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### Youth Music: Is It Right for the Schools?

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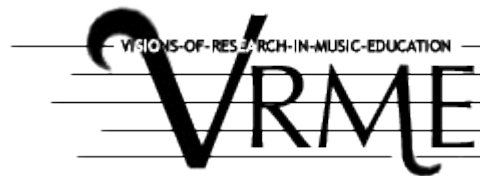
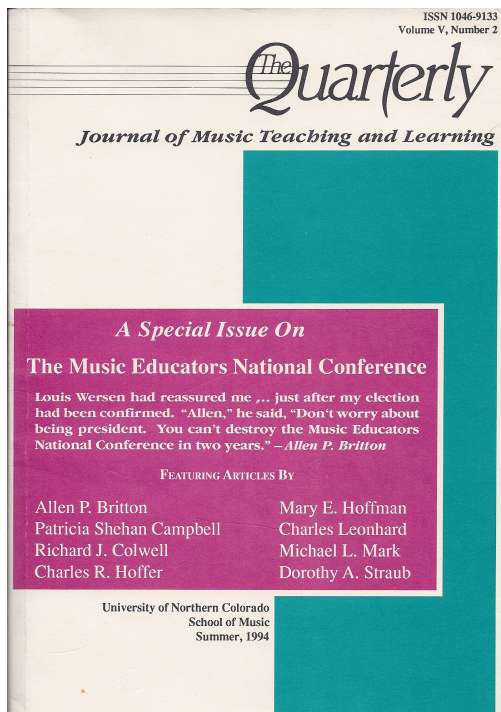
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*It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of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

# Youth Music: Is It Right for the Schools?

**By Michael L. Mark**

*Towson State University*

Most people love popular music. Our lives, and indeed our society, would be profoundly different if popular music was not a familiar facet of the environment. Popular and classical musics meet different societal needs, and there should be no question of one or the other, or of one being superior to the other. We need both.

The Music Educators National Conference became officially involved in popular music in the late 1960s. It coined the term “youth music” to depict all musics that are popular with youth, but the term is actually synonymous with “popular music.” The designation was first used when MENC addressed itself to the use of popular music in schools in the November 1969 issue of *Music Educators Journal*, which was dedicated to the subject of youth music in school programs.

Popular music had been used sparingly in schools for decades and was little respected among most music educators. In 1941, Peter Dykema and Karl Gehrkins wrote that swing music was not a “legitimate type of human experience.” They advised that the use of such music in schools would “cheat youth of a highly important experience ...”<sup>1</sup> Similar

opinions were expressed by other writers throughout the 1940s and 1950s, despite the fact that the use of jazz in schools had increased dramatically since the 1930s. Many

school programs had dance orchestras in the 1930s. These were later called jazz bands, stage bands, and finally jazz lab bands. General music programs began to incorporate jazz and Broadway music in the 1950s. The use of popular music increased steadily in schools throughout the 1950s and 1960s, both in performing ensembles and other music classes.

Probably few music educators realized at the time just how momentous the event was when MENC endorsed the use of youth music in school music programs in 1967. This milestone in music education

history was accomplished through the Tanglewood Symposium. After the symposium, MENC promoted youth music steadily and systematically. Why did MENC suddenly turn so much of its attention to popular music? The reasons for this remarkable and consequential action were rooted in the societal ferment of the 1960s and will be discussed later in this article.

Since the 1960s, popular music has become an integral component of many music programs and has had significant influence on the curriculum. As with any genre of music, we do not actually know how extensively it is being used, and we can

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judge only by such indicators as the representations of popular music in music catalogs, at conference exhibitions, on conference programs, and other such means. Based on these criteria, it appears that the use of popular music in schools is extensive and far reaching.

After a quarter of a century, however, and despite popular music's valuable societal function, it is time to evaluate its use in school programs. We must ask if music that is so well appreciated and understood — and that thrives in the greater society — should be so ingrained in school programs. Most educational changes are eventually evaluated to discover whether particular goals have been achieved and what other successes might have resulted, but there has been no evaluation of the use of popular music.

### **Music Education and Societal Change**

Music education exists for many reasons, but society has always sponsored it primarily for one purpose: It has met certain societal needs. Society is a dynamic entity, always evolving, developing, and changing. To continue meeting the needs of the society that supports it, music education must also ceaselessly evolve, develop, and change. American music education has done this successfully since becoming a curricular subject in 1838; like American society, it too is a dynamic entity.

A review of the second half of the twentieth century alone reveals a remarkable number of changes in music education, from professional values to teaching methods and business practices. Some of the major developments that have supported music education since mid-century are the aesthetic education movement, comprehensive musicianship, the adoption (or adaptation) of foreign curricula, the growth and development of nationwide public relations and advocacy, and the shift from a Eurocentric view of music literature to a more catholic view. There have also been negative changes, mostly due to worsening economic conditions, and music programs have been reduced or eliminated in many parts of the country. Although this threat initially placed music educators in a defensive posture, the resulting national advocacy movement by MENC has

achieved a remarkable degree of success.

Most change takes place in relation to the greater society, and is encouraged, if not actually imposed, from outside the profession. Some of the most important advancements in recent times originated in the education crisis of the 1950s, when the American public became increasingly alarmed at the declining quality of education. The successful flight of the USSR's Sputnik I in 1957 signaled that the United States was no longer the leader in space technology. Anxious Americans feared that the Soviet Union was winning the Cold War, and that there was imminent danger of attack. With the financial support of the federal government and private foundations, and at insistent urging from business, industry, and the military, educators began directing significantly more attention and resources to such subjects as mathematics, science, and foreign languages.

It was not long before music educators became apprehensive that their discipline would be devalued. Perhaps in response to this concern, the aesthetic education movement began in the late 1950s. Allan Britton and Charles Leonhard, the two early leaders of the movement, probably sought to avoid having educational resources redirected from music to other subjects. They formulated a more principled rationale, one based on the inherent nature of music, to replace the old utilitarian justifications. The emphasis on conceptual learning in the early 1960s was another way in which the education community responded to the crisis. The widespread acceptance of the principles and practices of Kodály and Orff made it possible for music educators to join the conceptual learning movement.

Many of the curricular changes of the 1960s have had their day, and we remember them now by some mark left on the curriculum. One consequential innovation, however, the use of popular music, still remains in practice. If the music literature used to teach music *is* the curriculum, as has been often stated, then possibly the most significant change in recent music education history is the adoption of the belief that all musics are equal members of the curriculum. The assimilation of popular music in school programs modified, and to a large extent,

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transformed the very core of the discipline. The societal influence that brought about the metamorphosis was the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It would be satisfying to profess that the new recognition of all musics was an evolutionary change, and that music educators originated the movement toward teaching all musics in schools. We, however, like other educators, saw the light as demonstrations were held to protest the war in Vietnam and in defiance of “the system.” Young people demonstrated even as relevant laws were being passed, regulations written, and judicial decisions handed down. It was made clear to educators, as it was to the leaders of business, industry, and the military, that they could no longer do business as usual.

The remarkable strength of the Civil Rights Movement lay in the physical demonstrations that took place across the country by groups of people who demanded universal, undiscriminating equality. Education was a prime target. Demonstrations closed many universities, many more than once. For the first time, at least in recent history, American universities responded to student needs expressed through physical threat. Young people acquired influence of unprecedented magnitude in the United States. They gained seats on governing boards and important committees of educational institutions. New programs were created to give academic recognition to American minorities. Similar results were seen in the public schools, especially high schools, where demonstrations also took place. One barrier after another fell before the tremendous pressure imposed by demonstrating students, and as they gained momentum, more and more concessions were made.

One of the results of the Civil Rights Movement was the recognition that the youth culture was a distinct element of American society, rather than an extension of adult cultures. Dismayed by the young peoples’ radi-

cal standards of sexual conduct, drug usage, bizarre styles of dress, and various forms of illegal conduct, adult Americans came to recognize a discrete culture. Further, many young people of that era extended the youth culture to form a counterculture that openly opposed the societal laws and mores they considered unnaturally restrictive. Some members of the counterculture demonstrated their dissent by means of legal protest; others, however, openly disobeyed laws, flaunting their contempt of traditional American values. The counterculture of the 1960s was interwoven with the youth culture. As a result, although a minority of young people engaged in extreme activities, many adults nevertheless tarred all youth with the same brush.

Both the youth culture and the counterculture were especially exemplified by their music, just as interest in popular music has characterized young people for a long time. The new youth culture was a latter-day version of the popular culture of the 1920s, when recordings and commercial radio for the first time allowed people all over the country, and in many parts of the world, to hear the same music. Popular music was not new in the 1920s, but the media made it possible for an international culture to germinate from it. By the 1960s, jazz, “America’s classical music,” had become a traditional American music and was arguably no longer categorized as popular music. The more traditional popular musics of the time — ballads and show music — were of little interest to most young people. It was rock music that became one of the most cohesive central elements in a revolution that changed American society. Rock both symbolized and unified the young culture; in fact, the music festival at Woodstock, NY, became one of the strongest symbols.

The protest movement, made up of youth, war protesters, advocates of minority rights, women’s rights, and others created new so-

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cial conditions that, in retrospect, were clearly good for democracy in the United States. It also created controversy and turmoil, however, that still haunt us. The current issue of homosexuals in the military is just one example of the residual effects of the Civil Rights Movement.

The movement awoke music educators to the fact that multicultural education was the right and necessary path to take. Many students did not fit the mold that the music curriculum had been designed to serve; instead, they came from a profusion of ethnic backgrounds, and their musics were not those found in basal series or sung by high school choruses. The emphasis on Western art music was simply too restrictive for a nation of immigrants, and it denied equal validity and respect to their musics. As urban problems proliferated and school desegregation proceeded on its bumpy road, music educators realized that they were in a position to help people understand each other through music. The melting pot had itself melted, and many Americans came to accept that one of the greatest strengths of the United States is its diversity. Bennett Reimer wrote, "Only the most provincial would assume that no one can or should share the musical benefits of a group other than the one to which he happens to belong."<sup>2</sup>

The Music Educators National Conference was in an excellent position to support diversity. MENC was well aware of the need for multicultural education before the 1960s, but the formal recognition granted to the concept by Article 2 of the Tanglewood Declaration officially turned the profession in a new direction. The article states: "Music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belongs in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to involve music of our time in its rich variety, including *currently popular teen-age music* [author's italics] and

avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures."<sup>3</sup>

Youth music was swept into the picture along with multicultural music. The role of the newly sanctioned musics has expanded steadily since the Tanglewood Symposium. The earlier ideal of European classical music as the consummate artistic achievement of the civilized world no longer dominates the music curriculum. As new kinds of music proliferated in the schools, Western art music was relegated to a position of equality among all musics.

Multicultural and youth musics are discussed together here because the youth music of the late 1960s was that of a culture. Since the social tide of change was so closely identified with the music of the youth culture, it is not a great leap of logic to propose that popular music belongs in the category of multicultural music. A comparison, however, of one important extramusical characteristic, longevity, illuminates a critical difference between ethnic and popular musics.

Traditional ethnic music is of significant age; music that expresses the culture of a people is likely to have existed for many generations, perhaps for centuries. Musical evolution might have taken place with the passing generations, but the roots of the music are obvious and still express the characteristics of a particular ethnic group. Popular music, on the other hand, changes every few years. Sometimes it has an even shorter life than that. It is a vibrant genre that evolves quickly to satisfy the particular tastes of each succeeding cadre of youth, and then fades away. Once a new style prevails, older ones quickly begin to sound archaic and soon have little appeal to most young people. They might remain attractive to some older people, but they are not handed down from generation to generation, as is traditional mu-



sic. Outdated popular music becomes a thing of the past that is offered to the nostalgic through television commercials as recordings "that can't be purchased in stores."

This comparison illuminates the fact that currently popular teen-age music is a fleeting entity that is not necessarily valued by anybody other than teen-agers, and in many cases, not even by them as they pass into adulthood. And as every teen-ager knows, there is no one currently popular teen-age music. There is a multitude of styles of rock and country musics, each of which has its own adherents.

The Music Educators National Conference played a leading role in the adoption of multicultural and other musics, including popular music. As a cosponsor of the Tanglewood Symposium, it helped articulate the need. After the symposium, MENC systematically pursued the adoption of the new musics in schools. It assisted in creating the National Association of Jazz Educators (NAJE) in 1968 and immediately upon its establishment, accepted it as an associated organization.

In 1969, MENC cosponsored the Youth Music Institute to establish a dialogue between music educators and representatives of young people of the youth music culture. The MENC Goals and Objectives Project, which began in 1969, proposed the study of 18 broad topics, one of which was concerned with music of various cultures, including the youth culture: "[MENC will] Advance the teaching of music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures."<sup>4</sup> The effort was successful, for it is highly unlikely that popular music would have become ingrained in the profession so quickly and so pervasively without the leadership of the Music Educators National Conference.

Looking back to 1967, one might ask

## *The Central Questions*

It is difficult to criticize the use of a certain music in the curriculum without appearing to disparage the music itself, so there has been remarkably little dialogue on the issue of popular music in the curriculum. Yet we must ask three questions:

1. Does popular music need to be taught? One purpose of schooling is to learn what is normally not learned outside of school, as is popular music. The very word "popular" connotes that a particular strength of popular music is its immediate appeal, which is readily accessible without education.
2. Should the precious resources of time and money allocated for music be reserved for teaching music that requires teaching and guidance to be understood?
3. Should instruction in a musical genre with such a short life span be a significant part of education for a lifetime?

whether "currently popular teen-age music" as stated in Article 2 was included because of a new idealism in music education or as a response to the immediate demands of the youth culture. Probably it was both, but the tumult and foment of the time, with almost daily occurrences of physical violence, could well have been the stronger influence on the symposium participants, as it was on other policy planners. Did the participants really believe that currently popular teen-age music belonged in the curriculum as an equal to all other musics, or did they give in to the same pressure that swayed other societal institutions?

What do we believe now about youth music in the school curriculum? Should currently popular teen-age music be the curricular equal of all other musics? Every music educator knows that ethnic and art musics require considerable education and experience to develop a deep appreciation for them. The rewards are different from those of currently popular teen-age music and are more difficult to achieve. Does that make a difference?

Now, in a time of economic exigency and public discomfort with schooling, it is appropriate to examine whether scarce resources are best spent on popular music. This is not to say that there is absolutely no place in the curriculum for popular music. . . . The issue is whether popular music deserves an equal place among musical genres.

### **The Need For A Closer Look**

Many musicians agree with the ideal of equal recognition and respect for all musics, including all forms of popular music. No music exists without some group of people who respond to it and love it, and nobody can argue with another person's taste. The salient point, however, is that when the music literature of school music programs was modified so radically, the very core of music education changed. And now, about a quarter of a century later, the profession still does not really know if any particular goal has been achieved, or if popular music has made music education better than it would have been without it. As to the appropriate music for school programs, the issue is whether granting curricular equality to all musics was the right thing to do. If we question anything in the music curriculum, it should be the music we use. Nothing is more basic. The use of popular music, lumped together with jazz, classical, and traditional music of other cultures, bothered many music educators in 1967, and still does not sit well with some.

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Now, in a time of economic exigency and public discomfort with schooling, it is appropriate to examine whether scarce resources are best spent on popular music. This is not to say that there is absolutely no place in the curriculum for popular music. It is unlikely that we will ever again see a time when there is no popular music in school programs. The issue is whether popular music deserves an equal place among musical genres. The adoption of popular music in the 1960s might well have been beneficial at the time, and perhaps the current use of popular music is entirely appropriate and correct. Maybe, though, it is not appropriate or correct, especially considering the differences between the youth cultures of the 1960s and the 1990s. After more than 25 years of experience with popular music, we should question whether music education has been improved because of it. This is a complicated matter — after all, who is to say what "improved" means? As professionals, though, we should want to know. Unfortunately, we have not even begun to examine the issue.

The music is the heart of the music education curriculum. MENC continually encourages curricular work by its members through various councils, committees, publications, and in-service conferences. MENC, however, must remain neutral in regard to curriculum. As a community that embraces all viewpoints, it must champion the work of all of its members equally. Like most professional education organizations, it is limited in its actions to broad areas that encompass the entire profession. It can offer positive leadership in recommending that all musics should form the basis of the music education program, as it did in the Tanglewood Symposium. It is not in a position, however, to recommend removing anything from the curriculum.

If MENC cannot move in this direction, then who can? Who else speaks for the pro-




fession with the authority of MENC? No other music education organization is nearly as influential. This examination is not a job to be undertaken by accrediting agencies or boards of education. It would be unthinkable to ask an organization not specifically concerned with the well-being of music education to determine what kind of music should be used in schools. A study could be undertaken by a state music education organization, by the College Music Society, the National Association of Jazz Educators, or any of a number of other organizations, but they would probably have the same limitations as MENC, and the impact of their findings on the profession would be limited.

This leaves researchers, working either as individuals or in teams, who are capable of designing and implementing a study of grandiose proportions to examine a basic and practical issue that affects music education in the United States and in many other countries. It would seem appropriate for MENC to fund such a study because the organization was so instrumental in creating the conditions that must be studied. Yet this might be perceived as a politically sensitive issue, because MENC would appear to be looking for an answer that could harm some of its members. Therefore, such sponsorship is most unlikely. Perhaps one of the funding

agencies that supports research on educational issues would underwrite the study. Which researchers would be most likely to undertake a large study of a somewhat amorphous nature? These questions require discussion among individuals and in SRIG meetings. Combined, these concerns could form a viable topic for a team of expert music education researchers, working collaboratively with scholars in such other disciplines as psychology and sociology.

The researchers who finally undertake such a study will provide an important service for the profession. We have gone a long time without answers, and if music educators are to continue offering the highest level of service to society, they must know what music to teach.

### Notes

1. Peter W. Dykema and Karl W. Gehrken, *"The Teaching and Administration of High School Music"* (Boston: C.C. Birchard, 1941), p. 455.
2. Bennett Reimer, "General Music for the Black Ghetto Child," *Facing the Music in Urban Education* (Washington, DC: Music Educators National Conference, 1972, p. 89.
3. Robert A. Choate, ed. *Documentary Report of the Tanglewood Symposium* (Washington, DC: Music Educators National Conference, 1968), p. 139.
4. "Goals and Objectives for Music Education," *Music Educators Journal*, 57, no. 4 (December 1970), p. 24-25. 

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