

TEACHING MUSIC APPRECIATION BY MEANS OF
THE MUSIC-MEMORY CONTEST

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An examination of the literature bearing on the subject discloses the fact that the pedagogy of music, in so far as public-school procedure is concerned, has undergone some very radical changes in the last few decades. The emphasis in the past was largely on performance, and music was considered largely a luxury rather than a legitimate part of the curriculum. Boston introduced music into the public schools in 1837, following the influence of the Pestalozzian schools, but this subject was not generally taught until many years later. In method, a Pestalozzian principle also was involved, for the approach to the subject was highly analytic, with the attempt to emphasize details of tone study and note-reading strongly manifest. As recently as 1895 Superintendent Edward Brooks, of the Philadelphia school system, dealing with the teaching of music in a portion of his report for that year, concerned himself entirely with the more technical aspects of the subject. He placed the blame for the lack of appreciation of music which he said he found in this country on lack of training of a specific, technical nature. He demanded that teachers qualify themselves to teach music as well as the fundamental subjects. Brooks seems to have been in harmony with the then prevalent conception of teaching music appreciation.

Fifteen years later an eminent educator and pioneer thinker, in a monumental work, wrote a chapter on the pedagogy of music, from which the following excerpts are taken.

Thought and reason and their vehicle, speech, are all three of them novelties in the natural development history of the soul. In the dim past, psychic life was very different. . . . Feeling, instinct, and impulse were all. . . . It is of this older, larger, deeper, and more generic soul of man that music is the best and truest of all expressions. . . . If we abandon ourselves to the very madness of mysticism, we may say that vibrations and impacts are as old as matter,

heat, light. . . . Probably all energy is rhythmic and cadenced, so that in this sense the music of the spheres . . . is no longer myth but science. To all these influences, protoplasm . . . has responded from the first. . . . Thus, in music, man may today dimly revive the most ancient elements and experiences in the history of his soul. . . . How zealous should be our advocacy of a pedagogy that shall guarantee to every soul, especially during adolescence, when it is most susceptible, adequate exposure to this art that has in it more promise and potency than any other kind of culture, that is without exception of quintessential, liberal, humanistic, educational value.¹

Continuing, this author asks that teachers become more idealistic; that they convey to pupils the vast numbers of associations wrapped around compositions, the circumstances evoking the productions, the emotional appeals made by songs which have comforted nations and have laid bare the very souls of composers; and that they lead pupils to sing because they want to sing. He says:

Nowhere has the logical been so oblivious of, or opposed to, the genetic pedagogic order. . . . I honor the very indifference of the average child to its music lesson, because this is its own mute protest against a monstrous thing. . . . We persistently and with stupidity ineffable assume that musical education is all in performance. . . . Children should, in fact, hear vastly more music than they sing or play; and this should be a prominent, if not a predominant, part of their musical training. They must listen, and be taught how to do so by abundant experience and practice.²

Without agreeing with the debatable phases of Hall's interesting theory, one must admit the convincing nature of much of his argument. Moreover, the quotations serve to substantiate the statement that the pedagogy of music has changed and that the emphasis has shifted from mere technique to appreciation.

At present the tendency is to teach a certain amount of technical musical knowledge in the public-school course in an effort to enable all pupils to read simple music at sight, to sing with pleasure, and to understand certain fundamental musical concepts. In addition, a great deal of time is spent in teaching appreciation, in endeavoring to develop a love of good music, largely by familiarizing the children with music of a desirable type. An attempt is made to teach the child to listen intelligently and gradually to acquire the ability to appreciate the more complex musical types. Incidentally, the child

¹ G. Stanley Hall, *Educational Problems*, I, 91, 92, 94-95. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1911.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 122.

is taught a certain body of knowledge relative to music and musicians and to musical instruments.

Five years after Dr. Hall stated his position, we find another observer describing a new era in music teaching.

Having reformed its methods, elevated its standards, and thrown wide the door of opportunity all in the interest of the special student, it is now turning its favor toward those who stand outside the ranks of those who would play, sing, or compose; the noble company upon whom music depends for its patronage. . . . It is shaping its plans and adjusting its methods with a view to an extension of taste and appreciation among the people. Its ultimate purpose is to promote intelligent musical appreciation as a factor in popular education.¹

There are certain specific reasons for this kind of teaching. It helps to satisfy that inner urge of which Hall speaks. It helps to develop those appreciations for which Kilpatrick² argues. There is at present very little disposition to quarrel with the statement that music appreciation answers a definite psychological need. Moreover, it provides specific training for a proper and desirable use of leisure time, an admitted responsibility of the public school.

A secondary, but highly potential, effect of music appreciation lies in the ultimate development of American audiences which will attend and encourage worthy performances. No one at all familiar with the history of the drama or of music will discount the importance of audiences in the fostering of either. Those familiar with the situation tell us that now, as never before, audiences are growing both in numbers and in discrimination. We are also told that now, as never before, good music is available to nearly anyone willing to listen. J. F. Cooke, editor of the *Étude*, speaking at the University of Pennsylvania during the Tenth Annual Schoolmen's Week, said in part: "Communities are building in all parts of the country wonderful auditoriums costing from \$50,000 to \$30,000,000 each. Literally, billions are appropriated for these new structures. What will be their principal purpose? Music. Unquestionably, music."³

¹ Edward Dickinson, *The Education of a Music Lover*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916.

² William Heard Kilpatrick, *Foundations of Method: Informal Talks on Teaching*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1925.

³ James Francis Cooke, "Our Stupendous Future in Music," *Tenth Annual Schoolmen's Week Proceedings, April 12-14, 1923*, pp. 30-31. University of Pennsylvania Bulletin, Vol. XXIII, No. 38, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1923.

He continued to speak of the enormous growth of the popular demand for music as exemplified by great musical organizations, theater orchestras, and similar developments.

Dr. Hollis Dann, eminent musically and at that time state director of music in Pennsylvania, addressed the same meeting and also enthusiastically traced the growth of the popular demand for music and the great place music has taken in educational fields and in private life.¹ Few are better qualified to speak with authority on the subject than Hollis Dann.

If these observers are right, if there is in this country a tremendous wave of interest in music, the public school is largely responsible for the development of intelligent appreciation. If they are wrong and there is no great interest, the schools still face a grave responsibility in the arousing of interest. It seems, however, that the first alternative is correct, for, in spite of the shrill complaints of many who see nothing at present but love of jazz, in which they can see no good, it does not appear to be a stretching of the facts to say that never before has church music been at so high a level, that never before have so many communities offered free concerts, that never before has public-school music been so close to life-needs, and that, in general, more people are listening to music and demanding good music than ever before in the history of the country. The situation offers a great opportunity to the schools.

It has been pretty clearly demonstrated that appreciation of music can be taught, just as appreciation of other arts can be taught, and that consistent effort on the part of the schools will result in both appreciation of music of the better type and a demand for it. These results can best be accomplished not by attacking music deemed undesirable but by making the desirable type familiar. This direct method is based on sound psychological principles of interest and activity. In addition to being superior to negative criticism, it is superior to the older attempts to teach appreciation by analyzing compositions or by citing the opinions of others. The first step is to see that much good music is heard, that appreciation is devel-

¹ Hollis Dann, "Music as an Avocation," *Tenth Annual Schoolmen's Week Proceedings, April 12-14, 1923*, pp. 24-29. University of Pennsylvania Bulletin, Vol. XXIII, No. 38. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1923.

oped through personal experience, for it is a subjective matter. As a recent writer ably points out, the results will not be equal in all individuals. But why should they be? Nor will the tastes be equally refined. The opinions will be honest opinions, however, and not snobbery, and it is better honestly to enjoy mediocre music than to pretend to enjoy complexities which are beyond one.¹

It is likely that no single device has done as much as the music-memory contest to develop real appreciation of music and to stimulate interest in music, even in localities where formal concerts are rare and great artists never appear. Credit for originating this idea is generally given to C. M. Tremaine, of the National Bureau for the Advancement of Music. Last year hundreds of city-wide contests were held, as well as several state contests and school programs.

The general plan of the music-memory contest is simple, and it can readily be adapted to a local situation. As a rule, all that is required is a phonograph and access to a group of records, which in many cases need not even be purchased.

The music-memory contest is a device for motivating appreciation work, the participants being placed in intimate contact with a body of selected music over a certain period of time. The first step, of course, is the selection of a program. As in all other matters, the program should be carefully adjusted to the prospective audience. For children of junior high school age, one type of record or selection would be chosen; for a city-wide adult contest, another type. The present discussion assumes an audience of school children.

It is not necessary that the school principal or other person making the selection be a musician or be thoroughly familiar with music. There are excellent helps in selecting programs which make it entirely possible for any intelligent person to select a program with a fair degree of success. The Victor Talking Machine Company distributes excellent material free of charge. The National Bureau for the Advancement of Music, 45 West Forty-fifth Street, New York City, has also arranged some excellent programs. However, it is wise to consider these items in program formation: the period of time over which the contest will extend, in order that there will not be too long a program for the practice time available; the

¹ D. G. Mason, *From Song to Symphony*, chap. i. Boston: Oliver Ditson Co., 1924.

availability of phonograph records of the numbers chosen; and the opinions of local musicians. If contests have been held before, the program should not duplicate previous programs of recent years; they should repeat, to a degree, the types of music. Insure a variety of selections and a program which will appeal to the children for whom the program is designed. Admit the existence of Herbert and Sousa and lesser lights than they, even though in the back of your head Wagner and Beethoven may squirm and protest. Remember that, fundamentally, the program is to be enjoyed.

The program having been decided upon, the next step is the "presenting" of the selections to the children. Before this is done, however, the whole plan of the contest should be made clear to all the teachers involved. The program, accurate in detail, should be given to each room—if possible, to each child. This program should list the several selections, giving the name, the nationality, the date of birth, and the date of death of the composer in each case. If the composer is living, it is well to state the fact.

The actual presentation should be carefully considered. As a rule, this takes place in the auditorium, but it is largely a matter for individual decision. When a selection is presented, any possible relevant and interesting detail should be given. This includes facts regarding the composer, the circumstances leading to the production of the particular selection, the story involved in the piece itself, peculiarities of composition understandable by children, the musical instruments used in making the record, and similar items. All of this information is given in the literature published by the National Bureau for the Advancement of Music and by several of the talking-machine companies and in many books about music.

The children should be encouraged to keep notebooks, in which they may place notes with regard to the selections and any scattered material which they can collect. Pictures of the composers, scenes from operas included in the program, descriptions of the selections, and descriptive matter relative to peoples whose folk-songs may appear in the program are examples of possible notebook materials.

The duration of the preparation period is also a matter which varies with practice. Some prefer to complete the program within a relatively short period; others feel that seven or eight months is

not too long a time. Likely, the longer the period, the better the effect.

The emphasis should always be on enjoyment, not on memory. The contest emphatically should not be an attempt to train the memory. It should attempt to bring children into contact with a body of good music and to teach children to listen appreciatively to that type of program.

In the individual classrooms there is much opportunity for combining the program with language work, history, reading, spelling, and geography. The vocabulary potentialities are large. Almost invariably, children seek much outside material and learn many words. Folk music and national music provide useful avenues of approach in the study of history and geography. Comments on the selections or informational reports are useful language-work vehicles. Always the child is forming opinions and appreciations of his own.

Many outside agencies can be enlisted in carrying on the contest. The local music teachers will often include numbers from the program in their lessons, and local orchestras, especially in the theaters, will include selections in their programs. Local musicians will usually be glad to sing or play the selections in the school before the pupils. The local press will print informational articles regarding the selections, provided these articles are carefully prepared. As a rule, the women's clubs will participate actively.

The records themselves can often be borrowed from local dealers, if credit be given them during the contest. The talking-machine companies, from the point of view of business, readily see the possibilities in these contests. They appreciate the fact that greater interest in music provides a market for their more expensive records, and, as a rule, they co-operate most heartily. In other words, interest in good music in the town in which he is located is a music dealer's stock in trade, and he will gladly help to create and foster that interest. Many schools and communities offer prizes for the best papers and the best notebooks, but this, too, is to be decided by the individual school.

The programs vary a great deal in length. As a rule, about forty numbers are included, but many individual schools consider a pro-

gram of about twenty-five numbers preferable. Usually, the children will be interested in a program which includes a group of opera selections; a group of marches; folk-songs, including spirituals; some popular or semipopular ballads; some national airs; some descriptive music; and some definitely modern music.

Three programs of this type have been presented in the Tileston Public School. Each successive program attempted to carry out the same general plan, and each year saw increasing interest. Each year at least one new room, not content to be dependent on the three phonographs belonging to the school at large, bought its own machine. There are now seven in the school. After the first year the contests were held because both teachers and pupils expressed a desire to have another; the parents expressed approval both individually and by means of a resolution of the Parent-Teacher Association.

Entrance in the contest should be entirely voluntary. Compulsion is not a psychologically sound motive. As a rule, the contest is held as follows: The entire program is played through in random order, and the entrants write the information asked for as the numbers are played. As a rule, the questions relate to the title; the name, nationality, and general period of the composer; and relevant facts. There are many variations of this procedure. Some play only excerpts of the selections and only a sampling of the total program. Some schools allow the notebooks to be taken to the contest on the theory that this encourages notebook work, which in turn assures familiarity with the program. As a matter of fact, the notebook gives little help in the contest, because the child must recognize the selection before he can enlist the aid of his notes concerning it.

The National Bureau for the Advancement of Music stresses the idea of perfect papers and asks specifically that the reports give the number of perfect papers submitted. Of course, "perfect" is to be interpreted as "perfect in so far as recognition is concerned." The perfect papers hardly give a fair measure of the success of the contest as a whole, but that record is at least of interest and may to a degree reflect some measure of the cumulative effect of a series of contests. The record of entries and perfect papers of the three contests held in the Tileston Public School is shown in Table I. Far

transcending perfect papers, in the opinion of this school, is the amount of general interest manifested, which can hardly be subjected to objective measurement.

The Tileston contests were designed particularly for Grades V-VII, inclusive, representing from 400 to 450 pupils. Boys and girls were about equally represented among the entrants. The school is largely attended by children of mill workers and others who have little opportunity at home to develop appreciation of the type described.

TABLE I

Contest	Number of Entries	Number of Perfect Papers
1.....	220	38
2.....	236	42
3.....	255	123

Interesting as a sidelight were the results, during the last two contests, of a poll to find the most popular and least popular selections. In the first poll, Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* was overwhelmingly the most popular, even though so general a favorite as Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever* was included in the program. Massenet's *Élégie* was the least popular, followed closely by a negro spiritual. In the second poll, Sousa's *Fairest of the Fair* and *The Grand March* from *Aïda* led all others in popularity. The *Siegfried Funeral March* was the least popular. The reasons for the choices were in many cases most naïve, but they were honest opinions. The contest was considered worth while because of this fact rather than because 123 perfect papers were submitted.