

2021

Comprehensive Musicianship at East Carolina University, 1966-11968

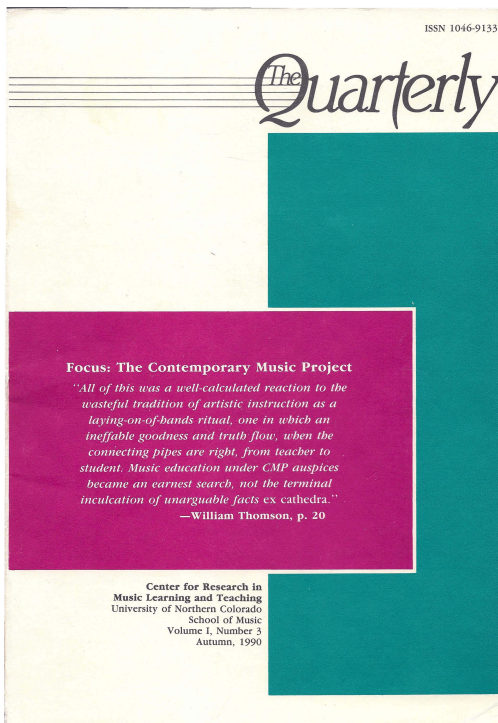
Thomas W. Miller
Northwestern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme>

Recommended Citation

Miller, Thomas W. (2021) "Comprehensive Musicianship at East Carolina University, 1966-11968," *Visions of Research in Music Education*: Vol. 16 , Article 32.

Available at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol16/iss1/32>



Title: Comprehensive Musicianship at East Carolina University, 1966—1968

Author(s): Thomas W. Miller

Source: Miller, T. W. (1990, Autumn). Comprehensive musicianship at East Carolina University, 1966—1968. *The Quarterly*, 1(3), pp. 58-60. (Reprinted with permission in *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 16(1), Summer, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>

It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Comprehensive Musicianship at East Carolina University, 1966–1968

By Thomas W. Miller
Northwestern University

Following the publication of the proceedings from the seminar held at Northwestern University in 1965, which defined comprehensive musicianship, the Institutes for Music in Contemporary Education (IMCE) were formed to implement the concepts and ideals expressed in that document. East Carolina University (ECU) in Greenville, NC, was invited to become one of the participants in the Southeastern Region. Wiley Housewright of Florida State University chaired the regional group, and the late Earl Beach, then Dean of the School of Music at East Carolina, asked me to represent the school.

At that time, freshman theory classes at ECU were taught by faculty who had been hired primarily to provide applied music instruction within their instrumental specialties. The program was directed by a theorist and a common syllabus was used, but for most of the instructors theory was a secondary interest. When I was appointed to represent ECU, I had taught freshman theory for several years and was familiar with the program. In addition, I was teaching Introduction to Music Literature. Both subjects were key elements in the comprehensive musicianship experiment.

In the fall of 1966, in accordance with the principles included in the 1965 Seminar Report, the faculty decided to experiment with the new approach, correlating music literature and theory and implementing the principles of comprehensive musicianship. The freshman class of approximately 100 was usually divided into four sections for theory instruction; in one section, designated as an experimental section, the traditional syllabus would be abandoned in favor of the new approach. Further, the experimental section

would be taught by a team rather than a single individual. Since the experiment was vehemently opposed by the nominal head of theory, the team consisted of those young faculty, mostly performers,

“Comprehensive musicianship was a concept and a set of principles for the education of musicians. There was no officially approved program, no universal method, no prescribed gospel.”

who were philosophically comfortable with the ideals of comprehensive musicianship and had some reason to believe that the present program could be improved.

Establishing Objectives

Very few ECU freshmen had any prior exposure to the study of music theory or much acquaintance with the monuments of music literature. The correlation between theoretical study and music literature was an attempt to establish a relationship between the two. The participation of the faculty performers and conductors proved to be a boon to the program, because they provided a great variety of music literature from numerous media. The team agreed on the following objectives, which emerged as the guiding principles of the experiment:

1. to use examples of authentic music literature whenever possible for study;
2. to expand the repertoire to include music other than that of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries;
3. to seek new resources for study through the introduction of non-Western music and a significant amount of twentieth-century music, particularly that

which could be performed in solo and ensemble both in class and outside;

4. to approach the study through analysis and the compositional/creative rather than imitative mode. (It was also decided to drop keyboard harmony from the syllabus because of the limitations on time and literature it imposed. Eventually a separate course in keyboard skills was developed and taught by a specialist.)

5. to seek to develop students' musical curiosity and to provide them the means to seek out the new and unknown and the tools and skills to understand them.

As the first year of the experiment progressed, the experimental group's attitude toward theory changed noticeably. The teaching team's observations were reinforced by the students' applied music teachers. Student performance was a regular part of the theory class, and students were beginning to relate the two. Emboldened by the students' positive attitudes, the team proposed that a second experimental section be added in the fall of 1967, thus including 50 percent of the incoming freshmen. Despite opposition, this was done. During the second year of the experiment, notwithstanding the negative propaganda from some quarters, the students were very enthusiastic. Many in the traditional sections clamored to transfer to the experimental sections. Thus, the decision was made to implement the program for all entering freshmen the following year. Now the challenge was to standardize the program while retaining flexibility and individuality.

Two difficulties emerged during these first two years. First, correlating the music studied in Introduction to Music Literature and Freshman Theory proved more and more difficult. Because most ECU students had received so little exposure to the great works of music, it was deemed important to their later study to provide them with the experience of listening to a body of selected works. Theoretical study proved more adaptable to the study of smaller works and a nonchronological framework. The correlation between works studied in the applied music studio and the ensemble proved much more successful; in fact, many studio teachers became involved in the process. Eventually

their influence proved of inestimable value in making the link in the students' study.

The second difficulty concerned evaluation of the experiment. The "control group" was not really such; the learnings of the two groups were so different as to preclude comparison. No standard measurement could be applied to both groups. The support and testimony of many applied music faculty proved helpful. While a majority of faculty expressed satisfaction with the results and were willing to accept the potential of success on faith, this hardly satisfied the harshest critics or provided a sound basis for the future development of the program.

Resourcefulness and Curiosity

Some answers began to come in the third and fourth years of the program, as students entered their professional studies. Most ECU students were music-education majors; therefore, the methods courses and the student-teaching experience provided the best evidence of the realization of the fifth objective, a cumulative one. The CM students were not only more resourceful and curious, but they were much more willing to take risks than the traditionally trained students. Testimony from music-education faculty and student-teacher supervisors overwhelmingly confirmed this. Given the differences, a longitudinal comparison was the only feasible evaluation.

The aspect of IMCE at ECU which was the least successful was the link with the public school program. For numerous reasons, one being the comprehensiveness of the music programs, it was decided to establish a relationship with the Raleigh, NC, public schools. Although there was interest and sympathy with the ideals of comprehensive musicianship on the part of a few faculty in Raleigh, most did not understand it and did not wish to be diverted from what they saw as their principal task, traditional school music activities. This, combined with the distance of 90 miles between Raleigh and Greenville, made it impossible to establish a strong presence in the schools. Consequently, that aspect was discontinued after one year. In retrospect, one might

question the wisdom of this undertaking when so much needed to be done at the collegiate level.

Observations and Reflections

While the experiences and results at ECU cannot and should not be generalized to the entire nation, some observations can be made based on the perspective of 25 years since the Comprehensive Musicianship Program. Wisely, the Contemporary Music Project never developed a new dogma to replace an old one. Its directors judiciously avoided any temptation to set a party line and to require conformity as a price for participation. The tremendous variety of methods represented in the various programs reflects this lack of dogma. The Institutes were forums for sharing ideas and experiences rather than a council preoccupied with developing the approved method. Comprehensive musicianship was a concept and a set of principles for the education of musicians. There was no officially approved program, no universal method, no

prescribed gospel. The comprehensive musicianship imprimatur did not exist.

What perhaps the Comprehensive Musicianship Project and the Institutes did accomplish was the opening of new possibilities for teaching basic musicianship. Comprehensive musicianship demonstrated the superiority of using authentic music literature over synthetic exercises in the teaching of musicianship. It recognized the twentieth century as the repository for all music and expanded the active repertoire for study to include music before and beyond the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It encouraged exploration of music outside the Western Art Music tradition and provided for more than a cursory examination of the music of our time in all its variety. It is not too presumptuous to suggest that Comprehensive Musicianship's most profound and lasting contribution was to challenge many of our earlier assumptions about the teaching and learning of basic musicianship. □

The University of Northern Colorado School of Music



An AAEO Institution

- Nationally acclaimed faculty, with specialists on every instrument
- More than 50 award-winning performance ensembles
- Full range of degrees from bachelor through doctoral programs; BA, BM, BME, MM, MME, DA, DME
- Emphases in music education, music history/literature, theory/composition, music performance, conducting, performance/pedagogy, music theatre, opera theatre, jazz studies
- Employment opportunities, scholarships and assistantships for qualified applicants

Call 1-800-548-8178 or write:

University of Northern Colorado
College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Music
Greeley, Colorado 80639