

Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

The refereed journal of the



Volume 10, No. 2
December 2011

David J. Elliott
Editor

Electronic Article

Introduction

David J. Elliott

© David J. Elliott 2011 All rights reserved.

ISSN 1545-4517

The content of this article is the sole responsibility of the author. The ACT Journal and the Mayday Group are not liable for any legal actions that may arise involving the article's content, including, but not limited to, copyright infringement.

For further information, please point your Web Browser to <http://act.maydaygroup.org>

Introduction

David J. Elliott, Editor
New York University

This is the first issue of *Action, Criticism, & Theory for Music Education* that has been my privilege to edit. As the third editor of *ACT* since its inception in 2002, I owe much more to Thomas Regelski (Finland) and Wayne Bowman (Canada and the USA) than I have the space to express properly here. Suffice it to say that Tom and Wayne have not only given freely of their time and wisdom over the last several months to smooth my transition to this position, they have also established extremely high standards of scholarship and editorship, which I am committed to maintain. Indeed, and because Tom, Wayne, and *ACT*'s contributors have always shared a mutual "ethic of care" for scholarly excellence and integrity, *ACT* has become one of the leading journals in the field of music education. In short, and on behalf of the MayDay Group's membership and our many readers worldwide, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to Tom and Wayne for their extraordinary dedication to editing *ACT* so meticulously, rigorously, and imaginatively during the last ten years.

But there is more. Much more. The steady growth in the quantity and quality of contributors' submissions to and publications in *ACT* is also a result of the extraordinary work of a small corps of devoted volunteers who constitute our production team. Each member of this team is an exceptionally busy professor or graduate student who cares deeply about the Mayday Group Action Ideals, *ACT*, and our readership. Without their continuous and tireless efforts behind the scenes, this journal would not exist. Now is an appropriate time to acknowledge our huge debt to each member of this team, past and present.

In his first issue as editor (see issue 6.3, http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bowman_6_3.pdf), Wayne expressed his gratitude for the work of Darryl Coan (Illinois), Vince Bates (Missouri), PJ Heckman (New Jersey), Kristen Myers (Wisconsin), Chris Trinidad (British Columbia), Frank Abrahams (New Jersey), and David Lines (New Zealand). At present, Kristen Myers continues her superb work as our final copy-editor; Vince Bates is now the Associate Editor of *ACT*; and Chris Trinidad continues his work on the layout and design of each issue. Mary Kate Newell (Pennsylvania) and Frank Martignetti (New York) are recent additions to our team of Editorial Assistants. Our Editorial Advisory Board, supported by

members of the MayDay Group-at-large and outside reviewers, continues its outstanding work. Of course, Tom and Wayne will continue to play key roles as advisors, contributors, reviewers, and editors of special issues. In sum, *ACT* is not only a scholarly journal but, most importantly perhaps, a collaborative community of global scholars—our contributors, reviewers, readers, and members of our production team. Without each and all, *ACT* would not be what it has become: a top-tier academic journal with peer review and editorial processes as rigorous as any in the world.

As well as serving as a testament to the Action Ideals of the MayDay Group (MDG), *ACT* is deeply committed to maintaining worldwide availability through commercial-free open-access. Implicit in this commitment is *ACT*'s continuing dedication to “scholarly autonomy and independence.” Aside from the obvious meanings of this phrase, it emphasizes that *ACT* will never tie itself to a particular institution or publishing house because doing so would eventuate in several unacceptable consequences. One consequence would be the commercial necessity of charging subscription fees, which would limit our readership and the distribution of authors' ideas, especially in marginalized regions of the world. Another would be the need to constrain contributors' discussions to publishers' traditional norms of length and depth. Indeed, whereas many print journals restrict authors to 6000–9000 words, many *ACT* articles, past and present, are considerably longer. (For example, this issue includes two articles that are considerably longer.) Thus, as Wayne emphasized in his first issue as editor:

Any internet user, anywhere in the world, may read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles, and may use them *without cost* for any lawful purpose. The sole constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role for copyright in this domain, is to give authors (a) control over the integrity of their work and (b) the right to be properly acknowledged and cited. Thus, OA [open access] is entirely compatible with copyright, with processes of rigorous peer review, and indeed with all the other features and benefits of conventional scholarly literature. The primary difference is that expenses, which often constitute substantial barriers to access, are not borne by readers and users. (http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bowman6_3.pdf, 3)

In 2012, *ACT* will publish two special issues concerning the natures and roles of ethics in music, education, and music education. Another issue will be dedicated to a selection of papers presented at the 2011 MDG Colloquium, which was held at the University of Utah. As with the majority of past issues, however, *ACT* will be primarily concerned with publishing manuscripts we receive on a regular basis. In this regard, and as stated on the MayDay Group's website, I wish to emphasize that *ACT* continues to welcome submissions

dealing with critical, analytical, practical, theoretical and policy topics that apply, challenge, or extend matters related to the MayDay Group's "Action Ideals". (See: <http://www.maydaygroup.org/php/resources/general/actionforchange.pdf>) These ideals include a range of areas and strategies for needed change in music education and community music, and embrace a wide range of related topics, content, questions and issues. (See: <http://act.maydaygroup.org/php/policies.php>).

ACT 10/2. Regular issues of *ACT* often contain perspectives on and analyses of a wide range of topics in music, education, and music education. Sometimes these discussions coalesce around one or two identifiable themes; sometimes not. The articles in this issue resist simple categorization and encapsulation. If anything, they serve to confirm the profound breadth, depth, and continuously evolving natures and values of contemporary music education and community music. But how could it be otherwise? Indeed, the global, interlocking human activities of music, education, school music, and community music (not to mention the various theoretical lenses we can apply to them)—all of which are inherently fluid—will never cease to diverge, recombine, and deepen. And so it is that this issue features discussions by five distinguished scholars from Canada, Finland, Sweden, and the USA that range across the following topic areas: concepts of and links between freedom, constraint, and gender in popular musics; informal music teaching online; contrasting positions on the nature of praxial music education; rural music teaching in the USA; and arguments for fundamental revisions in music teacher education.

Cecilia Björck's discussion springs from Lucy Green's proposal that formal music education would be wise to examine how popular musicians learn and use informal learning as a model. While acknowledging Green's point, Björck emphasizes that, in places where popular musics have been included in formal music education for many years (e.g., in Björck's Swedish context), the assumed formal/informal duality is too simplistic because it hides many unexamined and contested layers of discourse and practice. For example, when the international popular music industry is probed in relation to its aims, biases, and local manifestations, it is clear that this genre/style category is "permeated by gender norms and expectations" and that sex-based imbalances in performance and education are exceedingly complex. Björck is especially concerned, of course, with school manifestations of these norms, practices, and biases.

Following from the above, Björck seeks to problematize the freedom/constraint dualism as it relates to popular musics in general and gender in particular. In doing so, she utilizes Foucault's critical constructionist framework. Within this part of her essay she makes many trenchant observations on gender and popular music history, stereotypes of masculinity/femininity in pop styles, youth subcultures, performativity, and power and oppression. Björck concludes that "concepts of freedom and constraint in relation to popular music-making" need to be "troubled" to reveal how "popular music-making may function as empowering but also as disempowering" and to create a viable alternative to liberalist and structuralist ideas of power, resistance, freedom, subjectivity, ownership, and social change. In sum, says Björck, the "transgressive and transformative processes [of popular music] should be seen as constituted not by freedom *or* constraint respectively, but by both."

Janice Waldron's essay examines the online teaching and learning context of the Banjo Hangout (BH) community (www.banjohangout.org) with particular attention to two genres: Old Time and Bluegrass banjo music. "Established in 2000, the BH has 51,000 members, and, on a typical afternoon, approximately 1100 to 1300 members are online surfing the site." Waldron's purpose is twofold. First, she aims to investigate the learning and teaching strategies that participants employ in the BH community in order to draw implications for informal music learning, lifelong music learning, and formal school music education, including aspects of identity, practice, and meaning in the "third space" of virtual music communities. In reading her arguments, many important questions come to mind. For example: What is the nature of "online community"? How does hyperconnectivity alter traditional, participatory, face-to-face interactions typically associated with "folk musics" and their inter-personal connections? Do practices of music making online involve distinctive ethical concerns?

Waldron's second aim is embodied in her methodology. She approaches her chosen topic and research site by means of cyber ethnographic methods of participant-observation that utilize computer-mediated-communication (CMC), blogging, forum posts, e-mail, chat room conversations, hyperlinks to YouTube, and other Internet learning resources. By doing so, she intends to demonstrate the appropriateness of employing cyber ethnography for online qualitative research in music education and community music. Indeed, Waldron argues that while cyber ethnography is an increasingly prevalent methodology in the social sciences, media research, and musicology, music educators have yet to embrace or appreciate the full

potential of this research paradigm. In summary, Waldron's essay not only extends the concept of informal learning to musical "happenings" online, it represents a bold effort to expand conventional notions of music education research.

Thomas Regelski offers an important and timely counterargument to Philip Alperson's recent discussion, "Robust Praxialism and the Anti-Aesthetic Turn." On one hand, notes Regelski, Alperson reaffirms the importance of "music as praxis" (a seminal concept he originally introduced in 1991) and argues strongly that praxialism is thriving in contemporary music education. As Regelski explains in great detail, however, Alperson is seriously mistaken in his claim that an adequate explanation of the meaning and value of music is only possible by incorporating a range of traditional aesthetic concepts.

Regelski's discussion is exceedingly deep and lucid. He examines the many problems and pitfalls inherent in employing aesthetic concepts to understand the natures and values of music and provides a clear and erudite discussion of "music as praxis" and music education conceived as praxis. In doing so, he emphasizes that if music is not understood properly as a state of praxis, then "the endless perplexities of translating the ambiguities of . . . aesthetic theories into tangible and practicable teaching practices . . . conspire against predictable and pragmatic pedagogical results."

The threads of Regelski's essay are difficult to tie together simply. Suffice it to say that Regelski exposes the weaknesses of Alperson's argument by explaining many details of praxis and aesthetics that Alperson overlooks, omits, and/or confuses. In doing so, Regelski argues that "praxial theories of music and music education not only do not need aesthetic speculations to be robust; they are vastly more robust without them," and that "music and music education should continue to embrace and advance a post-aesthetic paradigm—a praxial one . . . unencumbered by the unnecessary ballast of 'aesthetic this, aesthetic that, aesthetic whatever'."

"How would you like to be called 'poor white trash'?" Using the lenses of his personal, family, social, cultural, and musical experiences in and out of school, **Vincent Bates** presents an illuminating analysis of the actual and potential oppressions experienced by "poor, white, rural school music students in the United States." He argues that "poor white trash" is one of many common and degrading "boundary terms" that create and enforce multiple cultural, cognitive, and emotional divides among so-called rural, urban, and

suburban Americans and (more importantly for Bates) among a large portion of the 10 million public school children who attend rural schools.

In the course of his essay, Bates unpacks many key terms, concepts, and assumptions. In relation to “poor,” he notes that, in the case of his family, “we called ourselves ‘poor’ and [but] we were proud of it,” a statement that he elaborates from analytic, narrative, and emotional stances. For example, he explains that, for his close and extended family, the word poor was “a badge of honor—that we had to learn to work hard and stick together to ‘make ends meet’ and we didn’t generally seek help from others.” Using many personal examples (including wonderful family photos), Bates unfolds and supports his many arguments, including his point that rather than linking “poor-white-rural” to a specific group of people in a specific location, it’s much more appropriate and useful “to view poor-white-rural as more of an intersection between class, race, and/or geographical location. In other words, while poor-white-rural can designate a specific oppressed group, the stigma that confounds white privilege with poverty and rurality extends well beyond a single demographic.”

Of course, Bates also paints a vivid portrait of his home, community, and school music making in the areas where he grew up, including his earliest experiences “along the border between Utah and Nevada—100 miles from the nearest town and 30 miles from the nearest paved road.” In this context, says Bates, “we were a musically rich family.” He adds that, in general, his school band music experiences were positive. A key issue for him, however, pivots on the issue of whether school music experiences were sufficiently “needs fulfilling in the long-term as they could have been or as outside-of-school experiences have been.” Additionally, he challenges the familiar but problematic assumption that traditional school music is inherently “good” for fostering “social mobility” (a concept he also unpacks carefully): “Formal music education (school music) is more about the preservation and perpetuation of social inequalities than it is about fostering social mobility.”

Richard Colwell’s essay takes us in a somewhat different direction. At this point in time, says Colwell, many issues and assumptions related to teacher education and teacher quality in the USA are under severe scrutiny. He argues that music educators should embrace the current crisis in American education in order to reassess and revise the dominant music teacher education curriculum paradigm, which is rooted in the curriculum model that Karl Gehrken first formulated in 1922. For example, Colwell argues that we would do well to offer undergraduates more study and career options, including the option of becoming not

only excellent musician-practitioners but also/or musician-scholars. Doing so would involve creating “one or more distinctive [undergraduate] teacher education programs in music” by adding a second or third track to the traditional undergraduate curriculum. Colwell is not advocating that all music teacher education programs do so, only some: “I understand that a practice-based undergraduate curriculum has been and continues to be excellent preparation for many, if not most, music teachers.” That said, he is not convinced—indeed, he is highly skeptical—that maintaining the status quo will improve music education in the future.

Colwell supports his arguments with a wealth of research from inside, outside, and across the borders of music, education, and music education. He begins with a critique of the music teacher education literature, which demonstrates that current trends in music teacher certification do not address his main concerns. From this starting point, Colwell moves on to suggest that we should examine carefully the possibility that future music educators, especially scholar-musicians, should study a non-music discipline in depth, a point he argues with reference to the humanities. Lastly, he provides a detailed examination of research concerning key aspects of pedagogical content knowledge that music teacher education faculty need to include in scholar-musician degree programs (if not in music teacher education programs in general): “motivation, assessment, critical thinking, and transfer.” In conclusion, Colwell asks this: “If someone should be addressing important questions in arts policy and the philosophical base for the importance of music education, why not a prepared music educator, one whose expertise extends beyond correcting the flatting by the sopranos, and multiple music education experts working both separately and together?”

I suggested previously that while it sometimes happens that the contents of *ACT*'s regular issues coalesce around identifiable themes, this does not always hold, as the diverse topics and perspectives in this issue illustrate clearly. Yet, diversity is a theme of its own: it serves to emphasize the profound and increasing complexity, fluidity, and continuously evolving nature of global efforts to theorize and practice music education and community music. I hope readers will find this issue's expressions of these complexities thought provoking and useful.