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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

By

Jason Vodicka, *guest editor*

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Richard Colwell's editorial in the premier issue of *The Quarterly* begins, "Birthing is an exciting and rewarding time. New ventures bring with them promise and hope." Twenty years later, we release the reprints of that first volume with the same sense of birthing as we bring *The Quarterly* online, giving it renewed life. Its mission then was to ask "the critical questions facing the music profession." Its commitment to "the breath of music learning and teaching" remains as relevant today as when these questions were first asked and answered. Many of the authors at the early stages of their careers have since become prominent and familiar voices in music teaching and learning.

The first two issues of *The Quarterly* affirm the importance of a philosophical foundation for good teaching. Good teaching, however, is much more than a solid philosophical framework. Philosophy must be accompanied by continuous experimentation at the classroom level to find the best methods and strategies until philosophy and practice merge. This inquisitive, experimental approach to music learning applies not only to teachers but to students as well. Issues 1 and 2 also frequently address the concept of critical thinking, a topic still very relevant today.

Issue 3 explores the uniquely American experiment that was the Contemporary Music Project (CMP). Each of the authors were involved in the CMP as young composers, program administrators, or teachers. While the project had its own stated goals, those who participated in the project repeat similar outcomes at all levels. First, CMP brought communities together, at the local level to hear, create, and experiment with new music, and at the national level to discuss what it is that we do in music education and why we do it. Second, while at first focused on young composers, CMP actually focused music learning on the students. Critical thinking, composing, arranging, and playing with music were identified as more important goals than rote memorization and performance. Third, while the focus of the project was initially to bring in newly composed music to schools and communities, the project had the effect of broadening the scope of literature to include the music of many cultures based on a common elements approach. Fourth, the strength of CMP was that it primarily focused on the people involved in making music, not on what they do or how they do it. Training teachers first as solid musicians, with an emphasis on individuality (not standardization, materials, rubrics, or methods) was what the project was about.

When explaining the Contemporary Music Project, David Willoughby states, “Any approach to teaching and learning that demands an expansion of attitudes and knowledge, that requires continued study and contemplation about music and music learning, and that involves extensive risk-taking and perhaps failure intimidates many teachers. The tendency is to carve out a comfortable rut and feel cozy in the security of the known and proven.” It is often said that teachers teach the way that they were taught. Missing from today’s teachers is an approach to teaching that is also a form of learning. While many say they are open to new ideas, in reality, they only *want* to be open to new ideas. We still have much to learn from this important project.

Good teaching is about finding balance between philosophy and practice, between the contemporary and the classic, between the local and the global. In his introduction to issue 4, editor Manny Brand insists that we must be global in our thinking because the challenges faced in music education are too massive to limit ourselves to insular thinking. At the same time, we must keep our own students and our own situations in clear focus. Balance is the key – not simply adopting techniques, activities, or systems because they work for someone else, but because they have potential to positively impact our own students. This exploration of music education around the globe is the feature of issue 4.

In exploring music education systems outside the United States, several similarities arise. All authors find that there is not enough time allotted for music education in order for it to be successful. Secondly, there is not enough training at the college level to adequately prepare teachers to teach music. Third, where the public schools fail, private teachers step in. In most countries, only specialty music schools have good musical education, and other students must take private lessons in order to learn about music. Similarly in America, students learn technique and skills from private teachers because they are not adequately taught in school programs. Finally, all authors describe a rise of indigenous music in music classes. Fortunately in the United States, music teachers are beginning to seriously address students’ “indigenous” musics (pop, rock, rap). Curiously, music educators around the world find that their European-style systems actually stifle musical talent and interest because of an emphasis on Western music. While many countries have used Western art music to “refine” the native culture, are we in the United States doing the same also?