

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF MUSIC
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Report of the President

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Last year our annual meeting centered on the issues of developing a positive future for art music, and we are continuing the theme this year. I chose this subject for my Report to you today, partly because it is surely one of the major challenges we face, and partly because I was inspired by Sam Hope's beautifully concise and comprehensive paper, "Creating a Positive Future for Art Music," which I read as a call to arms. In fact, I asked the NASM staff to place another copy of it in your packet again this year with the idea that you may find guidance and inspiration in it, as I have.

My train of thought went this way: First, I wondered whether there is any point to considering that there is a cumulative effect to the activities and advocacy each of us engage in at our local level. And then, it occurred to me how important it might be to consider whether our advocacy role depends upon our ability to understand the critically important, but often nuanced differences between music's intrinsic and extrinsic values. This latter point seems especially important now, given the complex and often overwhelmingly commercial environment for messaging, branding, and marketing in which we live.

I'll frame these two issues by asking two fundamental questions: First, "What is our message?" Second, "How do we best advance it?"

Given the challenges in messaging I referred to a moment ago, it seems essential that, first and foremost, we try our best to understand what comprises music's intrinsic values, so as not to confuse them with extrinsic ones. It would seem such an obvious, bedrock tenet of our profession that music has intrinsic value, since its meaning to us is at the very heart of our devotion to it. Obvious, but not so easy to make clear.

As we explore this further, I will share with you some intriguing surprises by way of a case study in which extrinsic and intrinsic values appear to become conflated, which I hope will illustrate this point.

To demonstrate the difficulty of defining music's intrinsic value, here is how Leonard Bernstein, arguably one of our most articulate spokespersons ever, struggled with this question back in 1973:

"There's got to be more to (music) than...merely pleasurable functions...Music means more. 'Means': there's the problem. Means what? Well, the very first Young Peoples' program I ever gave on television, about fifteen years ago, was entitled 'What Does Music Mean?' Here I am still asking that question...My answers haven't changed very much, but I think I can now present a more mature formulation of them...As concisely as possible, this is it: music has intrinsic meanings of its own, which are not to be confused with specific feelings or moods, and certainly not with pictorial expressions or stories."¹

If Lenny were with us now, I think he would see that in just the last ten years, defining music's intrinsic values has become even more complicated.

Here's that case study I referred to earlier:

In 1997, the arts advocacy world was taken by storm by "The Mozart Effect." Its central thesis is that listening to Mozart and other art music will raise intelligence levels among children and improve comprehension in science and math. What is fascinating is that its author (coincidentally my Boulder,

Colorado neighbor, Don Campbell, with a passion for his thesis and a genius for marketing) created a “tipping point” that attracted the attention of policy wonks, school board activists, arts advocates and (surprise, surprise), those who saw an opportunity to make a buck. If you were to ‘Google’ the terms ‘music and intelligence,’ your computer screen would be lit up by a list of thousands of commercial websites promoting music CD’s, videos, and books all marketed towards one extrinsic value: Listening to music will increase a child’s IQ.

Politicians adopted “The Mozart Effect.” Some of you may remember that, in the late nineties, Governor Zell Miller proposed a six-figure budget allocation to his state legislature to ensure that every baby born in the state of Georgia would go home with a CD of classical music. The New York Times reported, and I quote, “...during his budget address Governor Miller played a bit of Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’ on a tape recorder and then asked the lawmakers, ‘Now don’t you feel smarter already?’ Representative “Buddy” DeLoach in an interview shortly after the session remarked, ‘I asked about the possibility of some Charlie Daniels or something like that. Having never studied those impacts too much I guess I’ll have to take their word for it.’ ”²

But here’s a caution: Popularity and commercial success can also lead to public parody. A friend forwarded these witticisms recently making the rounds on the Internet:

The Wagner Effect: The child becomes a megalomaniac. May eventually marry his sister;

The Ives Effect: The child develops a remarkable ability to carry on separate conversations at once;

The Liszt Effect: The child speaks rapidly and extravagantly, but never says anything important;

The Schoenberg Effect (and my personal favorite): The child never repeats a word until he’s used all of the words in his vocabulary. Sometimes he talks backwards. Eventually, people stop listening to him. The child blames them for their inability to understand him;

The Bruckner Effect... well, you get the idea.

Actually, I have appreciated what Don Campbell’s writings and advocacy have achieved. I experienced the impact not long ago when my local School Board conducted open hearings on a staff recommendation to close a budget gap by cutting all sixth grade music study in Boulder County. The many parents who flocked to the microphone that evening prevailed; “The Mozart Effect” was their primary argument.

That’s half the case study. Here’s where it really gets interesting: There are two important research centers at major universities that may some day prove incontrovertibly that Don Campbell is right.

Since the 1980’s, the field of cognitive musicology has been systematically exploring the interrelationships between music and the brain. David Huron, the Director of the Cognitive and Systematic Musicology Laboratory at Ohio State, helps us to understand just what his field is all about: “It is the study of musical thought and mental representation. It is the study of music that places the mind in the central position.”³ He and his fellow researchers methodically and scientifically investigate how music generates intellectual engagement and emotional states. I commend his writings to you because they are instructive, revelatory, in a way, and eloquent. In his latest book, “Sweet Anticipation,” for example, he writes, (quote) “Where magicians evoke awe by appearing to transgress the laws of physics, no comparable recipe exists for creating musical awe. (Yet), musicians have amply demonstrated an exquisite skill in evoking the profoundly sad, the twistedly absurd, and the deeply awe-inspiring.”⁴ Huron’s experiments are designed with extraordinary care to find out how music does this.

And here’s the other. At McGill University’s Center for Institutional Research in Music Media and Technology (the acronym is “Kermit”), researchers recently attached electrophysiological sensors to conductor Keith Lockhart, 5 members of the Boston Symphony, and 15 members of the audience, to measure brain activity during a BSO concert, to determine “any differences in emotional levels and types

of emotion experienced from the conductor to the musicians and the musicians to the audience".⁵ Imagine getting closer to a verifiable understanding of music's impact on our emotions and our brain activity!

Yet, even the blunt popular force of Campbell's "The Mozart Effect," and cognitive musicologists' scientific measurement of the interactions between music, heart and brain will not replace Bernstein's eloquent declaration, "Music has intrinsic meaning of its own." Because, even when the day arrives when cognitive research conclusively verifies that there is a connection between intellectual development or emotional response, and studying, performing, and listening to music, as great a day as that will be, it will still be the music itself that is the message. And we must continue to remind ourselves exactly what we are communicating about art music's *raison d'être* when we buy into and make the argument that music makes us smarter, healthier, or wealthier. We must remain clear, and steadfast: Just as we want people to study science because we want achievement in science, we want people to study music because we want achievement in music. Just as we want studies in science for everyone whether they will become scientists or not, we want studies in music for everyone whether they will become musicians or not.

This begs the second question I asked at the outset: How do we advance the message? I suggest to you that collectively, we have assets substantial enough to create our own tipping point. And, whatever your assumptions may be, I am convinced, given these assets that the solution is NOT about the resources.

To make this point, let's take inventory:

First, count us: 610 member institutions in this room, each producing dozens to hundreds of concerts and other presentations each year, ubiquitously and comprehensively. The fact is our institutions are cultural centers for our communities.

Second, over a hundred thousand students are majoring in our programs. I think about the visits I've been privileged to make just recently to Morehouse College, the University of Michigan, Alcorn State, Southern Illinois, and Vanderbilt. As diverse as these fine programs are, at all of them I have seen the passion and commitment to our art in their students' faces, just as I have in those of my own at CU. Our students are potentially our best present and future ambassadors.

Third: Millions, including our alumni, attend concerts in this country year after year. They represent a huge natural constituency.

Fourth: There is the collective power of our ideas. What better way to think about the academy than as a laboratory for innovation, an opportunity to work with our faculty and students on imaginative programming, inventive marketing, effective outreach?

Fifth: Beyond the academy, peer organizations such as MENC, the American Symphony Orchestra League, Chamber Music America, and CMS, work constantly on these same things: effectiveness in advocacy, outreach, and communications. In addition, NASM now collaborates with the European Association of Conservatories and works in parallel with schools around the world.

Sixth: Together, we have been figuring out the power and impact of the Internet, which offers us unprecedented richness and reach in our communications, advertising, and marketing beyond imagining just two decades ago.

Taking all of these assets into consideration, I hope you agree that the potential in these numbers and forces is astonishing.

Perhaps such an inventory seems merely to beg the question: Where do we go with all of this? For now, I will suggest just two things:

First, let's continue to become as sophisticated as we can in understanding the issues. For starters, by reading and re-reading the two papers in your packet: *Creating a Positive Future for Art Music*, and *The Basic Value of Music Study*, we can all become more adept at working strategically with our faculty. I don't just mean performance and composition faculty, but also those whose work is more centered in verbal communication in music: our musicologists, music theorists, and music educators; with the staff who support us; and with students who learn with us and from us the nuances of programmatic, thematic, or schematic ideas associated with the music we present, each in our local, individual context.

Second, I urge you to use that power of the Internet to share your thoughts and innovations with one another because even though many of them may seem unique to your own local conditions, they can be adapted and adopted by others of us. It's what I said at the beginning of my Report: With each of our individual actions, initiatives, concerts, ideas, we arrive at a cumulative strategy as each of these actions at our local level, multiplied many times over, produce a national effect.

In closing, I suggest to you that we do have the opportunity and the capacity to advance the growth of music activity, study, and, ultimately, the valuing of it nationally. If we go forward with a new level of vision for what great music can be in our society, if we have confidence in the cumulative impact of our efforts, we can be powerful and effective advocates for music in which its intrinsic values will come shining through. And best of all, we will have provided meaning, depth, and richness to the lives of millions more of our fellow citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have my very best wishes for a successful academic year. Thank you very much.

ENDNOTES

¹Leonard Bernstein, "The Unanswered Question," *Six Talks at Harvard* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1976), 130-131.

²Kevin Sack, "Governor Seeks Musical Start for Babies," *The New York Times*, Jan. 15, 1998.

³David Huron, "Foundations of Cognitive Musicology" (The Ernest Bloch Lectures, University of California-Berkeley, 1999), I, 5 (online).

⁴David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 1.

⁵Unattributed Article, "Plugged into Mozart," *McGill Reporter*, April 13, 2006.