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CMP: A Personal View

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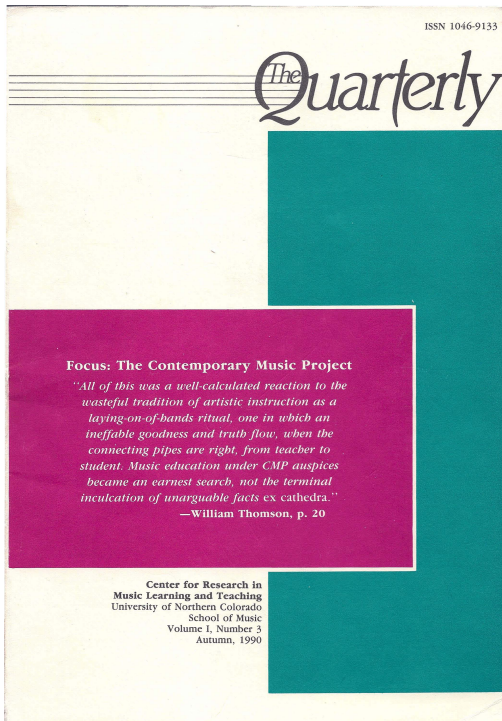
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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of 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.

CMP: A Personal View

By Charles H. Ball

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Without question, the Contemporary Music Project was the single largest, and possibly the most influential, organized attempt to improve music instruction in the history of this country. It involved, to a greater or lesser degree, hundreds of persons within the music profession. My own involvement, while not great, was considerable, and I count myself fortunate to have participated in the project on several occasions and in several capacities. The following brief remarks are intended as an informal personal memory of some of those activities, along with a few opinions and observations acquired along the way.

An IMCE Program at Peabody College

Although I was aware of the existence of CMP from its inception, at first my awareness was vague. I knew of the work of the young composers, and I had read with enthusiasm the 1965 publication on comprehensive musicianship. But it was not until 1966, when I joined the music faculty of George Peabody College for Teachers, that I experienced first-hand a CMP project in practice.

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With the advent of the Institutes for Music in Contemporary Education (IMCE), Gilbert Trythall of the Peabody faculty received a grant to conduct a two-part program, with both college and public-

school components. The public school phase, involving three schools with very different social and cultural levels, sought ways to teach music through the “popular culture”—a notion that at the time was very strong in our national life. The Viet Nam War, the civil rights movement, and the popular protests voiced by many folk and rock groups all strongly contributed to this somewhat romanticized idealization. It seemed natural that, given these conditions, there should be an opportunity to use popular art forms as a beginning point for wider study.

The public school phase was an interesting and fruitful experiment which resulted in many discoveries. But even though the use of rock music, active involvement in electronic composition, and involvement with the then avant-garde notion of chance music were demonstrated to be useful, the most fundamental discovery was that the notion of “pop culture” itself was somewhat slippery. In fact, it proved to be not one thing but many, for no one “pop culture” exists. Instead, there are any number of differing subcultures, each requiring its own understanding and its own approaches. While this now appears self-evident, it was not so at the time.

The project was not continued in the schools after the funding stopped, but a permanent record does remain. The teachers and some of the children involved were brought together at Peabody College to make a film demonstrating the project’s basic ideas, methods, and results. The film was never released commercially but is extant and in the possession of Dr. Trythall, now of West Virginia University.

The second component of Dr. Trythall’s program dealt with the implementation of some aspects of comprehensive musicianship at the college level. Specifically, the lower-division requirements in music

history and music theory for music majors were discontinued, and in their place was offered a three-year sequence in which the historical and theoretical materials were combined. Organized chronologically, the unifying theme in all the courses was the analysis of style. In order to accommodate this organization, the ear-training component of the theory courses was removed from this sequence and taught separately, using both traditional sight-singing instruction and a tape-based program developed by Dr. Trythall.

As a major departure from the past, the experiment proved to have both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the organization made possible a greatly enhanced understanding of the development of musical style. Without question, the students who completed the sequence possessed a superior grasp of the development of Western music. On the negative side, the teaching of practical theory suffered. Because of the chronological sequencing, the students' study of common-practice harmony was begun quite late, and they did not attain adequate proficiency in its use.

Had the program continued to evolve over a longer period of time, adjustments might have been made to lessen this disadvantage, but this was not to be. By the middle of the 1970s, the faculty members associated with the project had moved on, and those who replaced them did not wish to continue with the CMP program. In 1979, Peabody became a part of Vanderbilt University, and the School of Music was phased out entirely.

On balance, the project clearly revealed the advantages of using the techniques of theory in a historically based analysis of style. It also revealed the weakness of teaching music theory in an historical context.

A Workshop for College Teachers

My second major experience of CMP occurred during the summer of 1969. MENC President Wiley Housewright had appointed a seven-member National Commission on Teacher Education. As representative of the southern division of the conference, I was invited to observe a

CMP workshop held at the Eastman School of Music, record my impressions, and publish them later as an article in the *Music Educators Journal*.

Directed by Samuel Adler, the workshop was designed to acquaint college music teachers with the principles and practices of comprehensive musicianship. I was given freedom to roam among all the various activities of the workshop.

What I saw was impressive indeed. The faculty included some of the most respected names among composers, theorists, music historians, and conductors. The program was a well-coordinated mix of studies in theory, history, composition, and performance, all presented in a way which emphasized the relationships among these components.

The workshop illustrated several important points. First, it showed clearly that diverse components of music could be presented within a context of unity. It also showed, however, that the success of such a venture requires a massive investment in time devoted to planning and coordination. Without such investment, the workshop could have been a fragmented and less effective experience. The lesson to all who aspired to adopt their own CM programs was clear.

Yet, the workshop demonstrated that unity can exist in great diversity. Everyone on the faculty had the same goals and approached them in more or less direct ways—but in ways vastly different from one instructor to another. The strong individuality of each faculty member was preserved, even within the context of a highly structured program. The fact that this strong individuality was a major asset is a lesson needed by contemporary educational reformers, many of whom seek improved teaching through the suppression of individuality and the adoption of standardized and rigid instructional models.

A Workshop for Public School Teachers

The success of this workshop for college teachers led to the next logical step—similar activities designed for music teachers in the public schools. Three regional workshops, each two weeks in

length, were held during the summer of 1970—in San Jose, in Wichita, and in Nashville. With John F. Sawyer, I served as co-director of the Nashville session. The workshops were patterned after the previous summer's session at Eastman, maintaining the same high quality in the faculties and the same coordinated approach to the program. The sessions were enthusiastically received by the teachers who attended. For many, the experience was a significant eye-opener. They were introduced to a range of literature far broader than most had ever experienced; they were involved in "hands-on" composition as well as performing; and they were exposed to the infectious enthusiasm of an outstanding faculty.

I wish I could report that every teacher went back to the job filled with zeal for CM and that this happy situation continues today. Unfortunately, there was little formal follow-up and evaluation of the workshop results, and no long-range, longitudinal evaluation. Whether the workshop played more than a motivational role will never be determined. My guess is that some of the participants did make at least small permanent changes in their teaching, but given the brevity of the experience, the lasting effect was probably only a change of perspective.

My later participation in CMP events included conferences at Airlie House and at Phoenix, the latter of which aimed to provide guidance for the preparation of music teachers. This was, I think, a most valuable and fruitful session. Principles emerging from that conference—a broader study of music literature, the music teacher as performer, composer, and critic; the inter-relatedness of music and culture—have all become institutionalized in the accreditation process for music education programs.

Measuring the Success of CMP

How are we now to assess the lasting effects of CMP? One way, of course, is to assay the written record. The project has left us a handsome library of music written by young composers who were involved from the very beginning. In addition to music, other publications have preserved the project's philosophy and many accounts of its practices.

A second measure of the project's success is the degree to which we now take for granted many CMP ideas which once seemed unfamiliar. Among the most important of these is the broadening of the repertory for study and, particularly, the powerful notion of the "common-elements" approach to study. Of equal import is the view of every musician as performer, composer, critic, and teacher. Although one may doubt whether any of these ideas truly originated with CMP, it was nevertheless CMP which brought them together, codified them, and made them a part of our everyday vocabulary and thought.

Perhaps the greatest legacy is the least tangible and the least measurable. That is the enriched and changed viewpoints of countless music teachers—an enrichment which necessarily makes a difference in the day-to-day work of each person. The modern climate of educational reform all too often diminishes the value of such individuality and the intangibles it involves. But it is just these intangibles which impart a human dimension to teaching, a dimension sorely needed in American education across the board. In my view, CMP had widespread influence at this personal, humane level. We can never measure it, but there is no doubt that it exists. And to the extent that it exists, we are the richer. □

Correction

In the final paragraph of *The Quarterly*, Volume I, Numbers 1 & 2, page 46, the first sentence was inadvertently misprinted. The correct sentence follows:

Teachable items in this list (all of 1 and the cognitive and psychomotor content in 2 and 3) probably constituted the program goals and occupied the students of early eighteenth-century singing schools.

The Quarterly regrets the error.