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### Music Education as Aesthetic Education: A Critical Inquiry

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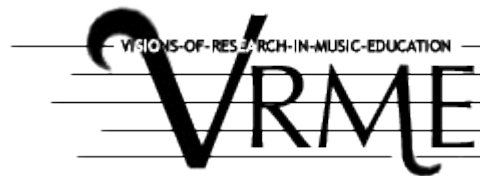
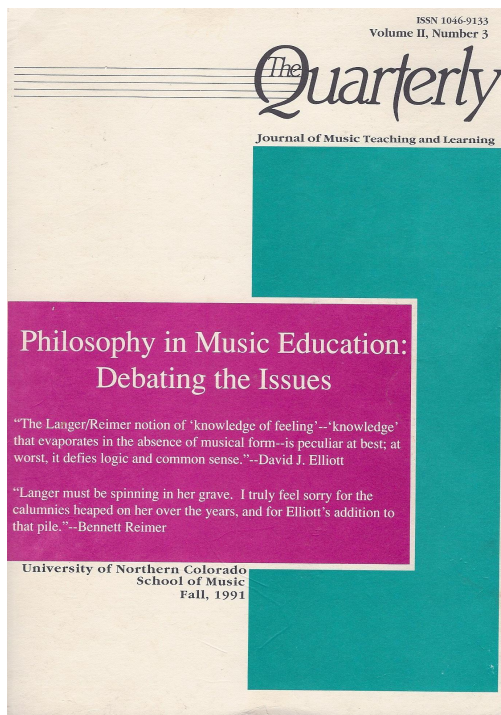
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# Music Education as Aesthetic Education: *A Critical Inquiry*

By David J. Elliott  
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“**M**usic education as aesthetic education” (or MEAE) is one of the most influential concepts in the history of our field. For decades its principles have been repeated, refined, and assumed in countless publications. For years its assumptions have been applied by curriculum planners and classroom teachers. Accordingly, generations of music educators have been reared on its beliefs.

The most extended expression of these beliefs is Bennett Reimer’s *A Philosophy of Music Education* (1970). The range and depth of Reimer’s work has made MEAE an intellectual hub for inquiries differing widely in purpose, motivation, and method during the last 20 years. In short, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (APME) is one of music education’s “classic” formulations.

Given the stature of MEAE and the complete reaffirmation of its underlying beliefs in the new edition of APME (1989), it may seem that there is little to say at this point beyond noting new variations on old themes. Not so.

The “new” version of MEAE provides an important opportunity to remind ourselves that unexamined philosophical commitment is of negative value where the health of a profession is concerned. Viewed as rational practices, music, education, and music education are dynamic, evolving systems. In contrast, philosophical commitment is often static. Hence guidance therefrom is likely to become obsolete eventually. As a matter of principle, then, our commitment requires regular review.

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If it can be further demonstrated that the source of this commitment is logically flawed, then the need for critical re-examination becomes even more immediate. Such is the case, I believe, with the philosophy of music education as aesthetic education.

## Overview

In a previous review (Elliott, 1989a), I examined several weaknesses in MEAE. Here I undertake a more thorough philosophical analysis.

Indeed, it is important to emphasize that the intent of this effort is nothing more or less than to “do philosophy” on behalf of music education. What “doing philosophy” includes is being “critical”—not in the vulgar sense of deliberately finding fault, but in the Greek sense of *kritikos*: being a careful scrutinizer of reasons, concepts, and beliefs to separate right claims from wrong. In sum, an uncritical philosopher is no philosopher at all.

What the MEAE philosophy has taken decades to develop cannot be fully examined in one essay. Accordingly, the focus here is MEAE’s *philosophical* foundations. Consider, however, that since MEAE’s practical guidelines depend on these foundations, the adequacy (or not) of the latter directly implicates the former.

To anticipate, I suggest that despite modifications and additions, the central weaknesses of MEAE are not only repeated but deepened in APME (1989). Chief among these weaknesses are the following:

1. MEAE depends on a cluster of blurred distinctions and oversimplified dichotomies that undermine its logical integrity;
2. the basic premises of MEAE depend on a reductionist concept of “music;” and
3. at its core, MEAE is only a cogent explanation of Susanne Langer’s illogical theory of art.

These weaknesses do not disqualify MEAE completely. Nevertheless, they are sufficient

in number and depth to aver that MEAE not only fails to provide a plausible explanation of the nature and value of MUSIC, it fails to offer a defensible account of the uniqueness and necessity of music in education. In short, while its place in history is not in dispute, MEAE's status as a philosophy certainly *is*.

This article has two parts. Part One addresses the first and second weaknesses listed above. Part Two addresses the first and third. More specifically, Part Two attempts to explain why MEAE's central claim—that “music education is the education of human feeling” (Reimer, 1989, p. 53)—fails the test of logical scrutiny.

### Part One

The fundamental premises of MEAE state that “the essential nature and value of music education are determined by the nature and value of the *art* of music [italics mine]” (Reimer, 1989, p. 1).<sup>1</sup> APME promises to explain the meaning of these premises through “reasoned, careful, systematic statements” (p. 2). At first glance, everything seems in order. Unfortunately, these premises blur several important concepts and distinctions. Let me explain.

1.1 Although the term “art” saturates MEAE from beginning to end, Reimer does not explain that what he actually means by “art” is *not* art, but “fine art.” The distinction is crucial. Why? Stated correctly, MEAE's premises go as follows: The essential nature and value of music education are determined by the nature and value of the *fine art* of music. This distinction highlights two key questions:

1. Who/What says that music is *a priori* a “fine art”? and
2. How does the equation music = “fine art” restrict or expand our understanding of what MUSIC *is*?

Section 1.3 below provides several answers. First, however, a larger point must be made.

Although MEAE's basic equation (music = fine art) may seem quite natural and unassailable at first, it is neither. The assumption that music is a “fine art” (or aesthetic) in its nature and value is not only theory-laden, it is theory-generated. Accordingly, several philosophers suggest that to embrace the “aesthetic” concept of music is to embrace a particularly limited notion. Indeed, the aesthetic

concept of music rests on the obsolete social and historical pronouncements of a distant time and place (See Berleant, 1986; Sparshott, 1982, 1987; Wolterstorff, 1980, 1987; Donougho, 1987; Subotnick, 1987; Danto, 1986).

First of all, then, although Reimer claims that “there exists at present an extremely high level of agreement about the nature of music . . . among those who have given serious thought to this matter” (p. 3), much serious thought in the contemporary philosophy of music speaks against this claim. To explain more fully, we must look carefully at what “aesthetics” really means.

1.2 “Aesthetics,” says Reimer, is “the branch of philosophy concerned with questions of the nature and value of the arts” (p. 1). Furthermore, says Reimer, Aesthetics is the study of that about art which is the essence

of art . . . so among all the disciplines of thought that are interested in the arts, aesthetics is the one devoted to an explanation of their intrinsic nature. (p. 2)

There are several reasons to question Reimer's notion of aesthetics. First, aesthetics is *not* the (only) branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and value of music. Aesthetics (properly understood) offers only one particular viewpoint on the nature and value of music. Hence it is arbitrary to imply, as APME implies, that aesthetics is the

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Philosophy is  
not a convenience store full of theories waiting to be purchased by music educators shopping for the ‘best possible point of view.’ Rather, philosophy is an active practice: it is the critical examination of concepts, assumptions and beliefs.”



definitive philosophical source on what is essential about music's nature and value. In fact, as I argue next, it may be the reverse.

1.3 Western philosophical thought about art and beauty began with the Greeks. But it was not until the eighteenth century that a particular group of theorists including Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Baumgarten founded "aesthetics" and, along with it, the notion of art as "fine art."

"Aesthetics" was originally coined by a young German philosopher, A. G. Baumgarten (1735), to designate a field of study that would accomplish for the emotional effectiveness of nondiscursive symbols what logic accomplished for the symbols of conventional reasoning. Most attempts to formulate a systematic theory of "fine art" based on aesthetic assumptions, including Susanne Langer's theory of art, duplicate Baumgarten's intent.

From a primary concern with poetic imagery, Baumgarten's sense of "aesthetics" grew quickly to include the images of painting, the general effectiveness of works of art and, finally, all natural things. Those who considered the beauty of art no different than the beauty in nature deemed aesthetics the study of beauty. Aesthetics is still commonly used in this sense: namely, as "pertaining to sensory contemplation and its objects." Aesthetics then become entangled with the notion that beauty was something accessible only to those with *taste*. Like morality, taste was considered an attribute that was innate yet open to influence through education. In short, as conceived by Baumgarten and elaborated by Kant in his *Third Critique*, aesthetics was actually "an offshoot of attempts to formulate a normative theory of taste; that is, to vindicate the preferences of cultivated persons" (Sparshott, 1987, p. 39).

Now prior to the emergence of aesthetics in the eighteenth century there was no such thing as the grouping we now call the "fine arts." Of course, music, painting, poetry, and so on were in place centuries before Baumgarten's arrival, as was the term "art" in the Greek sense of *ars* or *techne*: something done or made.<sup>2</sup> Missing until the eighteenth century, however, was a conceptual basis for uniting these otherwise disparate phenom-

ena. Aesthetics provided the required concept. According to the "aesthetic concept," music, painting, and so on are not "useless;" rather, they all have one particular use: They are "objects" which exist primarily to be contemplated "aesthetically," i.e., in abstraction from their contexts of use and production.

The formalization of the "aesthetic concept" was aided by the social practice of conceiving and using "music" (and so on) as a collection of objects or "works" in this fine art way: of "that use itself coming into prominence among the cultural elite of the eighteenth century" (Wolterstorff, 1980, p. 7). Theoretical norms of contemplation were simultaneously and subsequently codified. These norms included the overarching concept of "aesthetic experience" and its concomitants: intrinsicality, disinterestedness, psychical distance, and so on. (Two hundred years later, MEAE continues to embrace and promote these same aesthetic norms wholly and uncritically [See Reimer, 1989, pp. 102-104]) Those for whom the "fine arts" were the center of concern made aesthetics into *the* theory of art.

Properly understood, then, aesthetics is not a synonym for "the philosophy of art" or "the philosophy of music," as aesthetic educators believe. Rather, aesthetics is "that branch of philosophy that is concerned with the analysis of concepts and the solution of problems that arise when one contemplates aesthetic objects" (Hospers, 1967, p. 35). Aesthetics is not *the* theory of art; aesthetics is one particular body of theory. Moreover, aesthetic theories are inherently narrow. How so? Because the aesthetic concept of music begins and ends with the reductionist assumption that music has only one nature and one purpose: "Music" is essentially a matter of autonomous objects or "works" that exist to be contemplated in a uniform and narrow way, i.e., aesthetically. It is precisely this set of eighteenth-century axioms that underlies MEAE (See Reimer, 1989, pp. 28, 99) and that MEAE continues to perpetuate.

The question that arises next is this: Why did the aesthetic concept and its accompanying norms emerge at this particular time? Several writers, including Donougho (1987), Geertz (1983), Kristellar (1965), Elias (1969),

Berleant (1986), and Bourdieu (1972, 1984) emphasize that aesthetics was indigenous to the social context of eighteenth-century Europe. The nobility of the time were legitimized as such by their association with the princely courts of the period, and, naturally, by their preference for and support of court-approved pursuits. Such pursuits included the “beaux arts.” Music was at the center of this legitimation and sponsorship process. Donougho (1987) comments on this “prestige function” of fine art:

It served to mark off the nobility from the crowd and to affiliate them with the court. Having lost the status attendant upon their military role, they [the nobility] received compensation in aesthetic coin. Becoming cultured rather than learning how to use the rapier became the primary duty of the gentleman, the “*bonnete homme*.” And where the elite had used to participate in popular culture (festivals, carnivals, and the like), they now began to withdraw and establish a sense of “high” culture, excluding the “low” (p. 342).

1.4 In view of the above, it seems reasonable to suggest that MEAE’s definition of aesthetics is, at best, incomplete. What Reimer defines as “the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and values of the arts” (p. 1) is the philosophy of *art*, not *aesthetics*. Moreover, aesthetics and the philosophy of music are not synonymous, because not all philosophical thinking about music embraces the assumptions underlying the “aesthetic” concept of music. Indeed, several contemporary philosophers emphasize that what some people (especially aesthetic educators) too often take as fact—that music is aesthetic in nature and value—is not a fact, nor is it born of fact, nor do all philosophies of music begin and end with the norms promulgated by aesthetics. The aesthetic concept of music is merely one notion of music rooted in eighteenth-century *a priori* assumptions.

More to the point, the likelihood that the main ingredients of this originating context have already passed away and that the aesthetic axioms anchoring MEAE are now obsolete has been argued vigorously of late (e.g., Sparshott, 1980; Berleant, 1986; Wolterstorff, 1987). Berleant (1986), for example, argues that the old aesthetic axioms—*aesthetic object*, *aesthetic qualities*, and *aes-*

*thetic experience*—are “anachronistic . . . and manifestly unsatisfactory” in accounting for most examples of music, dance, painting, and so on of the past century and even “misleading” when applied to examples from earlier periods (p. 104).

In sum, since *one* aspect of MUSIC no doubt involves its status as a product, and since aesthetics offers one important historical notion of the *product* dimension of music, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the “aesthetic concept” of music be granted a limited place within a more comprehensive and realistic philosophy of music education. But more than this, would be unreasonable since, as many philosophers now hold, the central weakness of aesthetics is that it fails to acquit MUSIC as a rich and complex human phenomenon. The aesthetic concept of music is unjustifiably essentialist: It is on a hopeless quest for the singular essence of “art,” something that we can catch and repeat in one evocative phrase.

It follows from the above that APME’s familiar distinctions among three alternative theories of art—referentialism, absolute formalism, and absolute expressionism (pp. 14–29)—are distinctions without a difference. How so? Because all three theories are aesthetic theories. They all begin and end with the constricted notion that “music” (all music everywhere) is *a priori* a collection of autonomous aesthetic objects.

Thus, in addition to being conceptually and historically inaccurate, MEAE’s equations—i.e., aesthetics = the philosophy of art = the philosophy of music—give music educators the false impression that there are no philosophical alternatives to the aesthetic view. As Alperson (1987) clearly demonstrates, however, there is a large body of Western philosophical thinking about music that originated with the Greeks and that flourishes today unencumbered by the aesthetic concept. On these grounds, Sparshott (1982) objects to the common confusion between aesthetics and the philosophy of art that MEAE perpetuates:

. . . works of art are made before they are enjoyed. Not only does their status as things made by people radically affect the way we perceive them and think about them, but the making itself is a human activity that one would

“The nobility of [eighteenth-century Europe] were legitimized as such by their association with the princely courts of the period, and . . . Music was at the center of this legitimation and sponsorship process.” -- David J. Elliott

expect to be more, rather than less, an expression of human intelligence than the appreciation of criticism of them. . . . But to treat the philosophy of art as a division of aesthetics casts doubt on the legitimacy of this procedure (Sparshott, 1982, p. 16).

1.5 Sparshott's observation leads us to other blurred distinctions in APME. First among these is Reimer's claim that “the words ‘musical’ and ‘artistic’ will often be used to substitute for the word ‘aesthetic’ because they usually mean the same thing” (p. xiii). Reimer's conflation of these terms is mistaken. There is an important body of philosophical discourse that speaks against the suggestion that these terms “usually mean the same thing.” A simple example will emphasize the crucial distinction between “aesthetic” and “artistic.”

Any phenomenon, natural or human-made, can be examined in terms of its sensuous, formal, or “beautiful” qualities. A sunset, for example, can be looked at solely in terms of its colors and so on. But the experience of a painting of a sunset is a different matter altogether. Here we must be concerned not only with the concrete aspects of the painted sunset, but with its artistic (as well as its many other) aspects: e.g., the skill and knowledge demonstrated in the production of the painting; the standards of artistry met or failed; the way certain traditional problems, techniques, and processes of painting were taken up, met, or surpassed; the way the sunset is characterized by the artist, and so on. But in the case of a natural sunset, artistic criteria do not apply since a sunset has no link with a human artist. In other words, what separates a painting of a sunset from the “natural beauty” of a real sunset is the presence or absence of human agency and artistry.

According to MEAE (pp. 104-106), however, it apparently matters little whether one is looking at a natural country scene, or a painting of a country scene, or listening to a

piece of music. In all cases, the goal is to achieve an “aesthetic experience” by perceiving and reacting to the “aesthetic components of a thing” (p. 107). Thus, says Reimer, just as the “music educator (aesthetic to the core)” looks at the natural valley scene and “loses himself in the expressive qualities presented to his vision” so that “his experience is aesthetic” (p. 105), the very same music educator moves next to a Mozart symphony and approaches it in the same way. “He [sic] perceives those qualities which make sound expressive—melody, rhythm, harmony, tone color, texture, form—and their fusion in a work . . . His experience of the music . . . is aesthetic” (p. 106). Indeed, his or her experience is aesthetic, but this does not automatically mean that our busy music educator's experience of the Mozart symphony is artistic, let alone musical. To be musical, one's experience and understanding of a Mozart symphony must go far beyond aesthetic qualities.

Educationally speaking, then, whereas a comprehensive philosophy of music or painting would be equally concerned with a wide range of considerations impacting on a musical performance or a painting, an aesthetic philosophy like MEAE focuses almost exclusively on aesthetic elements (Reimer's brief references to “artistic/cultural influences” notwithstanding). In fact, aesthetic theories in general, and the aesthetic theories of Langer and Meyer in particular (upon which the MEAE depends), have little to say about artistic matters. Accordingly MEAE has little to say about artistic matters. MEAE conceives such aspects of MUSIC as craft, skill, technique, artistry, expertise, and performance as “means behaviors” (p. 167) or “technical-critical” considerations that have no intrinsic values. Indeed, it is a major weakness of MEAE that it makes no use of important distinctions in the recent philosophical literature of “artistry” (e.g., Howard,

“Elliott’s quote about how the nobility in eighteenth-century Europe used the ‘prestige function’ of fine art to mark themselves off from the crowd . . . is about as germane to contemporary aesthetics . . . as eighteenth-century science is to contemporary quantum physics.” – Bennett Reimer

1982; Best, 1982; Fethe, 1977; Rao, 1988).

In short, MEAE is an aesthetic philosophy through and through, *not* an artistic philosophy. The point is worth emphasizing in view of the implication arising from APME’s conflation that MEAE is more comprehensive than it really is. In fact, the MEAE notion provides minimal insight into many essential concepts related to music as an *artistic* endeavor in general, and to music and music education as it concerns *performance* in particular. Hence MEAE’s curricular suggestions about performance as a “means” in both *general* music and performance programs are weakly founded.

In sum, because MEAE’s aesthetic axioms exclude the vast majority of ways of conceptualizing and experiencing music, an aesthetic concept of music is, at best, an oversimplified concept. Indeed, MEAE’s prior assumption that *the* nature and *the* value of music (instead of natures and values) can be determined for all music everywhere is, in itself, narrow and arbitrary. This last point deserves a further word.

1.6 In contrast to the position taken in APME, I suggest that “philosophy,” properly understood, is not concerned with saying what is “necessary and unique” about phenomena like music, or what music is “at bottom” (p. 85). Rather, philosophy seeks to say what music is all about when considered comprehensively. Furthermore, philosophy is not a convenience store full of theories waiting to be purchased by music educators shopping for “the best possible point of view” (pp. 14-15). Rather, philosophy is an active practice: It is the *critical* examination of concepts, assumptions, and beliefs. On this view, precise distinctions and comprehensiveness are the hallmarks of good philosophy.

MEAE’s initial insistence that we should confine ourselves to a search for *the* single

nature and *the* value of music is, therefore, a questionable philosophical strategy. In fact, it contradicts APME’s promise to provide music educators with “a probing analysis of the nature of music” (p. 7). Moreover, consider that APME’s one-dimensional notion of philosophy may be partly to blame for its tendency to traffic in oversimplified dualisms (e.g., reasoning versus feeling, science versus art, making versus creating) as opposed to undertaking careful conceptual analyses of these key terms. More on this in a moment.

1.7 For the above reasons, I suggest that an explanation of the natures and values of music are not necessarily (or even likely) to be found in an aesthetic concept of music as MEAE maintains. Put differently, Reimer’s claim that “aesthetics is the study of that about art which is the essence of art” (p. 2) is comparable to claiming that (say) Puritanism is the study of that about religion which is the essence of religion.

Indeed, by relying on aesthetics for a grounding concept of music, MEAE negates the possibility of developing a philosophy of music education based on an independent philosophy of music as MUSIC. The objections of aesthetic educators notwithstanding, it seems clear that MEAE’s grounding “aesthetic concept” of music is static: It rests squarely on the central axioms of eighteenth-century “aesthetics” (Berleant, 1986).

Thus, when Reimer claims that “the position about art being taken in this book is, essentially, a ‘musical’ one” (p. 119), it is actually the reverse. (In any case, what we need and want is not a philosophical position on fine art, but a philosophical position on MUSIC.) Properly understood, the position about music taken in MEAE is not a musical one but an aesthetic one. That is, Susanne Langer’s theory of fine art (MEAE’s foundation) begins with the prior assumption

that music = autonomous aesthetic objects (= “perceptible forms” = “presentational symbols” and so on).

1.8 In view of the above, MEAE’s contention that aesthetic appreciation is the most appropriate way of approaching musical performances “is to promote a normative rather than a descriptive paradigm of artistic response. It may be desirable to some, but that is all” (Markowitz, 1983, p. 34).

Indeed, in reflecting on the logic and plausibility of MEAE’s notion of “musical experience,” consider that aesthetics defines “musical” via a negative norm. That is, MEAE insists that listeners ought not to consider the sounds that they listens to in equal relation to human concerns outside the sounds themselves: social, historical, moral, political, religious, or even musically “technical-critical.” MEAE’s theoretical center of gravity lies inward: “Absolute Expression,” says Reimer, “insists that meaning and value are internal; they are functions of the artistic (i.e., the aesthetic) qualities themselves and how they are organized.”

Accordingly, MEAE insists that the listener strive for a kind of “immaculate perception” of so-called aesthetic qualities. Of course, as we now realize, this asocial, ahistorical amoral—in a word, this “a-human”—notion of musical experience is in keeping with Europe’s eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ethnocentric norms of appreciation.

In fairness, Reimer does tack on the qualification that “the artistic/cultural influences surrounding a work of art may indeed be strongly involved in the experience the work gives, because they become part of the internal experience for those aware of these influences” (p. 27). As far as MEAE takes it, this makes sense; unfortunately, MEAE doesn’t take it very far. It can’t. MEAE’s focus is dominantly internal in all circumstances. Moreover, MEAE does not provide a plausible explanation of how external influences become internal, or how a listener can be concerned with practical and social aspects of music and, at the same time, “be removed from practical, utilitarian concerns” (p. 103).

In sum, MEAE maintains that all music everywhere ought to be approached aesthetically by making “external” considerations—even artistic considerations of performance—

subservient to internal “aesthetic qualities.” Thus we find, for example, that MEAE categorizes the “technical-critical” experience of music as “nonmusical” because it is “nonaesthetic” (p. 120): i.e., because “in this response the perception is of the technical and peripheral elements which go into the making of music” (p. 125). Following Reimer’s previous conflation (aesthetic = artistic), such matters are therefore also nonartistic. Note also that matters of audience size, intonation, and style are listed *together* under “technical-critical” as if they all had equal status in the process of music-making (p. 125).

More importantly, MEAE seems wrong to suggest that the control and deployment of *technical* elements of a performance are *a priori* “mechanical” elements. Excellent performances pivot on *how* they are achieved, and how they are achieved involves “technique” as part of artistry and musicianship in a far more rich and complex sense than MEAE ever takes up in its limited references to “craftsmanship.” Surely the matters of a pianist’s style and a violinist’s vibrato are not simply “technical-critical” and not at all “nonmusical” as MEAE declares (p. 120).

Before leaving the point about “outside” musical matters, consider that Kivy (1984) is only one among several contemporary philosophers who has provided rich and detailed explanations of the so-called “extramusical significance” of representational music. Such analyses provide strong reasons to question MEAE’s narrow view that referential musical experiences are *a priori* nonmusical because they are “nonaesthetic” (p.120). In fact, one of the several ways in which music performs its several cognitive functions is the way in which some works act as predicates to various “subjects” (people, events, places). That is, passages of music *can* and *do* function as musical “predicates” to characterize “subjects” indicated by titles and programs. Such pieces and passages “characterize” by means of the *equal interplay* between musical patterns and contextual cues that we understand verbally and nonverbally, not by reference to a dictionary of one sort or another, but by knowledge and cultural conventions.



Overall, MEAE directs the listener to homogenize the diversity of practices and purposes that musical performances and compositions can and do involve by: (1) imputing a single purpose to all of them; (2) imposing a single mode of response on all their listeners; and (3) attributing a single motivation to all artists. Furthermore, MEAE holds that the music of all cultures must be approached in the same way, i.e., aesthetically (p.145). This seems to defy logic, cultural reality, and the basic ideals of multicultural education, as I argue elsewhere (Elliott, 1990).

In plain English, MEAE's insistence that all instances of "music" everywhere ought to be approached aesthetically, listened to aesthetically, and taught aesthetically is analogous to a sports law stating that all instances of "football" ought to be approached, appreciated, and taught as soccer. MEAE's insistence will only impress those who are already convinced.

In fact, what is the basis for MEAE's edict that if a person does not follow the aesthetic rules of engagement, then a person's experience is "nonmusical"? The basis cannot be past or present human practice. The Greeks had music but no concept of "the aesthetic point of view," and many forms and practices of contemporary music and world musics militate against such norms. The same is true of many other musics in many other periods of musical history. In fact, the imposition of a uniform method and standard of aesthetic perception in relation to all music listening seems to be the antithesis of what is most observable about the practice, the production and the experience of music: its diversity, nonuniformity, and ambiguity—even with respect to its perception.

1.9 To conclude this brief examination of aesthetics, consider that the essence of music conceived aesthetically lies in a set of predetermined norms that dictate an idiosyncratic concept of what music *is*. The link between music and aesthetics (properly understood) is therefore not a natural link; it is a purely theoretical link based on the institutionalization of a specific social/historical doctrine of production, attention, appreciation, evaluation, and interpretation.

The weight of modern scholarship in the

philosophy of music, the philosophy of art, the history of musical practice, and ethnomusicology presents a major challenge to the "aesthetic concept" of music that anchors MEAE: "the assumption that music is necessarily art in the fine art sense is ahistorical and arbitrary" (Donougho, 1987, p. 24). Put differently, the aesthetic axioms that anchor MEAE relate to the contemporary philosophy of music as IQ relates to the contemporary psychology of intelligence. Accordingly, MEAE's aesthetic concept of music could no more ground (say) Wolterstorff's multifaceted reflections on music than the IQ concept could ground Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

1.10 As a coda to this part of the discussion, and as a prelude to the next, let us now examine a concept that is given a prominent place in the new version of MEAE: namely, Reimer's concept of "a concept." Reimer wants to say that music is "nonconceptual in essence," but this cannot be held. Musical cognition is conceptual in both the traditional sense (which Reimer underestimates) and in the much more contemporary senses of the term which Reimer overlooks. Moreover, MEAE's fabricated dichotomy, music (= non-conceptual) versus the basics (= conceptual), is not only unsupportable, it shoots music educators in the foot. Let me explain.

Based on what he believes are "two excellent definitions of a concept" (taken from Gowin, 1970 and Kaelin, 1970), Reimer makes three untenable claims (pp. 80-81). First, says Reimer, "what is needed for a concept to exist . . . is something that is manifested more than once. A singular instance of something cannot be a concept" (p. 81). The second thing needed for a concept, says Reimer, "is some sort of sign or symbol, or name, or indicator of the common feature being noticed" (p. 81). Third, a concept has to do with "how well a person associates a particular symbol or name with the phenomenon to which it refers" (p. 83). Let us take each of these claims in turn.

First, although it has long been assumed that a singular instance of something cannot be a concept, substantive evidence from cognitive science leaves little doubt now that a concept *can* be represented by what cognitive sci-



“More directly, Reimer’s ‘nonconceptual’ notion of music shoots music education in the foot: It not only represents the nature of music cognition to both our allies and our opponents, it flags the baseless notion that music cognition is devoid of ‘thinking’ as this term has traditionally been understood.” -- David J. Elliott

tists call “an exemplar”: that is, one specific instance of a concept or a subset of a concept (See Smith, 1988; Kemler-Nelson 1984; Brooks, 1978; Medin and Schaffer, 1978; Medin & Smith, 1981; Nosofsky, 1986; Estes, 1986). In fact, not only are exemplar-based concepts highly adaptive, but children “generally learn artificial categories by nonanalytic exemplar strategy” (Smith, 1988, p. 43).

Second, it is *not* a necessary condition of “a concept” that a phenomenon be paired with a symbol of *any* kind, nor is it the case that when no words or other symbols are present “the experience is nonconceptual” as Reimer maintains (p. 81). Again, many lines of evidence now indicate that conceptualization can proceed in words, or actions, or abstract and concrete imagery.

Since Reimer brings up the subject of action, recall what Gilbert Ryle (1949) pointed out years ago in his well-known book, *The Concept of Mind*: namely, that intentional actions are *conceptual* through-and-through. With this in mind, consider the following passage from APME: “No words or any other symbols need be present as you . . . take the walk, and so long as no such vehicles are present, the experience is nonconceptual” (pp. 81-82).

Reimer trips the old Cartesian trap by suggesting that intentional physical action is not conceptual. Not surprisingly, then, MEAE is unable to provide an adequate explanation of musical cognition as it manifests in musical *performance*.

Returning now to the main point of this section, consider that our contemporary understanding of “a concept” goes far beyond the old “classical” formulation which MEAE adopts to contrast (falsely) with its “nonconceptual” notion of music. Cognitive science now recognizes various types of concepts (Smith, 1988; Nelson, 1985); “conceptualization” is no longer uniformly conceived in the one-dimensional terms held

by Reimer’s chosen sources. Rather, a concept is a cognitive unit that can be manipulated as though it were a mental object (Nelson, 1985, p. 72), or embodied in action.

Indeed, people regularly conceive problems and their solutions in nonverbal modes (now considered instances of conceptualization): i.e., various forms of concrete and abstract representation (See Glucksberg, 1988; Shepard & Metzler, 1971; Miller, 1972; Kosslyn, 1983; and Potter et. al., 1986). Moreover, even brief reference to *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967) and/or *The Encyclopedia of Psychology* (1984) reveals that the modern understanding of “having a concept” is not limited to knowing the meaning of a word or associating a symbol with a phenomenon. Instead, “having a concept” and “conceptualizing” *includes* a wide range of cognitive processes. For example, a musician may have a clear, nonverbal, aural concept of “tone quality” which s/he mentally manipulates or conceptualizes while composing, arranging, or performing music.

Hence, Reimer is incorrect when he claims that “In all cases . . . a concept is a mechanism by which one can refer to a noticed phenomenon” (p.83). Furthermore, in having a concept of something like “tone quality” (i.e., holding an aural image in my mind), I also have “knowledge *of*” this phenomenon. And although there are many phenomena I cannot put into words (e.g., the precise quality of a clarinet’s tone), I can still *conceive* them and think with them as mental representations. “Clarinet tone” is not merely a perceptual construct, as MEAE’s oversimplified dichotomy of percepts and concepts leads us to think. Each “clarinet tone,” (melody, and so on) is a specific auditory event that we pick out of the acoustic wave and categorize as such by means of a myriad of contextually sensitive cognitive processes. Thus it does not seem to be the

“I find it incomprehensible that [Elliott] criticizes me for not regarding musical experience as cognitive, when that is precisely the point I argue . . .” — Bennett Reimer

case that concepts only provide “knowledge about” and “never yield *knowledge of*” as Reimer maintains (p. 83).

In sum, although MEAE (p. 81) is correct in saying that no *words* are necessary while listening to Beethoven’s music, conceptualizing in *all* sorts of ways (conventional and unconventional) *is* necessary in varying proportions according to the kind of music being cognized, the description under which it is being cognized, and the context in which it is being presented and out of which it originated.

Kivy (1990) emphasizes, in fact, that all music listening experiences are concept-laden (in the traditional and nontraditional sense). Moreover, says Kivy, it is a serious underestimation of our cognitive capacities to suppose that thinking about music while listening to music compromises our enjoyment or affective experience of the music, as Reimer suggests (p.109). Although academics separate such cognitive aspects out for discussion, in reality they occur coincidentally and in much more complex ways than we can possibly describe in simple dichotomies (e.g, thinking *about* versus thinking *with*). We hear “music” in terms of various descriptions which we can (and often do) think *about* and *with* at the same time. Even in the case of so-called “pure” instrumental music, the sounds are never “alone” in the strict sense of being “intrinsically” meaningful. The meaning and/or enjoyment of musical experiences is neither direct nor immediate as MEAE claims (p. 91). On the contrary, it is heavily mediated by knowledge and experience: by what has been traditionally understood as conceptualization, and by what has more recently been understood.

Overall, then, the absence of internal speech while listening to music or making music does *not* mean that such experiences are nonconceptual as Reimer claims, only nonverbal. As Glucksberg phrases it, what matters is the way in which the mind “speaks

while thinking, not the tongue” (Glucksberg, 1988, p. 239). Reimer errs by conflating the two. In short, and as Smith (1988, p. 21) makes clear, the classical view of a “concept” put forth by Gowin and Kaelin (and adopted by Reimer) “has been seriously undermined by the collective work of linguists, philosophers, and psychologists” since the 1970s (see Schwartz, 1979; Fodor, et al, 1980; and Smith and Medin, 1981). Accordingly, Reimer’s alleged dichotomy between “conceptualization” and “aesthetic perceptual structuring” cannot be held. Moreover, this “new” contrast is just Langer’s discursive-presentational dichotomy in new jargon.

To end this section of the discussion, note that although MEAE puts great faith in Howard Gardner’s overview of cognitive science (p. 85), Gardner’s survey does not stand up as a reliable source on the nature of *auditory* cognition. Hence, to use Reimer’s own words, perhaps we ought to be “very cautious in making claims that cannot be substantiated,” (in which category I include Gardner’s very general claims about the inherent separateness of language and music processing). How so? In contrast to the Reimer/Gardner reflections on musical cognition versus language cognition, recent studies in auditory cognition indicate that music and speech cognition share many commonalities not previously understood.

1.11 Following from the above, but now on the larger view, MEAE’s basic notion of “the musical experience” relies too heavily on vague, Romantic notions that take no account of the research literature in music cognition which has burgeoned since the first edition of APME. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder why any philosophy (let alone music education’s only philosophy), so concerned as it is (and ought to be) with issues of perception, affect, consciousness, cognition, mind (and so on), should so consistently overlook contemporary research in cognition generally and music cognition particularly.

More specifically, how can MEAE maintain such a stark contrast between thinking and feeling? For as the recent literature on affect makes clear, cognition and affect overlap like themes in a fugue; their complex interconnections are not nearly so black-and-white as MEAE's dualisms make it appear (See Elliott, 1987). More accurately, there seems to be no such thing as thinking without feeling, or feeling without thinking (including reasoning). Thus there are no good reasons to claim, as MEAE claims, that "reading and writing" are devoid of affective involvement. Nor can it be held that reasoning, logic, rationality—in a word *thinking* (See p. 80), as this term has traditionally been used—is absent from music-making and music listening. In fact, the richness of musical cognition inheres in it being *conceptual* in a wide array of senses. MEAE's central claim that music (along with each of the other so-called "fine arts") has a special corner on feeling, and reading and writing on thinking, is an oversimplification (to say the least).

1.12 In view of the above, and as Vernon Howard (1982; 1990) makes clear, "music"—especially music performance—necessarily depends on *many* varieties of thinking ranging on a continuum from traditional forms of propositional thinking to nonverbal forms of procedural thinking (see Elliott & Rao, 1990). Thus, when Reimer states that music is "nonconceptual in essence" we must consider the possibility that his philosophy offers a misleading view of the nature and value of music and music cognition and, therefore, of the nature and value of music education.

More directly, Reimer's "nonconceptual" notion of music shoots music education in the foot: It not only misrepresents the nature of music cognition to both our allies and our opponents, it flags the baseless notion that music cognition is devoid of "thinking" as this term has traditionally been understood. More accurately, music cognition (as it applies in both music-making and music listening) is concept-laden in the richest sense of the term.

In sum, although MEAE wants to tell us that music is "cognitive" (which it most certainly *is*), MEAE fails to provide a substantive explanation. Instead, it posits an oversimplified and

untenable dichotomy: music = nonconceptual versus "the basics" = conceptual.

Viewed broadly, we must consider the possibility that MEAE's penchant for simple dichotomies (e.g., "writing and reading educates reasoning," whereas "creating art and experiencing art educates feeling," pp. 32-33) may actually place music educators in a defenseless position. For in response to similarly unsupportable characterizations of the nature and value of the sciences versus the arts (e.g., science = reasoning versus music = feeling), Vernon Howard (1988) sounds a warning:

Such a simplistic and misleading scheme alienates even as it misrepresents, leaving us confused as to what art and science are, what they do as symbolic constructions, what the complex relationships among them are, and what it takes to do them well (p. 18).

Let us now turn to a detailed examination of MEAE's *central* claim: the claim that music education is the education of feeling (p. 53).

## Part Two

The philosophy of MEAE is intended to explain the idea that "music and the other arts are a basic way that humans know about themselves and their world; that they are a basic mode of cognition" (p. 11). In fact, as Reimer credits (e.g., pp. 45, 50, 63, 102, 119), this idea and its supporting theory are original to Susanne Langer. Hence MEAE's philosophy is essentially an explanation of Langer's theory of art, which holds that "works" of fine art are a special kind of symbol.

2.1 To Langer (and therefore to Reimer, pp. 29-37), neither the variety of the external world nor the constant flux of our feelings is knowable unless somehow ordered or stabilized. The way humans make their experiences intelligible to themselves and to others is to impose symbolic forms and patterns on their experiences. Symbols are more intelligible than the things they stand for (events, feelings) because symbols are stable and orderly.

On this view, languages (reading and writing) are one way we order our experiences. But to Langer, works of art also provide ordered patterns that are analogous to important aspects of our lives. Therefore, says Reimer, "creating art, and experiencing art, do precisely and exactly for feeling what

writing and reading do for reasoning" (p. 33). The ordered patterns of works of art (nondiscursive symbols, or expressive forms) are more understandable than the "raw experience" of feeling because they are focused, objective, and orderly, whereas feelings are not. Langer (1953) therefore defines art as "the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling" (p. 40). On this view, music is a "device to hold onto feeling....a means to give it permanent embodiment" (Reimer, p. 33). Thus, Langer (1958) concludes, if "the arts objectify subjective reality," then "art education is the education of feeling" (p. 8). Reimer refashions Langer's thesis as the grounding concept of "music education as aesthetic education":

The major function of art is to make objective and therefore accessible [or "conceivable" (Reimer, 1970, p. 39)] the subjective realm of human responsiveness. Art does this by capturing and presenting in its intrinsic [or "aesthetic," *ibid.*] qualities the patterns and forms of human feeling. The major function of education in the arts is to help people gain access to the experiences of feeling contained in the artistic [i.e., "aesthetic" *ibid.*] qualities of things. Education in the arts, then, can be regarded as the education of feeling (p. 53).

Anchoring Reimer's (i.e., Langer's) philosophy, then, is the following dualism: discursive forms provide information (knowledge about) whereas nondiscursive forms provide insight into feeling (knowledge of). Music, on this view, is a special kind of symbol: a presentational form (p. 86ff).

2.2 Langer and Reimer want to claim that music is a presentational form that is "isomorphic with the patterns of felt life" (p. 102). This claim depends upon the further claim that the necessary and sufficient condition for one thing to symbolize another is that both things share a similar structure or have the same "logical form." That is, Langer's theory maintains that the "pairing" process we perform when we understand that something represents something else symbolically requires us to make a logical relationship in our minds between the two members of the pair. Such pairing requires us to make an analogy between the structures of the two items in the paired relationship.

Unfortunately, this pivotal claim cannot be defended. It is *not* necessary that two things

share a similar structure in order for a symbolic pairing to exist. Ernest Nagel (1943) made this point decades ago in a classic critique of Langer's theory. Nagel (p. 324) observed that if we take  $y = \sin x$  as an example of a symbol, we realize that it stands for a specific type of curve, the pattern of which has no analogous relationship to its symbol at all. Nagel further points out that a map only succeeds in re-presenting a geographical area to the extent that an interpreter understands from the outset that a flat piece of a paper with such-and-such marks means such-and-such. In other words, a map is not *a priori* presentational. Its meaning depends on prior discursive explanation. From this standpoint, it does not have an analogous structure to that which it represents. Furthermore, there is nothing to prevent us from giving someone a "picture" of a geographical area by describing it in words that specify landmarks, distances, geographical relationships, and so on. Again, such verbal descriptions have no analogous relationship to that which they symbolize.

Nagel's criticisms are enough to dissolve the foundations of Reimer's dualistic view of symbols. For if things do not need to share the same logical form to be paired in a symbol-object relationship, then the basis for the unique importance Langer and Reimer claim for presentational forms disappears and, along with it, the claim that there is a natural disparity between what discursive and presentational forms can symbolize. But even if Langer was correct on this point, there are two further objections to her grounding dualism (which includes the claim that discursive form is fundamentally incapable of presenting the forms that our feelings take). Before explaining these two objections, however, there is an odd contradiction in MEAE that begs for attention now: namely, Reimer's curious claim that music does and, at the same time, does not arouse feeling. Let me explain.

2.3 A vital tenet of Langer's theory is that music does *not* arouse feeling in a listener; music does *not* provide listeners with an experience of actual feeling. On the contrary, Langer (1942) believes that:

if it [music] has emotional content, it "has" it in the same sense that language "has" its con-

“Is it not the case that people often find musical performances valuable for themselves?” -- David J. Elliott

ceptual content—symbolically. . . . Music is not the cause or the cure of feelings, but their logical expression (p. 218).

Thus, says Langer emphatically (1942), “*what music can actually reflect is only the morphology of feeling* [italics mine]” (p. 238). Musical patterns represent the *general* forms that various feelings take and that various feelings can share. In other words, musical patterns have an open or unconsummated link with the forms of feeling (Langer, 1942, p. 240). Reimer quotes and rephrases Langer’s point on several occasions (e.g., pp. 50, 52, 88–90, 131).

At the same time, however, Reimer also claims that music presents conditions which “arouse feelings” (p. 50). In fact, Reimer goes further: He claims that “the explanation of musical experience given here (i.e., Reimer’s explanation of Langer’s theory) implies another theory of how sound can be used to give rise to feelings” (p. 130). In the very next paragraph, Reimer quotes a key passage from Langer which emphasizes the *opposite*: “The tonal structures we call ‘music’ bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling” (Langer, 1953, p. 27, cited in Reimer, p. 131). Immediately following this quotation, Reimer reverses himself again by referring his readers to Leonard B. Meyer’s theory (1956) for an explanation of how music *arouses* feeling. Unfortunately, Meyer’s arousal theory has also been systematically discounted in a number of analyses (e.g., Budd, 1985; Kivy, 1990).

So, whereas Meyer’s theory is an arousal theory of the music-affect relationship, Langer’s is *not*. Contrary to Reimer’s belief, then, Langer’s theory does *not* imply a theory of how music *arouses* feeling; in fact, her theory explicitly denies that music arouses feeling. Why? Because for Langer to suggest otherwise would be to dissolve the basis for her claim that music provides us with insight into feeling by *symbolizing* its dynamic forms (not by arousing its actual content).

So (asks the reader), does music arouse feeling, or not? Do we believe Reimer when

he says that music captures and presents “the patterns and forms of human feeling” (p. 53), or do we believe him when he says that music produces subjective responses (p. 130) and arouses feeling (p. 50)? The question seems rather important given MEAE’s *central* concern with feeling and the “education” of feeling. MEAE offers no answer; instead, it simply knots two opposing (and equally untenable) theories together.

(The reader will please note at this point that I am *not* suggesting that music and affect are unconnected; not at all. I am only arguing that the MEAE philosophy fails to provide a plausible explanation of the music-affect relationship on which to rest its central claims).

2.4 Now, the first of our two objections to MEAE’s grounding dualism (see section 2.1 above) concerns the fact that it is not the *forms* of our feelings that we usually have the most difficulty capturing in words (See Budd, 1985). Instead, it is the specific content of feeling that we have difficulty putting into words. However, this difficulty is likely not due to some natural incapability of discursive forms to render feeling. Rather, it may be a result of the fact that: (a) what we feel is unformed, or only in the process of forming, when we attempt to put our feelings into words; and/or (b) that we simply are not adept at using the expressive possibilities that language affords to capture the forms and/or content of our feelings.

Second, language *does* have a powerful capacity to engage our feelings beyond its special use in poetry or drama, as any reader of good prose will confirm, and as any witness to a skilled speaker, storyteller, or comedian will attest. Langer and Reimer attempt to support the opposite view by providing a reductive account of the affective capacity of language. Of course, if one restricts oneself to simple words and phrases to represent what one feels, or if one completely overlooks the power of human utterance and inflection (or argument, or logic) to move people with words, one can make it *seem* that discursive form is somehow inad-



“The arts always have been and remain a source of a special, satisfying way for humans to experience.” -- Bennett Reimer

equate in this regard. But of course, language offers so much more. In short, Reimer's (i.e., Langer's) reductive view of language is not a satisfactory basis on which to rest the contention that words are naturally incapable of moving us, or that “reading and writing” are devoid of affect.

2.5 Next, MEAE's claim that the significance of music is a result of an “isomorphic” relationship between the patterns of music and the forms of human feeling is open to several obvious objections.

First, as Langer admits, (and as Reimer accepts implicitly, pp. 45-50; 101-102), *different* feelings may share the *same* forms. To Reimer and Langer, then, feelings are not distinguished by the forms they take (e.g., patterns of growth and decay, tension and resolution, flowing and stowing, etc.). Accordingly, the best we can obtain from music is not an understanding of actual feeling, but only insight into the general forms of feelings. But what could the value of such a general awareness be? Indeed, *generality* (says Reimer) is the precise characteristic of discursive form that makes it inadequate as a means of understanding feeling.

Second, if the affective states of depression and joyfulness, for example, can both share the *same* form, then the unique value that MEAE attributes to music is dissolved. How so? Because if entirely different feelings are not distinguished by their forms, then these forms of development must not be limited to music or to feeling. In other words, there is nothing to distinguish the forms of feeling as Langer and Reimer (pp. 100-102) describe them from the forms of an indefinite number of natural and artificial patterns that permeate human existence: e.g., the ebb and flow of tidal seas, the expansion and contraction of a rubber band, the breathing pattern of a kangaroo, or as Reimer suggests, “the gathering storm, its energy, its dissolution” (p. 101).

At best, then, MEAE's concept of the significance of music sums to this: what music can do is little more than to re-present the *general* forms of an infinite number of indis-

tinguishable natural and artificial processes which are already available for our contemplation in any number of objective forms. It turns out, then, that not only are presentational forms “quite powerless to give precise knowledge about the factual world” (p. 87), they do not give us precise knowledge of subjectivity, only “a sense of” the “dynamic form of feeling” (p. 92). Harold Osborne (1984) is quite direct in his assessment of these weaknesses in Langer's theory:

Whatever else we may say about them, works of art are essentially individual and uniquely created constructions, to be apprehended each for what it is, not rudimentary concepts or generalized statements about feeling or anything else (p. 87).

In the third place, then, we must question whether the value that MEAE attributes to music provides a convincing explanation of why music is necessary. For what could be the value of music's very general relationship with forms of feeling (and the forms of many other things)? Why would anyone want such general “knowledge of” the forms of feeling? And why would people value music over any number of other vehicles that can objectify the “morphology of feelings”? Could access to such patterns be the primary reason why people seek to make music and listen to music? If so, then how can Reimer claim simultaneously that (a) discursive forms are not capable of capturing the forms of feeling because they deal in generalities (p. 86) and (b) that “presentational forms” are capable of capturing human feeling because they represent the *general* forms of feelings, and of storms, and of the breathing of kangaroos?

2.6 More fundamentally, there is a crucial contradiction in MEAE's premise that music is a nonreferential, presentational symbol. Why? On one hand, Reimer (p. 92) and Langer (1957) insist that music is self-referential:

The art symbol . . . is the expressive form. It is not a symbol in the full familiar sense, for it does not convey something beyond itself (p. 139).

On the other hand, however, Reimer and Langer hold that music is significant precisely because it expresses something beyond itself:



It is a metaphor or an analog, “a tonal analogue of emotive life” (Langer, 1953, p. 27; Reimer, pp. 52, 131).

This contradiction raises two major problems for the philosophy of MEAE. First, Reimer’s grounding notion of music is hopelessly ambiguous on an essential question: Is music self-referential or not? The question is important because the efficacy of Reimer’s philosophy pivots to some considerable extent on his “straw man” tactic of discrediting referentialism.

In fact, although Reimer tries to have his cake and eat it too, logic will not allow it. For if (a) the locus of music’s significance (“knowledge of” the forms of feeling) and (b) the means of providing this “knowledge of” (musical patterns) are parallel, then (a) and (b) are logically separate. In other words, MEAE is *not* an absolutist theory as Reimer claims, it is a referential theory. What MEAE is really claiming is that the significance of music lies *outside* the sounds themselves: i.e., in our own personal awareness that we have (somehow) grasped something about how feelings go.

Indeed, consider that what the MEAE explanation really amounts to, as Kivy (1990) argues, is a fancy variation on referential accounts of musical meaning. That is, instead of a conventional program or narrative, Absolute Expression substitutes a “deep” or hidden narrative (Reimer following Langer following Schopenhauer?) concerning the progress and development of feeling. Quite conveniently, of course, the meaning of this special narrative is “ineffable.”

Second, if music captures *not* actual feeling but an “analogue of emotive life,” then as Thomas Clifton (1983) rightly observes: “Langer seems to have introduced into her argument a strangely circular syllogism” (p. 43):

Art is a symbol of human feeling.

We experience symbolized expressions of feeling in works of art. Therefore, art is the symbol of a symbol (pp. 43-44).

2.6 Apart from these logical flaws, common sense is enough to raise doubt about MEAE’s basic notion that music is symbolic in some strange sense of this term. For even if we defy logic and admit that there may be a type of symbol that can be both referential and non-referential simultaneously, this would still require us to accept another un-

likelihood. That is, it seems implausible to suggest that whenever we encounter the isomorphic relationship of music and feeling we experience music “immediately” (pp. 91-92) as a means to an end: that we understand immediately that an “analogue of feeling” is the object of our cognition and that music is its vehicle to cognition because, following Langer (1942), we find “the latter more easily available than the former” (p. 58) or, following Reimer, because “we can examine the object that captures the feeling” (p. 35).

In fact, is it not the opposite? Is it not the case that people often find musical performances valuable for *themselves*? If so, then we must at least question the primacy of the function that Langer and Reimer assign to music: that listeners seek out music to get “knowledge of” a composer’s “understanding about the nature of feeling” (p. 66). Even if we admit this possibility, we could not say that it is either a necessary or a sufficient requirement for the enjoyment of understanding of music that we listen to it as a presentational form in order to gain something more interesting than the sounds themselves; i.e., a feeling of having grasped the forms of feeling. For these reasons, it is difficult to argue with Malcolm Budd’s conclusion (1985) that “it is not in general true for the listener that music is any kind of symbol” (p. 116).

2.8 On the other hand, perhaps Langer and Reimer really do make a case for the idea that music provides a specific understanding of music in virtue of their idea that music is an unconsummated symbol: that music imposes orderly forms on what we already feel, or that it imposes new patterns for our feelings to take. In either case, according to Langer and Reimer, a listener “fills in” the forms of the unconsummated symbol (the music) with many possible ways of feeling “depending on who is experiencing it and what that person brings to the experience at that particular moment” (p. 88).

But like the empty forms in a coloring book, one could easily spend one’s entire life filling in the given forms with a few basic colors. In other words, if one does not feel deeply or broadly before perceiving and responding to the “open” forms of feeling, and if one can not “know of” these feelings with-

out the forms that music allegedly imposes on one's feelings, it is difficult to see how imposing such forms could amount to any "knowledge of" feeling. Furthermore, it does not seem plausible that a listener's lack of experience with feeling could be improved merely by offering new forms for his or her amorphous feelings to take.

2.9 Beyond the weaknesses already noted, there are four more arguments against the significance that MEAE claims for music. First, how can it be said that music "educates" if neither the forms that our feelings take, nor any insight we gain into these forms, is intelligible outside music listening experiences? According to MEAE, our minds cannot hold the forms of feeling in consciousness. They slip the grasp of our cognition; feelings are elusive: "they disappear into thin air," says Reimer, so that before a feeling can "wash away," we need to "make it into an object so that it stays as it is" (p. 35). Neither the analogous forms of music that capture the forms of feeling, nor any intuitive recognition—nor any "flash of understanding"—"none [of these] is permanent beyond the sound that passes" (Langer, 1942, p. 244). On this view, whatever we sense about the nature of human feeling is *only* available to our minds during the "immediate experience" of works of art (Reimer, p. 92); it cannot be known or retained outside of the experience of music. On this view, to claim the listener has achieved "*knowledge of*" feeling, that listener would have to be permanently engaged in listening to music. The Langer/Reimer notion of "*knowledge of* feeling"—"knowledge" that evaporates in the absence of musical form—is peculiar at best; at worst, it defies logic and common sense.

Second, as Sparshott (1963) and Lemmon (1975) point out, to posit that musical patterns and the forms of feeling are "isomorphic" requires that these two phenomena be separately identifiable in the first place, "that is, that they can be known independently of each other and brought together for an investigation of similarities or dissimilarities" (Lemmon, p. 43-44). But this is precisely what MEAE denies: "The major function of art is to make objective and therefore accessible the subjective realm of human respon-

siveness" (Reimer, p. 53). To Reimer and Langer, then, music and feeling are synonymous. Aside from the logical weakness of this notion, it creates another problem. For if the forms of feeling can only be accessed when feeling is objectified in music, how can we judge whether or not a piece of music is "sensitive," i.e., whether or not it has succeeded in capturing "the depth and quality of feeling" (p.136)? How can we compare something with itself? Reimer tries to compensate for this problem by positing other criteria for judgement. But because the majority of these criteria (e.g., imagination, sensitivity, and authenticity) involve dimensions of experience wherein means-ends distinctions are not relevant (see Sparshott, 1986) they fail to provide adequate bases for determining musical excellence.

The larger problem with MEAE's criteria of judgement, of course, is that they rest on a concept of "creativity" that is obsolete in terms of contemporary philosophical and psychological research, as I explain elsewhere (Elliott, 1989). Hence many of MEAE's assumptions and pronouncements on the "creativity" of performing, composing and listening are not only questionable, but potentially damaging to music education.

Third, if MEAE is correct that our cognition cannot retain (a) the elusive forms of feeling, or (b) the analogous forms of feeling embodied in music, or (c) a logical intuition about the forms of feeling, then MEAE's claim that the primary function of music is "cognitive" rests on an equally peculiar sense of "cognitive." Indeed, in addition to what has already been said about the inadequacies of this philosophy's notion of "a concept," MEAE seems in conflict with itself on an important point: namely, how we get this curious "cognitive" payoff from music. Consider the following.

On one hand MEAE insists we adhere to a specific way of listening to music to receive what it offers. That is, we must follow all the rules of "aesthetic experience." As already noted, these eighteenth century canons are based on an elaborate system of prior social/historical concepts (verbal and nonverbal). These must be learned (formally or informally); they are by no means "natural" laws.

On the other hand, MEAE asserts that music presents the forms of feeling “immediately,” via a pure perception of sounds.

2.10 Finally, MEAE’s departing plea for a transformation of music education to “a still undefined unity with its sister arts” (p. 241) is yet another way in which this philosophy undermines its own intent to provide a strong and secure basis for music education. How so? A final note on Reimer’s debt to Langer will explain the point.

Langer’s theory of fine art takes the aesthetic concept of the “fine arts” one step further. In her attempt to construct a comprehensive theory, Langer (1953) argues that “the proper way to construct a general theory is by generalization of a special one” (p. 24). Hence Langer generalizes her symbolic theory to all the “sister arts.” The outcome of this logic is the conclusion (repeated by Reimer) that all fine arts are unified in a common purpose: to express forms of human feeling (p. 231).

Unfortunately, Langer’s argument fails. For constructing a general theory from a special one only holds if the special theory one begins with is satisfactory in itself (which is doubtful in the case of Langer’s theory), or if all such theories turned out to be the same regardless of their starting point. But verification of this is not possible. Thus, as Sparshott (1963) notes, Langer’s logic ought to raise serious doubts in anyone bothered by such exclusive claims of truth based upon one-sided and unverifiable accounts (p. 43). From this perspective, Reimer’s belief that “any claim we make for the value of music in education can be made equally validly by every other art” (p. 227) is problematic on three counts.

First, as I have explained already, Reimer’s claim is based on an illogical theory of the nature and value of music. Second, it rests on a questionable approach to developing a general theory. Third, it prevents MEAE from providing what it promised readers at the outset: a “strong foundation” for explaining why music’s value is “unique” (i.e., singular, without equal, or impossible to duplicate). For how can music’s value be unique if the same value can be provided by many other pursuits? Following MEAE’s logic, if teachers or administrators substitute painting or dance, or poetry for music, they are still providing students with something that MEAE asserts has essentially the same nature and value as music: a perceptible form expressive of human feeling. As it turns out, then,

MEAE is advancing the view that music is neither unique nor necessary in the curriculum since any “fine art” offers the means to improve that which MEAE most wants to improve: not musicianship, not musicality, not artistry, but “aesthetic sensitivity” (p. 229). According to this philosophy, as long as a “fine art” is available in the curriculum, students will have access to “forms of feeling” the embodiment of which is the essential function that “all art serves and fulfills in the same manner” (p. 229).

## Conclusion

Since MEAE holds that the nature of music is limited to symbolizing the forms of feeling; and since the activity of imposing general forms on feelings does not seem to be educative in any logical sense; and since the forms that music re-presents are neither distinguishable between feelings nor among other nonaffective phenomena; then MEAE’s notion that music “educates” human feeling—and that music education is the education of feeling—seems implausible.

Put directly, MEAE’s adopted position on the nature and value of music has severe weaknesses. Its most important propositions do not pass the test of logical scrutiny. According to MEAE’s own premise, then, the same must be said of this philosophy’s explanation of the nature and value of music education.

For these reasons (and others that cannot be given more space here), I suggest that “music education as aesthetic education” does not provide a secure philosophical basis for the organization and conduct of music education.


In conclusion, if there are good reasons for music educators to have such a thing as a “philosophy of music education,” then perhaps it is time to begin looking for an alternative to “music education as aesthetic education.” Perhaps the time has come to develop a new philosophy of music education, not by culling from normative theories of music-as-fine-art, or “symbol,” (or whatever), but by undertaking an independent philosophical analysis of MUSIC itself.

## Endnotes

1. All page references refer to the 1989 edition of *A Philosophy of Music Education*.
2. APME does not include a careful analysis of this root sense of “art” (see Reimer, 1989, pp; 65-66).

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