so much due to physical characteristics as it is due to the relative lack of informal music activities in the home and in the preschool. Most parents and preschool teachers have not acquired the necessary understanding and music skills to guide children appropriately through the music babble stage. Thus it becomes the responsibility of the elementary school music teacher to deal with the very delicate matter of how a child who is immature in music but mature in other respects might be best introduced to music. Information is being gathered. What we know at this time is that young children who are passing through the music babble stage are not little adults. They do not learn music in the same way as adults do. They must pass through the music babble stage before they can appropriately learn music in the same way that adults do. Just when a child has completed the music babble stage and begins to understand music as older children and adults do is not quite clear. Nonetheless, what is clear is that if young children are forced into formal music instruction without the necessary readiness of informal instruction, which, in essence, is the encouragement of music babble, great harm can be done. The new emphasis I speak of must be on the acquisition of knowledge about how young children learn when they learn music, and on the activities and materials which are most suitable for young children who are entering the music babble stage as well as for young children who are passing through that stage.

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When a child's music aptitude has become stabilized, we are not ~~sure~~ of the extent to which he has passed through the music babble stage. We know only that he has passed through the music babble stage. When a child is in the music babble stage, his music aptitude is developmental. Thus it is obvious that music educators must see to it that an adequate amount of time in the school day is devoted to the appropriate type of guidance for children who are in different stages of music babble as well as for those who are out of the music babble stage altogether. Teachers must also endeavor to learn what types of music skills and music content are most advantageous to children who are in either the developmental or stabilized music aptitude stage. <sup>AS YOU HAVE HEARD</sup> ~~I am given to believe~~ <sup>SOME OF SOME OF</sup> ~~that Howard Hanson would have been saying these things to you had he been here tonight.~~

It may seem that I have been critical of elementary school general music teachers. That is not my intent. As a matter of fact, I hold them in high regard. Considering what they have had to contend with over the years, they have performed admirably. However, the time has come for a new emphasis. We, as members of a profession, must give the necessary attention to elementary general music to make it an integral part of the school curriculum. We must first see to it that elementary general music teachers are given guidance in how to teach young children in terms of method as it relates to learning theory, and what to teach children in terms of music content. Then we must give elementary general music teachers and their programs proper support and recognition. One of the ways in which we can achieve those aims is by helping them obtain proper schedules for teaching young children. One period a week for music instruction is not sufficient; moreover, a period should not be longer than one half hour, preferably twenty minutes. The evidence indicates that two shorter periods are far more beneficial to music learning than one long period. Another way to help elementary general music teachers is to see to it that they are not required to teach hundreds of children each week. Finally, we must use all of our influence to insist that colleges and universities initiate on a grand scale research which bears on how young children learn when they learn music; and ways must be found to pass on research results to the teachers. If all

of this cannot be accomplished, we cannot expect the elementary school general music teacher to do much better than what we have come to expect as a standard.

Colleges and universities are also arenas of our profession. It is of importance that methods courses stop the mere training of prospective teachers for day-to-day music instruction. Rather, it is essential that prospective teachers become educated about music learning processes. Just as we can no longer afford to train rather than to educate young children and students in music, so we can no longer afford to simply train rather than to educate prospective music teachers.

An era is ending. The new emphasis must be on the education of young children, not at the expense of performance, but as a foundation from which performance should flourish. The new emphasis also has its implications for the musically talented; the physically, emotionally, and mentally handicapped; senior adults; and a multi-cultured society. At least some level of music aptitude can be found in every human. As professional music educators, we must acknowledge individual musical differences and make the effort to unfold and nourish the talent of all children as early in their lives as possible. We must care enough to learn beyond the day-to-day techniques and materials which have come to take on such unwarranted proportions in our professional work. The winds of the future are already blowing upon us.

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