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## **Electronic Article**

### **Automania: Music Education and the 'Music World'** Editorial introduction to ACT Vol. 4, Issue 2

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*Editorial Introduction – 2005 Issue***Automania: Music Education and the ‘Music World’**

Thomas A. Regelski, Editor



From its inception—indeed, a major reason for its inception—the MayDay Group has been concerned to promote change in music education. The need for change is not a matter of change for its own sake (although the so-called “Hawthorne Effect” in industrial psychology did suggest that sometimes change just ‘shakes things up’ enough to promote some benefits). Instead, it accepts there are good and sufficient reasons to believe that serious problems exist in the “field” of music education today that prevent it from fulfilling its projected contributions to the musical lives of students and to the ‘music world’ that is so central a part of any society.<sup>1</sup> This failure to fulfill the lofty benefits claimed for it are in large part a source of the legitimation crisis facing music educators everywhere today and of the advocacy that is thus required to legitimate the value of music in education in the absence of concrete results society finds noteworthy and valuable.

Many in music education today have narrowly (or self-servingly) and thus mistakenly construed the music world as involving only *performing musicians* and their various *musics*. But, using the concept of the ‘art world’ described by leading philosophers of art as a model, the music world of a society includes *all* musical and music-related practices in that society. In our society, these include publishing music and books (etc.) about music; the manufacturing and merchandizing of instruments and related music technology and equipment; the recording industry, along with radio, MTV, downloading of music to computers; and the local music stores that have the most direct contact with the everyday musical needs of many people. Of course, it also incorporates performing groups like orchestras and opera companies—but also every kind of musical group or ‘artist’, amateur or professional, and the important roles of music management and agents. To all these, add music criticism and journalism, film and television music,

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music education and therapy, music scholarship of all kinds<sup>2</sup> and all the various musics and the social practices that occasion them (such as religion, ceremonies, dance, leisure-time hobbies, amateur practices, audiophile interests, etc.). And, finally (though far from comprehensively), our music world also embraces a host of so-called ‘everyday’ musical involvements that extend from the use of music by joggers, teens with their Walkman’s, in aerobics, and for various social occasions ranging from caroling, church choirs and sing-alongs, to selecting recorded music for dinner parties, weddings, and other social events.

In ignoring the breadth, pervasiveness, and importance of the music world (whether at a national or regional level, or simply in a local community), music educators have failed to notice—or, if they do, do not welcome—that it is active, vibrant, and thriving at every level. Except, however, for music education, with its performance and appreciation-as-connoisseurship models, and other practices and paradigms inherited from the Classical music traditions into which music teachers have been socialized. These traditions and paradigms are typically predicated on taken-for-granted assumptions, theories, and speculations about the quasi-sacred, autonomous, purely aesthetic value of music. Furthermore, these assumptions, theories, and paradigms are themselves historically situated traditions based on equally taken-for-granted assumptions, theories, and practices of other kinds, from earlier times. In fact, as ‘conserved’ by universities and conservatories, these layers of different (sometimes conflicting) traditions are themselves creating a major legitimation crisis, as is seen by the economic problems faced by the Classical music field—problems requiring increased government subsidy or private patronage.

Social and cultural theorist Theodor Adorno warned over a half-century ago that Classical music itself had been ‘commercialized’—had become an industry—and complained of the negative consequences for its integrity. Nonetheless, many in the Classical field of our music world ignore his admonition (though they are keenly focused

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on the income it offers them). A prime reason for this is that Classical traditions and scholarship eschew social theory and music sociology because these disciplines stress the very social role, dimensions, and practical contributions of music that are denied by the for-itself autonomy claimed by the doctrine of *aestheticism*<sup>3</sup> taken for granted in the field of Classical music. Thus, Classical music itself is gradually losing cultural and economic ground in comparison to just about any other sector of the music world.

The critical thinking and Critical Theory at the heart of the MayDay Group agenda is concerned to study, analyze, and critique whether school music should continue to be largely autonomous of society and of the many other fields that make up our music world.<sup>4</sup> In this, school music shares (or is the result of) the premise of Classical music's traditional criteria of aesthetic 'disinterestedness', purity, and thus *autonomy* from life—a premise philosopher of music Aaron Ridley derides and rebuts, calling it "automania" and its defenders "autonomaniacs."<sup>5</sup> Given the legitimation crisis of music education, and the ineffectiveness of advocacy in improving the 'position' of school music in the music world and society, the MayDay Group has generally focused on re-connecting school music with society—that is, with the wider music and social world to which music education presently seems to contribute very little, or at least not enough to establish itself in a favorable 'position' vis-à-vis other musical fields within the music world in which ordinary people, "just plain folks," engage, often without benefit of instruction.

Earlier issues of ACT have presented scholarship of a wide-ranging nature, much of it from disciplines and research fields that are often ignored, belittled, or denigrated in music and music education scholarship; or from voices within musical disciplines that have either been silenced, denounced, or disregarded for taking unpopular or new or challenging 'positions'. The scholarship found in ACT, then, has addressed issues that are central to understanding the factors that contribute to the unfavorable 'position' music education finds itself in today (and the ever-weakening 'position' of Classical music, at

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least in its ‘conserving’ and museum-like paradigms) and thus points to potential, even recommended, actions for change. The present issue continues along these lines with a collection of articles that, in one way or another, address issues that either have gone largely unnoticed or that present alternative perspectives on taken for granted paradigms in music and music education.

Mandy Stefanakis’ study of how music fulfills some very basic human needs in unique ways addresses aspects of human life and the human body that are too little considered in music and music education scholarship in recent years. It might be tempting for apologists of music education to add her analysis and findings to their vocabulary of advocacy were it not for the implications she draws from her study—implications that are considerably at odds with the autonomania typical of the aestheticism most advocacy accepts uncritically. The importance of music to ‘real-life’ or ‘everyday life’ needs has important implications for teaching it in a way calculated to have an impact on students’ (and later, adults’) choices and actions in their music world. Particularly interesting is the “New Basics” concept of curriculum currently finding favor in Queensland, Australia, that stresses “basic,” not in the usual terms rationalized by music education apologists, but in terms of the basic, everyday needs—including musical ones—of ‘everyday’ people.

Cecelia Torres and Jusamara Souza describe one portion of a project of the “Music Education and Everyday Life” group, centered at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. Though Brazil and Australia are widely separated geographically, Torres was fortunate to study at the University of Queensland, Australia, and thus it is not surprising that, like Stefanakis, the ‘everyday life’ theme should occupy her thinking. Among other interesting aspects of this is that this theme is clearly gaining currency in musical scholarship as the alternative to autonomania,<sup>6</sup> and that developments in one country can be related to those in another country. The shared fruits of one part of the larger project described in the present article also demonstrate some of the down-to-earth

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implications for both teaching and children's musical learning—in this case, for Grade 5 students.

Karen Snell's article is an especially different consideration of music *in* everyday life and of education *for* everyday life uses of music. She studies a large and popular music festival, the OM Festival, held each year in northern Ontario, Canada. While this study is of but one festival, the OM Festival is unique in the educational aspects—formal and informal—that continue to serve as the underlying rationale of its organizers and that, as reported in this study, have important, lasting influence on participants' musical lives and their music education long after a particular festival has come and gone. Snell recommends that music educators consider holding live, multi-day festivals, with similar formal and informal educational features, as a form of music education—a pedagogical strategy, if you will—that could involve or center on a local community and its music world.

Peter Gouzouasis treats the reader to yet another consideration of music education in relation to life: the newly emerging and popular technology and software that allows—indeed, facilitates—forms of musicking that heretofore have not been available, or not possible for musical neophytes. Much has been written in the last decade, of course, about computer assisted instruction in music. However, just as many people still use the computer mainly as a smart typewriter and fail to appreciate and learn its other, creative possibilities, so have music educators too often failed to appreciate and teach specifically *towards* various kinds of personal uses of computers and related technology (e.g., accompanying software) involving music. When technology is regarded not just as a teaching 'tool' but, as Marshall McLuhan recommended, as a "message" of its own, then it need not be limited to use simply as a teaching aid; it can be used by students at home, throughout life, as an 'instrument' for various kinds of musicking currently overlooked by school music. He argues, then, not for the FITness recommended by earlier experts ("fluency within information technology") but for FATness ("fluency within arts

technologies”), especially in our case, with music technologies, using the new GarageBand software as a case at point. He concludes that it is folly to ignore how students relate to music in their lives and the “hidden curriculum” (as he calls it) of their learning and musicking in the music world. He (rightly, I think) fears that inattention to the music world outside the school door and its potential for significant forms of musicking will leave music educators more and more distanced from the music world and reminds us that only taken-for-granted traditions hold us back from bravely entering these newly emerging aspects of what will be the music world of the future—with or without school music.

Finally, Rhoda Bernard provides another perspective on music in everyday life—in this case, in the lives of music teachers themselves. Unlike other accounts of music teacher identity that see music teachers socialized first as “musicians” and then (to varying degrees) socialized as “teachers” (in music education courses, student teaching, and on-the-job), Bernard emphasizes the impact of a music teacher’s own performing experiences on, first of all, “identity,” and suggests an identity of “musician-teacher” that combines what other models address separately, or sequentially; and, secondly, she stresses the impact of a teacher’s own performing experiences on how and what is taught in school. All this serves to highlight an under-appreciated facet of being a music teacher in comparison to teachers of other subjects: Music teachers are ‘trained’ practitioners and many remain active musicians in some way or another, while history teachers are rarely practicing historians, or chemistry teachers practicing chemists.

While she doesn’t mention this, there are potentially problematic consequences that can arise from this circumstance. For example, it can lead to a too narrow focus on the kind of performing that constituted the bulk of the university education of music teachers and that interests them outside of their teaching duties. This focus on performing overlooks or ignores the wealth of other musical practices in any music world that students could be ‘turned on’ to (for example, as described by Gouzouasis), and that

music teachers can address in helping students to gain beginning levels of competence that can serve them outside of school and throughout life in what will always be a changing music world. Another potential problem, one cited not infrequently by critics in our field, is the situation where music teachers—*viz.*, ensemble directors—‘perform’ an ensemble in ways that serve the director’s musical needs more than the students’ pragmatic and lasting educational needs—that is, the goal of developing and directly encouraging their independent musicianship and thus informing their musical capacities and choices for whatever musical fields they prefer, whenever in life.

In conclusion, this issue illustrates our continuing attempt at providing provocative and challenging theory, criticism, and useful insights. In music education (and music scholarship, generally) there exists too little opportunity for ‘off-beat’ research—scholarship and thinking that is ‘off the beaten path’. It may well be, then, that the various beaten paths have become ruts and that the more we travel those paths, the deeper the ruts, and the less likely it will be that we will want to or be able to get out from being in ‘over our heads’ with ineffective traditions. We hope readers find our efforts to explore alternate routes and destinations to be healthy and helpful, and we certainly encourage those who are already engaged in such scholarly exploration to consider ACT as a vehicle for sharing their work with others.

Tom Regelski

Helsinki, March 2005

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The idea of a “field” that is part of a particular ‘world’ and the jockeying for “position” by “fields” within that ‘world’ (and between different ‘worlds’) comes from sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Very briefly, in his various writings, Bourdieu defines “fields” of practice that exist as a collective ‘world’ of related practices—a highly differentiated ‘world’ within the larger social world that, in essence, functions like a super- or highly particularized field. For example, the ‘music world’ in our society ‘positions’ itself in relation to the ‘sports world’ or ‘art world’ for, say, our leisure time. Bourdieu



purposefully chose the word “field” (*champ* in French) to convey the active maneuvering for ‘position’ and advantage by athletes on various “fields” of play in sports (i.e., in various games within the sports world). This ‘positioning’ involves what often amounts to maneuvering for advantage between the fields in a ‘world’ as well as within a field itself. Thus jazz is a field within the music world today that contends with other musical fields for audiences, yet it is a ‘world’ to its sub-fields that, in turn, contend for their own share of such audiences. Similarly, music education is a field within the music world that seeks to ‘position’ itself favorably in that ‘world’ and in the society that sustains it. The sheer volume of recent attempts at advocacy demonstrate clearly that the ‘position’ of music education is not strong in the music world, or society-at-large, and that music educators realize this weakness but prefer to rationalize it rather than to do anything about it.

<sup>2</sup> Sociologists and anthropologists point out how talk and writing about music influences how we ‘hear’ music and, hence, how we value it. Traditional music scholarship has, therefore, literally ‘defined’ how people think about, hear, and use music—at least people who have been influenced by such talk (e.g., lectures) and writing, such as music teachers. However, music journalism is also important in this regard and music criticism itself has in recent years grown, as have the number of magazines, websites, etc., devoted to various kinds of popular, world, and other exoteric musics. Scholarship about these musics has also grown and it, too, has the effect of influencing how those musics are heard, valued, and used. All of this demonstrates that musical ‘meaning’ and value are determined in key ways by particular music worlds, their dynamics—the social, economic, political, educational, and other institutional forces (etc.) that sustain them—and, thus, by the historically situated and other particular conditions that change as rapidly as society does. In fact, some theorists suggest that changes in a music world are often central to social change, such as the impetus given to copyright laws in Western societies by printed music, or the social, legal, and technological changes wrought by downloading music from the Internet.

<sup>3</sup> See, David Whewell, “Aestheticism,” in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 6-9.

<sup>4</sup> An important source of the legitimation crisis of music education is that ‘school music’ has in effect become a musical field of its own—one that, however, has few, weak, or intangible connections to the rest of the music world or society. It is, therefore, disconnected from the larger music world outside the school and constitutes its own field of musical praxis that is limited almost totally to music in school—usually, at that, only in a particular school—during the school years. This accounts for its relatively low ‘position’ in the music world and in the social world at large.

<sup>5</sup> Aaron Ridley, *The Philosophy of Music: Themes and Variations* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004). Also, see the critique by Whewell cited in n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> See Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) and the “Symposium: Music’s Significance in Everyday Life,” in Vol. 1, No. 2 (December 2002) of this journal, which features several essay reviews of DeNora’s book by scholars in and outside of music and music education, along with DeNora’s reply.