
Editorial

The contributors to the Issue of the *British Journal of Music Education* come from different geographical areas and fields of professional work. They are also very dissimilar in their spheres of interest and in their underlying assumptions about music and music education.

Malcolm Ross and Allan Hewitt share a concern over the practice of music teaching in school. Beyond this they represent quite different perspectives. Drawing on what might be called the mainstream of writing in music education, Allan Hewitt presses the case for activity-based learning experiences, demonstrating how the Scottish Standard Grade (the equivalent of the English GCSE) aspires towards this by requiring performance and composing. A much more radical approach is taken by Malcolm Ross. In an article that music teachers should find challenging and may find disturbing, he asserts forcibly that – in spite of all attempts over the past decade and more – music in schools is still in poor shape. In his view, little more than lip service has been paid to the motivation of pupils and the activities of the music classroom are hopelessly out of date and out of touch. He is critical of the way in which teachers are trained, of the ways in which music teachers handle music in schools and he questions the assumption that music can be taught at all in schools.

Since his early work with Robert Witkin, Malcolm Ross has been challenging and provocative over the state of music in schools, which he perceives as inferior to drama and the visual arts. In this article he cites new evidence to suggest that – in one small geographical area of England at least – music in secondary schools is still not highly regarded compared to the other subjects. From this he is able to generalise colourfully and provocatively. I hope that readers will indeed feel provoked and will respond in publishable writing, either in form of letters to the Editors or as contributors. Is Ross right? Are better things happening than he describes? Where is the evidence for this? We look forward to hearing from readers.

Malcolm Ross notwithstanding, there is a general perception that formal teaching methods are being replaced by fairly free composition in secondary school music. Indeed, this point is taken for granted by Andrew Johnstone who examines the future direction of third-level studies (music in tertiary education). He believes that students entering universities will have had very different musical experiences in their schools from those of 10 or 15 years ago. The school music curriculum does indeed appear to have changed. This raises questions as to how those teaching in higher education should respond and what previous models have existed for musical analysis and the relationship of analysis with composition.

In her article, Eleanor Stubbley, writing on field theory and play in performance, brings us back to one of the issues raised by Ross, that play is an important and fundamental human activity. In her thoughtful philosophical analysis, Stubbley considers performance as an activity which has an important role in creating a space

for play. If we are to respond to this then we must consider once again the role of the teacher, the style of teaching and learning and – above all – the nature of music and the reality of each student’s experience.

Michael Stimpson provides a very helpful analysis of some of the hardware and software that may be of value of music education for those with visual impairment. This specialist contribution is helpful both in the specific sense of identifying equipment and also in the general way by altering us to the needs of this group of people and to the resources that may go some way to meeting these needs.

Also quite specialised is Robert Kwami’s contribution on teaching West African musics. His article reminds us that proper engagement with music from anywhere in the world brings with it an obligation to understand something of its social context and musical procedures. In this clear account of some of the music of one region, Kwami is able to categorise various musics and draws our attention to their particular social functions.

Keith Swanwick