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SPECIAL SEGMENT ON VISION 2020 AND THE FUTURE OF MUSIC EDUCATION

Some Views from the Middle: Reflections on the Vision 2020 Project

American music educators in the 1990s were confronted with several challenges: quickly advancing technology, reductions in support for arts in schools, and increased commitment to large-scale assessments by policy makers. Add to that several curriculum changes, especially a movement toward the individualization of classroom planning, expanding multicultural music content, and the need for local and national advocacy. This article comments on trends such as these from the perspective of the MENC's *Vision 2020* project. The author, a music education historian and critic, and one of the seven *Vision 2020* commission authors, reveals his perspective on these matters and identifies three overarching themes in the *Vision 2020* publication: 1) placing music in personal and social life rather than as an abstraction from life, 2) justifying music's place in the school program on social and personal grounds, and 3) reestablishing an intimate connection between music in the school and music in everyday life.

Keywords: Vision 2020, music education policy, music curriculum, American music education, lifelong music learning

Introduction

The *Vision 2020* project was created by June Hinckley, then president of the Music Educators National Conference—National Association for Music Education ("MENC" in this paper, as teachers called it in the 1990s), in response to several moving forces:

The constantly changing demography, the advanced information concerning how students learn, and the explosion of technological advances combined with the burgeoning choices within our society seemed to be having profound influences on music education. [We must] look at what these changes would necessitate and what we as music professionals might do to insure that future generations would continue to experience the deep joy that we know as practicing musicians. (Hinckley, 2000, p. 1)

Guided by an advisory group of professional leaders, she and Clifford K. Madsen brought the *Vision 2020* project to life. I was honored to participate as one of seven commission leaders. My commission addressed the question, "Why Study Music?". Other commissions addressed other questions; see the Reference List for details.

My tasks for this article are more narrow: 1) to recall what the profession was like in the 1990s and why *Vision 2020* was deemed necessary, and 2) to identify themes that run through the *Vision 2020* project as reflected in the publication that emerged (MENC, 2000). These related but different tasks form the major outline of this essay. A disclaimer: These are my turn-of-the-millennium views focused by twenty years of limited involvement. However, 42 years of active work in music education since 1958, with students from grade four through doctoral programs in four states and internationally, give me access to a store of fond memories. These views are therefore idiosyncratic, but the length and breadth of my experience supports what I write here.

I was then in the middle of the music education establishment, neither in the same "trenches" as my graduate students nor in the same national leadership positions to which the creators of the *Vision 2020* project were elected. I therefore found reasons to be vitally aware both of what music teachers were experiencing and what their national leaders were doing to help.

The decade of the 1990s was certainly a time of flux. The impending new millennium inspired urgent discussions about change. America was undergoing an economic expansion that, coupled with good government, produced a balanced federal budget by 2000. It seemed ironic to music teachers that financial support for music programs was shrinking rather than growing.

America was also undergoing a social change, caused (some thought) by the coming information age. Large corporations were being created or radically expanded—Apple, Microsoft, Xerox, United Healthcare, and IBM's new look among them. Others were waning in importance—Kodak, coal mining, the railroads, the steel industry. Jobs that the middle class could always count on for their children were disappearing. As a consequence of economic and other changes, social change was palpable going into 2000.

Music Teaching in the 1990s

In my historical research work, I found it beneficial to look past the practices visible to observers to discern people's motivations—not only at *what* was done but at what was being reinforced and promoted. In the 1990s, just when developed nations were entering a post-modern age and their economies were expanding, music teachers who maintained modernist programs were reinforced. This was a paradox. Inside and outside the profession, music teachers were encouraged to maintain traditional (modernist) programs in a new, post-modern world. That is: large performing ensembles and large-group presentations of elementary students' musical skills were both expected and supported by American parents when massive social changes were in the wind.

Music Educators Struggle for School Music

Music education therefore had an ambiguous place in American schools. Although most US states required that music be taught to all students in elementary and middle schools, few required that it be taught by teachers certified in music. In some states, a course in music teaching was required in the certification programs of pre-service elementary classroom teachers.

However, no American state mandated large music ensembles in middle and high school. Yet nearly every American school district supported large ensemble programs. Music teachers in the 1990s were doing what was expected locally when they concentrated their students' efforts on activities their parents thought valuable.

Professional leaders, however, knew that trouble was on the horizon. A waning percentage of new music teachers was hired at the turn of the millennium compared with a decade before: In 1987-88, 5.3% of the new hires in American K-12 schools were in music. In 1999-2000, 4.3% of the new hires were in music, a 20% drop. By contrast, percentages of new hires in all other subject fields, except for Art/arts and crafts and general elementary, were markedly higher at the turn of the millennium (Warner-Griffin, Hoel, & Tadler, 2016, p. 25).

Administrators caught the drift. One of my in-service graduate students reported that she went to her principal for increased funding so she could buy a suite of Orff instruments for the elementary music classroom. Denied the first time, she went again with a better argument. Denied the second time, she pressed her case. Finally, the principal closed the discussion with this: "Look! You and the art teacher are nothing more than potty breaks for the real teachers. You're lucky their contract requires one and you're really lucky to have a job here. Don't ask again." This extreme statement was characteristic of the shocking disregard for classroom music teachers.

Several trends finally captured music education leaders' attention: dwindling resources for arts education programs, shrinking percentages of music teachers in K-12 schools, larger music teaching loads, and outright disrespect from administrators. These required attention to advocacy. "Parent power," it was called. Public relations, it was thought, could turn the tide. National music education leaders sensed this in the middle of the 1990s, and one of the reasons for the *Vision 2020* project was to support local advocacy. Michael Mark opened the *Vision 2020* report with a historical survey in which he stated, "The need for public relations increased in the early 1970s when the declining global economy directly threatened school music programs with severe budget cuts" (Mark, 2000, p.13). The need for advocacy was a familiar problem to music educators.

Leaders, Alliances, and Organizations

One strategy was to forge alliances between the MENC and other, better funded groups, principally the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS). NARAS sponsors the annual awards given to recording artists and technicians called the "Grammys," and Americans interested in the popular arts follow them. NARAS leaders were instrumental in getting the arts included in the Goals 2000 federal legislation. The follow-up to that legislation, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002, included the arts.

NAMM promoted Frances Rauscher's research finding that supported music listening and piano lessons for preschool students to temporarily enhance their spatial-mathematical abilities. At the time, I talked with both Rauscher and members of the NAMM board about the defects in the research project with preschool students and the gap between Rauscher's findings and the public case NAMM was making when they disseminated it (see also Jenkins, 2001). Arts educators, however, latched on to NAMM's narrative to help their local case for funding. As critic Alex Ross (1994) pointed out at the time, "The neurobiologists [Rauscher et al.] also suggest that their work will contribute to the demarginalization of classical music in American arts education" (p. 23).

The leaders of both NAMM and NARAS were vocal and helpful in publicizing the need for music educators in the schools. Don Campbell's book *The Mozart Effect* (1997) and his successful marketing campaign extended Rauscher's finding into general self-therapeutic uses of classical music. Music teachers shrugged: "It can't hurt," they seemed to say. Rauscher agreed when she walked back her promoters' fixation with her findings (Goode, 1999).

Other well-meaning attempts at advocacy were not so effective or helpful. The Arts in Education organization had a high profile then and still enjoys project funding from the federal government, but their solution is what I call "bungee-teaching"—drop professional artists into school programs for a few days "to save the arts in our schools," then pull them out. Local Arts in Education leaders were well connected with school board members and administrators and had ready supporters as a result. From music teachers' perspectives, these were top-down infusions of "help" from outside.

Two feature films, Mr. Holland's Opus (1995) and Music of the Heart (1999), did more damage than good to budget support for music education. Both championed off-the-books solutions to the problem of funding for music programs. In the 1995 movie, one of Mr. Holland's former students, who had become governor of their state, returns to play clarinet in his farewell concert. Even she could not save the funding for Mr. Holland's music program. What message did that send? Non-tax-based funding was key to saving music in the schools.

The movie, *Music of the Heart*, was a dramatized documentary account of the work of Roberta Guaspari, who talks her way into an East Harlem high school with a largely self-supporting program of violin instruction. Some famous violinists (Isaac Stern, Itzhak Perlman, Arnold Steinhardt) collaborated with Guaspari so that her students could perform with them at Carnegie Hall. Gradually, the school finds some money, but snatches it back after ten years of noble work by Ms. Guaspari. The message: Want music in the schools? Get outside funding.

That said, outside funding for some music programs was already the norm in some parts of the US. Especially in the American southeast, music booster groups quietly raised impressive amounts of money and paid large stipends over teachers' salaries to support such co-curricular programs as marching bands and school productions of Broadway musicals. Sometimes, in-school music teachers' salaries were subsidized, in part or in total, by outside groups such as youth orchestras and community theater companies.

Fragmentation in Music Education

Nationally, the music education teaching force in the 1990s was fragmented. At a time when professional unity was required, there seemed to be a proud organization for every type of music education program, not only nationally but also at every level of government—regional, state, local. Sandy Feldstein (2000) commented that the profession had too many specialized organizations: "In [music] education we have a profession with more splinter groups than any profession I have ever seen. It is mind-boggling" (p. 188). The MENC response

was to act as a 'big tent' for this "mind-boggling" jungle of national and state organizations.

This fragmentation extended to the ivory tower: the research community collected around Special Research Interest Groups (SRIGs) coordinated in the MENC by the Music Education Research Council (MERC) through its Executive Committee, of which I was a member during the 1990s. There were about a half dozen SRIGs at the beginning of that decade. Today there are fifteen SRIGs.

The older rationales for music in the schools were wearing thin. Early in the 1990s there was felt a need to revisit the profession's philosophical narrative. Music education theorists at the time became dissatisfied with the use of aesthetic philosophy as a theoretical grounding for music education policy and practice. The principal exponent of music education as aesthetic education (MEAE) was Bennett Reimer, whose views and writings were shaped by Charles Leonhard and Harry Broudy. David Elliott, one of Reimer's doctoral graduates, published *Music Matters* (1995) in which he argued against MEAE and established praxialist groundings for music teaching and learning. Thomas Regelski weighed in as well with important books and other publications touting praxialism as a better foundation for music education. The MayDay Group (MDG), founded in 1993 by me and Thomas Regelski, sought to critically explore alternatives to aesthetic philosophy as foundational, to expand the range of grounding theories for practice, and to connect music education theorists with each other across the world. Elliott, then at the University of Toronto, was a key member of the MDG at the time.

Two professional organizations emerged from this interest in collective action on philosophy and policy critique. One was the MDG, mentioned above. The other grew out of meetings during the 1990s and a decade later became the International Society for Philosophy in Music Education (ISPME). ISPME was led at the time by Estelle Jorgensen from Indiana University. Both ISPME and The MDG are international organizations. The ISPME meets biennially or triennially and The MDG meets annually. The key difference between the two is that The MDG developed a point of view on music education policy that they disseminate in a document they call "Action for Change." Their meetings identify one of that document's main positions as a focus for the meeting agenda. The MDG produced book-length presentations of their views. Both maintain web sites and other outlets for their reports. The ISPME supports the journal, Philosophy of Music Education Review (PMER). The peer-reviewed PMER features philosophical research in music education; other items of interest to music education philosophers also appear. The MDG has two free-access online fully refereed journals, Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education (ACT) and Themes, Opinion, Practices, Innovation, Curriculum, Strategies (TOPICS). ACT is focused on philosophical research in music education and similar theoretical writing. TOPICS includes writing of broader interest, including criticism, curriculum proposals, and policy recommendations.

Researchers outside the community of theorists saw a place for music education philosophy. Empirical research expert Cornelia Yarbrough (1996) wrote, "The function of philosophical inquiry in the future will be to do what science cannot. Its purpose will be to provide a sense of the big questions, a framework within which small hypotheses and topics lie" (p. 768).

National Goals and the Assessment Movement

The standards and assessment movements were on the rise. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 provided funding for large standards development projects. The MENC was ahead of the game with documents such as *The School Music Program: Description and Standards* (1985), and *Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Music Instruction: Grades PreK-12* (1994), but the rank-and-file unaccountably weren't buying it.

Assessment followed on the heels of standards. Teachers resisted the findings of the 1997 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) music examination, that American music education programs were producing poor achievement levels on a variety of measures. Performance teachers with ensemble programs asserted they already had long-standing assessment programs through "competition-festivals." Nevertheless, some state music coordinators pushed for new assessments. New York State, for example, won large Goals 2000 grants for assessment development projects in the arts. Unlike our colleagues in other fields whose programs are dominated by assessment-based curriculums, music teachers were little affected by standards and assessment development projects pushed on them, they grumbled, from above.

Themes in the Vision 2020 Publication

The *Vision 2020* publication was timely. The views of the *Vision 2020* authors revealed that a fragmented profession was in need of more effective advocacy. Music educators in both the public and the education hierarchies were fearful of music's place in K-12 schools, resistant to standards-based assessments, and in flux as to its grounding theories. Earlier attempts to guide practice such as the Yale Seminar, The Tanglewood Symposium, and seminars growing out of Tanglewood, wonderful as they were, gained little professional traction beyond

a nod to multicultural music education. Merely piling more attractive music into the curriculum was not an answer. Harry Broudy (1988), arguably the founder of aesthetic education, quipped, "In sum, the doubts about making arts education in general and music education in particular an integral part of general education in the public schools cannot be solved by prescribing Marie Antoinette's advice to the starving peasants of France" (p. 43). The *Vision 2020* project set out to provide better advice.

What embedded themes, then, did *Vision 2020* authors see as problematic? What was outdated? What values and policy positions needed to be reframed? What professional trends needed to be abandoned? What trends needed to be embraced and emphasized?

If Michael Mark was right in his masterful review of professional developments in the last half of the 20th century, there would seem to be little else the project could do.

Symbolically, the new millennium would seem an appropriate time for professional introspection and planning, but it, in itself, does not sufficiently justify a second major event of this type. The new societal order, however, does. . . . We have come to accept that what is effective and appropriate now [using technology, embracing a multi-cultural approach to content, accommodating a more diverse student body] probably will be outdated in a very short time. (Mark, 2000, p. 17)

Music is Human Behavior, Not an Abstraction

First, the authors locate music in human life and culture rather than as something separate and abstract, uniquely valuable by itself. This is a shift from the connoisseurship justification common since the 1950s to something more cultural and humane. In a sense, it returns the musical grounds of our work to the humanizing ideals of James Mursell from the 1930s and 40s, when music elitism was in its heyday (see especially Mursell, 1934). Mursell railed against musical elitism, especially in the selection of content for music programs in schools. Reimer (2000) echoes Mursell when he notes, "That music so powerfully fulfills values at each level of the human condition is testament to its necessity as a factor in the living of a humane life" (p. 37).

To realize this value, many *Vision 2020* authors call for (or assume the development of) programs the major outcome of which is lifelong music participation, what Judith Jellison terms "transition-based music education." She wrote, "Transition, defined earlier as the movement of individuals across a variety of school and non-school environments throughout life, is a valuable principle that can guide

curricular and instructional decisions and increase the probability that meaningful school experiences will continue in adulthood" (Jellison, 2000, p. 121).

Paul Lehman reflected the ambivalence of the 1990s with respect to its foundations. As a grounding principle, the cultural identity movement, growing stronger since the 1960s, seemed to ride the fence. By grouping students culturally, teachers can have it both ways: music as personal and human *as well as* music embedded in a more generalized socio-cultural life. Lehman wrote, "The student population will be more diverse than ever before in many respects, particularly in the ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented. Each of these groups will seek to ensure that its own cultural traditions, including its own music, have a place in the school curriculum" (Lehman, 2000, p. 92).

Carlesta Spearman (2000) translated the socio-cultural view into classroom policy:

Effective music teachers will have to devise appropriate classroom strategies for defusing tensions that normally arise from social differences. Teachers will have to work harder at treating all students equally and respectfully, bearing in mind the vital importance of consistent verbal and nonverbal behaviors in the acculturation process. (p. 168)

Growing out of Tanglewood and reflecting on the 1990s, the general trend toward the person as the center of educational planning and pedagogy was slowly gaining strength in music education. However, in the 1990s, it seemed stuck in the middle of its development. We were at a kind of intermediate grouping phase at the time the *Vision 2020* report was published: multiculturalism had yet to give way to the individual learner as the starting point of planning, instruction, and assessment. Identity grouping is still grouping.

The Place of Music in General Education

Second, most of the authors tackle the question of music's place in the general education of American children and youth. As Robert Glidden (2000) put it, "The question 'Why do humans value music?' is probably less pertinent here than the question 'Do we value music enough to teach it to our young?'" (p. 52). This, of course, is the key advocacy question and most of the authors dwell on it in some way.

Without having seen Glidden's response to Reimer before our report was written, my commission's contribution addresses the core of Glidden's question: "Why Study Music?" In my report, I asked and responded to several questions that nag at the issue: Famous performers learn "by ear," so why complicate music

learning by placing it in schools?; What are the desirable and likely outcomes of music study vs. learning on one's own?; Should everyone in general education study the same music content and strive for the same outcomes?

If one boils it down, I wrote, ". . . [music] study improves the range and subtlety of meaning we can derive from musical experiences" (Gates, 2000, p. 58). Put another way: "The best reason to study music is that it gives people a reliable, thorough, and efficient way of becoming expert at creating, communicating, and deriving meaning musically in the world of humans" (Gates, 2000, p. 62). The commission I chaired, and the report that resulted, placed the individual learner at the core of the conversation, a then-nascent trend in music education policy. This hope—that the individual would eventually become foundational to educational planning—was reflected in most of the *Vision 2020* reports.

Music in Schools and Music in Life

Third, it was clear in the writing that music education was too isolated from the musical worlds of people. Curriculum policy and music resource assumptions were overdue for a revision. One prediction vis-a-vis music's traditional isolation was made by Paul Lehman: "Although music must maintain its integrity and be taught primarily for its own sake, there will be an emphasis on interdisciplinary relationships and upon the unique usefulness of music in providing a framework within which to teach a wide array of skills and knowledge, especially in language arts and social studies" (Lehman, 2000, p. 96). Cross-disciplinary planning within school buildings, then, was one revision music educators needed to make. Breaking through school walls was another.

Resources for music learning must not be (and are not) imprisoned in schools. Several authors asked us to link our programs with out-of-school resources. *Vision 2020* writers, of course, called for adaptions of music learning to digital resources and networks. But Cornelia Yarbrough led us beyond that: "The issues of most importance for music education and the schools in the twenty-first century are: wider choices for schooling, ethnic and music diversity, the impact of technology and the digital revolution, and new approaches to teaching and learning" (Yarbrough, 2000, 193). Spearman agreed: "Community partnerships with music education to provide for people of all ages may cause a relocation of 'where music teaching happens' and the forms it will take" (Spearman, 2000, p. 181). Jane Walters (2000) discussed several growing alternatives to conventional brick-and-mortar schools as venues for music teaching and learning.

Richard Bell stated it directly: "Today and in the future, music specialists will be expected to use technology and hands-on professional development to connect students, classroom teachers, and the cultural community to the study of music, and to improve teaching and learning across the curriculum" (Bell, 2000, p. 213).

Carrying this notion one step further, Warrick Carter reflected his discomfort with the one-size-fits-all assumption of published music for school use: "It is only in the study of music that specific kinds of music are known as 'school music,' separate from other music with which students may participate as adults. . . . In other words, school music experiences have frequently neglected large areas of music making and music expression" (Carter, 2000, p. 140). And again: "There should be no separation between music and school music. Perhaps by the year 2020 we'll all get there" (Carter, 2000, p. 151; italics in original).

Summarizing Thoughts and Experiences

To the extent the changes outlined above take place, music teachers will assume the lead role in overseeing and improving the public musical health of the communities where they teach. Within their workplaces, music teachers at all levels have the means, the motivation, and the authority to take leadership of and responsibility for the musical health of their communities. In contrast with all other musicians in their regions, elementary and secondary level music teachers have access to the whole local population of people through the students they teach. Their students take with them the musical dispositions, skills, and understandings they have developed during their childhood and adolescence, much of it as a result of guided musical experiences in the school. Music teachers in tertiary schools have a duty to help their students understand and embrace this responsibility through example, guided explorations, and widened awareness of resources.

The *Vision 2020* project invited American music educators at all levels to think more deeply about their practice in light of our rapidly changing society at the turn of the millennium. Sam Hope cautioned us to remain courageous in the face of our detractors: "There are hundreds of non-substantive agendas [that attempt to hijack music for narrow political or economic purposes]. We satisfy these agendas at the peril of our cause and our professional lives and honor" (Hope, 2000, p. 85). *Vision 2020* was a timely attempt to focus the agenda and to strengthen the profession for leading roles in the effort to help students and their communities to create effective personal and communal musical lives in the early decades of the 21st century. The *Vision 2020* report charged the profession with a call to action embodied in The Housewright Declaration (MENC, 2000, 219-220).

The 1990s was a challenging time to be a music educator. And it was also full of promise. As I noted in an address to the Desert Skies Symposium in 1999:

"[Because of new technological resources] we can bring more music to even more kids, and bring them more deeply into musical contact with each other and with themselves. We have the tools to open the world to our students. To maximize these advantages, we have a lot of catching up to do" (Gates, 1999).

To develop the *Vision 2020* report the seven commission authors met with their members extensively in person and online. Conversations were challenging, intelligent, knowledgeable, creative, experience-based, and lively. This kept the *Vision 2020* report from being a "musty" book: teachers *must* do this; policy makers *must* do that; music education (whatever that is) *must* be more the other thing. But the seven commissions of in-the-trenches teachers, teacher educators, and industry people kept the "mustiness" to a minimum in their discussions and their reviews of commission authors' drafts. What emerged was a book still worth reading.

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Endnotes

¹Mark refers here to Tanglewood Symposium of 1967 as the first major event of similar scope, convened by the MENC to define and clarify the place of music in American society, to expand the content of music education programs, and to improve music instruction. Several follow-on conferences were organized to focus on special aspects of the report, encapsuled in The Tanglewood Declation. A major effect was the growth of multicultural music education content and practices. See Choate, 1967 for a report.

²An index of the *Journal of Research in Music Education (JRME)* from its founding in 1953 through 1997 appears at the end of this compilation. Its editors used an elaborate selection process characterized by numbers of times cited and frequency of authors' contributions to the literature, including published articles in such research periodicals as the *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education (CRME)*. See the compilation's Introduction for a full description of the criteria used in the selection of the content. A scan of the table of contents reveals that the heyday of cited research was in the decades of the 1980s and 90s. Articles on special populations research and multicultural music education showed new life in the decade of the 90s. Note that the compilation sources ended in 1996, just halfway through that decade.