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Amateurism in Music Education (1967-2019): Three Calls to Action

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Abstract

John Kratus' 2019 Music Educators Journal article "A Return to Amateurism in Music Education" contained what many may interpret as radical ideas to focus music education curriculum and instruction on amateurism. But upon further research, leaders within the profession have consistently affirmed the goals of amateurism. The purpose of this study was to analyze and compare themes of Kratus' concept of amateurism with declarative statements of the two most recent National Association for Music Education leadership summits, which charted the profession's future. Directed content analysis method¹ and deductive content analysis² of Kratus' "Amateurism" article, compared to declarative reports of the 1999 Housewright Symposium and the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium, revealed the following themes of amateurism in common between the documents:

- *Lifelong music learning for all people of all ages should be a primary goal.*
- *The curriculum should include all styles of music including popular music.*
- *Teachers should utilize new technologies in the music classroom.*
- *There is a need for more diversity in music teacher training.*

Kratus' proposed way forward, a strong emphasis on amateurism, coalesces the common themes of Tanglewood, Housewright, and many NAFME publications into curricular focus, giving action items grounded in sound pragmatic philosophy.

Keywords: curriculum, pedagogy, lifelong learning, amateurism, Housewright Declaration, Tanglewood Declaration

America is full of former musicians. As a music teacher, I constantly meet adults who used to perform in the school band, choir, or orchestra. I could not help but imagine if the world would

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be a better place for everyone if they had continued actively learning and making music. Too often, our music classes place the most robust emphasis on musical performance products of large ensembles. That focus can leave graduates with little more in their hands than trophies and fond memories. Schools should provide them the inspiration and skills to continue active, vibrant musical lives after high school ends.

As I read John Kratus' 2019 *Music Educators Journal* article "A Return to Amateurism in Music Education" I, found myself, a fifteen-year veteran in-service teacher, having an epiphany. I have seen the vast majority of my graduates discontinue music learning during college or immediately afterward. The traditional performance and competition-focused ensemble programs my colleagues and I have led do not appear to be inspiring or perhaps enabling graduates to continue learning music independently. Perhaps an effective method to cultivate music learning persistence into adulthood is what Kratus recommends, a focus on amateurism.

Kratus defined an amateur as "one who engages in music purely for the love of doing so,"³ and the semiprofessional as one who "strives to meet the expectations set by others but without the remuneration of a one-time occupation."⁴ Preparing students to become amateur adult musicians equips them with the abilities to make music independently and in small groups, for their personal enjoyment, in a variety of styles (especially those they choose), with modern instruments. Learning activities include performing, composing, improvising, listening, collaborating, songwriting, arranging, and producing.

Many in the profession balk at teaching amateurism, insisting that aspiring for semi-professionalism is the best way to teach student musicians.⁵ What have music education leaders and the NAFME said about amateurism? Analysis of the declarative reports of the 1999 Housewright Symposium and the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium, two of the pivotal 20th-century

music education leadership summits, revealed many parallels with the Kratus article. While not advocating precisely for amateurism, the declarations' themes echoed the same goals. Upon further research, I found NAFME and leaders in the profession have historically and consistently lauded themes of amateurism. Thus, in advocating for a stronger curricular focus on amateurism, Kratus' article does not break from tradition as one might imagine. However, his article does offer precise curricular and pedagogical methods to make real the goals leaders in the profession repeatedly declare.

Methods and Materials

I examined Kratus' 2019 *Music Educators Journal* article "A Return to Amateurism in Music Education" for themes related to the concept of the musical amateur (his idea to enable/inspire lifelong music learning) and themes related to the concept of the music semiprofessional. Then, using the directed content analysis method,⁶ I examined declarative summaries of the two symposiums for evidence of the themes: the 1999 Housewright Symposium and the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium. Finally, using the deductive content analysis approach,⁷ I searched for keywords such as "age," "lifelong," "amateur," and "adult," versus "professional," "musician," "standard," and "perform" and organized their contexts. The research questions were:

1. For what changes in the music education profession are the three documents advocating?
2. In these three documents, what are the relationships among themes related to musical amateurism?

Three Calls for Change

This renaissance of the amateur spirit in music is an expression of democracy. It affords the opportunity and encouragement of each person old and young to use the music in him [sic] in co-operation with others. Like all the fine arts, music has its aristocracies, but in its community expression, it is increasingly democratic.⁸

As Birge's 1937 quote reveals, the music education profession had valued amateurism since at least the 1930's Great Depression, when, in a moment of economic uncertainty, the leadership of the Music Supervisor's National Conference conducted its annual meeting. Even then, leaders in the profession wrestled with the ideas of semi-professionalism and amateurism and decided to focus on the latter in American classrooms. Amidst a “perplexing economic situation in all parts of the country,”⁹ the leaders aimed to ensure school music education's relevance to people's daily lives in that time. Following the meeting, editor Paul J. Weaver (1930) wrote of the proceedings:

Although we may not have realized it, music education has always had the dual objective of preparation for amateur musical activities on the one hand and pre-vocational preparation on the other. The balance between these two has been an unsteady one, one phase of the program being emphasized at one time and the other phase at other times... The emphasis of the discussion, however, was placed on the development of a true amateur spirit in music as a primary objective of music work in the schools.¹⁰

The soon-to-follow publication of “A Statement of Belief and Purpose” in *Music Educators Journal* included a stark endorsement of amateurism: “The development of a universal spirit of true musical amateurism, which shall carry over from school days into the life of each citizen, is

accordingly desirable.”¹¹ We will next explore three more recent calls for music education to make systemic reforms with amateurism as a core goal.

At MENC's 1967 Tanglewood Symposium, commission members representing diverse interests gathered to discuss the future of music education. The declarative statement from the symposium (the Tanglewood Declaration) advocated for music education to be a core school subject. At MENC's 1999 *Housewright Symposium on the Future of Music Education*, a similarly structured commission discussed academic papers and presented formal responses. The Housewright Declaration, part of the *Vision 2020* document, stated in part that “meaningful music activity should be experienced throughout one's life toward the goal of continuing involvement.”¹² The Housewright Declaration and the Tanglewood Declaration reflected the efforts of some of the most accomplished leaders and thinkers in the field of music education. The Housewright Declaration and *Vision 2020* document have been in place for twenty years as of the writing of this article, guiding music educators into the future.

In 2019, *Music Educators Journal* published an article by Kratus as part of an issue focused on popular music. In the article, “A Return to Amateurism in Music Education,” he reviewed a migration in the focus of American music education from amateurism toward semi-professionalism. He made recommendations for the field to move into the future by returning to its roots of preparing students to be musically independent amateurs.¹³ Kratus identified anachronisms stifling progress in music education and presented ways for teachers, administrators, and professors to succeed at teaching for lifelong learning. Kratus held that if curricula focused on amateurism rather than semi-professionalism, more students would become lifelong learners, music education would reach more students, and music education would attain a more stable foothold in schools.

Given these assertions, the purpose of this study was to analyze and compare themes of amateurism and related curricular and pedagogical ramifications within the three philosophically oriented calls to the music education profession to adapt to modern times. This study's analysis of the declarative reports from the symposiums and the 2019 Kratus article reveals four themes related to amateurism:

- Lifelong music learning for all people of all ages should be a primary goal.
- The curriculum should include all styles of music (including popular music).
- Teachers should utilize new technologies in the music classroom.
- There is a need for more diversity in music teacher training.

Ordinary theme #1: Lifelong music learning for all people of all ages

Education that results in no long-term use has little value, or as education philosopher, Jerome Bruner wrote: “The first objective of an act of learning is that it should serve us in the future.”¹⁴ Authors of all three documents asserted lifelong music learning as a central purpose of music education. In the third point of the Tanglewood Declaration, the authors called for music education to extend from preschool through adulthood. Housewright Declaration authors demonstrated MENC's increased focus on music for all ages, urging those in the profession to think beyond high school: “meaningful musical activity should be experienced throughout one's life toward the goal of continuing involvement.”¹⁵ The very first point within the declaration “All persons, regardless of age, cultural heritage ability, venue, or financial circumstance deserve to participate fully in the best music experiences possible.”¹⁶ The importance of lifespan musical experiences appears at the very beginning of the declaration.

NAfME publications continue to advocate for all people, not just children, to learn music. The current NAfME Constitution articulates the goal of lifelong music participation twice in the

Purpose section: “to conduct programs and activities to build a vital musical culture and an enlightened musical public for the benefit and the general welfare of all persons...” and “to promote the involvement of persons of all ages in learning music.”¹⁷ Additionally, the current vision statement posted in NAFME's strategic plan includes a reference to all ages: “Leading the world in music education, empowering generations to create, perform, and respond to music.”¹⁸ NAFME's current mission statement and preamble state:

Preamble: Music allows us to celebrate and preserve our cultural heritage and explore the realms of expression, imagination, and creation resulting in new knowledge. Therefore, every individual should be guaranteed the opportunity to learn music and to share in musical experiences.

Mission: The mission of the National Association for Music Education is to advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all.¹⁹

Kratus' amateurism is an effective way to put NAFME, Tanglewood, and Housewright's philosophical goal of lifelong learning into practice. For Kratus, teaching for lifelong learning is paramount. Rather than training school music students to become professional musicians, increasingly rare career options, Kratus advocated for teachers to cultivate student skills to enable them to enjoy amateur music-making for life. Kratus advocated for NAFME to revise the 2014 national standards to focus explicitly on developing students' lifetime musical habits. He also advised teachers to engage in more musical collaboration with community adults to build bridges between generations and widen the influence of school music to include adults. Finally, Kratus wrote that the “profession must raise expectations that students will use what they learn in school once they are away from school.”²⁰ To raise expectations for lifetime music-making, teachers must reiterate that goal to students verbally and with their actions. Teachers won't be

looking over students' shoulders when they are adults, so students must be able to make music independent of teacher help. Teachers who promote the goals of amateurism naturally teach musical independence because to make amateur music alone, and in small groups without a conductor, one must acquire the skills to do so.

Ordinary theme #2: The curriculum should include all styles of music

The authors of all three documents agree that we should teach more styles of music in school. Tanglewood's second point included a call for an expansion of curricular music to include all styles and periods, “including currently popular teenage music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and music of other cultures.”²¹ In the five decades since Tanglewood, popular music's inclusion in music education curricula remains a controversial issue but has been regularly supported by leaders in the profession. In the Housewright Declaration, the authors specifically mentioned Western art music, recommending the tradition to be upheld. At the same time, the curriculum expands to include other music.²² The Tanglewood Declaration appeared to suggest that schools were focusing on the Western art tradition to the exclusion of other styles of music. The Housewright Declaration and Kratus' article more overtly stated the point while acknowledging Western art music's important place in music education. If music education aims to create lifelong learners out of every child, then it makes little sense to exclude students or avoid widely used musical styles.

In a particular segment of a 2020 edition of *Contributions to Music Education* focused on *Vision 2020* and the future of music education, some of Housewright's foremost contributing authors' assessments of Housewright's themes are consistent with amateurism. Marie McCarthy cited Housewright's overarching themes of “inclusion and widening horizons.”²³ Clifford Madsen reflected that *Vision 2020* authors focused on issues of inclusion and that limiting

curricular offerings to the band, chorus, and orchestra is short-sighted and excludes many people because “most of the music that is employed and enjoyed by most adults does *not* fit this pattern.”²⁴ Upon looking forward, Paul Lehman contended the profession must increase high school music enrollment by expanding the curriculum beyond large ensembles to include music classes with no prerequisites.²⁵ Many of Lehman's ideas for potential offerings emphasize amateurism, including digital ensembles, guitar, keyboard, electronic music, steel drums, and interdisciplinary arts courses.²⁶

Kratus has argued for similar curricular changes, claiming the music education profession is stuck in the past, teaching students primarily large ensemble music using instruments from the 19th century and repertoire adolescents rarely encounter in daily life.²⁷ Very few adults continue playing in large ensembles, and a tiny percentage play professionally. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2019, there were only approximately 187,600 professional musicians in the United States.²⁸ In contrast, preparing graduates to make music as amateurs would almost certainly increase adult music participation.

Kratus suggested that students work independently and in small groups on many musical styles, which they are more likely to continue after high school.²⁹ Amateurism characteristically includes many styles of music, including popular music, because the music is chosen based on performer desires and is often made using modern instruments and technologies, which tend to be more attractive to young people than 19th-century instruments.³⁰ Busy adults raising children and working can find it difficult or impractical to attend regular extensive ensemble rehearsals. In addition, modern instruments are more likely to be in people's homes and do not require the logistics of extensive ensemble rehearsals for music-making. Thus, even as a practical matter,

amateurism increases the likelihood that students and adults will continue learning music outside school classrooms.

Ordinary theme #3: Teachers should utilize new technologies in the music classroom

If schooling is to prepare students for the world outside the classroom, schools must have comparable technologies to those in the private sector. In Tanglewood's fifth point, authors promoted television, computers, and educational technology to ensure music education's relevance. The idea was visionary in 1967 since most of the music enjoyed was live or on records, and few people had access to computers. Since 1967, much has changed in American musical life, and technology continues to evolve. Rock instruments, computer-based music, and laptop and tablet use have proliferated while most schools continue to offer music classes with 19th-century instruments.

Housewright's authors directed music educators to remain on the cutting edge of technology however that might look in the classroom. The Housewright's fifth point stated: "Music educators need to be proficient and knowledgeable concerning technological changes and advancements and be prepared to use all appropriate tools in advancing music study."³¹ In another *Vision 2020* chapter, Cornelia Yarbrough acknowledged the breakneck speed with which technology constantly changes and develops and the need for the field to embrace it as much as possible to reach more students.³² The upheaval in teaching and learning during 2020's COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that music teachers will need to be more flexible and embrace online resources in the future. We may always blend high school and collegiate classes with online and in-person content.

Kratus has written several articles on modern instruments and popular music.³³ He wrote that teachers should be trained to be confident enough to teach all styles of music, not just

Classical music, and with that comes the use of more modern instruments, including those used in current popular music. He reflected on studies showing significant declines in student school music participation. He argued that a significant reason for attrition is that music education “has become disconnected from the prevailing culture.”³⁴ Referencing the recent explosion in sales of keyboards and electric guitars, he noted that they enable students a more realistic opportunity for a lifetime of music alone and in groups. His 2019 article pointed out that even in the 19th-century, students learned using standard instruments of the time, not obsolete Renaissance-era instruments. Kratus argued against the use of anachronistic instruments, saying, “Digital instruments, guitars, and ukuleles are far more appropriate for current times than some rather obscure instruments currently taught in collegiate music schools.”³⁵

Ordinary theme #4: There is a need for more diversity in teacher training

The word “diversity” in this context refers to the range of concepts and skills included in teacher training programs and utilized within the classrooms of in-service teachers. Each of the three calls to action urged increased diversity of teacher training in music styles, music-related activities, ages and ability levels, community engagement, and personally relevant music activities. The authors collectively claimed there is more to music teaching than mentoring good performers. If instructors of collegiate methods courses diversify their approaches to music-making, teachers entering the field may be able to reach students who have found their musical interests excluded from school music programs. Several other authors have accused college teacher education programs of being performance-heavy, churning out excellent Western Classical Music performers who are ill-prepared to lead students in the many ways of interacting with music.³⁶

Kratus advocated for an expansion of curricular offerings to “appeal to amateur musicians as well as semiprofessional musicians.”³⁷ In addition to the traditional extensive ensemble repertoire, PK-12 music departments could include mariachi, iPad ensembles, music of the film, history of popular music, guitar, ukulele, keyboard, songwriting, composition, music technology, and music production. By integrating other types of musical performance into their classes, instructors could engage a higher percentage of students more effectively in the often neglected ways people interact with music such as composing, improvising, arranging, and responding to music.³⁸ Kratus has written that when a musician learns to create personally expressive music of their own, through processes like songwriting, a unique relationship between the artist and the art form is built that can significantly enhance a person's life and inspire music-making that lasts a lifetime.³⁹ Teaching skills such as songwriting, composing, arranging, producing, and listening, will likely inspire more students – future adults – to actively participate in music-making.

NAfME on the diversity of teaching training

NAfME has long argued for music teachers not only to be skilled ensemble conductors but to effectively teach many people with diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities. In its current standards, NAfME advocates for curricular inclusion of all the ways of interacting with music, including composing, listening, improvising, responding to music, and collaborating in many styles of music.⁴⁰ In the Tanglewood Declaration, authors, encouraged preparing teachers to work with more diverse populations, including “adults, with the disadvantaged, and emotionally disturbed.”⁴¹ The Housewright Declaration's authors urged the curricular inclusion of all aspects of musical activity “including intellectual, emotional, and physical responses to music.”⁴² The authors also recommended that researchers expand the study into how teachers

can promote meaningful music listening, a primary way adults currently interact with music. Housewright's authors endorsed teaching students informally, as amateurs often do. The authors supported an expansion of the role of the music educator, recommending “coordinating music activities beyond the school setting to ensure formal and informal curricular integration.”⁴³ Informal music-making is often how amateurs make music together and does not necessarily include sequential, lesson-based, formal, teacher-led learning.

Progress?

Music education leaders have effectively been advocating for amateurism for decades, but it has seemingly occurred only at the margins of school-based music education. Much room for progress remains, as contributing authors of *Vision 2020* later reflected.⁴⁴ In an article reviewing *Vision 2020* and looking toward targets for 2050, Lehman noted how little has changed over the years concerning the elusive goals and objectives embodied in the goal statements of the profession.⁴⁵ Madsen also noted that few of the profession's innovations had been enacted in classrooms, and “Most of these innovative practices seem to involve a small percent of our students. While we have done a fairly good job of educating a few, there are many more left without solid music education.”⁴⁶ Will American schools carry out the missions of Tanglewood, Housewright, and NAFME to reach more people and empower more graduates to be lifelong musicians?

Implications for classrooms

The COVID-19 pandemic that forced schools away from face-to-face instruction revealed (and data will undoubtedly someday demonstrate) something we most likely knew about high school large ensemble music classes: most students will not or cannot continue making music outside of classrooms. In many of my colleagues' classrooms, COVID-19 has made real-time

ensemble rehearsal impossible. As a result, many students are left stranded without the conceptual or applicable skills to continue making music independently. There may never be a better opportunity to examine music education philosophy and curriculum than right now. How will we ensure our music programs develop students' abilities to make music for life?

Perhaps Kratus' article came along just in time. Kratus stated, "if music is to be a lifelong activity, it must be taught in ways that allow our students to take it into their own hands outside the classroom."⁴⁷ At the core, Kratus' effort has linked specific instructional strategies to the concepts lauded by the authors of Tanglewood and Housewright. His proposed strategy, a strong emphasis on amateurism (not a complete abandonment of Classical or large ensemble music), unites the common themes between Tanglewood, Housewright, and NAFME goals into curricular focus, giving action items grounded in sound philosophy. Kratus' guidelines for a return to amateurism provide ways to operationalize Tanglewood and Housewright in music classrooms. He called for an "expansion of curricular offerings to appeal to aspiring semiprofessional *and* amateur musicians, revision of the standards to improve the quality and accessibility of music education for a diverse student body, and for all music education professionals to raise expectations that students will use what they learn in school when not in school."⁴⁸

Perhaps the most notable contribution Kratus made is that in his "Tipping Point" and "Amateurism" articles, he brought the concepts of Tanglewood and Housewright to new, more practitioner-oriented audiences – teachers and graduate students. Based on my conversations with colleagues, most in-service music teachers know little, if anything, about NAFME symposiums and music education literature. I have found value in comparing Kratus' views of amateurism with the principles established in the earlier Tanglewood and Housewright symposiums. They are calling for the same changes. I hope that teachers attracted to Kratus'

ideas can draw additional support from the wisdom of our field leaders during previous eras. This may enable the spread of “teaching for amateurism” to take hold within music education and make a difference in American musical habits for years to come.

Amateurism can be incorporated into existing ensemble classes to make those classes more dynamic and attractive to students traditionally left out of school music programs. Rather than solely rehearsing under the pressure of the next concert or competition, teachers can spend more time listening, composing, songwriting, and arranging many music styles. Teaching amateurism emphasizes the person making the music, their musical skills, creativity, enjoyment, well-being, and conceptual understanding. Amateurism also holds opportunities for music education to become more personally relevant to students, as they would work individually and in small groups to create performances of chosen and created music. Keeping students' futures and the long-term usefulness of concepts in mind as north stars guiding lesson planning could make a world of difference in our students and adults. Amateurs make music for their enjoyment, not for the approval of others, and intrinsic motivation to make music increases the likelihood of sustainability.⁴⁹ The authors of all three documents encouraged the music education profession to remain as essential as music is to American life, which would serve as advocacy enough to retain music in school curricula.

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