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Reflections on the MENC-CMP

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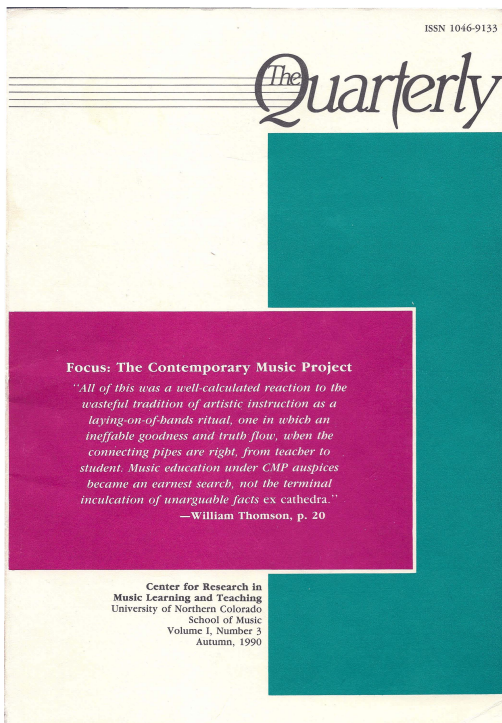
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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of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

Reflections on the MENC-CMP

By Robert Washburn

Crane School of Music

Potsdam College of the State University of New York

I'm happy to have the opportunity to reflect on my experiences as a participant in the Contemporary Music Project (CMP) of the Music Educators National Conference, administered under funding from the Ford Foundation. Not only was CMP a part of an innovative concept which had a pervasive impact on music education at all levels in the United States, but it was also a crucial element in my own development as a teacher and composer.

My first involvement was as a composer-in-residence during the first year of the Composers-in-the-Schools Program in 1959–60. The program placed 12 young composers in an equal number of public schools throughout the country, schools carefully chosen on the basis of having outstanding music programs in all areas and at all levels. The composers included a number whose works are widely published and performed today, although at the time most were only beginning to gain recognition.

The objectives of the program were several-fold. The principal purpose was to bring contemporary music experiences to musical performers vital to the future of music in this country—children and young adults. Those who conceived and planned the program visualized that the development of an informed and interested audience for so-called “serious” music must begin with young performers and their audiences. Along with this goal was the parallel goal of developing familiarity with and appreciation for contemporary music on the part of music educators who, in many cases, were minimally interested in it and had few materials to use in their teaching. Of course, the cultivation of receptive audiences in the many communities participating was another hoped-for result of the project.

Another objective was the development of a repertoire of twentieth-century music in various forms for various media suitable for use by young musicians in primary and secondary schools. Happily, this aspect of the project attracted the attention of several forward-looking publishers; the result was publication of a number of the works produced by the resident composers within a few years from the inception of the program.

A Composer in the Schools

My assigned residency was in Elkhart, Indiana. The high school supported an excellent symphony orchestra of about 110 players, an equally impressive concert band, and various choral groups of comparable accomplishment. There were excellent groups on the junior high level as well. During the year, I composed 15 works for these groups and had enthusiastic cooperation from the students, the directors, and the audiences. It was a valuable resource to have ready-made performing groups do readings for the purpose of revisions and modifications until the compositions were ready for performance and more widespread use. The advice of the local directors and student performers was often very helpful in learning to create music for players of less than professional level, a level to which a fresh-out-of-Eastman composition Ph.D. had not been accustomed. This experience was invaluable and affected in a positive manner my approach toward composition for musicians of all levels of skill.

There were also opportunities to work with student composers in the schools and to foster potential creative talents. Several of the high school students with whom I associated went on to pursue compositional studies in their college programs.

Although not a preconceived aspect of the program, the opportunity to work with Elkhart's community symphony orchestra, civic band, and several church choirs in performing several previously composed works and thus reach an audience outside the schools was a valuable experience. Interaction with performers and audiences in these instances was stimulating and informative.

Long-Term Value

In assessing the success of the Composers-in-the-Schools Program, I feel that its impact was strong and its original goals were well-achieved. Since its demise, however, there has been a slackening of interest in quality contemporary music on the part of music educators and publishers. In the case of the latter, in particular, the combination of increased costs of music publishing and the wide-scale photocopying of printed music have created a situation where publishers are publishing only music of a very conservative and commercial nature at an easy level of difficulty. The amount of available music by so-called "serious" composers is greatly limited. Even the conservative, commercial music now being published, however, has been influenced by the works produced by the MENC/Ford Foundation composers; the rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic materials employed are considerably more sophisticated than works of the prior era.

I have been very pleased with the number of performances given of my own works for school groups since I participated in the program 30 years ago. A high point of the 49th Music Educators National Conference in Chicago in 1984 was recognition of the 25th anniversary of the inception of the CMP. A special concert of works by participating composers was held, numerous performances of their works appeared throughout the conference, and a presentation of recognition was made to Norman Dello Joio, first chairman of the CMP Policy Committee.

CMP at the Crane School of Music

The second aspect of my involvement with the MENC-CMP was my participation as project director of a two-year

Comprehensive Musicianship pilot program for first- and second-year college music majors at the Crane School of Music of the State University College at Potsdam, NY. A number of these programs were set up at colleges throughout the country for the purpose of encouraging the use of a format in which music history and literature, structure and materials, and skill areas (e.g., ear-training, sight-singing, conducting, performance) were taught in an integrated context. Under the aegis of the Institutes for Music in Contemporary Education (IMCE), a number of seminars were organized by the MENC/CMP. Noted musical specialists in various disciplines met to formulate philosophy and policy statements. The following statements were outcomes of the seminar on comprehensive musicianship at Northwestern University in April, 1965, and were refined at the Symposium on Evaluative Criticism for Music in Education at Airlie House in May of 1967:

A. Each component of basic music studies should be directly related to all others: for example, theory to history; or ear-training to writing; analysis to performance, sightsinging, and conducting.

B. Individual courses of study within the comprehensive musicianship curriculum should draw materials and techniques equally from all areas. To establish relations between the music of today and the past underlies all IMCE programs.

C. Although the present emphasis of IMCE is on the early collegiate courses of study, the theory and practice of comprehensive musicianship are applicable to all levels of education, from kindergarten to professional schools, regardless of the student's eventual career, musical or otherwise.

D. The fundamental educational objectives of all IMCE programs are to help the student develop self-direction, exercise imagination, and sharpen critical judgment in a broad perspective of music.

Establishing Focal Points

In order to implement these concepts in our local program, a document was drawn up which included a statement of the philosophical basis for the course, course objectives, and course organization. The principles underlying these points included the belief that both

intellectual concepts and technical musical skills are necessary for a musician to experience and communicate musically; and that to be valid and meaningful, concepts gained in one area of musical study should be relevant to all others. The principal focal points included:

1. The study of theory by analysis of a number of representative compositions from earliest known works to the present time.
2. The use of composition as a means of developing insights into musical works of the past and present.
3. Development of aural skills needed in performance, analysis, and teaching.
4. The building of an awareness of the development of music in an historical context, including the aesthetic principles underlying it and the forces influencing its growth.
5. Experience in conducting, orchestration, and arranging.

The two-year program was divided into two phases. Phase I, *The Elements of Music*, occupied one semester; and Phase II, *Introduction to the Structure, Materials, History, and Literature of Music* comprised the remaining three semesters. The areas identified in the phase titles supplied the frame for the organization with exercises in composition, conducting, sight-singing, and ear-training related to the music being studied.

In 1967, after the two-year pilot project with a single class, the faculty and administration approved implementation of the comprehensive approach for the entire freshman/sophomore class.

Problems of staffing emerged, as eight members of the existing faculty were required to immediately adapt to the method. Enthusiasm and willingness, as well as individual qualifications, varied from teacher to teacher. The students working with Professor "X," who had previously taught only music history, were likely to have seven hours a week largely centered around Grout; those of Professor "Y," formerly a theory instructor whose teaching was based on four-part Bach chorale harmonization, were likely to have seven hours per week of

McHose. Similar narrowness was apparent with a composition teacher who specialized in avant-garde techniques.

After several years of experience, however, and the addition of several new faculty members chosen in part for their ability to use the comprehensive approach, the program flourished. Students and faculty felt their music classes had greater meaning and effectiveness.

The comprehensive musicianship format remained successfully in place for over 20 years. Then a change of administration and career relocation on the part of several faculty, as well as the early retirement of several instructors (including the writer), substantially weakened the program. Maintaining the program was beset with difficulties: the need to give discrete grades in each of the areas included in the course (deemed necessary by the administration for transcript purposes); the question of what to do with students who did acceptable work in some areas and failing work in others; the increasing number of sophomore transfer students from two-year colleges (who had not had the comprehensive experience); and the difficulty of filling vacant positions with instructors possessing the qualifications, experience, and willingness to give the extra effort required for the preparation and teaching of the course. It ceased to exist as a formal course in 1987. Even though the change marked a return to the "compartmentalized" skill and content courses, the comprehensive philosophy remains, and aspects of it are incorporated when feasible.

My personal conviction of the superior effectiveness of comprehensive musicianship remains undiminished. Whatever administrative bugaboos and instructional challenges it may provoke, the greatly increased range and intensity of the students' involvement in music justifies its employment. The Contemporary Music Project, through its innovative programs, has made a significant contribution to music education in this country. One hopes its role will continue with characteristic impact. □