

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A REPORT ON CREATIVE MUSICAL ACTIVITIES FOR
ENRICHING A HIGH SCHOOL CONCERT BAND PROGRAMME

BY

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DEDICATED TO MY YOUNG DAUGHTER,
ALEXANDRA, WHO CONTINUALLY RESTORES
THE MAGIC IN MY LIFE.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A GREAT DEAL OF THANKS IS EXTENDED TO MY COMMITTEE MEMBERS FOR THEIR ADVICE AND ENCOURAGEMENT DURING THE COURSE OF THIS PROJECT.

A SPECIAL THANKS GOES TO THE CHAIRMAN OF MY COMMITTEE, PROFESSOR COLIN S. WALLEY, FOR BEING AN UNDERSTANDING FRIEND AND FOR ALLOWING ME "TO DO MY OWN THING".

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"And what is the purpose of writing music?
One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but
dealing with sounds. Or the answer must take the form
of a paradox: a purposeful purposelessness of a
purposeless play. This play, however, is an
affirmation of life - not an attempt to bring order
out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation,
but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're
living, which is so excellent once one gets one's
mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it
act of its own accord."

John Cage
from Silence

Everything is a process,
Nothing is a product.
There are no such things as "products".
What we know as a "product",
is simply that point where the process pauses,
before it continues on its own unique way.
No one can predict in which direction the
process will go. Who would want to?
The only thing one can do is use his own
unique self to perpetuate the process.
In this way, one becomes more unique,
more himself.

Konrad Mendres

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine what results would occur when a traditional high school concert band programme was enriched with various types of creative musical activities.

In order to achieve an atmosphere which would be conducive to this type of programme, student input became important in the initial design of both programme format and programme content.

During the course of the programme, opportunities were provided for students to experience a wide variety of creative musical activities. These activities consisted of; instrument making, experimentation with sound, simple improvisation and composition, student conducting, experimentation with other band instruments, and some exposure to other related art forms. During these activities, time was allowed for students to pursue their own musical interests in playful types of situations. Some of these creative activities occurred during the full band rehearsals and many occurred during small group sessions which consisted of a heterogeneous mixture of students in terms of age, grade level, and instrumentation.

A variety of adjunct musical activities were also provided to supplement the band programme.

Within the band programme, the band director took the initiative to become more personally involved with the students not only as a teacher, but also as a member of the band in both a musical and social context. Much of the musical and administrative decision making in the programme involved all band members.

In summary, results of this study indicate that high school band students are still sampling in terms of musical experiences and that a democratic system of band administration, in which students have the opportunity to pursue their own musical interests through creative and playful modes of behavior, has a positive effect on musical, social and individual growth.

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PROLOGUE

During the course of my teaching career, I have had the good fortune to be involved in a variety of musical workshops, with people of all ages, in school and out of school. Many of these musical "experiences" have been highly creative in nature, resulting in much expression of human feelings and emotion.

My observations of what has occurred during these sessions, have led me to the following beliefs:

- A. That people of all ages continue to "sample" in terms of musical interests and endeavours.
- B. That people who already have an interest in one major area of music may still have a substantial interest in exploring many other means of musical involvement.
- C. That more "fun" and more "personal" significant musical learning occurs when people are allowed to explore and utilize musical instruments and other musical devices in an atmosphere which is free and open, and which contains the fewest restrictions.

It is these personal convictions that have led to the course of the following study.

Konrad Mendres

Chapter One

A. Introduction

Music should be fun. It should bring laughter and put smiles on people's faces. Smiles and laughter mean that "something is happening". Somber faces do not tell you very much.

Music education should not be as serious a business as we like to make it out to be. Not knowing about Bach or Beethoven is not that crucial to one's existence. There are probably as many people who get as much pleasure from playing a drum as there are music critics who get pleasure from listening to Handel's Messiah.

The secret to success in music education is simply to make certain that those students who would like to learn to play drums can do so, and those students who would like to learn about the Messiah can also do so.

In these situations, it is more likely that students would develop their sensitivity to music. They would become more perceptive. Bennett Reimer would say that this would be the key to developing a person's aesthetic sense.¹

In order to learn, students do not necessarily need teachers. There are thousands of teenagers who have taught themselves to play guitars and drums without the help of schools or teachers. Young people have shown that one can learn music without the "expert" guidance of music teachers.

The Tanglewood Symposium in 1967 emphasized the need for music educators to provide more relevant musical experiences for students. The Symposium also stressed the fact that more creative approaches in music education were needed at all levels of the music curriculum.²

Music courses must provide those conditions for musical experiences to occur where students can become totally involved, where their feelings are allowed to blossom, and where they can make decisions and exercise

their own judgements. Carl Rogers would say that it is in these types of conditions that most significant learning occurs, where learning becomes relevant for the whole person, for both his intellectual and emotional natures.³ Reimer would add that it is in these situations that a person enriches his life by gaining insight into the nature of his own feelings.⁴ Maslow also stresses the importance of being able to "experience" one's intellectual and sensual natures.⁵ He emphasizes that when one becomes "totally" involved, one "experiences" knowledge rather than just remains a "spectator" of knowledge. He feels that creativity develops more "experiential", non-intellectual modes of learning, and that this type of knowledge is extremely important to human development.⁶

Music courses should also have a "fun" aspect to them. There should be times where one works not only in a serious vein, but also there should be times when one can "play" and "fool around" so to speak. There should be time allowed for students to examine and toy with ideas and things in a playful type of situation. Eble stressed the fact that a sustained and deadly seriousness in the pursuit of knowledge can be detrimental to free play of mind whereby the great gaps in our understanding are often made.⁷

Piaget's studies of children point out that creativity and learning are very closely related in play. His studies show that play is the activity of intelligence, and that play contains all those elements and conditions necessary for learning.⁸ It is in playful types of situations that one can most easily pursue one's interests. It is in play that one can re-construct, re-invent, discover, and make some sense and order out of things. Rogers would emphasize that it is these types of conditions, where learning is self-appropriated, self discovered, that learning significantly influences behaviour.⁹ Caplan adds that insight and creativity come from a long period of "playing", not as a flash of genius, and that playful experiences are more involving and less threatening to a student than learning superimposed by a teacher.¹⁰ Glasser differentiated between "learning

by discovery" and "teaching to discover". He concluded that perhaps "learning by discovery", which involves unguided exploration, results in more meaningful concepts.¹¹ It would seem that Glasser would favour playful types of modes for learning.

Both Ellis¹² and Lieberman¹³ equated playfulness and creativity. They recognized the value of play not only in childhood, but also throughout adult life. They both emphasized the fact that creativity flourishes better in unstructured situations. Lieberman particularly emphasized the need to make learning more "fun", especially at the high school level.¹⁴

Both Eble¹⁵ and Erichson¹⁶ emphasized the value and importance of creativity throughout life. Roszak believes that through exercising our creative energies we come to know ourselves and orient ourselves morally and metaphysically.¹⁷ Torrence points out that the stifling of creativity cuts at the roots of satisfaction in living and ultimately creates overwhelming tension and breakdown.¹⁸

Sherman points out that creativity and discovery are fundamental to music education. He differentiated between the "knowing musician", and the "knowledgable musician". A "knowing musician", he defines as one who knows music. This is a cultivated condition. It is nourished by discovery and it is a result of all that may be associated with creative activity. It is a result of one's coming to grips with things and ideas in ways that reflect individual assessment and decision. He defines a "knowledgable musician" as one who knows about music. This type of knowledge is expressed through verbalization, it is non-musical."

By structuring, compressing, and organizing music courses and curricula, we have not provided much possibility for a student's individual musical growth. We have forgotten, somewhat, that each student is a unique human being, that he has a variety of interests, and that he accepts only those learning experiences which are of significant value to him. Walley points out that every person enters a situation with his or her own unique

"model". He defines a model as the expectation, one has, of personal meanings that events are likely to evoke. He points out that when a student engages in activities for which there is little personal meaning, the experience becomes mismatched with his "model". When this occurs, the learner rejects the experience and is forced into the role of an imitator where he employs other models. The student goes "untouched" by the experiences.²⁰

Woodruff adds that affective preferences and tastes (values) grow out of a student's satisfaction or annoyance with his experience with things, concurrent with his understanding of them.²¹

All too often music educators tend to stress those musical teachings which they think are important. Certainly it is important to provide "models" for those students who may not have any, but it is far more important that music educators provide those experiences and opportunities by which students can enrich their existing models.

Rather than worry too much about what to teach students, we should concern ourselves more about providing those conditions and experiences in which students can learn.

The learning theories of both Bruner²² and Kohl²³ point out the value of devising curricula on a conceptual basis. They point out the need for learning experiences to be provided which continually re-examine basic concepts and build on them. Only in this way will the gaps between elementary knowledge and advanced knowledge slowly be closed. Eble, however, stresses the fact that educators should worry less about articulation between levels of learning and concern themselves more about fostering the imagination that leaps over gaps.²⁴

Mursell,²⁵ Leonhard and House²⁶ all stress the fact that a great variety of concrete experiences should be provided for students so that basic concepts can be broadened and strengthened. Woodruff points out that creativity can best be cultivated by helping students to become conceptually acquainted with their musical environments.²⁷ Reimer adds

that conceptualization in music is not an end in itself, but simply a means for improving the aesthetic experience.²⁸

The Manhattenville Music Curriculum Programme emphasizes the need for music curricula at all levels to be built on a conceptual core, and that creativity and discovery types of situations are the best ways of providing students with concrete experiences from which to develop concepts.²⁹

What types of learning experiences should be provided in music education depends somewhat upon a definition of what constitutes music. First of all, music education is not a study about things, it is an experience within things. If music is an expressive media, learning involves expressing. If music is a creative act, then learning means creating. If music has meaning, then personal judgements are fundamental to the learning process. If music is a communicative act, then learning should involve communication. If music has these characteristics, and it has, then students should be provided with those situations and experiences where they can create, communicate, exercise personal judgements, and express themselves.

Music Programmes are often too concerned with the production of musical "products" and in doing so, they often neglect the importance of human development. Music programmes should be more concerned with the human processes and should foster those conditions which provide each student with the opportunities to further his or her musical growth.

Kuhl makes an interesting point when he says:

"Everything a student does is supposed to be a finished product. There is little allowance for hesitant beginnings, false starts, bad ideas, impossible dreams - all explorations writers attempt before finding their own voices and the forms appropriate to express them, they are expected to be perfect everytime."³⁰

B. Importance of The Study

1. The Problem

The high school concert band programme has evolved because of the need to provide instrumental music instruction within the public school system. Throughout the course of it's evolution, the concert band has created it's own type of "musical establishment" with it's own unique attributes and philosophy. It has also adopted it's own distinct type of curricula and teaching method. Without doubt, the concert band provides valuable musical experiences for students who might otherwise be deprived.

Unfortunately, it has adopted a somewhat narrow approach to music education. Most concert band programmes have become stereotyped.

Many of the high school band programmes have become so structured and so selective in terms of curricula and teaching methodology that creativity and discovery types of learning have all but disappeared. Yet, it is a known fact, that few students enrolled in high school music courses have ever had the chance to work with, and explore, the raw materials which constitute music. For example, it is highly doubtful that a student who has played the trumpet or clarinet in a school band for two or three years has ever had much of an opportunity to work in discovery and creative types of situations. It is also highly doubtful whether this same student has had the chance to explore other musical interests which he may have. It is therefore, highly doubtful that his band experience has provided him with all those experiences which are necessary for his total musical and personal growth.

Certainly the study of the "musical monuments" of our past great composers has much to contribute to a student's musical growth. But Bach is much like God; each person has to discover Him in his own way. Band programmes should provide more meaningful and creative ways to help students discover that which is important to them.

In speaking about the concert band, Gibbs says,

"students are approached with a narrowly conceived invitation to 'join the band', but they are seldom extended an invitation to become actively involved in a personal creative act of musical expression and understanding".³¹

Band conductor Fredrich Fennell has also emphasized the need for concert band programmes to become more relevant to students and to provide those musical experiences which can best meet the students needs and desires.³²

2. Specific Problems of the Concert Band

(a) The band media of musical instruction is in itself a limiting device. McLuhan's point that the medium is the message is of significant importance in this instance. The band "media" does, in fact, shape the musical message. Musical instruments are machines, mechanical devices used simply for extending man's music making capabilities. Because of this the types and kinds of music making opportunities are limited within the band programme. Karel suggests that the instrumental media not only severely limits the scope and content of the band programme, but also it shapes the performer (student) and the types of learnings which can take place.³³ The instrumental media requires a student to specialize and this in itself is prohibiting.

(b) Because of the cost of band programmes, (not only in terms of money, but in time and energy) and because of public expectations, band programmes have become "performance oriented". They have become the school "showpiece" and in many cases have been musically exploited.

In a recent study on the performing habits of 222 high school bands in the United States, Jack Mercer concluded that most band programmes (concert bands, stage bands, marching bands) suffer from what he calls "performancitis". The band in the average high school with an enrollment of over one thousand students presented on average of 15.4 large group performances in a typical year. Small high schools with enrollments of four hundred to one thousand students were almost as active with a performance average of about 14.5 performances per year. In other words, the typical high school band gave an average of 1.5 performances a month during the school year - a large group performance every two and one half weeks! Mercer also points out that 76% of the large schools and 81% of the small schools had performed in contests during a typical year.³⁴ Although there are no statistics available on the present performing habits of Manitoba high