
EDITORIAL

By

Jason Vodicka, *guest editor*

The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning Reprint Series
Pennsbury School District
Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania

The seventh and final volume of *The Quarterly* contrasts the earliest trends in American music education with contemporary research. William Billings would have celebrated his 250th birthday in 1996, at which time the Society for Research in Music Education (SRME) presented their Research Keyfocus Sessions at the Kansas City meeting of the Music Educators National Conference, now called MENC: The National Association for Music Education. Issue one focuses on William Billings, the “Yankee Tunesmith” and Singing School instructor, while issues two, three and four are dedicated to papers presented at the SRME Keyfocus Sessions. The contrasts among the issues are striking. Billings wrote and worked autonomously, composing his own music, creating his own methods, and teaching students with no formal musical training of his own. The focus papers call for greater integration of the music education research community and were intended to create dialogue between philosophers, neurologists, sociologists, behaviorists, and historians.

In his editorial Jonathan Bellman explains that the Billings issue examines the Singing School master as teacher and composer. For example, Nym Cooke connects Billings’ compositional style to his personality and to the spirit of Revolutionary America. In examining Billings’ fusing tune compositions, Maxine Fawcett-Yeske states that his repertory “exhibits a remarkable development in the composer’s command of formal, contrapuntal, and textual-dramatic considerations.” However, the modal harmonies and frequent parallel intervals in Billings’ music made it unpopular in serious music circles soon after it was composed. Raymond C. Hamrick follows Billings’ music from Boston to the rural South, where it was guarded by the Shape Note tradition for over 150 years.

While Billings is more widely known as a composer, he was also one of this country’s first music educators. Rose D. Daniels explores Billings’ success in reviving congregational singing through evening classes for untrained singers. Focusing on singing tone and music literacy, he used a modified system of solfege for teaching notes and a pendulum to keep tempo.

Issues two through four focus on leadership. From the perspective of sociology, Paul Woodford explores the concept of musical leadership in both teachers and students. Musical leaders, he says, are able to think independently, challenge the musical ideas of others, and develop musical ideas of their own. They are able to claim specific musical traditions while understanding both their faults and strengths. True leaders are not people

placed on pedestals, he asserts, but people who are able to reconcile new ideas with their own beliefs.

Michele Kaschub explains the Modified Apprenticeship Model, a strategy for creating such musical leaders in the performance ensemble. Her model shifts the traditional teacher/conductor responsibilities to cooperative peer groups. Students are encouraged to be self-critical, and to think and act like leaders in the ensemble. Richard Colwell describes a successful professional development program in which an expert teacher enters the classroom for a period of a week or more, modeling, evaluating, and co-teaching alongside a novice teacher. The model teacher provides lengthy, context specific feedback that is not possible in day-long seminars.

Donald L. Hamann and Robert A. Cutietta report on the necessity of diversifying our workforce. In their 1997 study, they found that the profession was predominantly comprised of white females. They also found that one third of Hispanic and African American students identified a music teacher as their primary role model. As role models of the same gender and/or race are shown to be more effective than those of a different race or gender, the authors call for a workforce that more closely represents the students being taught. As the number of minority students in our classes continues to grow today, this necessity becomes even greater.

Donald A. Hodges reports on findings from the field of neuro-musical research. He asserts that all humans are born with a musical brain that is at least able to react to music. He also notes that the brain is responsive to music before birth, affirming that all people are capable of musical study from an early age. His finding that mental practice affects the brain in much the same way as actual physical practice offers a new look at the rehearsal process and suggests possibilities for new rehearsal strategies.

In the first article of issues two through four, Jere Humphreys calls for a radical rethinking of music education research. He advocates combining two or more research traditions (philosophy, neurology, sociology, etc.) in order to yield richer, fuller studies. Humphreys specifically advocates such multi-modal research to evaluate music education philosophies, to fill in the gaps of music education history, to research popular music trends, and to confront researcher bias by providing context.

Humphreys calls to mind David Elliott's praxial philosophy of music education. Presented in this issue by Elliott himself, the praxial philosophy is multi-dimensional and accounts for multiple meanings for music based on cultural context and individual experience. According to this philosophy, music education is not simply listening to great works, but involves performing, composing, improvising, and constant listening. For Elliot, music's truth then lies not in an idealized aesthetic experience, but in the many truths and realities possible through the combination of music, a musician, and culture.

Humphreys claims that evaluating such philosophies in a multi-modal helps to explain what music education actually accomplishes, a question that music education research has yet to fully answer. In the United States today, dire economic challenges

force music educators to be strong advocates for their profession. Insights into the actual accomplishments of music education can be of great use to music educators when working to prove the importance and relevancy of music education.

Two hundred years ago, the questions facing our profession were fairly simple. It took just one man to make significant changes in music education for an entire country. Today, the level of cooperation needed to make change in our profession has grown. Issues of leadership, race, gender, teacher preparation, and improving research practice are just as present today as they were when these articles were first presented. While one individual can still make a difference, it takes cooperation from many to improve and maintain the field of music education.