

Who is the “We”? Rethinking Professionalism in Music Education

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On the road that ascends from my situation toward the truth, there is only one way of moving beyond myself, and this is communication. I have only one means of emerging from myself. I must be able to live within another.

Paul Ricoeur

We . . . made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other.

Qur'an

*When the Tao is lost, there is goodness.
When goodness is lost, there is kindness.
When kindness is lost, there is justice.
When justice is lost, there is ritual.*

Lao Tsu



I want to begin this essay at the end, with a conclusion, so we don't lose track of its destination: At the center of all music making and musical experience lies a “we,” a sense of collective identity that powerfully influences individual identity. “I am,” then, not so much because “I think” or because “I perceive,” but because “we are,” and more particularly I want to assert here, because “we are, musically.” What I propose is that we start our professional theorizing here, with music as a social act and social fact, instead of music as an entity to which my relationship is aesthetic, receptive, and somehow individual in nature. This has quite a number of salutary consequences, I think, not least of which is the way in which it binds questions of music's (and music education's) significance to the “we” of whose experience it is constitutive. This is to construe music as a fundamentally ethical undertaking, linked in potent ways to who “we” are—to identity.

Who, then, is the “we,” this “we” that musicking creates, demarcates, and sustains? Since it is always both inclusive and exclusive, *whom* does it include and exclude, and why, and how?¹

Similarly (or is it part of the same interpretive move?) our claim to professional status as music educators is at once inclusive and exclusive. Who is the “we,” this “we” that the claim to professional music educator status creates, demarcates, and seeks to sustain? *Whom* does that claim exclude, and why, and how?

I submit that these inclusive/exclusive moves, moves implicated by musical action and by the processes of music education, are linked in important ways. More importantly, I submit that concerns about social justice in music education cannot be resolved without acknowledging this linkage and exploring the complexity of the ways these inclusive/exclusive moves interrelate.² As a fundamentally social phenomenon and a powerful means of mediating inclusion and exclusion, music is always an undertaking with profoundly ethical dimensions and implications.³ Our musical decisions and our choices as music educators are not simply or perhaps, even, primarily concerned with questions of aesthetic worth or the efficacious achievement of “musical” results.⁴ They are directly involved in issues of political economy, of access to resources, and in the ethical issues these implicate.

Only when we acknowledge the linkage among our musical choices (curricular, pedagogical, etc.), the ways we configure our music educator identities, and issues of social justice will music education be poised to move forward on this front. We are unlikely to make meaningful progress until and unless we recognize that the relationship between musical issues and social ones is not peripheral or contingent, but constitutive.

Music as Social: An Understanding Essential to the Pursuit of Social Justice

Those of us whom interest in topics like this brings together hardly need to be reminded of the skepticism with which deliberations like these are likely to be greeted within the music education profession at large. We face far bigger problems: funding, advocacy, policy issues—you know, all that ‘stuff’ that is of genuinely musical consequence. Equity and social justice are important, to be sure, but music education is first and foremost concerned with music. As an esteemed colleague remarked to me recently, “Whatever became of the good old days when we could speak without reservation and qualification about ‘the magic of

music’?” When I recently published issues of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education (ACT)* concerned with matters of gender and race,⁵ the response from one of our profession’s senior stalwarts was, in effect: That’s all well and good, but there is no place for stuff like this in the real world of undergraduate music education. We only have so much time to do what we have to do.

Now, I am sympathetic to at least part of what I understand these people to be saying. It is natural enough to wax nostalgic for the good old days when things were what they appeared to be (when girls were girls and men were men?⁶) and we didn’t have to worry about other meanings, other interpretations, or the unintended consequences of our musical discourses and actions. And it is true, of course, that curriculum and policy decisions require that we choose what, from among all the things that are demonstrably true and desirable to teach, we *must* teach—time and resources both being in chronically and pathetically short supply. We are not wrong to be concerned about matters of equity and social justice, then; and it is right that we should talk about them. But (and although this belief is seldom explicitly stated, it is no less firmly held) it is too bad, really, that we don’t devote our efforts to things of more direct consequence and central concern to music and music education: things, say, musical by nature; things that relate directly and fundamentally to teaching and learning music.

This stance troubles me, and for quite a number of reasons, not least of which is my firm conviction that music, as an invariably social construction, action, and phenomenon, is directly and significantly implicated in such matters. I will have more to say on that shortly. But it also worries me because of the way its narrow assumptions about the nature and value of music (and therefore, of music education) serve to foreclose potential debate on the issue: The study of music as music has no inherent or necessary relationship with social effects it may have, or with sociopolitical phenomena in which it may, at times, become implicated. End of story. Now, let’s get on with the pursuit of our truly musical purposes.⁷

I put this in the provocative way I do because I think that at the heart of the matter lies a set of assumptions about the nature and value of music that wrongly segregates the “truly musical” from things with which music may somehow become associated (the words “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” are the surgical tools commonly used for these purposes). And it seems to me that the way forward, if there is one, must build upon a reconfiguration of what we understand music to be. I am afraid that won’t be easy, because the way of thinking about

music that leads to such bifurcation and segregation is very deeply entrenched in our Western ways of thinking and talking and music-making. There are casual habits we can simply choose to discontinue should we wish; and then there are habits that are so inextricably wed to how we understand and navigate our worlds, so fundamentally a part of who we are that the mere suggestion of alternatives threatens not just our conceptions of music, but of ourselves as well. Questions of music's nature and value are questions of personal and professional identity.

Since I have devoted my academic career and the better part of my life to music and music education, so I trust you won't question the sincerity or depth of my commitment because of what I am about to share with you. But I have long struggled, and sometimes struggled deeply, with the tension between the assumptions that seem to lie of the heart of our understandings of music and music education—our assumptions of what constitutes professional practice in the field, if you will—and my heart-felt sense of what needs to be done to make the world a better place for my children, and yours, and theirs.

I am reminded, in a way, of the peaceful tranquility of the time my wife and I spent in places like Ljubljana, Belgrade, Zabreb, and Sarajevo, some 35 years ago when the region was still known as Yugoslavia. I knew Marshall Tito was a dictator. But that hardly mattered, or hardly seemed to: the country was beautiful, the people were warm and friendly, we were young and madly in love. The rest didn't count. Of course, we know now, and from painful experience, that Yugoslavia flourished, to the extent it did or at least in the way it did, because of the Tito-imposed social doctrine that placed collective Yugoslavian identity above local, ethnic identities. And we know all too well what happened when Tito died, and the frictions among those mutually exclusive ethnic identities returned temperatures to a boiling point. It was pleasant presuming that these conflicts didn't really matter, just like it is extremely pleasant to listen today to my recordings of Balkan music—Serbian, Albanian, Macedonian, Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian—for their haunting beauty. But those frictions did and do clearly matter, however convenient it may have been for Marshall Tito (and me) to dismiss them; and the harmonious beauty of the Balkan musics I cherish clearly belies the hatred among many of those whose musics they are. If music is itself cultural—and of course it is—then it is irresponsible to think of these musics as though they were not implicated, deeply and profoundly, both in the beauty and the troubles of these people.

Think for a moment about the forces troubling and dividing today's world: poverty, disease, starvation, war, terrorism, homelessness, pollution, global warming, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia and other hatreds far too numerous to mention. Consider, too, the bravery and conviction of those who devote their lives to battling such things. Against that background, consider what we do as professional musician-educators: It seems, at times, to use the words of Elliott & Veblen (2006), "quaint, if not largely irrelevant."⁸ As Ruth Crawford Seeger is purported to have said, making music amidst circumstances like these is rather like "closeting oneself in one's comfortable room in the selfish pursuit of personal delight." Nero fiddled while Rome burned. And we?

This line of thought could become dark and ponderous, which is neither how I feel at the moment nor is it my primary intent. But there is an important element of truth here, and what I do want to ask is how and why it is we appear to find ourselves in this situation. Part of the reason, I submit, is the way we have defined our professional skill and knowledge. And I think our capacity to make genuine progress on issues of equity and social justice requires a basic overhaul of that definition, those skills and knowledge, and in turn, of what we mean and whom we have in mind when we use this little "we" word. Who, as music education professionals are "we"? To what range of skills, dispositions, and concerns does this commit us? And what (and whom!) does it *exclude*? What kind of people and actions and beliefs fall within and without the area that "we" so casually demarcates?

In the end, I will want to argue the necessity to commit, as Richard Rorty urges, to extending the presumed range of "us"—to making "we" more inclusive of "they" and "them." But first there is some expository work to be done.

Professional Status as Exclusive

My title and my remarks so far make certain assumptions about the nature of professions and professionalism, assumptions that I need to clarify. Please note that I am not rejecting the need to professionalize music education—quite the contrary.⁹ But it seems to me that our appeals to professional status are mostly casual in nature, and I do not think that serves us well—especially where what we understand "professional" to mean is simply the opposite of amateur.¹⁰ Because of my interest in inclusion and exclusion, I want to draw upon a sociologically oriented interpretation of professionalization, one that conceptualizes professions as self-defined (self-serving?) elites. On this view, professions are defined in part

by skills and bodies of knowledge that require sustained and highly specialized study. Professional knowledge and expertise are things that are not easily or casually come by. As such, they designate capacities that are not shared by members of society at large; but they also and more particularly designate skills, knowledge, and capacities not shared by individuals in fields of endeavor that might, to the casual observer, seem closely related. To claim professional status is also to advance claims about whom that status excludes.

In the case of music education, we are concerned on the one hand to establish that its professional knowledge differs in substantive, even profound ways from that of educators in general, such that not just anyone who teaches, or who is certified to do so, can rightly claim music educator status. Hence, the professionalization of music education entails a clear distinction from general education. To those who see fluency in generic instructional method as the essence of educational professionalism, though, teaching is teaching and learning is learning: A professional educator is an expert in concerns about teaching and learning irrespective of subject matter considerations (or, in any event, the distinctions among various subject-specific pedagogical concerns are less important than their commonalities). Music education as a professional endeavor contests claims like these. Despite a broad range of shared concerns with educators in other subject domains, musical and instructional knowledge and expertise do not “travel” all that well: their distinction from other instructional domains is significant.¹¹

On the other hand, professional knowledge in music education differs substantially from mere musical knowledge and expertise. Were this not the case, there would be no point or validity in drawing a distinction between “musician” and “music educator,” or between “music specialist” and “music education specialist.” Again, there are those who argue, sometimes forcefully, that musicianship is the most important determinant of music educational expertise—that educational knowledge and expertise are strictly secondary to their musical counterparts. There is widespread sympathy for this position within the (professional?) schools of music where music education is most often housed in North American universities—sympathy that usually manifests itself in selection or admissions procedures based solely on perceived musical potential or achievement.¹² On this view, one can take accomplished musicians, give them a modicum of methodological or pedagogical knowledge, and thus create music education professionals. But a music education

professional (or so I would argue) is not simply a musician with pedagogical training. Music education professionals are not mere music specialists (musicians) who happen to teach.

It is not my intent here to argue the relative merits of these conflicting positions—they are probably well enough known to you in any case. What I do want to emphasize, however, is that “music education professional” is a category that, to the extent the label “professional” is warranted, is exclusive of both non-educator musicians and non-musician educators. It is also arguably the case that the equation “musician plus educator equals music educator” does not balance; that there is considerably more to being a music education professional than discrete knowledge and expertise in these two areas. The point is that the “we” in music education is not, if “we” is based on a claim to professional status, all-inclusive. The claim to professional status is necessarily exclusive, and whom it specifically excludes is a matter of considerable moment.

My further concern, to keep us on track here, is that such exclusions, essential though they may be, cannot be made as cleanly and neatly as we might like to think: They cannot be made with surgical precision. Along with its apparently appropriate and seemingly desirable professional exclusions, music education has excluded (and continues to exclude) a great many things of which we are unaware. Before I can unpack that claim, I need to shift my focus momentarily, and examine how musicianship and musicality function exclusively.

Aesthetic Sensitivity or Social Competence and Responsibility?

Let me submit for the sake of argument that music educator identity in North America is typically predicated on musicianship on the one hand,¹³ and instructional method on the other. As you have also already surmised, I think these constitute a woefully inadequate basis for the professionalization of music education. This could be argued any number of ways, but what I want to do here is to look at the exclusionary tendencies these two things share. Our conceptions of instructional method and of musicianship are both culturally- and practice-specific, which is to say that they favor and privilege method and musicianship *of certain kinds*, while excluding others. Both instructional method and musicianship are typically conceived along lines specific to the musical practices that have been the traditional focus of university music instruction. Those musical practices, as we know, are typically the ones that originated in the European aristocracy several hundred years ago. But neither instructional method nor musicianship is an absolute or a universal thing. Musicianship consists of

functional capacities developed in service of specific musical actions and endeavors, within specific cultural contexts. It is not so much an “it” as a “them”: flexible, temporal fluencies that manifest themselves in strikingly different ways in different kinds of musical action. Likewise, instructional method is contextually- and practice-specific. Both the kinds of skills and capacities that constitute musicianship and the methods best suited to teaching it depend on the nature of the music at hand.

The musicianship widely presumed essential to the skill sets of music education professionals, however, is musicianship of a very specific kind. We develop it through sustained studies of music theory (so-called, although there’s little that’s theoretical about it), music history (so-called, although it is seldom inclusive enough to warrant its implicit claim to comprehensiveness), aural skills (devoted to a very specific subset of those on which the world’s practicing music-makers draw), and “applied” music making—studies enshrined and entrenched many decades ago (and for Americans in particular, in NASM guidelines). Our instructional methods have evolved in service of practices rooted in the same kinds of priorities and values. Indeed, many music educators rationalize their professional endeavors on a practice- and style-specific notion of “aesthetic experience,” one that arose in largely the same circumstances as the approaches to musicianship and instructional method we have been discussing here. It is all very “neat.” It is also very circular.

The formula, as one might call it, seems to be something like this: (1) Start with an understanding of music derived from and well-suited to one particular mode of musical engagement and practice. (2) Craft a definition of musicianship derived from its basic tenets and demonstrable primarily on instruments that have evolved in its service. (3) Privilege curricula and pedagogies that serve to nurture that kind of musicianship. (4) Select students for advanced study on the basis of criteria well-suited to these modes of practice. (5) Hire faculty to serve the needs and interests of such students. And (6) assess success in terms of the extent to which the norms and values of that tradition and its conventions are preserved. How do you spell circular? *How do you spell “systemic”?*

Now, music educators have not been altogether oblivious to these circumstances, of course. However, our responses have been rather naïve, and our tactics not terribly effective. We have argued, as did the good folks at the original Tanglewood Symposium, the need to embrace a broader range of musics. But we have proceeded, quite wrongly I think, as if these musics could be simply added and stirred—as though we needed to challenge or change

nothing but our assumptions about the relative worth of these various traditions.¹⁴ The trouble was and is, it seems to me, that different musical practices do not so much represent variations of the same thing; they are profoundly different things, with different modes of musicianship, different modes of musical action and interaction, different value systems, and which entail, consequently, different pedagogical approaches. And the further trouble, it seems to me, is that meaningful change requires interventions that extend beyond the theoretical or conceptual levels to the social and material realities of university music schools.

We haven't the time here to pursue the argument in the detail it warrants, but I would submit that "aesthetic" accounts of musicianship and musical value (especially those variants derived from Kantian tenets) focus on individual perception, often contemplative or appreciative, of the formal or expressive qualities of presumed musical entities. This focus, it seems to me, is poorly suited to the collectivity and processual nature of many if not most of the world's musical practices. And this, in turn, causes us to neglect the sociopolitical and ethical dimensions that obtain for music as a mode of communal or social action. I have written at some length on what I believe to be the importance of conceiving of music as an ethical enterprise (Bowman 2000), and haven't the time to revisit that here. But the upshot of all this is that conceiving of music as a social rather than an individually receptive or formalist/expressionist or idealist phenomenon, draws *people* and *culture* into the musical picture. And music, unless I am very much mistaken, is a ubiquitously human undertaking. Thus, a tremendously important part of what we exclude from musicianship and music study and music teaching when we view them through generic "aesthetic" lenses are *the people* of whose culture and lives musical engagements form vital parts.¹⁵ The people we presume to educate become incidental to the professional practice of music education.

That is bad enough. But what also tends to happen is that people whose musics and musical values are not represented in our current programs of study (to say nothing of the instruments they play or the ways music functions in their lives) are *themselves* excluded. We are thus relieved of the difficulty of engaging otherness on both musical and human levels. But we are also and at the same time deprived of the *opportunity* to develop the kind of professional knowledge that is informed by the tensions that inevitably exist among and within living (which is always also to say evolving) traditions. Consequently, we reduce questions of musical difference to questions of relative worth, failing to recognize that what

is ultimately at stake (and what we might well expect the educational process to help address) are issues of uneven access to resources and power.

I think we need to learn to think of musics as fundamentally social phenomena;¹⁶ as actions and events that are always and intimately and constitutively connected to the lives and identities of people. Our musical exclusions, then, are always also exclusions of people. These circumstances have far reaching sociopolitical and pedagogical significance. To declare music's beauty or its supposedly "aesthetic" qualities the essence of music—that is, to say that these more than anything are what matter in understanding and teaching music—is not just a philosophical preference or predilection but a political act with far reaching consequences for concerns like equity and social justice. For it rules out of court things that matter, and tremendously: things that music influences, regulates, and in some instances creates, as nothing else does.

In a recent essay, Ian Cross¹⁷ argues that it is exceedingly rare for music to be used in any society for only one purpose. Its borders are open and porous, and its attendant meanings complex, contradictory, and fluid. It is, however, marked almost invariably by temporal regularity and periodicity. This remarkable combination of abstract openness and temporal/sensual regularities make of music a vital medium for the creation and rehearsal of flexible social interaction, writes Cross. Music and musicality exercise the human capacity to "engage in open-ended yet coordinated communicative behavior"—to develop what Cross calls "flexible social competence." Viewed this way (rather than "aesthetically"), music is a framework for non-conflictual social interaction, or, more specifically, "a medium for social interaction with inexplicitness at its core." Perhaps it is precisely in such experience, Cross speculates, that such concepts as "social justice" (and, I would add, broader ethical concerns) may actually originate.

How ironic, then, that we should find ourselves speaking of social justice as though it were something in which music is incidentally, tangentially, or optionally implicated. I am afraid that as long as we regard the social as an "extrinsic" or extra-musical concern, or as part of the "context" within which music-proper is somehow situated, our talk of social justice in music education will remain just that: talk. If, on the other hand, we can learn to regard music as a *performative*—as collective ritual enactments of patterns of "we-ness"¹⁸—then community is not merely part of the context within which musicking occurs, it is a creation of music, a creation to whose nature and character we are ethically obliged as

professionals to attend. Duke Ellington once said, “If it sounds good, it is good.”¹⁹ On that point, I’m afraid he was profoundly wrong.

More Porous Borders, a More Inclusive “We”

As I approach the end of this essay, I hope you will forgive me if I don’t revisit each of the points I have tried to make so far. My overarching concern has been to situate issues of social justice *within music* and thus *within music education*. And what I hope you will wrestle with is the idea that issues of social justice should not really require such situating because *they’ve been there all along*, albeit hidden behind our venerable assumptions and affirmative talk about the intrinsic, inherent, or “aesthetic” value of our music, and the aims and range of our instructional endeavors.

Allow me to close with a few comments that may make this point more directly, or at least differently, and, I hope, more forcefully. Where do we go from here?

- (1) Music *is* cultural and social (and therefore, I believe, political)—always and already. That being the case, whether issues like equity and social justice can or should be addressed or confronted in music education is not really the question. The real questions are (a) Whose interests have been served by excluding and ignoring them, as we have done historically? and (b) What kinds of musics and values and insights *and people* have been kept out by our territorial tactics?
- (2) But it is not quite that simple, is it? The challenge really amounts to how, on the one hand, to define, create, and sustain appropriate professional exclusivity while pursuing greater inclusivity on the other. How do we pursue greater diversity without compromising professional standards? I see no way to do this that doesn’t entail careful redefinition of what constitutes core or foundational professional knowledge in music education, and thus, *who we are*. Whom does such knowledge privilege, admit, invite, or welcome to music education? How, and why? Whom does it turn off and turn away? Are we really so certain that our conventional answers are the ones we need?
- (3) How diverse and pluralistic music education is, or can be, is a direct function of the diversity and pluralism of our membership, our musical practices, and their attendant curricula. Is the voice of music education the voice of heterodoxy or is it the voice of orthodoxy? Is it the voice of progress or the voice of suppression?

- (4) We cannot meaningfully address such questions by abstract argument alone: That is the failed liberal humanist strategy, after all. Instead, we must approach them in economic, material, and political terms, in terms of access, privilege, influence, and power. This means examining gate-keeping practices, entry to practice, field experience—things like that—and the kinds of intentional and unintentional obstacles we put place in front of people at each of those stages. *Existing structures and processes could not assure replication of the status quo more decisively had they been devised solely and explicitly for that purpose.* Entrance and graduation requirements in North American undergraduate programs assure that only people like “us” (White? Middle class? Able? Politely compliant?) enter the field. And hiring practices at university level assure that the ranks of music educators are filled overwhelmingly by people like “us”—with ever-more-lengthy backgrounds in “school music” that implicate deep attendant convictions about how music education “really is” and what it “must be.”²⁰
- (5) We have been exclusive to such a degree and in the same way and for so long that who “we” are has become unhealthily self-evident and beside the point.²¹ Our standards and conventions and ideas and assumptions—the things professionals use to guide and, where necessary, transform actions—consequently face few meaningful challenges, and their rigor has suffered significantly as a result. The richer and more complex and more diverse our professional membership becomes, the more we will need to develop complicated and robust senses of belonging, and the more we will need to find multiple ways to interact comfortably with the widest variety of people and situations. Until we can learn values like these, and learn to get along without the need apparently served by comforting affirmations of uniformity or unanimity, we will remain not so much a profession as a club.
- (6) Who is the “we”? And who isn’t? And why? (And how?) These questions can be evaded but they can’t be permanently avoided. They are catching up with us, and there will be a steep price to pay if we haven’t developed more convincing answers by the time they do. This is a systemic, institutional problem whose solution requires the kind of institutional change that will only happen when material resources are dedicated to the important work required.

Canadian composer/educator R. Murray Schafer asserts that, in his view, North American music programs are “crippled by affluence” (Schafer, 2006).²² I believe he is right—in ways

and on levels more numerous than he may be aware. We have tailored our programs to the attainment of professional ends that cater to the needs and interests of the “haves” in society. The resultant class of teachers and students drawn to music education—and the ends to which that education is presumed properly dedicated—constitute a very selective kind of “we,” a selectivity that extends well beyond professional knowledge. “We” are defined not just by what we do, but also by those with whom we presume to do it.²³

Sorting out the implications of these concerns is a task whose scope exceeds the limitations under which I am working here. However, one of these implications seems clear enough and important enough to warrant specific mention. Prospective music educators need to be proficient not only in the professionally-oriented musical fare that dominates and defines postsecondary studies in North America, but also in at least one amateur endeavor.²⁴ Amateur engagements—those undertaken and pursued for the satisfactions they afford (i.e., for the love—Latin: *amo, amas, amat*—of it), by means and at levels accessible to the population at large²⁵—should be part of the skill and conceptual sets of every music education professional. This would dramatically alter orientations to a broad range of critical professional questions: What? By whom? With whom? For whom? To what ends? To what extent? Under what circumstances? This would expand our professional purview and membership well beyond those currently devoted to the pathetically narrow, technical question, “How to?” It would also, taken seriously, create a place within the identity “music educator” for people whose musical involvements, actions, and values circulate around amateur rather than professional ones—a marked change and a marked challenge to the normative notions of right and wrong that currently define “music educator” identity, equating it with “musicianship” of a very particular, and very restrictive, kind.

Again, my concern is that the associated and supporting “Others” music educators have in mind when they (we?) announce their (our?) identity as part of the symbolic community called “music educators”²⁶ needs to become a far more heterogeneous group (racially, socio-economically, in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation, and the like): one more nearly commensurate with the diversity of our society’s (not to mention the world’s!) musical practices. Musical diversity is a conspicuous casualty of the currently homogeneous state of music education, but it is hardly the only one. Were we to develop professional identity (including entry to practice and our ideas of musical competence) around what arguably constitutes the professional act in music education—expert diagnosis and treatment of

problems²⁷—and were we to acknowledge the radical divergence of such professional acts among musically and educationally diverse practices—the face and the character of music education would be very, very different from the one we see today. As long as the face of music education remains white, middle class, musically-professional,²⁸ and the like, social justice will remain one of music education’s unfulfilled promises—and the ethical dispositions upon which it depends will remain peripheral concerns rather than professional imperatives.

We need to devote ourselves to creating what Beverly Diamond calls a “new elite”: one defined by and devoted to “the circulation rather than the consolidation of privilege” (Diamond, 2006). We must transform our understanding of music and our resultant pedagogies to—again, drawing on Diamond’s words—“reflect the socially urgent issues . . . of human lives” (ibid). The elite so created, however, would be profoundly different from the one currently invoked by the term “professional music educator.”²⁹

In our eagerness to claim professional status as music educators, we have created border stations and staked out territory in ways that have resulted in willful ignorance of problems beyond the range they demarcate and defend. We have created and patrolled boundaries with scant attention to the sociopolitical and ethical concerns that were also kept out. I dare hope for a time when these border stations will seem as eerily deserted and pointless as the massive ones between Germany, France, Holland, and other EU countries that, once filled to overflowing with trucks, cars, and armed guards, one can now speed right past, scarcely slowing down.³⁰ There are better, more responsible, more inclusive, and more just ways of professionalizing music education than the ones we have endorsed traditionally. Recognition of that fact is the first and most important step to making social consciousness and social justice definitive concerns of music education.

Lest what I have been arguing here be perceived as negatively critical—which it undeniably is in certain respects—let me conclude by urging that we retain sight of its positive, generous features. This reconfigured “we” whose possibility I have been alluding to, this “we” that is plural, fluid, and open, is not simply more “correct” in the sense that it better reflects the plurality of music and the social order. Nor is greater inclusivity its only virtue, desirable though inclusivity undeniably is. Its primary virtue, to my way of thinking, is a professional identity that derives from a broader and richer notion of musicianship than the one to which we have traditionally pledged our allegiance. This broader identity and this

richer musicianship are more responsive and responsible, more ethically directed, more hopeful, and more oriented to future possibilities than the ones in which we have traditionally found comfort. As Biesta (2003) reminds us, “The worth of intersubjective knowledge depends on the traditions and practices of the community in which they are formed. . . and the capacities for deliberation and testing of those claims [are] a central measure of the worth of that community” (103). Who and how (and why) “we” are—these are matters of paramount concern if we are to create for social justice the place of prominence it warrants warrants in a professionalized music education.

Coda: A “We” in Crisis?

The “we” created by the introduction of social justice concerns into music education is a “we” in crisis.³¹ The conventional musician-who-teaches concept of music educator identity “works” not because of its validity or desirability but of the comfort it affords the select few deemed admissible in virtue of their musicianship—the proficiencies, the musical values, and the modes of music making traditionally favored by the conservatory and the academy. Conventional music educator identity is created and sustained by systems of social practices and institutional “imperatives” so tightly linked that their contingency is scarcely perceptible. But many if not most of the attributes that currently demarcate music education as a profession—the things that “must be”—need not be. They are habits, ways of thinking, acting, and choosing that have arisen in the service of certain values and practices, and the interests of certain social groups. The voices (and musics, and musical practices, and instructional approaches) of those marginalized or excluded from music education and from its curricula cannot be silenced or ignored indefinitely.

The “we” created by the introduction of social justice concerns into music education is a “we” in crisis—because considerations of social justice cannot be so introduced without radically altering the nature of a professional identity traditionally equated with “musicianship.” Social justice issues are decidedly peripheral to the “we” that currently constitutes the music education discipline, and are marginal concerns in professional music teacher training programs. That must change. But such change is unlikely, I have argued here, unless and until we change (a) our philosophical assumptions about what music is and is not; (b) our admission criteria and gate-keeping policies; (c) our ideas about what constitutes professionalism; (d) and our implicit beliefs about whose music counts or has educational

value, why, and how. Our ability to overcome the comfortable inertia of our collective habits will depend on the urgency and clarity with which we are able to envision alternatives. And that will require welcoming to the conversation voices considerably more diverse than the ones to which “we” are accustomed to listening: voices that will doubtless say things we find difficult to hear. The crisis social justice creates is also one rich with potential to transform and reconfigure our discipline.

The “we” created by the introduction of social justice concerns into music education is a “we” in crisis because the conventional conception of music as a domain unto itself, where aesthetic and artistic concerns trump all others, is a conception of music in which the only instructional consequences that *really* count are musical ones—and in which, accordingly, remarkable musical ends can justify nearly any instructional means. Deliberation about things not “intrinsically musical” (indeed, it sometimes seems, the act of deliberation itself!) is, because it is “extra-musical,” largely dispensable. This value orientation, a pervasive feature of most music schools, is one that must be explicitly and formally interrogated with and by those socialized there but seeking professional employment in public educational institutions. The crisis social justice creates, then, is one that cannot be averted or responsibly avoided; neither can it be confronted without major realignments in our understanding of the nature and value of music. A music educator identity that is in harmony with musician identity requires a conception of musicianship that includes an essential social dimension and is, to that extent, fundamentally committed to socially just practice.

Notes

¹ The dialectical and reciprocal relationship of inclusion and exclusion are themes that have been perhaps most cogently explored in feminist literature, to which this essay is therefore deeply indebted. See, for instance, Seyla Benhabib’s (1987) argument that moral discourse requires engagement with concrete “others.” See also, Schor (1989) on “saming” and “othering.” In the music education literature, consult Julia Koza’s (1994a) “Aesthetic Music Education: Discourses of Exclusion and Oppression,” and her (1994b) “Getting a Word in Edgewise: A Feminist Critique of Choral Methods Texts;” Robert Lamb’s (1994) “*Aria Senza Accompagnamento: A Woman Behind the Theory;*” and Patricia O’Toole’s (2005) “Why Don’t I Feel Included in These Musics, or Matters.” Finally, see Godway and Finn’s (1994) *Who Is This We? Absence of Community* – the work that inspired both this essay’s title

and certain of its themes. Feminism is hardly the only area to study these concerns, of course: see, for instance, the sociological work in Lamont & Fournier, eds. (1992) *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*.

² This said, I want to make clear that this essay is rather more dedicated to the kind of social consciousness that is *prerequisite* to social justice than it is to exploring social justice per se. What I would like to urge in this latter regard, however, is that we resist the temptation to reify social justice – to think of it as an entity or a state. It is and must always remain a destination, an open concept or action ideal toward which we strive without the presumption of arrival. In many ways, it resembles the concept of music as praxis that some of us have advocated over the years: a practical and situated knowledge guided by commitments to right action, where “right” cannot be stipulated in any but provisional and contingent terms. This is the ethical view of music to which I refer elsewhere in this paper. I would urge us to think of social justice as an ethical commitment in the same sense. This is, in a sense, a denial of the philosophical propensity to definition.

³ See my “Music as Ethical Encounter?” (Bowman 2000).

⁴ I place “musical” in quotation marks because of a conviction that so-called musical results are not truly musical if and when they exclude the kind of social considerations I want to advance here.

⁵ See my “Music, Beauty, and Privileged Pleasures: Situating Fine Art and ‘Aesthetic’ Experience” (Bowman 2005); my “After the Silence of Aesthetic Enchantment: Race, Music, and Music Education” (Bowman 2006a); and my “Musical Experience as Aesthetic: What Cost the Label?” (Bowman 2006b)

⁶ It should be evident from my approach to this essay that this phrase is intended ironically: These “good old days” were, from a social justice standpoint, neither good, nor are they yet sufficiently old that we can speak of them in past tense. One of the main concerns of this essay is precisely the necessity of acknowledging and dealing responsively/responsibly with difference – with meaning’s multiplicity, with the consequences of our actions, and so on.

⁷ One critical response to this essay attempts largely the same move in a slightly different way: “Aesthetic education is no longer an issue in music education.” Since I believe it remains a profoundly important issue – and arguably all the more so to the extent its practical implication in music education becomes implicit rather than an explicit article of debate – I must question the agenda of those who make such claims. On whose authority, by what power, and with what concerns in mind, is something so deeply implicated in our understandings of what art and music ‘should be’ dismissed? We cannot undo three centuries of conceptual work with a mere wave of the hand; and where that attempt is made, we would do well to ask whose interests it is intended to serve.

⁸ Elliott, D. and Veblen, K. (2006).

⁹ I put it this way intentionally: In my view, the professionalization of music education is a task that remains to be accomplished. The claim to professional status for music education seldom extends beyond assertion.

¹⁰ Indeed, casual acceptance of the distinction between professional and amateur which treats ‘amateur’ in a derogatory way has far reaching and highly misleading effects on many practices in music education. I will comment briefly on this later.

¹¹ That said, it is important to note the problems created by constructing “music educator” exclusive of “educator”: it can undermine mutual understanding, the ability to communicate

effectively, and often serves to isolate even more profoundly individuals who are already marginalized. And isolation, like intensification and deskilling, can be a very effective way to de-professionalize.

¹² Admissions criteria, the processes by which music schools socialize those who are admitted (a rigorous musician-identity-creation project), and a very narrow definition of the “music education” job all work together to assure that music educators (prospective or current) evade difference or diversity. Only those “like us” need apply. These considerations work hand in hand with the myth of aesthetic insularity (inherency, intrinsicity) to assure that social justice remains a marginal consideration. Admission processes in particular help assure that most of this sorting happens at the “front end,” in the selection process.

¹³ Brian Roberts writes critically and persuasively about the preeminence of musicianship in music educator identity. See, for instance, Roberts 1993, 2004a, 2004b, & 2006.

¹⁴ See my “‘Pop’ Goes. . .? Taking Popular Music Seriously.” (Bowman 2004). See also Charlene Morton’s (1994) “Feminist Theory and the Displaced Music Curriculum: Beyond the ‘Add and Stir’ Projects.”

¹⁵ Worse yet, this exclusionary move is based on assumptions about the nature and value of music that purport to recognize the social dimension to which I am alluding here: It’s just that such considerations are ‘incidental’ or else so obvious they do not require explicit consideration.

¹⁶ Christopher Small’s (Small 1997) account of music as enactment of patterns of relationship is one such account.

¹⁷ Cross, 2006.

¹⁸ In my “Educating Musically” (Bowman 2002) I argued that musical action is “performative,” and to that extent is tightly linked to identity. The point that warrants attention in the context here is that performativity is a collective, or social phenomenon. Thus, who “we” are is in important ways a function of who we music with – whether as students, as teachers, or as members of society at large.

¹⁹ Jewell 1977, p.125.

²⁰ In case my point isn’t perfectly clear, making hires into music teacher education programs contingent upon x, y, or z years (a number that continues to escalate) of successful experience in the schools assures that the purview of the profession remains the purview of those who have “been *there* and done *that*.” The ranks of music educators are thus confined to school musicians. The population they are committed to serving is likewise the population of school musicians.

²¹ According to Roberts (2006), identity announcements are powerful indicators of how actors see themselves in relation to a social setting. Identity is always situated: a function of those with whom one presumes to be associated or contrasted, and a function of the kind of social supports provided for those associations. Announcements of identity can “work” only when they are acted upon and supported by Others. My point is that the associated and supporting Others music educators have in mind when, speaking of “us” or “we”, they announce their identity as part of the social group “music educators,” is a far more homogeneous group (racially, socio-economically, in terms of gender, age, sexual orientation, and the like) than the diversity of our society’s musical practices warrants. The social group, “music educators,” is a closed group – which, from the perspective of professionalism, is as it should be; but this is *not* as it should be if social justice is to emerge

as a salient or even a relevant concern. “Social actors ... create roles for themselves which they then try to inhabit,” writes Roberts. But these roles are not just there for the taking, like picking apples from a tree: they are self constructed roles that an actor can sustain only with interactional support. Where a social group is highly homogeneous (as is “music educator”) interactional support comes easily and identity receives relatively few challenges – at least so far as insider-outsider status is concerned. Challenges are rejected as aberrations – as inappropriate to or outside the role. Musical diversity is a casualty of this state of affairs. But hardly the only one: concerns about equity and social justice are marginalized as part of this very same move.

²² “Sometimes I think that music programs in Canada are crippled by affluence. How many times have I entered a classroom and the proud teacher points out all the instruments lined up against the wall, the loudspeakers, the amplifiers, the CD players... But the problem with flutes and trumpets and violins is that all you can do is to learn how to play them, and that takes years. A very expensive music education program has been erected in the form of a triangle in which the base line is all those enrolled in the program and the apex is the professional performer/teacher, or, in a very few cases, the genius who will make the school famous.” (Schafer 2006).

²³ Can there be such a thing as social justice, then, without diversity?

²⁴ Whether this should be additional or “instead of” is something that would benefit from debate as well.

²⁵ Cf. Booth, 1999. Tom Regelski (Regelski 2007) extends Booth’s theme to music education.

²⁶ See note 19 above.

²⁷ Consider Froehlich’s “Institutional Belonging, Pedagogic Discourse and Music Teacher Education: The Paradox of Routinization.”(Froehlich 2007).

²⁸ Here I am invoking a slightly different sense of the term “professional” than the one I stress elsewhere in this paper: professional in the sense opposed to amateur, the sense opposite the use of music to fulfill one’s everyday needs. To be musically-professional on this view is simply to be part of the community of people who earn livings making music.

²⁹ There will be readers who object to considering music education as “elite,” regardless of what it purports to do with privilege: It is one of those words that invariably raises red flags. I submit, however, that music educators, as professionals, must be elite at least in the sense of being exceptional at what they do – a point consistent with the sociological understanding of professions I endorsed earlier in this essay. There can be no music education profession unless such status is conferred on the basis of defensible merit. (The English “elite” derives from the Latin *eligere*, meaning to pick out, to choose, or to select – as its more direct derivative “eligible” suggests.) Unless we want to take the irresponsible stance that the category music educator includes anyone and everyone who wishes to claim it, professional music educator status must be conferred selectively: A category that excludes no one, after all, is meaningless. I make the assumption here that professional status involves a warranted claim to expertise rather than an arbitrary one. At issue, then, are the criteria appropriately invoked by warranted claims to music educational expertise. Current practice is largely arbitrary – based on criteria associated with professional performance standards in a narrow range of musical practice rather than criteria derived from a broad vision of educational expertise and inclusive understandings of musical competence. Needed, then, are warrants

carefully derived from deliberative acts. The wrong warrants may be chosen; but grounding decisions in deliberation rather than convention and habit introduces at least the possibility that demonstrable commitments to socially just practices will be among the criteria by which professional (elite) status is conferred.

³⁰ Lest we naively assume that the European situation represents a broad trend, note that the border between the U.S.A. and Canada is moving in precisely the opposite direction. Note, too, that the new European borders remain borders: I am not advocating the elimination of borders (as if that were possible), but rather, their deliberate, responsible, and ongoing reconstruction – in light of foreseen consequences, both musical and social. As Wolfe (1992) reminds us, “The debate over boundaries cannot really be a debate over the question of whether or not they ought to exist. It is as impossible to imagine a society without boundaries as it is inconceivable for modern liberal democracies to return to a feudalism in which boundaries are everything. Boundaries are both here to stay but also here to be crossed” (323).

³¹ The fact that this crisis is so little in evidence within the profession is dramatic evidence of the extent and severity of the problem: Social justice scarcely registers as a consideration where developing musicianship or transmitting musical skills are presumed constitutive of the music educator’s professional identity. I am indebted to one of this essay’s anonymous referees for pointing out the aptness of the term “crisis” for the situation created by the introduction of social justice into music education’s professional discourses.

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