



Title: CM: The Uncommon Elements

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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.

CM: The Uncommon Elements

By Martin Mailman

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My association with the Contemporary Music Project began on a cold and dreary Tuesday afternoon in November, 1958, with a visit by the Contemporary Music Project's first field representative, Gid Waldrop, to Dr. Howard Hanson's composition seminar at the Eastman School of Music. He announced to us that the Ford Foundation was going to fund 12 young composers to be in residence at 12 school districts, and that they would write music for the school musicians and ensembles. I wish I could report that his announcement generated an enthusiastic response from the composers in that class, but it did not. We were convinced that we were destined for far more important roles on the musical scene than to compose for some school kids. My dissertation, an opera, was about to go into rehearsal, and I was sure that fame and fortune, not to mention a tenured senior professorship, were out there just waiting for me. Gid invited us to apply, and several of us did. Mine was a very slim application consisting of one composition.

Perhaps that is why I was offered a residency in Jacksonville, Florida, only after the first choice of the selection committee had declined. Of the original 12 composers, four were from Eastman and had been recruited by Gid during his November visit. They were Emma Lou Diemer, Richard Lane, Robert Washburn, and myself.

The spring and summer of 1959 were both eventful and stressful for me. Since my doctoral studies were fast coming to completion, I had to find employment. College positions were not as plentiful as I had imagined, and my own estimation of my professional worth was changing rapidly. By the time the residency was offered, I accepted eagerly as I had no other choices. The prospect of a year in Jacksonville with a regular paycheck encouraged me to propose to my future

wife, who was then teaching piano at Eastman. She accepted! By some lucky stroke, a piano position opened up at Jacksonville University and she was hired. After composing a film score in Canada, I packed my few belongings into a car of questionable reliability and headed south to Florida to find us a place to live. The car survived the trip to Jacksonville and then to Dallas, where we were married, and back to our new home.

If I arrived in Jacksonville for less than exemplary reasons, I was determined to make my residency a success. The music supervisor, Carolyn Day, was also dedicated to the success of the venture. She made sure that we were introduced to all the music teachers and directors and that we made a plan to compose pieces for special occasions that would bring maximum notice to my works. In addition to composing, I spoke to many groups in the schools and the community and, most importantly, became involved with the students during the rehearsals of my music. Their enthusiasm was really infectious, and the excitement they brought to the first performances of my music made each premiere a special event for me that more than compensated for any technical limitations they had as young musicians. I suppose it was an affirmation of all of our efforts that we were renewed for a second year (1960–1961).

Although a number of the pieces I wrote have mercifully not been heard since their premieres, a few are still being performed regularly some 30 years later. Also, a few of the musicians we met in Jacksonville are still valued friends to this day. The experience of composing music regularly and hearing it performed by available resources is a habit that has remained with me since that time. Even though I am no longer a “young” composer, I am still a composer.

Developing Complete Musicians

One thing became clear during my residency: The musicianship of the teacher or director has a profound influence on the acceptance of new works by the students. Directors who were limited in their ability to read and understand a new score, or who had little or no appetite for challenging experiences were definitely negative factors in the process of presenting my music or, for that matter, any other music. Their own insecurity was quickly translated into a series of excuses and apologies that hampered the experience of the joy inherent in bringing a piece of music to life. On the other hand, those teachers and directors who were not afraid of reaching out shared some very rewarding music-making with their students.

There were plenty of teachers and directors whose training did not enable them to continue to grow as musicians and develop new skills and understandings beyond the limits of their own academic and musical preparation. The policy committee of the CMP began to give careful attention to this problem. Several meetings and conferences were convened to address this matter, and eventually the concept of comprehensive musicianship emerged. The concept was not conceived as a neat package ready for the music marketplace. Persons had to be identified who themselves exemplified this old idea under a new name, the idea being that a complete musician could create, perform, describe, and teach a wide variety of music, or at least bring these diverse skills to any musical task. Further, the idea defined music itself much more broadly than three centuries of Western masterpieces.

Strength Through Diversity

After leaving Jacksonville, we enjoyed five happy years at East Carolina University, where I served as Professor of Music and Composer-in-Residence. We moved to the University of North Texas in the fall of 1966, just about the time that plans were being developed for the Institutes for Music in Contemporary Education (IMCE). I was invited to represent my new school in the Southwestern Region of the project. The pilot projects were

developed by each representative and were intended to be practical applications of the CM concept, which was itself still evolving. No two projects were alike and very few of the representatives shared any commonalities. This diversity may very well have been the basic strength of the IMCE. The discussions, debates, and arguments that occurred concerning definitions of terms and the true meaning of CM were often heated and loud, but to the best of my recollection never violent.

The project at North Texas began in two parts. The first was an undergraduate course on the senior level. It met three hours a week and was rather immodestly called "Comprehensive Musicianship." The class had an enrollment of about ten students. By the time I stopped teaching the course in 1981, there were usually about 50 students each semester. My successors in teaching that course, Lenore Pogonowski and the late Avon Gillespie, certainly had different resources than I did in coping with the numbers, although we all struggled with reaching the individual in a rather crowded situation.

The second part of the project involved the junior colleges in Dallas and Fort Worth, where rapid growth was occurring. The mechanics of the project were that there were four or five campuses I would visit each week in order to sit in on their classes, and once each week the teachers would come to Denton for a seminar. Given the very different mission and population of these schools, including their open-door admission policy, we addressed issues and problems not found at our university. For example, all students commuted to these colleges and had little access to practice facilities, libraries, rehearsals, concerts, and the faculty. Their main musical experiences were with church music or rock music, their primary instrument was guitar, and their career goals were totally unfocused.

As with any challenge, there were marvelous opportunities for creative solutions and fantastic rewards in terms of individual change and growth. These rewards were made possible by the extraordinary dedication and commitment of the teachers; this same dedication is responsible for the higher-quality programs that emerged at

the junior colleges. In fact, several of our outstanding music students received their initial training at those schools.

The junior college seminars, expanded and with a broadened focus, were offered to public school teachers as a summer workshop for graduate credit. A number of area teachers enrolled, including several from the Arts Magnet High School Program in Dallas. The summer workshop also continued until 1981 with good enrollments; additional opportunities included one-day workshops for teachers during the school year in various locations. The many pilot projects of the IMCE differed not only in their relevance to CM but in their capacity to sustain themselves beyond the initial funding.

As special-interest seminars, meetings, and conferences continued during the 1970s, some of us found ourselves to be "traveling salespersons" for CM. I had the opportunity to visit many places I might otherwise never have seen, including spending one night in a convent in Kansas with E. Thayne Tolle, then the Field Representative of the CMP. Thayne and I logged many miles spreading the word; we met many interesting musicians and teachers all over the country.

As a faculty member at CM workshops, I met and worked with such outstanding colleagues as Barbara Reeder-Lundquist, Robert Trotter, and David Ward-Steinman. They were formidable co-workers and extraordinary communicators; I learned much from them. To maintain their high standards and to match their considerable contributions was a challenge. Their insights into music from all over the world were invaluable and their ability to engage others in bringing unfamiliar music to life was incredible.

The CMP umbrella covered a wide spectrum of people and interests; thus its directorship changed hands from time to time, as did its staff, policy-makers, funding sources, and perception of "burning issues." These issues were thoughtfully addressed but not always put to rest. The question of evaluation is one example of a somnambulant issue, as are many of the curriculum matters raised so frequently at conferences. The issues had a chronology that reflected the success of what preceded

them. There would never have been the need to measure achievements if they had been dismal failures. The elusive CM package thankfully never did materialize. Many fine reports of projects and conferences were published, as were books authored by people involved in CMP. These record the diverse perceptions of CM and serve as inspiring models of what can be accomplished when one "lets go of the rope," as Grant Beglarian's anecdote of the discovery of Carlsbad Caverns depicted.

Life as a Composer

Throughout this time I continued to compose regularly, and I would like to think that my exposure to CM and CMers had a positive effect on my artistic development. It certainly influenced my resources as a teacher of composition. I do not want to emulate Peter Sellers' character in the film *Being There* and offer nothing but platitudes, so I will leave it to others to determine the merit of my music and my contributions as a composer. The distribution of works by the young composers was greatly facilitated by the interest of many publishers in the project's commercial potential. Some of us have continued our association with these publishers.

In addition, the substantial number of high schools that have funded new works from living composers, I suspect, is an outgrowth of the Young Composers Project and the positive experiences of young musicians in bringing a new piece to life. Students' sense of pride is even greater when they have sold candy, washed cars, and hawked tons of frozen pizza to raise the necessary funds. Almost always, a part of the commissioning project is bringing the composer to the final rehearsals and concerts. This, too, is obviously related to the experiences of the Young Composers Project.

While at first my conducting was limited to my works, I became interested in bringing my CM understanding to rehearsals and concerts of all music. Over the years I have found frequent opportunities to serve as a clinician and guest conductor at both the high school and college levels. Techniques of improvising, using

music of other cultures, and discovering common relationships among seemingly diverse works were initially developed in the classroom but have worked equally well in rehearsal.

What Made CMP Unique?

To answer the questions “Is there life after funding?” or “Where is CM today?” requires an assessment of the salient qualities of CM. It is an awesome task made even more frightening by the fact that as one ages, the expectations for pronouncements of wisdom become greater. As a young composer, I could say anything, but now . . . ? To me, what made the CMP unique was simply the individuals associated with the project. The best were fine musicians before their CM experience, although many grew as a result of it. They were creative risk-takers who had the ability to inspire others to join them in pursuit of their visions. Their creativity gave rise to new experiences as well as to the discovery of new relationships between existing experiences. They achieved what composers, performers, and teachers aspire to—profoundly touching the spirit of another human being and allowing others to participate in the most satisfying and valued expressions of our art. The CMP did not invent this behavior, but the CMP did identify it, reward it, and, to a limited extent, codify it. All of this was happening when mobility and technology were rapidly making us a global community; the expanded musical repertoire mirrored the expanding world of our contemporary society.

Of course not everyone involved with CM was a musical visionary, and many people never associated with the projects exemplified a recognizable number of the valued CM attributes. Since, in my judgment anyway, the individual was the single most important ingredient in CM, it meant that in order for CM to survive as an ongoing concept of dealing with music, the individuals, or the people they influenced, had to survive.

For instance, Barbara Reeder-Lundquist notated African drum charts for use by others, but unless you had performed with her and had been exposed to her

vast energies and glowed with her when the music really started to jell, you might not inherit her legacy. How could we package Barbara and all her vitality and knowledge? We can't. Fortunately, she made so many presentations that many of us can recall what she did and use the charts as a guide to stretch ourselves toward those glorious remembered moments. We must also work and practice as long and as hard as she did to even approach her success.

The CM participants hoped that what we did as individuals touched others and lit their fires. The great desire of many to package and summarize what is in reality the soul of the individual was (and is) the dilemma of CM. I believe we did change the way many feel and think about music.

Look at the songbooks children use today and compare them with those of 30 years ago. They are much more global in their selections. Look at the wealth of anthologies focusing on real music from a broad spectrum of time and places and compare them to the few music examples that were found in the older textbooks.

Look at the performance repertoire of today's schools and colleges. Sure, much worthless trash is still being used, but some fine works by living composers, often created by the direct encouragement of schools and colleges through commissions, are also available.

Over 30 years have passed since I first heard Gid Waldrop explain the project that has so deeply affected my life as a composer, teacher, and human being. The rewards have been good, and for that I am grateful. But as any composer knows, the next piece is the one to which you must dedicate yourself, regardless of past successes.

CM has a distinguished past. Its future will depend on individual contributions to the art of music and our collective ability to grow and welcome the challenges that are ahead. Because of the past efforts of so many gifted participants, we face those challenges less constrained in our skills and attitudes and with considerably more options than we would have without the experience of comprehensive musicianship. □