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With or Without Worms, Gordon's Apple Still Shines

Manny Brand

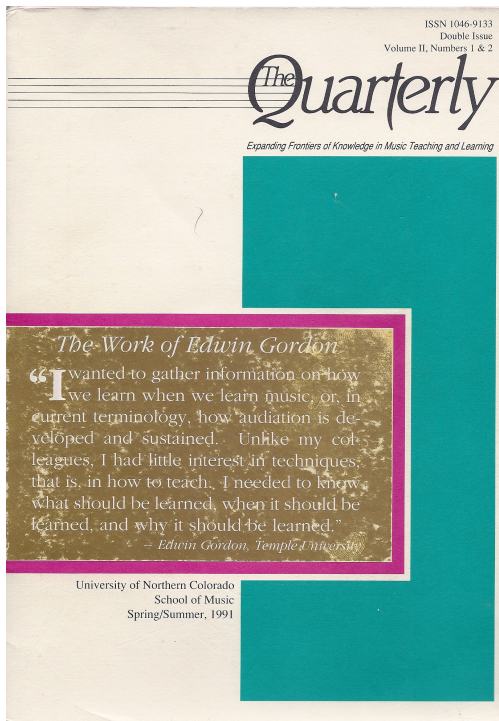
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Author(s): Manny Brand

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With or Without Worms, Gordon's Apple Still Shines

Editorial by Manny Brand

Southwest Texas State University

“I joining a few other boys, was labeled a blackbird. The remainder of the children, the bluebirds, were the singers, and we blackbirds were the non-singers, always assigned to the back of the room during music instruction. The memory of my frustration still lingers, because I knew even then, how much I wanted to express that part of me that was musical.” Edwin Gordon’s “confession as a blackbird” is just a taste of the intellectual feast that awaits TQ readers of this double issue on the work of Edwin Gordon.

Gordon is, of course, a leading figure in music education and the most well known measurement specialist in the field. His scores of articles, six books, dozen hefty monographs, hundreds of papers and presentations, and seven standardized music tests, along with his co-authored general music series and instrumental music series based on music learning theory, all assure his place among the most productive music education scholars of our time. Because we in the academic community generally subscribe to the central notion that “the unexamined life is not worth living,” this reflective and critical examination is most welcomed. Through capacious lenses this issue of TQ fulfills our intellectual need to thoroughly study the work of a colleague—one who is an academic force and leader in our profession.

Just as Gordon’s work is multidimensional, encompassing music learning theory, musical development, instruction, and evaluation, so is this review and analysis of his works. Thus, this issue is divided into five separate sections, covering the diverse terrains of Gordon’s intellectual landscape.

Section 1 is a broad review of the contributions of Edwin Gordon. Appropriately, the

first article, “Gordon on Gordon,” provides a rare peek into Gordon’s life history and personal motivations which so very much mold his professional work. What drives an individual to the unrelenting pursuit of knowledge? Gordon provides an answer, one that is poignant and thoughtful. Others, however, provide additional insights. For example, Robert Hohn, an educational psychologist, examines how Gordon’s ideas

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have evolved in congruence with current developmental theory.

Diversity is further pursued in Section 2, offering perspectives on the worth, problems, and promises of Gordon’s ideas. Of all these authors, Richard Colwell and Frank Abrahams are the most critical of Gordon’s work. Scott Shuler and Maurice Byrd state that Gordon’s ideas have found increasing acceptance. Shuler notes, for example, that Gordon’s concepts of “audiation” and “developmental aptitude” have become part of the vocabulary of professional music educators.

Section 3 deals with aptitude, the area in which Gordon has made truly significant

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contributions. Here his work on music aptitude is thoroughly reviewed and examined. Section 4 addresses music teaching and learning, covering such topics as Gordon's learning sequences, rhythm syllables, and music learning theory. The final section presents audiation, potentially Gordon's most fundamental contribution to our thinking in music teaching and learning.

This issue aspires to be an objective examination of the work of one of the most significant thinkers and researchers in music education. Applying Peter Prescott's analogy to Gordon, the fact that worms are found in

Gordon's apple does not tarnish the apple's gloss. Clearly, Gordon's achievements and his importance are in no way diminished by recognizing his work's vulnerability. After all, unexamined ideas and approaches in music education are of little lasting use in improving music teaching and learning. Closely examining the work of others is especially important in our field where traditionally we, as a profession, tend to find comfort in one of two dialectic extremes: unthinking embracement or equally unthinking refutation of professional ideas. This issue of TQ helps us avoid either path.

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