

Contemporary Approaches In Music Education

In recent years, many varied approaches to music teaching have developed. This healthy situation presents the music educator with the dilemma of keeping abreast of new ideas, adapting them to his own teaching, and at the same time avoiding the pitfall of jumping on the latest method bandwagon just to keep in style. What are some of these significant developments? What trends are common to most of the contemporary approaches and where do they differ? What concepts and activities can the classroom teacher incorporate into his own program through thoughtful analysis and applications of the contributions of others?

To gain a comprehensive over-view of the present music education scene, one must go back at least to John Curwen and Emile Jaques-Dalcroze in the nineteenth century. Even these pioneers did not break completely new ground, since their work was profoundly influenced by such early music educators as Guido d'Arezzo of mediaeval times. However, since our immediate concern is the contemporary scene, we shall begin our historical perspective in the 1800's.

The Englishman Curwen took the set of Latin syllables, "do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do," invented by Guido to identify specific tones, and altered their use so that "do" would mean the key-note, regardless of its pitch. This "moveable do" system has been used extensively in Britain and America with varying degrees of success.

Emile Jacques-Dalcroze was Professor of Harmony at the Conservatoire of Geneva at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of this century. His interest in music education led him to the use of body movements to express the various elements of music. He, himself, describes his approach as . . .

a system of musical education in which the body itself shall play the role of intermediary between sounds and thought, becoming in time the direct medium of our feelings - aural sensations being reinforced by all those called into being by the multiple agents of vibrations and resonance lying dormant in our bodies; the breathing system punctuating the rhythms of words, muscular dynamics interpreting those dictated by musical emotions.

The child will thus be taught at school not only to sing, listen carefully and keep time, but also to *move* and think accurately and rhythmically. One might commence by regulating the mechanism of walking, and from thence proceed to ally vocal movements with the gestures of the whole body that would constitute at once instruction *in* rhythm and education *by* rhythm.¹

Dalcroze's emphasis on rhythm, creative body movement, improvisation, and aural perception have all found their way into the so-called new methods that we hear so much about today.

Another innovator whose contributions have not been fully recognized was Satis N. Coleman whose experiments during and immediately after World War I in the Lincoln School, New York, showed the possibilities of creativity in music and the use of instruments. Her pupils themselves made many types of instruments, including drums, pipes and xylophones with both metal and wooden bars. Her classes improvised melodies, starting with two-note chants, and gradually expanded their musical vocabulary to the five-note pentatonic scale².

One of the most significant developments in the music instruction of today has been the awakening of interest in school music by established composers. Carl Orff in Austria and Zoltan Kodaly in Hungary both turned their attention to music education and brought an added respectability to school music. Both men have stressed the use of the pentatonic scale, as did Coleman and others before them, and the use of folk material in presenting music to young children.

There are, however, significant differences in the teaching methods of these two giants. Orff finds that the use of both existing and especially-designed instruments gives an added dimension to music, and allows children to experiment with many different tone colours. He suggests that simple xylophone-type instruments - metallophones and glockenspiels - free the child from the inhibiting influence of more complex instruments. The use of the pentatonic notes (do, re, mi, so and la) gives the child a complete tonal system with which to experiment — improvising tunes and accompaniments that cannot go wrong since the pentatonic scale contains no dissonant semi-tones.

Movement, too, is an integral part of Orff's *Schulwerk*. Miriam Samuelson, in describing a typical Orff class, states that clapping, stamping, drumming and speaking — all related to whole body motions — characterize the first step of rhythmic comprehension. It might be noted that although Orff follows the principle of Dalcroze in stressing the value of movement in developing

musical awareness, his activities (clapping, stamping) are more definite and less subtle, reflecting the Germanic character in contrast to the fluid free-flowing movements of Dalcroze, with his French background.

Music reading, which McElheran⁴ suggests receives too little emphasis in the Orff method, is stressed by Kodaly. Although Orff supporters might say that music reading is not neglected, but rather delayed until the children have had considerable experience in making music, Kodaly prefers to start music reading and writing activities as early as the first grade. Even Kodaly, however, precedes actual reading (using Curwen's "moveable do" syllables) with the use of hand signals (also developed by Curwen). This physical representation of tonal direction is again related to Dalcroze's involvement of the whole body in expressing and understanding music.

Orff's use of instruments is another point of difference from Kodaly who works solely with the unaccompanied voice⁶. Although it is quite true that the human voice is the greatest and most expressive medium for music making, it is also true that instruments play a very important part in the music of today. A complete music program, then, cannot neglect experience with instrumentation.

Other music educators have extended Orff's instrumental involvement to include such standard instruments as the piano and violin. They refute his claim that these instruments are too technically demanding for the young child, and have shown that it is *how* the instrument is approached that matters.

Pace, for example, uses a keyboard application of the pentatonic scale. This scale, also used by Coleman, then Orff, and Kodaly, is especially suited to the keyboard because it can be played entirely on the five black notes. Since the five fingers of the hand conveniently correspond to the five black notes, the young child, through simple keyboard experiences, can successfully use the piano in making music.

Suzuki, in Japan, has provided further examples of successful group instruction in standard instruments — in his case, the violin. By copying the sounds of the instructor as well as recordings, Suzuki-trained children have become amazingly skillful and musically-sensitive groups of young violinists. Suzuki's "Talent Education" approach is now being experimented with in many areas in this country and the United States.

A few of the better known approaches to music education have been discussed - Curwen, Dalcroze, Coleman, Orff, Kodaly, Pace, and Suzuki. The list is by no means complete. The materials and

methods developed by Mrs. Justine Bayard-Ward are taught extensively at the Laval University Faculty of Music and the ideas of Maurice Martenot of the Ecole d'Art Martenot of Paris have found favour in some Quebec schools. The list could be expanded to include many more. However, perhaps the point is made that many gifted teachers have developed a variety of successful means of presenting music to children.

Some of the most recent experiments have involved the newer technology. Programmed instruction has been applied to music by many authors, but the most useful applications appear to include actual sounds, often through use of tapes in the programmes for self-instruction. Carlsen at the University of Connecticut and Spohn at the Ohio State University have produced effective materials of this type for college level instruction. Materials at the school level are still very rare. Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) also shows great promise for music educators but the musical applications of this medium have barely been explored as yet.

What points of agreement seem to emerge? First of all, the success of group procedures has been proven over and over again from Dalcroze to Suzuki. The most recent trends including programmed-instruction and CAI also accommodate individual differences that are so marked in a music class. The involvement of the whole child with emphasis on aural development is another thread running through the various methods. Some differences have been noted in the opinions about instruments and music reading, so the discerning teacher must examine and experiment with several points of view in order to develop his own. In doing this he will find a thoughtful, searching attitude — an attitude that has inspired all those who have made a worthwhile contribution to music education — will lead to the growth of his own individual way of exploring music with children.

REFERENCES

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