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## EDITORIAL

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‘Education is an admirable thing, but it is as well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.’ Oscar Wilde is notorious for his flippancy. Yet, where music is concerned there would seem to be more than one uncomfortable grain of truth in this saying. How much musical learning is truly the consequence of formal instruction? The contrast between the acquisition of musical skills that occur naturally within informal settings and the lack of progress apparent in many classrooms has long been a source of bewilderment to our profession. Music so often seems to fail as a *subject* within the authorised curriculum. Yet, as Malcolm Ross never tires of reminding us ‘the kids are crazy about it.’ Even within schools, there is an unspoken recognition that music flourishes best when the boundaries of classroom and timetable disappear and teachers and students share music informally *outside the curriculum*.

The painful contrast between formal schooling and informal learning is something British music teachers share with their colleagues in Africa. This theme recurs throughout the enlightening and often disturbing articles that follow. The appearance of this ‘African’ issue of BJME in July 1998 is timely, as it coincides with a major conference in Pretoria of the International Society for Music Education.

The learning of music resembles the learning of language in a number of ways. Both are learnt by ear in early childhood through informal contact rather than planned teaching. The role of *play* is significant. In her study, ‘Melody, Language and the Development of Singing in the Curriculum’ Akosua Addo examines the relationship between tone production and language among Ghanaian and English children. The children Addo has observed learn through their singing games. She argues persuasively that teachers should take note of this informal process when devising work within a classroom setting.

In ‘Challenges in Music Education Facing the New South Africa,’ Elizabeth Oehrle tells how the legacy of *apartheid* has cast a long shadow over practices in many schools that fail to recognise and value the diversity of music that children experience. Before going to school, ‘many an African child is a fully capable musician. The present school method of music soon knocks this potential out.’ Oehrle also stresses the as yet unfulfilled potential of Indian musical culture as a contributor to music education in the ‘new’ South Africa.

Malcolm Floyd and Robert Kwami raise awkward questions about the use of African music in British schools. Teachers and children may experience the sounds of African music, but are these appropriate given that within the classroom the music is deprived of its original ‘meaning’ and cultural context? Should teachers make efforts to restore these ‘missing messages’? Malcolm Floyd has some constructive suggestions for raising the awareness of British teachers and their students to gain a better understanding of what gave rise to these sounds in the first place. Robert Kwami is

emphatically positive that given a good conceptual grasp on the part of teachers, British children can share and understand the distinctive features of a musical culture, even when the resources found in most British schools are not authentically 'African.' Kwami wants the similarities as well as the differences between cultures to be highlighted, hence his preference for the term 'intercultural' rather than 'multi-cultural.'

Traditional African practices may sometimes be misunderstood in this country, but here, at least, they are at long last coming to be valued and respected. However, colleges and universities in Africa have tended to base their curricula on European models, and pay scant attention to African music. Elizabeth de Lowerntal, Richard Okafor and Trevor Wiggins find that the present generation of African students is increasingly rejecting traditional music in favour of Western pop, and there is no institutionalised bulwark of a 'cultural heritage' to counteract this tendency. Yet Africa has made the most significant contribution to the development of Western popular music for the past hundred years. As a result of America's domination of the entertainment industry, this contribution has had repercussions throughout the world. Blues, gospel, jazz, rock'n'roll and reggae all bear the hallmarks of their African origins. But the United States has signally failed to repay its cultural debt. Young Africans today are rejecting their history and traditions in favour of the undemanding offspring of a musical culture that has returned across the Atlantic robbed of much of its subtlety and complexity, plugged into the mains and disseminated to an increasingly passive audience. African music is dying, and unless efforts are made, it will have disappeared completely within a generation.

Elizabeth de Lowerntal found little enthusiasm for traditional forms among the students at the Zimbabwean training college, where she conducted her study. They quite mistakenly saw their musical heritage as outdated and irrelevant to their needs. De Lowerntal's observations of teaching sessions in the college on traditional instruments again raise questions about learning through instruction. From her account, the taught sessions on the mbira were an uncomfortable experience for teacher and students alike.

If de Lowerntal finds the rejection of traditional values worrying, Richard Okafor finds it pernicious. In a powerfully expressed article, Okafor sharply criticises the formal institutions of education, based again on Western models, which have rejected Nigerian culture and have signally failed to 'mould the development of music in society.' Okafor excoriates the blatant commercialism of the Nigerian media, which have promoted Western-based pop at the expense of the lively and spontaneous home-grown popular music that has developed in the past fifty years. In many ways, Okafor sees these as problems requiring political action.

Like de Lowerntal in Zimbabwe, Mofusi Phuthogo finds the choices for professional development among Botswanan teachers lacking in vision. They tend to see music education entirely in terms of choral singing. Even the traditional marriage between music and dance reflected in the community outside schools is rejected in favour of 'theory of music to aid sight-reading.' There seems here to be a mismatch between what teachers say they want in the form of in-service training and what is really needed if their work is to reflect and celebrate their culture in its richness and diversity.

In 'Teaching Culture: Thoughts from northern Ghana,' Trevor Wiggins converses with a Ghanaian Chief. In a way this interview draws together many of the threads spun by the other articles in this issue. One of the delicious ironies to emerge from this thoughtful, reflective conversation is how technological 'progress', exemplified by the spread of the national electricity grid deep into the Ghanaian countryside has

brought cultural impoverishment and standardisation in its wake. At present, in the remote areas of Ghana even the individual tuning systems vary from village to village. But people will cease to see the need to fashion instruments or to make music at all when they can hear it coming from loudspeakers. This issue contains a heartfelt plea for teachers and educational institutions to understand and respect musical learning wherever it occurs and to take steps to halt the decline of what we are belatedly realising, has been one of civilisation's finest artistic achievements.

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