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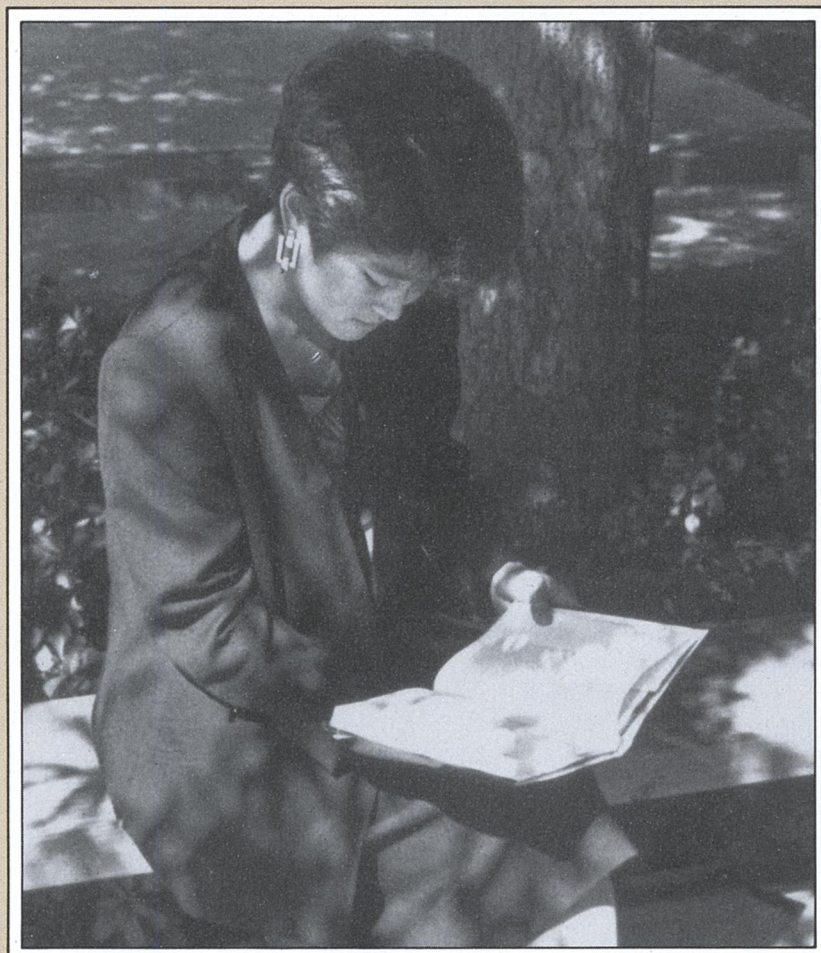
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Philosophy and the Music Teacher *Challenging the Way We Think*

by Estelle R. Jorgensen



The practical techniques used by music educators are built on a variety of fascinating philosophical systems. Estelle R. Jorgensen, a professor of music in the Music Education Department of Indiana University in Bloomington, gives some valuable suggestions for learning about the underpinnings of the profession.

In recent decades there has been somewhat of an hiatus of interest in philosophy as it interfaces with music education, a reality that concerns some music educators. Relatively few philosophies of music education have emerged during the past two decades, notably Bennett Reimer's *A Philosophy of Music Education* and Keith Swanwick's *A Basis for Music Education*.¹ These have not received the kinds of penetrating critiques from music educators that might have exposed analytical flaws or moved us further along the road to formulating a comprehensive philosophy of mu-

sic education for our times.

Many pressing philosophical questions face the profession today and may well confront us in the future. Nevertheless, the preparation of music teachers at the undergraduate level centers on the development of skills and methods rather than on critical thinking, as if teachers were being prepared as technicians to use other people's methods rather than as professionals who are fully capable of designing their own approaches and developing strategies to meet the needs of particular students in given circumstances. Strong under-

graduate (or graduate) courses in the foundations of music education that equip students with the knowledge to carefully examine and evaluate ideas about music education are less common than they ought to be. Rather, such courses often amount to summaries and distillations of others' ideas, with the result that music teachers acquire a secondhand rather than a firsthand acquaintance with the source materials and, as a result, a superficial understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of music education.

As a profession, our response to the need for comprehensive plans



and standards has generally involved the assembly of committees of successful teachers and university clinicians to describe what should be in the profession. This approach (exemplified in MENC's publication, *The School Music Program: Description and Standards*) is useful, but the assumptions underlying those plans and standards may not have been critically examined. These developments have understandably left music teachers with the impression that serious philosophy does not have much to say about what they do in their classrooms, that music education is primarily a practical rather than a philosophical activity, and that philosophy simply amounts to personal opinion. If one teacher disagrees with what another does, it is basically one individual's opinion against another's. No one can say which is the better.

The place of philosophy in music education merits careful consideration. In unpacking the problem of what role philosophy should play in the life of the individual music teacher and the profession as a whole, I shall examine three specific questions: What is meant by philosophy of music education? Why is philosophy important for the music teacher? How can a music teacher develop a personal philosophy of music education?

What is meant?

It is important at the outset to establish what a philosophy of music education is *not*. It is not simply an assortment of opinions or unsubstantiated assertions. It is not a "liking" report—"I like this; therefore it is good." It is not simply a distillation of the opinions and ideas of others. Nor is it readily or easily developed by committees as a consensus of the prevailing collective wisdom. Nor is it armchair reflection of the kind that is easily done in the ivory tower with no necessary relation to the practical


world of experience. It need not always be based on or necessarily follow empirical research in order to be valid. This does not mean, however, that it cannot be grounded in the findings of empirical research. Many are the philosophers whose work draws from the findings of psychology and anthropology, among other fields. (One thinks, for example, of the work of Ernst Cassirer and Vernon Howard, and of Susanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*). It is not just about the aesthetics of music, the study of how people respond to music. Nor is it true that all philosophies are equal, or that an eclectic view is necessarily better than a purist position.

Rather, a philosophy of music education represents a series of tightly reasoned arguments or justifications that explicate the assumptions accompanying or underlying and preceding action. Philosophy is both a body of ideas and a way of thinking. Philosophers clarify meaning as a maid sweeps clean the house of ideas, and they also design the conceptual framework of the profession, much as an architect designs the house. The justifications that the philosopher offers are of several different types: they may be logical (offering a coherent whole that is internally consistent, corresponding to evidence, be it persuasive arguments or empirical evidence), moral and ethical (invoking expectations or rules of conduct grounded in certain spiritual or social beliefs and values), political (based on certain political ideas and structures), and aesthetic (presupposing certain understandings and values that relate to the nature of the aesthetic and artistic experience involving both the response to and the expression of art). A good discussion of the functions of philosophy in education can be found in Israel Scheffler's book listed in "Suggested Readings."

Philosophy addresses epistemological questions that relate to questions of knowledge, ontological questions that center on aspects of being and reality, political questions that focus on questions of governance and the political process, axiological questions that emphasize matters of valuing, aesthetic and artistic questions that focus on the nature of the response to and creation of works of art, and ethical questions that center on considerations of "oughtness" and "rightness." These among other questions are absolutely crucial to the task of music education today and tomorrow. We may ask: "Why is music education important in today's schools?" "What musics should we be teaching and why?" "What specific objectives ought we to be espousing as a music teaching profession?" "How should music education be carried forward?" "Who should be responsible for music education?" "Should change be effected in music education, and if so, how can we effect it? If not, why not?" A philosophy of music education involves much more than a consideration of aesthetic questions. Indeed, I believe one of the important mistakes we have made in music education philosophy in recent years is to draw altogether too narrow a view, which has left us with too limited a vision of the interface of philosophy and music education and of the nature of music education itself.

Broad and rigorous study

As a cross-disciplinary field of study, music education derives ideas from other areas such as music, education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. This reality necessitates a broad preparation for music teachers and makes it more difficult to cover ideas in depth. As a result, music educators often end up with a smattering of knowledge about



Every music curriculum is the embodiment of a philosophy of some sort.

ideas rather than an in-depth understanding of them. For example, in my graduate foundations of music education classes I frequently meet students who have a limited knowledge of philosophy, understand little of the wider historical context outside music history outline courses, and feel frustrated that much of their training has been so full of techniques and methods courses and educational requirements for state certification that they have not had the opportunity to read broadly and in depth. This is not to say that practically oriented courses are not important. Quite the contrary. But it is one of the problems in our profession that we cover so much ground superficially, leaving the student little time, except perhaps in the context of a thesis or dissertation, to explore anything intensively. We are beginning to do much better in areas such as psychology and sociology, and it is heartening to see the strengthening of links between music education and systematic musicology and ethnomusicology, but at this point, there are few places where students can explore ideas in music education in a philosophically rigorous manner and to any depth.

Some music teachers imagine that, because they draw their ideas from several places, their so-called eclectic philosophy is better than if they had drawn their ideas from only one source. For example, if they can somehow combine the ideas of Kodály and Orff-Keetman, they have something better than if they follow either Kodály or Orff-Keetman alone. So they gather ideas from various people and end up with a collage of ideas they call their philosophy. This may seem sound. The problem is that the assumptions that underlie these various ideas may conflict with each other. For example, the assumptions underlying the techniques of Kodály and those of Orff-Keetman

are very different, and it is difficult in some ways to reconcile them. The temptation inherent in eclecticism is one of superficiality—to merely combine things that may or may not be internally consistent. I suggest, however, that the reconciliation of disparate visions of music education ought properly to be synthetic rather than simply eclectic. In creating a synthesis, one formulates something that is not only integrated but new. The art of designing music curricula, of translating general propositions into actual and specific practice, is fraught with difficulty. (This fact is noted in the articles and book by Joseph Schwab listed in “Suggested Readings”). While it might seem that a multiplicity of methods may suggest a wider vision, their reconciliation within a coherent curriculum may be a difficult thing to achieve in practice.

Critical analysis

Some philosophies are better than others. They are better articulated and substantiated, and they offer world views that are more attractive and ethically acceptable than others. As music educators, we must be equipped to critically examine those visions that are put before us in the name of curricular methods. (Indeed, it is safe to say that every music curriculum is the embodiment of a philosophy of some sort, whether explicit or implicit.) Advocates of one view or another are naturally evangelistic. They would like us to believe that their approach to music education is superior. I have often been surprised at the reluctance of some music educators to look critically at the methods they espouse.²

Resistance to critical examination of ideas and methods is unfortunate because if an approach is sound, it will stand up to close scrutiny. A better response might be: “Bring on the critics. Let us test the method and carefully ex-

amine the evidence. If this really is a superior method it will be sustained as such. If not, its limitations will be evident. Either way, it is important that we gather evidence to justify our claims and carefully arrive at our conclusions.” Professional music educators must reach the point of being self-critical, examining ideas and methods dispassionately, deciding individually and collectively which stances they will adopt, and justifying their decisions in philosophical sound ways.

A philosophy of music education may be derived in at least two major ways: inductively, from the study of empirical evidence (as we see in experimental research in physics and chemistry), and deductively (as evident in mathematics and philosophy). We make a mistake when we imagine that inductive, empirical research will always yield us valid models or that it is the only way to derive ideas. Rather, students of symbolism in the arts, including Ernst Cassirer and Nelson Goodman, teach us that the symbols we use provide lenses through which we see the world or ways by which we make our world or our versions of it, giving meaning to what we see. A better approach than that of relying exclusively on induction is to strive for a melding of both inductive and deductive approaches to music education research. This approach implies within it both paradox and tension, and yet it offers a potentially rich reward for the development of theory and practice.³ We need philosophy to help us articulate a vision that informs empirical research and yet draws from it.

Philosophical study

There are several reasons why every music teacher should be a philosopher.⁴ In essence, these reasons amount to expressions of the principle that education is primarily a philosophical endeavor and

that all our objectives, methods, and organizational structures must be philosophically defensible. Our assumptions provide the basis of and guide for our actions, specifically, as we administer our music programs, design our music curricula, interact with students in individual and class settings, and in all our teaching, learning, and musical experiences.

Of all the decisions music teachers make, curriculum design is one of the most important because it embodies an expression of our professionalism, our decision as to what experiences ought to be provided in a given set of circumstances for a particular student or group of students. Both the design process in music curriculum and its justification involve the application of philosophical knowledge and skills.

Recent research in music education has focused primarily on empirical questions and has provided important evidence for various models of teaching, learning, instruction, and administration. Music teachers must ultimately decide, however, which views they will endorse. Indeed, results of empirical research are partly interpreted in the light of the underlying models used. Nelson Goodman rightly reminds us: "Truth of a hypothesis after all is a matter of fit—fit with a body of theory, and fit of hypothesis and theory to the data at hand and the facts to be encountered."⁵ Music teachers, therefore, cannot uncritically accept the results of empirical research without carefully questioning the theoretical models or the assumptions underlying that research. Moreover, while empirical research may help provide answers to some physiological, psychological, and sociological questions related to the teacher's work, it may not address important but often more elusive moral, ethical, and aesthetic issues.

Models of teaching abound, as

SUGGESTED READINGS

Philosophy in music education

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Fletcher, Peter. *Music and Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Jaques-Dalcroze, Emile. *Rhythm, Music and Education*. Translated by Harold F. Rubinstein. 1921. Reprint. New York: Arno Press, 1976.

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Mark, Michael. *Source Readings in Music Education History*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1982.

MENC Commission on Standards. *The School Music Program: Description and Standards*, 2d. ed. Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1986.

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Scholes, Percy. *Music: The Child and the Masterpiece: A Comprehensive Handbook of Aims and Methods in All that is Usually Called "Musical Appreciation."* London: Oxford University Press, 1935.

Small, Christopher. *Music-Society-Education*. 2d. ed. London: John Calder, 1980.

Suzuki, Shinichi. *Nurtured by Love: A New Approach to Education*. Translated by Waltraud Suzuki. New York: Exposition Press, 1969.

Swanwick, Keith. *A Basis for Music Education*. 1979. Reprint. Windsor: NFER-Nelson, 1981.

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Philosophy in general education

Bruner, Jerome S. *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*. Expanded ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.

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Dewey, John. *The Child and the Curriculum*. 1902. Reprint. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

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Hight, Gilbert. *The Art of Teaching*. 1950. Reprint. New York: Vintage Books, 1955.

Howard, Vernon. *Artistry: The Work of Artists*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1982.

Joyce, Bruce and Marsha Weil. *Models of Teaching*. 3d. ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

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- Scheffler, Israel. *Reason and Teaching*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973.
- Schwab, Joseph J. "The Practical: Arts of Eclectic," *School Review* (1971): 493-542.
- . "The Practical 3: Translation into Curriculum," *School Review* (1973): 501-522.
- . *Science, Curriculum and Liberal Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978. See chapters 10 and 11.
- Smith, Ralph, ed. *Aesthetics and Problems of Education*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971.
- Whitehead, Alfred North. *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*. New York: Free Press, 1929.

General philosophy and aesthetics

- Cassirer, Ernst. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944.
- Collingwood, Robin G. *The Principles of Art*. London: Oxford University Press, 1938.
- Copland, Aaron. *Music and Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952.
- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Paragon, 1934.
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- . *Ways of Worldmaking*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978.
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Psychology, sociology, and ethnomusicology


- Blacking, John. *How Musical is Man?* 1973. Reprint. London: Faber and Faber, 1976.
- Davies, John Booth. *Psychology of Music*. London: Hutchinson and Co., 1978.
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- Nettl, Bruno. *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaptation, and Survival*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1985.
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can be seen in the works by Scheffler and by Bruce Joyce and Marsha Weil listed in "Suggested Readings." Music teachers have to decide for themselves which approaches they can justify on logical, moral, ethical, or aesthetic grounds. The same may be said for all the other aspects of music education, be they learning (or the acquiring of knowledge), administration (or the context in which music instruction takes place), instruction (or the interaction between teacher and student), or systematic musicology (or the study of the musical experience, its nature and meaning).⁶ In the final analysis, all of these aspects must be justified philosophically.

Articulating a philosophy

Granted, we might all agree that personal experience and reading are very important in principle. But a teacher states: "Maybe philosophy is of utmost importance for college and university professors. Some of us are so busy with the nuts and bolts of teaching music that we do not have the time to devote to matters that seem not to bear directly on the work we are doing. It is a matter of priorities—practical considerations are just so much more important than questions of theory and philosophy that practice wins out every time." In response to this view, however, there are compelling reasons why time devoted to reading and reflection, to the development of a coherent philosophy of music education, is well spent.

Knowing why we teach as we teach, why we adopt certain curricular and instructional approaches, increases our effective power because it focuses our attention on those issues that are of prime importance. We become less concerned with what we see as the periphery of music education than with its center. Knowing that what we do is based on a firm philosophical footing gives us increased con-



philosophy challenges us to revise our thinking about music education.

fidence. We want to be sure that we have built our house wisely and well, and, above all, we want to be sure that it has solid foundations. For if the foundations are unsound, so is the rest of the house, no matter how beautiful it looks.

As we study the writings of great minds, we see new ideas that challenge us to take risks and to adopt fresh perspectives. We are able to launch out confidently from the safe curricula of the past into a future in which the old does not necessarily apply. We are in a position to be known by our students as fellow travelers along the path toward wisdom, because we have a constant stream of fresh ideas to add to our musical and educational understanding. In the quietness of reflection, we can separate out those things that clutter our professional lives and make us needlessly busy from those that focus our effort.

The great teachers of history both treasured time for reflection and drew strength from the stress and rigor of their teaching. Through reflection, they were able to focus on what they saw as essential—those things that really mattered to them.⁷ Indeed, we note a long and distinguished line of teacher-philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Jesus, Boethius, Alcuin, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Hildegard von Bingen, Martin Luther, Jan Ámos Komenský, Johann Pestalozzi, and Maria Montessori—to name a few whose influence has been especially telling.

Having an articulated personal philosophy prevents us from being swayed by every new idea that comes along or pressured to do things as others do them—especially by those in authority. We come to understand that there is no one high road in music education that is the panacea for all our problems. Nor is there an easy road. Rather,

teaching music is a constant challenge to our resourcefulness. Because it suggests disparate visions, philosophy challenges us to revise our thinking about music education and rework our methods when change is called for.

A collective philosophy

Not only does a personal philosophy help us articulate a vision for our individual futures, it also impels us to build a world view for our collective future. A new age is upon us—an age that challenges our preconceptions and concepts of reality and demands of us new attitudes, beliefs, and understandings. “Without a vision,” the wise man says, “the people perish.”⁸ If music educators neglect philosophical thinking, we too may perish as a profession. For we will not have answers to the different and difficult questions that are being asked of us. We will not have a *raison d’être* for a new age. As we grasp the importance of philosophical reflection, revisit again those landmarks in the past that have shaped our thinking, and consider the ideas of our contemporary prophets, we are able to break free of the constrictions of our past prejudices and explore the exciting possibilities of the future world.

We clearly need a new collective vision for our profession. In our focus on empirical research, we have gained many useful insights into the nature of teaching, learning, and the instructional process. But the function of empirical research is to test paradigms rather than create them—that is the work of philosophy. Without such a dimension to our research and teaching effort, we are left conceptually and even spiritually shortchanged. Philosophy offers us another complementary approach that enables us to clarify and refine our ideas critically and carefully and to make

informed judgments about all the aspects of music education that touch us as musicians, teachers, and students.

Means and sources

For many music teachers, experience is an important source of their philosophy of music education. Observation of children and young people, and experience in curricular and instructional strategies that seem particularly effective in engendering student learning, confirm certain impressions, beliefs, and values held by the teacher. Moreover, observation coupled with reflection on that observation suggests an experientially based philosophy that, because it is derived from an intimate and personal experience, is something that the teacher is prepared to act on and, importantly, loves to do.

But teaching experience alone is not enough to provide a teacher with the basis for a broadly based personal philosophy of music education. The ideas of others help to widen our vision, suggest questions that we may not have thought important, and raise difficult questions and solutions to those questions that may run counter to our personal views. Hence, we are challenged to reevaluate our positions and prevented from uncritically doing things in the ways we have always done them. Our ideas take on a freshness and an openness that we are otherwise in danger of losing. To prevent intellectual fossilization, we need to be constantly learning and keeping our minds open to new ideas, not only in music but more broadly in education.

One way to do this is to read—not only technical material that suggests new ways of doing what we do, but especially ideas about what we ought to do. The reason for this is that some ideas may be



more difficult to work through than is technical material—they challenge our minds in ways that stretch us to think about what we are doing and why we are doing it. For example, it is more challenging to read Kodály's *Selected Writings* (in which, in a series of essays, he discusses his ideas about music and music education) than it is to read a book of singing games and dances consonant with Kodály's approach to music education.⁹ This is not to say that the book of singing games lacks value, but rather that the selected writings have their importance too. Reading imaginatively, we get a sense from Kodály's essays of what he was really aiming for. We can reflect on what he said and decide whether it is important for us and for what reasons. Then we can read the book of singing games with new eyes, seeing its significance more clearly.

The question remains as to what we should be reading. Several writers have articulated a philosophy of music education. Among these one might cite Charles Hubert Farnsworth's classic *Education Through Music* and the books written by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Percy Scholes, Shinichi Suzuki, Zoltán Kodály, Christopher Small, John Paynter, Keith Swanwick, Peter Fletcher, and Bennett Reimer listed under "Suggested Readings."

Outside music education, there are classics that every music teacher ought to read. To orient oneself, it might be wise to begin with a book like Michael Mark's *Source Readings in Music Education History*, which includes short excerpts from the writings of some of the important philosophers and educators throughout history. Thereafter, one might dip into Plato's *Republic* and his *Laws* and see the same radical philosophy of music education as central to the educational process in the work of Frie-

drich Schiller and in that of Herbert Read.

On the nature of the musical and artistic experience, one might read John Dewey's *Art as Experience* and the books by R. G. Collingwood, Aaron Copland, Immanuel Kant, Susanne Langer, and Roger Sessions. Also valuable are the collection of essays edited by Ralph Smith and the book by Vernon Howard (see "Selected Readings").

Several works on the educational experience may be cited. For instance, one might read John Dewey's *The Child and the Curriculum*, *Democracy and Education*, and *Experience and Education* and the books by Alfred North Whitehead, Gilbert Highet, Jerome Bruner, Israel Scheffler, and John Passmore (see "Selected Readings").

These lists only illustrate that there are many valuable and stimulating things to read, and our education is incomplete if we have not read these or other such foundational materials. My list does not include a wealth of material on ideas in curriculum, on important psychological, ethnomusicological, and sociological research, among other areas, as they impinge on music education. One thinks, for example, of the books by John Blacking, John Booth Davies, Rosamund Shuter-Dyson and Clive Gabriel, Bruno Nettl, David Hargreaves, Jay Dowling and Dane Harwood, and the book by John Shepherd, Paul Virden, Graham Vulliamy, and Trevor Wishart (see "Suggested Readings"). Reading such books as these stimulates our thinking and helps inform our personal and collective philosophies of music education.

Anti-intellectualism is something we should shun as music educators. Our heritage is an honorable one. For millenia, musician-educators have sought to balance theory

and practice, ideas and practical realities. We must seek every opportunity to better prepare ourselves to examine the ideas and underpinnings of our profession, and to carefully examine how we may be better able to serve our students in the future. We are able to greatly improve the philosophy we do, the critical analyses we undertake, if we *will* to do so. Optimist that I am, I look forward to seeing this dream become reality.

Notes

1. The books by Reimer and Swanwick are listed under "Suggested Readings," as are all of the resources named in this article.
2. The Palotai-Bacon exchange constitutes one such example. See Michael Palotai, "Has Hungary Outgrown Kodály?" *Music Educators Journal* 64, no. 6 (1978), 40-45; Denise Bacon, "Hungary Will Never Outgrow Kodály," *Music Educators Journal* 65, no. 1 (1978), 39-44.
3. See Estelle R. Jorgensen, "On Research in Music Education," paper presented to the Canadian Music Research Council, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland, May 1977. Published in abridged form under the title, "Some Observations on the Methodology of Research in Music Education," *Canadian Music Educator* 20, no. 3 (1979), 45-50.
4. Abraham Schwadron makes a similar point in his essay, "Philosophy and the Teacher of Music," *College Music Symposium* 17 (1977): 74-81.
5. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1976), 264.
6. See Estelle R. Jorgensen, "On the Development of a Theory of Musical Instruction," *Psychology of Music* 8 (1980), 25-30.
7. See Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching* (1950; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1955).
8. Proverbs 29:18. For a discussion of the challenges of the new age, see Estelle R. Jorgensen, "The performer's musical education and the new age," unpublished paper presented to the International Society for Music Education, Canberra, Australia, July 1988.
9. Compare *The Selected Writings of Zoltán Kodály*, ed. Ferenc Bonis, trans. Lili Halápy and Fred Macnicol (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1974), to Lois Choksy and David Brummitt, *120 Singing Games and Dances for Elementary Schools* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987). ☐