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# Editorial

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The widening influence of instrumental teaching and performance must surely be the most significant development of school music in Britain during the past thirty years. Its impact can be seen in the outstanding performance standards of the national and county Youth Orchestras, Jazz Orchestras and other ensembles, the impressive range of high-quality music-making evident each year at the Schools Prom, and of course in the schools themselves; in the variety of concert and music-theatre presentations and in day-to-day classroom activity. The latter is particularly significant because so much of what we now take for granted in general music education – including the encouragement of composition and improvisation and the consequent broadening of music examinations, as in the new 16+ schemes – would have been severely hampered without the earlier effort and resources devoted to instrumental teaching.

Higher Education too has benefited – most obviously by the growth in importance of musical performance in university degree courses (complementing rather than competing with the College of Music courses). This is yet another outcome of extensive LEA commitment to instrumental training. The standard of performance among 18- to 21-year-olds has risen continuously and course content, in Colleges, Polytechnics and Universities, has been expanded, so that things are possible today which would have been unthinkable even twenty years ago.

In terms of employment an increase in opportunities has been evident. Sponsorship from the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Regional Arts Associations has helped establish many a new ensemble of young players, as well as extending the repertoire of new music by making funds available to commission composers. Training schemes have been set up to cover everything from orchestral playing and opera to advanced piano tuning. New openings for young musicians have presented themselves in the media, in musical journalism, Arts administration and continuing education. Not only has the musical world itself been greatly enriched, but artistic and imaginative ventures as a whole have gained wider community acceptance. There is no doubt that we need people with musical skills and insight, and it is apparent that the background for this kind of enterprise will so often be the LEA-initiated instrumental schemes and performance opportunities. It is this provision, more than anything else, which in recent years has brought out latent musical awareness in large numbers of young people.

All the more sad, then, that seemingly short-sighted policies are currently destroying this growth at its roots. Instrumental tuition schemes may seem to apply to a minority of the school population, so that to cut back on the provision of instrumental

teachers could be regarded as a comparatively easy way of saving money. Yet demonstrably this work has far-reaching effects upon the cultural health of our society. Far from reducing our efforts, we should be increasing them and doing our utmost to improve the service.

This issue of BJME emphasises the current concern among music educators for the extent and quality of performance skills. To begin with, it is vital that we do not lose sight of what has been achieved, and that we continue to acknowledge valuable work where it exists. Sheila Nelson's stimulating account of the establishment and progress of the Tower Hamlets instrumental scheme, Michael Stimpson's well-argued case for greater recognition of the guitar in education, and Tim Cain's reminder that many stimulating classroom musical experiences can follow when the teacher creates 'conditions for satisfying . . . performances to take place' are all very appropriate at this time. Yet, to demonstrate the continuing worth of these activities we must also show that we are aware of improvements which may be needed in some areas. Articles by Janet Mills and David Cooper review the ways in which we encourage children to begin lessons on musical instruments, and a letter from Molly McEwan takes a hard look back over seventy years of examinations. Between them they point to deficiencies in present practice and to the need for change or further development.

Development there must be – and the resources to make it possible must be found if we are to avoid losing so much of value from the labour of the past thirty years. Among the hopeful signs are ventures such as the Guildhall School of Music's teaching and research project on *Music Performance and Communication Skills*, set up in September 1984 with financial support from trust funds, industry and commerce. This is an exciting departure which foresees the need for different forms of training to meet the new opportunities for musicians in society. On page 97 of this issue Peter Renshaw gives us a short statement about the project. In a later issue we hope to be able to publish a fuller account of the project's progress. Meanwhile we wish them well in this enterprise. For, as Peter Renshaw points out, there are indeed 'fresh challenges confronting the musical world'; this is therefore a time to believe in what we have to offer and a time to act.