
EDITORIAL

Many of the articles included in this issue prompt us to ask some uncomfortable questions about what is worthwhile in musical education (and what is not); about whether innovations are really helpful or simply allow us to duck more central issues; and about the piecemeal nature of curriculum development in music, despite the corset of the National Curriculum. These are not new questions, as Gordon Cox's historical research reveals so vividly. He traces the birth and demise of Musical Education of the Under-Twelves (MEUT), a movement that lasted from 1949 until 1983. Many of the most distinguished British musical educators of that era threw their energies and influence behind attempts to revitalise music in schools, only to see their idealism dissipated in wrangling and spurned by teachers who were reluctant to embrace change. The ideas and practices encouraged by MEUT were remarkably wide-ranging: percussion band; work modelled on the principles of Orff and Kodály; composition; music and movement; focused listening (often connected to broadcasts); and musical notation.

Although this is a familiar menu, notable new arrivals in music classrooms occupy the attention of other contributors to this issue of the *BjME*. Among the innovations are the increased use of information technology; a more intense study of non-European music; an acceptance that a wider variety of idioms (popular music in particular) is worthy of pupils' attention; and the involvement of professional musicians in curricular music.

I am not sure whether these innovations should be regarded as the new fruit of a healthy plant or as attempts to 'rescue' music as a curriculum subject. Among our contributors, Malcolm Ross may be in an especially strong position to offer an informed opinion, since his recent research replicates work carried out in the 1970s when, with Robert Witkin, he confirmed that music was considered the least popular of school subjects by the large number of pupils interviewed. His more recent research reinforces this gloomy picture in most respects, but that is not the main thrust of his article. He compares some of the uplifting musical experiences he encountered at the Dartington International Summer School in 1998 with the more baleful evidence from schools. He declares, 'Frankly, if music education – as instruction and assessment – cannot be reformed it should be allowed to die'.

But who is going to decide what the reforms might be, and who will do the reforming? If anything, the trend seems to flow the opposite way. The National Curriculum could well be regarded as 'a reform', but voices are being raised in protest at the prescriptive and even proscriptive nature of the requirements of the National Curriculum, especially in its most recent revision. We are not comfortable with 'reforms' imposed upon us, yet the meagre allowance of time for music at all key stages, and the obligation to cover the statutory programmes of study at Key Stage 3, inhibit innovation. In some schools, music (among other subjects) may be heading for

fossilisation, but it is not fossilised yet. Most of the remaining articles in this issue describe research into extensions to the musical curriculum, and offer some evaluation of their worth. It is significant, perhaps, that this work is being pursued by academics and others not wholly absorbed in the routines of the school classroom. Most projects have benefited from extra funding, generous staffing and plenty of resources. We will need to ask whether the time, trouble and expense will help to lift music from the malaise identified by Ross.

Some would argue that music has boxed itself into a corner in schools. The 'whining schoolboy, with his trumpet case, ... creeping like snail unwillingly to school' (with apologies to Shakespeare) is a picture familiar to most. It needs guts to uphold the trumpet over soccer, and some argue that the elitism associated with music is a creation of music teachers themselves. In this issue, Peter Cope suggests that opportunities for learning are missed in instrumental lessons. He sets out to demonstrate that instrumental tuition 'can ... enhance children's cognitive abilities, their academic achievement and their self-esteem', and suggests that 'if learning a musical instrument can develop a spectrum of abilities, arguments for increasing its availability are more compelling'. This up-beat message creates unease among those who feel that music should be studied for its own sake rather than become a mere servant of other subjects and qualities. If this returns music to its position of exclusivity, the development of collaborations between professional musicians and schools may well help to bridge the gap between the 'elite' and the rest. Sue Cottrell describes her involvement in monitoring pupils' learning outcomes with a view to identifying the core elements of effective collaboration between music organisations and schools. This project, commissioned by the London Arts Board and Yamaha-Kemble (UK) in 1994, led to some mixed conclusions. Cottrell's analysis is useful because she seeks to locate common denominators contributing towards success or failure. Naturally, others involved in similar work in the future will seek to build on the successful strategies and to avoid the pitfalls she identifies. Chris Naughton's article also examines innovation linked to intervention, this time by students training to become teachers of music. His main concerns are to investigate the effect that working in the non-European musical idiom of samba has on students' attitudes, and to discover what might be gained through studying the cultural context of the music as well as the music itself. Despite the inarticulacy of many students' responses, a picture emerges of some being keen to plunge into the musical unknown while others are interested in the broader implications of working in a new musical context.

We can only guess whether the innovatory work, discussed above briefly, will touch the imaginations of teachers of music nationally. Many work in isolation as the only music specialist in their school, enjoying little local contact with other specialists. For this reason, the work of Charles Byrne and Mark Sheridan could be of great significance. They describe their efforts to establish communication between teachers of music through the World Wide Web, concentrating on composition, known as 'invention' in Scotland. The SCARLATTI Project aims to harness and share best practice, and to create what might be termed an electronic dialogue between teachers of music. This bold and highly innovative venture is conceived as a long-term event whose outcomes will not be known for some time. Byrne and Sheridan will be contributing a second article in due course, letting readers know what happened.

It is easy to allow oneself to become depressed about the *status quo* yet to be anxious about innovation at the same time. Ross has hard words to say about the state of music in schools, but he rejoices at the live music-making he encountered at the Dartington International Summer School. If we wish to raise our spirits, real music-

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making is surely the tonic we need. Colin Durrant's article offers useful advice on how conductors might help to create better choral performances and, no doubt, increase the joy of the music-makers. When the distinguished clarinettist, Jack Brymer, was asked how orchestral players wreaked revenge on bad conductors, he paused, then said, 'Follow their beat'. Durrant's determination to establish good habits during training could lead to beats worth following and to a deep satisfaction in making music, whether it be traditional, revolutionary, or anything else.

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