

Dionysus Redux: Rethinking the Teaching of Music

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Over the years, I have thought a great deal about music and, more particularly, about the teaching of music. This has often led me far away from the usual thinking about those subjects. I have even, as I do now, put my thoughts to paper, and as all professors are expected to do from time to time, I have "disseminated" my thoughts through publication. I hope that the reader does not think it excessively egoistic that I have even reflected on those past thoughts, much as a baby uses analytical fascination with certain bodily outcomes as an important step towards learning to control them. It should come as no surprise that in rereading my earlier efforts, I have found them to be reflective of various of what Gail Sheehy once called "passages," and what she now calls in the true spirit of Western civilization, "*new passages*."¹ My passages have embraced various roles including student, performer, conductor, teacher, historian, administrator, and now in my dotage, dispenser of advice.

It is perhaps ironic that, as a music historian, I am normally little interested in my own past. However, my past was thrust upon me when an article that I had written some years ago for this journal, "The Flaw in the Ointment: Who Will Teach the Understand-

ing of Music?" was reprinted in another.² This came without my foreknowledge and caused me an instant anxiety attack. "My God, what did I write?" flashed through my mind in bold letters. Or, more appropriately, "Whom did I offend this time?" Rereading that article has led to me to ponder the question anew, this time from the perspective of professor, and like most professors, I cannot resist sharing my thoughts.

I had expected by now to be more sanguine, perhaps even phlegmatic, about issues such as the teaching and learning of music. Instead I find myself more choleric than ever. I do not favor diatribe as a form of argument, but in gleaning what I still believe of what I earlier wrote from the chaff I wish I never had, I find some arguments still relevant, but in a different way, and new arguments suggesting themselves. It was after fifteen years in the abyss of administration that I decided I would once again become a teacher. I wish in some ways that I had remained unchanged from my earlier professorial incarnation, but of course that is not realistic. When I expressed some slightly nervous anticipation about resuming my old persona, a friend said gently, "Don't worry, music hasn't changed that much." But, as I discovered with some pleasure, I have.

Caveat

I think I owe the reader a clue about what is to follow so that an intelligent decision may be made whether or not to read on. For a long time I have felt, along with many others I am sure, that an essential ingredient has been missing in the teaching of music. I know that I am not alone in my earlier thinking that the missing link had to do with *how* music is taught (at all levels of the teaching food chain) rather than *what* is being taught. That of course assumes that they can be separated. My most recent thinking, however, has convinced me that the latter is causing the problem. In the following paragraphs, I would like to illuminate my view that it is the *what* that is the radix of the problem, and of course that has much to do with the *how* as well. The missing *what* is in my current view the *hedonic* quality of music, and I hope that it does not strike the reader as excessively self-indulgent that I shall take my time in elaborating upon that somewhat mysterious element. I wish to consider the view that the hedonic element was once the entire *raison d'être* for music, not to mention the other arts, and to speculate on why that element has disappeared. I then wish to propose how this aspect of musical experience might be restored so that not only the experience of music

might once again be construed as pleasurable, but the learning of it as well.

Opposing Dualisms

In one of my earlier articles,³ I noted the tendency of Western thought to divide all thinking into dualities or polarities—black-white, good-evil, right-left, nature-nurture, sacred-secular, Eastern-Western, highbrow-lowbrow, and especially, rational-emotional. I used the term *Manichaeism* to describe this model of thinking, but upon reflection, I think I was wrong. Manichaeism attempted to reconcile or syncretize opposing dualisms, whereas in our Western culture we rarely do so, for that might suggest the defeat of the side we most favored. We are so governed by a bias toward competition, perhaps because of our long love affair with pure capitalism and/or sports, that if one position is to prevail, the other must fail. This is the kind of thinking so typical of the many television programs that consist of people shouting and yelling their opposing views with no hope of reconciliation. The dualistic kind of thinking is often applied to music—namely, form-content, Bach-Handel, Brahms-Wagner, Classic-Romantic, program-absolute, and so on. I suppose that these unreconciled dualisms exist because of the brain's inability to hold two opposing or contradictory thoughts at the same time, but that is only speculation. The brain, in any event, is a sort of information bottleneck and finds these polarities helpful in getting things organized.

A New Dualism

To the endless list of opposing dualisms I add yet another, one that I hope will explain the current state of music teaching and why much of it doesn't seem to work very well. The dualism I wish to illuminate is what I will call hedonic-anhedonic, and if the reader can for a moment suspend the normal belief systems/superstitions that govern our professional lives, I will attempt to explain what I mean.

I have previously written about the great difficulties provided by the branch of philosophy called value theory. One of the best explainers of value theory for

the philosophy-challenged was Georg Henrik von Wright's little book, *The Varieties of Goodness*.⁴ Wright placed goodness into several categories. Among them were utilitarian goodness, moral goodness, ethical goodness, the good of a being, technical goodness, and so on. It is interesting to note that the category he called hedonic goodness had to be justified in ways that moral goodness, or ethical goodness, or even the technical did not. Here, I am using the term *hedonic goodness* to cover much the same territory as the word *pleasure*. Thomas Jefferson, no slouch as an amateur philosopher, felt no particular qualms when he wrote that among the *self-evident truths*, no less than life and liberty, was the pursuit of happiness, which we could also equate with the hedonic. The pursuit of happiness, or pleasure, has continued unabated to the present day, not unlike my little dachshund who persists in pursuing automobiles without the foggiest idea of what an automobile is, or for that matter, what he would do with one if he caught it. It is much the same with the hedonic, and by extension, music. How many of us could or would deny that music at its most basic and fundamental level is an example of hedonic goodness or pleasurable pursuit? Yet, how often do we persist in the notion that this does not mean actually catching the hedonic, only pursuing it, often by the same inefficient means that short legs provide my dog? Because of various brain mechanisms that we often call "rationalization," we are able to convince ourselves that pleasure was not what we were after, that there was something else we wanted, and that pleasure was only the means by which we were pursuing that wanted thing. Do we know what we want? Most of us think so until pressed to articulate it, and then as often as not the question becomes one that erupts from many students these days: "Why do we have to know that?"

I use the term *anhedonic* to represent the other pole, though here I am drawing not on the psychological literature, which considers anhedonia to stand for one's inability to experience pleasure. Rather, I use the term to describe some-

thing that seems valuable not because it is pleasurable, but rather more because it isn't pleasurable—in other words, it invokes the "absence of pleasure."

The Teaching of Teaching

I asked a serious question in the subtitle of the article referred to above—"Who Will Teach the Understanding of Music?" The reason that I was somewhat dismayed by seeing the article reprinted was because from the vantage point of the administrator, I was rather vituperative towards anyone who was trying to evade, or more often, evading the question all together. These people are now my colleagues. Of course "understanding," as I used it in the title, is a loaded word, an open concept that requires a context for definition, but I didn't reveal that in my article. I assumed that everybody would just know what understanding meant, the way everybody thinks they know what love means. Administrators do that, and some get very good at it.

One of the really big problems for teaching the understanding of music, as I have noted, is that teachers of music in the schools (as opposed to universities or colleges, which bear blessed little resemblance to schools) had to go to a university or college before they could become teachers. (The logic of that has not recently been evaluated, but that would have to be another essay.) There they found themselves in a department of music. The word *department* normally stands for a distinct, usually specialized division of a large organization. I have long held that *compartment* would be the better word for use in specifically academic organizations. In a generic university, departments are now so distinct and specialized that they cannot or will not talk to or otherwise communicate with other departments, and it has long been the case that subdepartments of a music department cannot or will not communicate with or talk to other subdepartments. In many cases, the subdepartments consist of a single superspecialist, so that in many music departments, the individual members do not even talk to each other, unless, of course, it is for the purpose of denying

someone else a promotion. Thus, a typical music department is often a conglomeration (organization is too generous a term) of a bunch of distinct and specialized compartments, much like the containers that one sees being loaded onto ships. We all know that loneliness breeds eccentricity; neurosis; and, as I have observed elsewhere, more serious mental conditions such as paranoid schizophrenia. To be absolutely empirical about it, I have one colleague who will no longer even talk to himself. Multiply this separateness by a number too high for calculation, and we have a measure of the division that exists between a music department and whatever unit happens to govern the teaching of teaching, and/or the state board that certifies teachers.

Anhedonic Music

I will leave any discussion of the teaching of teaching to those with a finer sense of the ridiculous. I will now proceed to elaborate on what I consider to be the "flaw in the ointment" in the teaching of the understanding of music. I teach my undergraduate students the fairly simplistic model of history that holds that history is a constant and expanding spiral of answers to the related questions, "What is it?" and "How did it come about?" If there is time at the end of the hour, we ask "Why?" The answer to the first question, insofar as the teaching of music in the university is presently concerned, is that music is something anhedonic. What else could explain it? Walk into any theory class on any given day and observe that music is being taught as an *abstract system* of identifiable parts, each of which can be observed in isolation from the rest of the system. When the system is thoroughly defined, dissected, analyzed, and picked apart, the work is done. If there is anything hedonic in this venture, it is the theorists' pleasure in doing theory. Rarely does one find any evidence of the hedonic in the students' experience of the theoretical, unless the student has already made plans to enter the professoriate or law school. To this day, I have never heard a theorist attempt to explain what is hedonic about the music, or how

affect of any kind is achieved. I have not heard very often that affect is even relevant. In fact, rarely have I heard a theorist begin with the *experience* of the music itself, rather than with an abstraction from the music. This abstraction is treated as reification, that is, the abstraction is treated as some physical reality, capable of some sort of scientific observation.

Theory in the university is most often taught not by theorists but by composers

Hedonic." However, I don't know how many of these composers of pleasurable music will fare in their academic appointments, much less keep them.

My current clan affiliation is with musicology, and I have often argued that the last people who should be teaching the history of music are musicologists. Musicologists' ideas of "whatisit" differ extraordinarily from those of the theorists. The "whatisit" for a musicologist is most often not music,

We must find a way of teaching that does not place all the focus on music as an abstract, rational, anhedonic system.

whose primary audience therefore consists of those who will support them for tenure. We have entered into an entirely new age of patronage that has yet to prove salutary to the art. Their compositions are usually premiered to small groups of listeners, and it is de rigueur to accompany the new work not with a program, as with Berlioz or Liszt, but with an *analysis* of the piece. Some of these analytical programs take longer to read than the piece does to hear, and they are often more interesting. I once told a friend (still a friend) who introduced a new work at a conference of university composers that while I hated the piece, I thought the analysis was very entertaining. I know of one such composer who frames his scores and hangs them on walls as graphic art. These anhedonic composers are often trained in a tradition extending out from Webern, Boulez, Babbitt, and others whose music never tried to be hedonic. These university composers, by way of their theory classes, are the primary ones teaching our students to understand music. Change is on the way among composers who are sometimes called "Neo-Romantic," a term that I think should be replaced by "Neo-

but facts about music, as many musicologists freely admit. Currently, that may have to do more with gender orientation and power relationships, and the type of paper on which the music was first written down, than with any musical experience. I find little in the musicological literature that would serve to explain the affect of a piece of music, how or why a piece of music is hedonic, or how or why a piece could become pleasurable, nor do I find much in the general students' experience of musicology that would indicate that pleasure has much whatsoever to do with the process of learning music history. Musicologists' earlier intense dislike of Mahler had much to do with his highly emotional, affective, and hedonic music. Audiences throughout the world have smitten that kind of musicological thinking down at the ticket office. The average music-history text devotes less than a half-page to Tchaikovsky's symphonies, and I wonder if this is not some form of reaction to nonmusicologists' enjoyment of them. Puccini gets only a couple of sentences in some history books, presumably because he offers a pleasurable theatrical experience. Even Leonin gets more inches than that.

Western and Non-Western Music

The gentle reader has by now concluded that I am consumed with bashing and trashing and have nothing nice to say about anyone engaged with what is recently called the "enterprise of education." That is not so. I marvel at philosophers' endeavoring to explain things, however wrongheaded they might sometimes be, and I also respect many ethnomusicologists who have a better understanding of the pleasures of music than almost anyone in the profession. One of my early mentors, Charles Seeger, became fascinated with "non-Western" music long before it became politically correct and multicultural, and some even credit him for making it into a disciplined realm of thought about music. Charles was born a philosopher and never had to struggle to become one. That is why he was a better teacher in his late seventies, deaf as he was, than I will ever be. He loved music precisely *because* it was hedonic and he never feared to say so, and many of his explanations of music began right there, with the pleasurable *experience* of music. Ethnomusicology has only recently become historical in some of its orientation, but yet it has for many, many years revealed more about history than have some other disciplines. That is because ethnomusicologists began by observing cultures that still valued music because, and in some cases only because, it was hedonic—cultures as diverse as parts of Africa, India, and Java. I suppose that is why the British found this music to be "exotic." People enjoyed it. In fact, my first course in non-Western music was called that, "Exotic Music." Bruno Nettl, for one, has long advocated looking at Western music through the eyes and ears of the ethnomusicologist. To explain his view would be too much of a digression for even me because I am a historian, dammit, and I want to know how the current situation came about.

I wrote the article entitled "Cassandra's Curse" because someone asked me to, a clear indication of my susceptibility to flattery. I was asked to fantasize (prophecy is too much even for me) the "future evolution of Western art music" two concepts that I hold in fair disdain.

Cassandra, you will recall, was given the ability to foresee the future, and her curse was the inability to do anything about it. To begin the article, I subjected myself to the questionable discipline of defining both evolution and Western music. How could I but fail? If ever there were examples of the reification fallacy, one need look no farther than the idea of music evolving.

There are various theories of what makes music "Western," among them the fact that Western music is written down and, more recently, written prescriptively. This might date the beginning of the history of Western music at around the ninth century. Another theory states that Western music began with music *composed* as "pieces" of music, or works, or in the written form, things. Most words that begin with "com" imply a putting together of something from constituent parts, and so it is with composition and composting. A salient feature of the history of Western music is the notion that it has continuously evolved, which places great emphasis on novelty and "newness." The treatment of discrete musical works as historical "events" invites a level of abstraction that is at the heart of the study of Western music: musical works are things, like rocks, capable of analysis and description. Music in this view is not process, or experience. We constantly look for the beginnings of things in typical Western history so that we can place these things in some rational model of development or, metaphorically, evolution.

Looking for the beginning of Western music, as important as it is to some people, is like looking for the beginning of a circle, but since we are *Western*, we have to start somewhere. Otherwise we wouldn't know when we have passed *go*. The simplest place to start is where others have started, and so the most obvious thing to do would be to start where Donald Grout started when he wrote *History of Western Music*.⁵ Grout said, and legions of music history teachers have echoed, that Western music started in Greece. If we have to blame our current state of affairs on anyone, it might as well be the Greeks. This is not

entirely fair if we accept that Pythagoras learned much of his trade in Egypt and that Mani (or Manes), the originator of Manichaeism, was Persian, but we have to start somewhere, so why not the Greeks. We can find many examples of polar dualisms in the work of ancient Greek philosophers, and especially in Greek mythology, and few are more clearly laid out than the ideals associated with the religions of Dionysus and Apollo. These two names came to symbolize in the writings of Nietzsche two different aspects of music. However, instead of seeking syncretism, as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer before him tried to do, we have come to use these names to emphasize polarities. I can even stretch the implications of these names to symbolize the hedonic and the anhedonic. I have come to the conclusion that the historical effort to keep these concepts polar instead of reconciling them is what has brought us to where we are in the teaching of music, and that is why a lot of that teaching is not working very well.

Gifts of the Greeks

Westerners have generally idolized the Greeks, and, to some extent, with good reason. After all, it was Thales who gave us science as well as the over-generalization, Pythagoras who gave us mathematics, Socrates who taught us to think abstractly, and Plato who taught us how to reason clearly. The Greeks also gave us sophistry, to which they later gave an undeservedly bad name. Without the sophists, teachers would not be paid today, nor would we have a system of education based almost entirely on being talked at.

Not all cultures valued the Greeks as we do now, and one has only to read what the Persians thought of their endless questioning and arguing to wonder if there is not another side to all of this intellectual hero worship. The Persians thought that the Greeks were especially sly with words and therefore not to be trusted. "Wriggling eels," they called them. As with all things intellectual, there is danger in looking at only one side of things. We "know" the Greeks largely through what has been called

their “classical” age. In Western Civilization classes, we come to the Greeks through Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and by default we begin to believe that what they taught is the sum total of what was Greek culture. How often are we taught Pythagoras’s extraordinarily nonrational side, that he founded a mystical religion, that his religious followers would not eat beans because they contained the transmigrating souls of humans, that Pythagoras himself would not eat meat of any kind because he was worried that he might be eating some departed ancestor? That doesn’t sound much like the fellow we normally associate with the founder of mathematics and music theory. How much do we know about Greek religion before the fifth century B.C.? What do we really know about the music that Plato protested against so vigorously in his *Republic*? We know really very little of this Greek music because only about one thousand bars have come down to us, and this includes a lot of conjectural supplements. We have only about twenty pieces of music from over seven centuries, and we are not at all sure how they might have sounded. We *do* know a great deal about Greek music theory. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, enough Greek writings survived for Boethius to give us a fair picture of the abstract system that was the theory of Greek music. And a highly abstract system it is. One must wonder what Plato got so exercised about in the *Republic* if the music he listened to followed those theoretical rules. What could it have been that led him to propose one of the earliest forms of musical censorship, one that politicians and religious reformers have repeated with each generation down to the present?

Dionysus and Dionysism

One of the more interesting aspects of the Greeks is that they were remarkably tolerant of a whole host of gods. Many cultures are or have been like that. I have a close friend from Japan, a Christian, who was married in a Shinto ceremony and teaches at a strict Buddhist college without any problems at all in reconcil-

ing these various theologies. This is characteristic of a significant number of other cultures today, or at least those that have been able to avoid monotheistic missionaries. Clearly, the most popular Greek god among the group known as the Olympians was Dionysus, that exceptionally interesting fellow I mentioned in the title. It is typical that we refer to religions we don’t approve of as “cults,” and therefore we have grown accustomed to the term *Cult of Dionysus*, a term I will hereafter reject. Dionysus is often casually dismissed as merely the god of wine and revelry, a god who promoted a cult of heightened pleasure for the sake *only* of pleasure. There is considerably more to it than that. The followers of Dionysus sought wisdom and spiritual enlightenment through ecstasy, a radical notion in the present day, when ecstasy is thought of primarily as the byproduct of one or another gravely sinful behavior. Ecstasy was considered to be the transcending of one’s senses—literally, driving out one’s senses—so that one is carried above and beyond rational thought. This condition was desirable because one’s spirit or mind could then receive enlightenment. It was believed that ecstasy could endow a person with divine creativity. Ecstasy was highly valued by the Dionysians as both a way to divine inspiration and, if not the only, certainly the best path to enlightenment and wisdom. Ecstasy was a positive, liberating condition, one to be highly valued and pursued by whatever means. It joined the worshiper with nature, and Dionysism had a reverence for nature that is finding resonance again in the present day.

Ecstasy could be achieved in a number of ways, including ecstatic and often nude dancing (cf. John Mellencamp’s popular CD “Dance Naked”) through nonreproductive sex, which had not yet achieved the status of carnal sin; through music; and through sung drama. The achievement of ecstasy could be aided by alcohol in the form of wine. These activities were sacred, and in the latter stages of the religion, they were accompanied by considerable ritual and ceremony. The religious celebrations of Dionysus gave us our first the-

atres, and Dionysism gave its worshipers a great deal in the way of musical pleasure. We are told that, from time to time, things got a bit carried away, as we would expect from the group pursuit of ecstasy, and we have considerable evidence of what today might seem bizarre behaviors, especially by the maenads, who I once saw described as “unnaturally excited women.” Women were the primary followers of Dionysus.

In the main, Dionysists were concerned with a different part of the soul/mind than were Plato and his followers, and the popularity of Dionysism made it a distinct threat to emerging monotheistic religions, not least of which was Christianity. In its early days, Christianity borrowed from Dionysist practices in the development of Christian rituals. The *Confessions of St. Augustine* reflect the inner conflict caused by a Dionysian experience of music within the context of Christian worship.

The ceremonies that honored Dionysus were extremely important to the early development of what we think of now as the arts. Choral song in honor of Dionysus led to tragedy and comedy. The dithyramb became an extremely influential musicopoetic genre. The aulos was the primary instrument associated with Dionysian ceremonies, and it was capable of enormous emotional power and was almost magical in its effect. It was essential to the ecstatic worship of Dionysus. Aulos players were generally professional, and were exceptionally skilled at arousing emotion. Dionysian worship was unthinkable without instrumental music and dancing of the most exciting kind.

But it was worship, and ecstasy in worshiping this deity was thought to be good. This attitude still holds today in some of the television worship services that put whole congregations into exactly the same sort of ecstasy and even trance as the ancient Dionysists, though without much in the way of nudity and alcohol. Dionysism was generally a benign religion, worshiping nature, opposing violence, valuing spiritual enlightenment, emphasizing the worth of the individual, and so on. It was not judgmental, and it did not punish human

feelings. However, new religions began to spread in the West, including Greece—religions such as Orphism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Whatever the original intentions of their founders, these religions became essentially state religions of a moralistic kind and were often used as instruments of conquest. Orphism was a descendant of Dionysism, an adaptation or a reformation of it, and although the origins are obscure, most musicians know the myth of Orpheus as the spirit of music. He was killed by the Dionysian maenads. Orphism gradually changed Dionysism, modifying it by bringing it under greater and more rigid control and attacking various of the rites and rituals. Orphism had a severe moralizing effect on Dionysism, putting great emphasis on abstinence and the renunciation of desire. Ecstasy was no longer a central feature of religious celebration. Followers were strictly vegetarian, wore white clothes, were extremely moral in their behavior, and tried to purge themselves of all Dionysian aspects of their personality, including the pursuit of ecstasy. Orphism can be found in the religious doctrines of Pythagoras, and Orphism was a powerful influence in preparing the people for the coming of Christianity.

Dionysism was violently attacked in Rome, which passed severe laws against the orgiastic rites of what was now always referred to as a cult. It is likely that several thousand people were executed in an attempt to repress Dionysism. The cult of Mithras was probably an effort to return to Dionysian ideals and beliefs, as one can note in its practices and rituals. The rites of Mithras were preceded by banquets at which bread and wine were consumed. The birth of Mithras was celebrated on December 25. This cult was opposed by Christianity, however much this latter religion borrowed from Mithraism. When Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire, Mithraism, along with all vestiges of Dionysism, went underground and all but disappeared.

Nearly all music educators are familiar with Plato and his *Republic* and with what he thought about emotionalism in

music—it was dangerous on purely moral grounds, and perhaps more to the point, it was dangerous on political grounds. Plato greatly distrusted the power of music over human emotions, and therein lies a clue to his thinking. Nearly all writings about Plato and music stress this single point, that he was concerned with the power of music over humans and their emotions. Think for a moment about the dynamic here implied. Music was a strong force, and in Plato's view not a benign one, that could make people into something other than they ought to be. Plato thought that certain types of music were of themselves *bad*, because these musics could overpower people and their moral sense. Music had to be controlled for the good of the state. Rarely do we hear that music is a positive force that aids the human in achieving a higher state of emotional arousal and enlightenment, as with the by now hated Dionysists. Rather, precisely because of the fear of emotional arousal, any music that contributes to it must of necessity be repressed. Plato considered music and musical instruments to be seductive, particularly the instrument of Dionysus, the aulos. He was also opposed to the professional musicians who developed their skills in competitions. Plato was very concerned about complicated rhythms and complex musical forms. He was much impressed by Spartan simplicity and that the Spartans valued only ancient music that had remained essentially unchanged over many years. The Spartans severely punished those who departed from their ancient traditions. The worst punishment of all was that applied to Terpander by depriving him of his musical instrument, his greatest source of pleasure. Oh, to be sure, there was good music that could have good results, but that was music subjected to strict moderation, emotional control, and enjoyed through contemplation. As we see, music became a kind of political football in the way that Social Security, Medicare, Rap Music, and various etceteras are today. Plato thought that music should be used only for the attainment of sound morality, and he expounded this view in a docu-

ment that purported to dictate how the ideal state should operate and how music could serve this political end.

In spite of every effort to keep Dionysus in his closet, the extraordinary forces that we associate with him on both the psychological and physical levels are difficult to keep locked up. Freud taught us that. If Dionysus comes out of the closet, as a favorite southern legislator put it in another context, "we are opening a whole box of Pandoras."

Bias toward the Rational

It is axiomatic that every article must have at least one point, and I have finally reached mine. We have seen through history a constant battle between Dionysism and the Apollonian efforts to control, rationalize, or entirely repress it. At this point, I want to associate Dionysism clearly with the hedonic and its Apollonian polar opposite with the anhedonic. I believe, further, that the anhedonic approach to the teaching of music has come to dominate music teaching in the colleges and universities and, insofar as that has influenced the training of music educators in the schools, at all levels. I believe that this is due largely to an unconcealed bias in favor of the rational spirit as represented by Plato and his contemporaries, a bias that drives most activities in a university, save for the tenure process. It is evident that in most circles, the forces of rationalism and abstractionism have won most of the battles. It is equally apparent that the Dionysiac impulse seems to be winning the war on a larger front. In the next paragraphs, I would like to work toward a point of view that does not necessarily value one side of the dualism by devaluing the other. Rather, what is needed is a change of emphasis at the most basic levels if the teaching of music is to be successful in the future.

I once wrote an article called "The Mind's Ear,"⁶ in which I attempted to simplify some of the work that is going on in brain research as it applies to music. Brain researchers stand opposite to many who have tried to develop philosophically based theories of mind, which go all the way back to the Greeks once again but were articulated for the modern

age most clearly by Descartes. The materialists hold that the brain *is* the mind and the dualists hold that brain and mind are quite different. The materialists are trying to bridge that gap, although most dualists continue to maintain that such bridges are impossible.

Together with that line of thought is another that questions the traditional concepts of intelligence, which have long been measured in purely rational terms, and in the ability for abstraction,

and evolutionary psychology are causing people to speculate more than ever before upon the origins of such concepts as feelings, emotions, pleasure, love, morality, and so on. This is one of the most exciting periods of intellectual ferment in my memory, and I believe that the ramifications for the teaching and learning of music are absolutely incredible. Let me tiptoe around for a bit in the fields of speculation and suggest what I think might be in store for music educa-

forego food and water as long as the electricity is available. Similar studies have been conducted on humans, especially in the area of drug research, and similar conclusions have been drawn—that humans have a pleasure center that is susceptible to both electrical and chemical stimulation. Music has been demonstrated to be an effective stimulus for such a phenomenon.

Third, current research into the hearing process traces neuronal pathways from the cochlea, which changes energy from physical to electrical, through various regions of the brain. The first region is the brainstem and cerebellum, the oldest parts of the brain in evolutionary terms. Musical stimuli reaching this part of the brain stimulate physical activities such as breathing rate, heart rate, the galvanic skin response, and so on. That music stimulates this part of the brain is indicated in studies of degenerative brain diseases in which musical response is one of the last things to deteriorate. Musical stimuli then reach the limbic system, where most emotions are believed to originate, before reaching the cortex, where such stimuli are analyzed and conceptualized. There is no evidence to suggest that music first stimulates the cortex, then the limbic system, and finally the cerebellum, although there is a considerable exchange of information between the parts of the brain.

Fourth, evolutionary biopsychology theorizes that the strong emotions such as love, pleasure, anger, the reproductive urge, and so on, developed in humans for particular reasons, most of them biologically determined and related to the reproduction of genes. Morality came about in order to allow humans to adapt these strong emotions to the needs of civilized social interaction. My own theory is that music may have played a role in this evolutionary process. A fuller discussion of these theories intended for the layperson may be found in Robert Wright's *The Moral Animal*.⁹

Fifth, any number of psychological and brain studies have indicated that when what we call the conscious mind tries to solve problems using rational logic, it is perhaps the least efficient

If students truly enjoy the music they study, they will want to know more about it, which should be the basis for teaching history and theory.

a condition that can be traced back to the Greeks. We now have a new movement that lays claim to an *emotional intelligence*, and this concept is discussed fairly thoroughly in Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*.⁷ This view holds that considerable mental work is being done in parts of the brain that are outside the consciousness (often thought of as below the consciousness, ergo subconscious), and it speculates that success in life depends more on this kind of mental activity than on that taking place in the cortex, the center of traditional reasoning, speech-logic, and abstract thought.

The Biology of Music

There are also various recent attempts to explain music as a biological experience, a matter of brain chemistry that involves the same pleasure centers as does sex and even drugs. Frederick Turner recently discussed the "biology of beauty" in *Beauty: The Value of Values*.⁸ Although I disagree with much in this book, I do support Turner's fundamental idea, that the experience of beauty is a pleasure that is mediated by a highly complex brain chemistry. The expanding fields of evolutionary biology

and evolutionary psychology are causing people to speculate more than ever before upon the origins of such concepts as feelings, emotions, pleasure, love, morality, and so on. This is one of the most exciting periods of intellectual ferment in my memory, and I believe that the ramifications for the teaching and learning of music are absolutely incredible. Let me tiptoe around for a bit in the fields of speculation and suggest what I think might be in store for music educa-

tion. I shall try to keep the remainder of my argument as simple as possible, so that if there is to be any quarrel with it, that quarrel will not rest on a misunderstanding of my ideas. First, Dionysian ecstasy would be recognized today as a heightened state of emotional arousal and satisfaction, and the wisdom or knowledge gained would probably be thought of as intuitive insight or inspiration of the sort considered to be evidence of emotional intelligence, which cannot, on the face of it, be construed as morally repugnant. Dionysian ecstasy corresponds to a heightened pleasure, or a very strong hedonic experience of the sort that many people are capable of achieving through music.

Second, the neurosciences, of which there are many, have long recognized that regions of the brains of mammals can be considered to be "pleasure centers." This has been proved in a variety of ways, all of which are unquestionably scientific. The most famous example involves identifying such sites in laboratory animals and allowing an animal to self-stimulate this region electrically. The animals will continue to stimulate the center and will even

form of thinking we have in a wide variety of problem-solving settings. Other parts of the brain do far more important work than the centers of reason, abstraction, and logic. The recent literature on emotional intelligence has raised a number of interesting theoretical points in this regard.

Finally, there has been a dearth of consensus among all parties—for example, music educators, college professors, students, parents, and so on—as to *why* we should teach music, in the schools or elsewhere, at all. What is the relative value of music education? How can this value be articulated?

Music Education

What do these various points have to say for or to music education? In the first place, those whom we are targeting for music education have found their version of Dionysian ecstasy in music that has little if anything to do with the “high art” music we would like them to learn. Popular, commercial, rock, or whatever one would call it has nearly succeeded in driving out all other kinds of music among a major segment of young listeners. And why not? This music stimulates strong feelings, even ecstasy. Has it not always been so? This has not been lost on professional moralizers, but they have had remarkably little effect in bringing about any change in the listening habits of their targets. The Dionysian drive for ecstasy has not diminished in the human animal in all these years, but there is still the question of whether it is still a route to wisdom and enlightenment.

Music education, as a discipline, is right now a muddy river of conflicting values, a delta with no main channel. Many readers will consider music to be *intrinsically* valuable, while others will look at it only from the standpoints of utilitarian value—the “usefulness of music.” Education has embarked on a new era of utilitarianism without considering the origins of that philosophy. Utilitarianism began by considering good that which brought the most pleasure or happiness to the greatest number of people. At its point of origin, this had nothing to do with the usefulness of

finding a job, making more money than one person can spend, or of keeping children off the streets. Music in a utilitarian sense has nothing to do with entertaining the often mindless spectators at a sporting event, or providing a watered-down Las Vegas escapist extravaganza of dancing singers. Music has a different utility than that.

Perhaps it is not so much a question of teaching music as it is one of music *teaching*. If music belongs in public education, then we might best consider what music teaches the student before we become overly concerned with how best to teach the student music. We need to focus on why the student should learn that particular thing, and only then how it should be taught. If music teaches pleasure, if it is hedonic, then it certainly no *worse* than the study of history, literature, or any other subject that civilized people pursue for the pleasure of it. I am no longer persuaded by bromides like “people who don’t study history are condemned to repeat it.” Even professors of history repeat the mistakes of the past, and the Bosnian conflict illustrates the emptiness of that claim. History is taught because there is pleasure in knowing history, and attempts to justify it by other means are just forms of rationalization. Literature has always been studied because there is pleasure in good reading, though it is not always taught from the same perspective. In the day of the calculator, mathematics has utility only as a different way of thinking about things, not of doing arithmetic. Science is also simply a way of thinking about things and is often not utilitarian at all. Scientists decry the lack of scientific education and then proceed to teach outdated physics of questionable usefulness. As a friend of my son once confessed (in court), the only useful thing he learned in chemistry was how to make the little bomb that blew up the front of a rival school after losing a football game. Most of the subjects taught in school are utilitarian only because they teach different ways of thinking, along with, one would wish, the pleasure of thinking in those ways. Given the recently recognized importance of emotional intelligence,

music and the other arts belong in this particular category of the utilitarian.

It is harmfully wrong to suggest that teaching pleasure is somehow worse than teaching other things in a school and, in fact, teaching the hedonic might be considerably better than what the physical educators teach under the rubric “no pain, no gain.” High school athletics often drive people away from the pleasure of exercise with the notion that one must “play” with pain in order to succeed. This derives from a type of thinking that holds that if it is *not* painful, neither is it valuable.

Music has a place in the educational scheme and a very important one. However, if music is to be taught as a positive pleasurable force in the pursuit of happiness, if it is to be taught as a developer of emotional intelligence, then we must find a way of teaching it that does not place all of the focus on music as an abstract, rational, anhedonic system. That way of teaching will not be discovered in any college classroom that I know of. If that kind of teaching is to come about, it must come from the people actually doing it in the schools.

How to do it? The music-education literature is filled with “how-to” books. I wonder if a fair comparison can be made with diet books—there seems to be more than a little similarity. Each diet book begins by claiming that all other diet books are wrong, and in that they seem to be correct. However, most diet books have within them at least several grains of truth, and perhaps it is so with music education how-to books.

David Elliot has addressed a number of points with which I can resonate in a new book entitled *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education*.¹⁰ New philosophies always interest me, almost as much as old ones. The division of the book into sections reveals its intent. The first section describes the activity of philosophizing in connection with the pursuit of “a new philosophy.” The middle portion of the book reviews many of the issues and activities commonly construed as musicophilosophical. It is followed by a final section that proposes the development of new curricula in music, the presumably logical

outcomes of all this philosophizing. The introduction states that the book is intended for senior undergraduate and graduate music education students as well as in-service music educators. It is unfortunate, given my earlier observations about the closed mindedness of academe, that this book is aimed at a particular segment of the musicoacademic community, because that means that other segments will dismiss it out of hand, or just ignore it, and they should not. I wish that all participants in the music teaching "enterprise" would read the book as an example of how to think about music. Another reason for appreciating Elliot's book is that it has helped me to better conceptualize why I disagree with some of it.

I do agree with Elliot (and others) who argue against Bennett Reimer's (and others') contention that "aesthetic experience serves no utilitarian purpose. It is experience for the sake of experience in and of itself" (page 36). This is the equivalent of what the critics of Dionysian ecstasy have said, that it is ecstasy for the sake of ecstasy, which serves no useful purpose. I hope that I have shown that in the Dionysian belief system, ecstasy had the clearly utilitarian goal of enlightenment and wisdom. Elliot proposes quite reasonably that "music is something people do" (page 39). The word *music* in this sense is a verb, hence *music*ing is a name for the activity of doing music. I judge from that statement that music must therefore be an intentional, volitional activity, but I could be mistaken. So it is, by extension then, with listening. In Elliot's model, the experience of music brought on by listening is an intentional, cognitive act, and this leads to some confusion in my mind in distinguishing between listening and hearing, a point of confusion I will try to resolve further on.

Later on in the book, Elliot uses the term "human auditory processing" (page 191), an egregious metaphor common among those trying to model the activities of the brain/mind. It is not clear whether he considers listening or hearing, or both, as human auditory processing. In chapter 4, he attempts to explain music listening, but his conclusions are based too much on speculative work that

is not adequate for the self-evident principles he has tried to propose. For example, he states that music listening includes constructing a kind of cultural profile of the musical sounds we are *cognizing*. Now this is speculation pure and simple because, so far as I know, nobody has yet figured out how this processing takes place, or what cognizing is or is not. All we have are theories, and new ones nearly every day. Listening as "thinking-in-action" (page 192) and "knowing-in-action" does not bring us closer to the truth as I believe it to be. Reference to "covert construction of musical patterns" assumes much more than I am willing to assume. In fairness, Elliot retreats from this position a bit, but he seems to imply throughout that listening and hearing are different activities, and this does not fit my model.

Elliot holds that one of the reasons that people like or dislike music is that musical works are socially constructed, socially embedded, and socially mediated *constructions*. All of this constructing, mediating, and embedding apparently goes on after hearing the music, and/or perhaps after listening to it, I am not exactly sure when. This model does not mention the hedonic process, experience, or activity at all, or how experience of the hedonic might influence the liking or disliking of the music. I am hard pressed to believe, as I think he does by association, that the success of rock music had much to do with Susan McClary's comment:

The explosion of rock'n roll in the mid-1950s brought a vocabulary of physical gestures to white middle-class kids that parents and authorities rightly perceived as subversive of hegemonic bourgeois values.¹¹

I was there. I don't agree.

Finally, my last reference will be to the following sentence:

In summary, a basic part of music listening involves cognizing musical patterns in relation to socially determined beliefs. In the process, listeners assess music as delineating a particular belief/value system with which they then do or do not empathize. (page 196)

This is not listening, this is thinking about listening, and these are quite different activities. This reveals the central

belief system of many music educators—that music is a cognitive, conscious, reflective experience, and that music education relies on enhancing this cognitive experience, usually through the types of models that rely very heavily on metaphors and other types of abstractions. This is the sort of mental activity that the Dionysians were trying to *transcend*, to block out, as it were, until the later Greeks put a stop to it all. I hope that Elliot would agree with my representation of his ideas even though they are taken out of context.

My problem at this time is with theories of music learning that depend entirely upon cognition and conscious learning. A common definition of cognition as "an internal representation of reality" can be traced back to Piaget.¹² As Ross Buck put it, "the cognitive system is a systematic view of reality organized by the individual's capacities—for perception, attention, learning, memory, discrimination, and generalization . . .".¹³ The point here is that cognition and emotion are generally considered to be different kinds of systems, even though they may and often do interact. Cognition as an abstraction relies on a grossly simple model of the brain. Emotion, on the other hand, relies on models that are yet too complex for explanation. Buck suggests that the cognitive system has its *source* (his italics) in "biologically based motivational systems which have evolved to encourage the development of an internal representation of reality." He further considers the cognitive system to be a behavior control system that interacts with lower-level systems in the control of behavior.¹⁴ In other words, a lot of music "processing" goes on before it ever reaches the cognitive system, before it becomes cognized into structures, before it becomes mediated by language, and so on. Cognition, like consciousness, is an abstraction that can be understood on various levels, but it is notoriously difficult to generalize, and even more difficult to relate to the functions of the brain. The cognitive view presumes that musical activities *begin* in those regions of the brain most concerned with cognition, those usually associated with the

cerebral cortex. I will call this a “top-down” approach because, as Buck has it, the interaction is with “lower” systems. I have suggested elsewhere in this article that music is a “bottom-up” process, beginning with these “lower” systems, at least geographically and assuming that the subject is upright, such as the cerebellum, then the limbic system, and finally the cortex. I maintain that this distinction is extremely important for the teaching of music, because the biological origins of the hedonic certainly influence what comes later as cognition of the hedonic.

In this article, I am approaching music as a biological phenomenon, one that came into the human system fairly early in evolution, a phenomenon that has been shown over and over to have distinctly biological results, and one that is closely related to the notion of biologically generated pleasure. I believe that I can at least assert that music is a physical cause of hedonic activity, and that this is where music education ought to begin if it is to be successful. Biological theories of the arts are very old. The eighteenth century theory of the “humours” is but one example, and it is certainly not the oldest. These old theories seem to be finding resonance in the current research on the brain and the nervous system. I believe that this gives credibility to the model I am supporting, and that the evidence is strong enough to consider some alternative ways of teaching music.

The Good Teacher

The reader should be very nearly ecstatic that I will not, by way of conclusion, propose a new curriculum for music education. After years as an administrator and accreditation evaluator, I have become so palpably sickened by what passes under the rubric of “curriculum reform” that I have no stomach left for the process. Curriculum design is no longer a case of applying epistemology, or even learning theory, speculative though it may be. Curriculum reform is a case of politics pure and simple. Curriculum design has descended down the intellectual ladder to the rung reserved for the promotion of ide-

ology and bias. I am so disillusioned by the term *output* and its corollary, *standard*, that I can hardly bring myself to write the words. I have become convinced that the teaching of music must be done in spite of the curriculum. Good teaching of music will begin from the perspective of what the novelists call “point of view,” and that rests with the individual teacher who is still sufficiently idealistic to want to make things better for the students and not the school and its board. (I am convinced that anhedonia is a prerequisite for board membership.) I think that this point of view can be based on a few simple universals that the good teacher can translate into methods for imparting or, perhaps better, arousing learning.

I think that the evolutionary psychologists and biologists are essentially correct in putting forth the view that the most important human activities have universal roots. These may be buried deeply in the brain, and they may have become so repressed that they have been all but forgotten, but they are still there. All learning of any worth proceeds from these universal roots, and all learning comes from the hedonic quality of that learning, the pleasure of knowing. Very little learning of any worth comes from the anhedonic, learning that is somehow painful or, at least, not pleasurable.

The emotional intelligence school suggests to me not only that music is hedonic, but also that it teaches something good by being hedonic. Music influences the development of part of the brain about which we know next to nothing, except that it seems to do a great deal of very important work. I believe it to be true that this part of the brain is as important as, if not more important than, the parts of the brain with which we do our reasoning. Our trust in the efficacy of reasoning is based on faith, and faith, as Mark Twain put it, is “believing in what you know ain’t so.” Based on the evidence that has already accumulated, it is just as “reasonable” to believe that the other parts of the brain are as important to thinking and knowing as is the part of the brain appealed to by reason. We will have to set aside our extraordinary cultural bias in the power of abstraction to

rekindle what the Dionysians tried to teach us so many years ago.

Universal Principles

Let me finish, then, with what I think are the more or less universal principles underpinning the teaching of music and let the teacher have at it.

1. Music most probably had its origins in hedonic activity. It was the pleasure of music that made it so important to so many humans that music evolved along with the brain. That simple statement explains why music has so much power yet today. Music continues to be a strong *biological* stimulus.

2. Music enhances many other hedonic experiences, such as cooperative or communal activity, religious expression, shared joy, mutual understanding, love, and, yes, even sex. Music stimulates brain activity that contributes to other brain activities. Music teaches in the sense that it alters the brain in valuable ways, and in that sense it is clearly utilitarian.

3. The teaching of music should begin where it used to begin, with the hedonic experience of music, or hearing, if you will. If analysis or cognizing is to be involved, it should be an analysis or cognition of the experience of the music. Cognition should follow hearing. This ought not to detract from the pleasure of music but should increase it.

4. Musical abstraction should be valued for what it is, abstraction, and not reification. The abstraction should first be an abstraction from musical experience, second from the musical work. The musical score should be treated as what it is, a secondary source for the understanding of music.

5. The teaching of music history, music theory, or any musical context should proceed from the hedonically motivated desire to explain and understand musical experiences more fully. They should not be treated as ends in themselves.

6. Musical performance should be taught as a way of discovering even more pleasurable experiences in music. Musical performance training should be for the sake of the growth of the student, not for the sake of entertaining an audi-

ence or any other superficial purpose. Musical performance must be internally motivated rather than externally motivated; for example, awarding some prize or other reward.

7. Music education should be based on engaging students in the pleasure of musical experiences first, then utilizing that pleasure as the motivating energy to refine taste and musical technique, not the other way around. Music education methods should include allowing the future music educator to develop personal creativity as a way of eliciting hedonic responses to music.

What the Teacher Teaches

All of those "universals" should be realized not in a new curriculum, or new standards, or new input/outputs, but in what and how each teacher teaches within the existing models of instruction and within each teacher's unique context. The teacher should believe in the primacy of the hedonic good in the teaching process and should use it as perhaps the most powerful tool in education. One of the oldest maxims in education, going back to the ancient Persians, is that in order to be a good teacher, one must learn the belief systems of those being taught. This means that the teacher will have to learn what is hedonic for the students being taught, and not teach from the perspective of what is hedonic for the teacher. If multiculturalism is a goal of the curriculum, then the individual teacher will need to find examples of non-Western music that are pleasurable to the students, something that ought not to be difficult to do. Likewise, if teaching the classical canon is a goal of the curriculum, then the teacher must seek

out examples from the canon that are initially pleasurable for the students. Once the hedonic beachhead is secured, once the students have experienced the pleasure of whatever music it might be, it will be far easier to motivate them to progress to more complex and even intellectual aspects of music. I am convinced that if students truly enjoy the music that they are studying, they will want to know more about it, which should be the basis for teaching theory and history. This approach is equally valid for ensemble directors. While there is some research available on what makes music enjoyable, I suspect that this is too general to suit each unique situation.

All of this places the primary responsibility upon the individual teacher and not upon the designers of curricula. All too often, curriculum designers begin from the belief that all people experience music in essentially the same way and that all people value music in much the same way, and that there is but one definition of music. I believe that experienced teachers already know better. Therefore, if there is to be success in the teaching and learning of music, it will come from the creativity and hard work of the individual teacher and not from some committee or council or board or society. All of this should also renew the hedonic experience that was once associated with teaching.

What I have proposed here is not new and not even original. I do feel, though, that it has been lost in the dust of colliding value systems. If all teachers would simply return to the first principle that made music such a powerful part of the human experience throughout human evolution, I believe that the success of music education would be assured.

Notes

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