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Ideas, Decisions, and Music Study

*I*DEAS, DECISIONS, AND
MUSIC STUDY



FOUNDATION FOR
THE ADVANCEMENT
OF EDUCATION
IN MUSIC

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*Music is a
central part of basic education,
because musical achievement
resolves the conflict between order
and reason on the one hand
and spirit and emotion on the other.
It represents a synthesis where
order and reason heighten both
spirit and emotion. It constitutes
one of the highest pleasures
mankind has produced in its
ceaseless quest for civilization.
It has power to shape individuals
and societies.*

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

EVERY DAY, DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT MUSIC STUDY. SOME ARE FAVORABLE, OTHERS ARE NOT; SOME ARE MADE BY INDIVIDUALS, OTHERS BY GROUPS. UNFORTUNATELY, MANY DECISIONS AFFECTING MUSIC STUDY ARE MADE UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE BEST INTERESTS OF MUSIC ARE FAR FROM THE PRIMARY CONCERN. FOR THIS REASON IF NO OTHER, WE IN THE MUSIC COMMUNITY WHO HOPE TO PROMOTE THE STUDY OF MUSIC MUST UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE NATURE OF DECISION MAKING. OUR STRATEGIES MUST BE AS VARIED AS THE PEOPLE INVOLVED AND REFLECT RESPECT BOTH FOR MUSIC AS A DISCIPLINE AND FOR WORK AS A MEANS TO INDIVIDUAL FULFILLMENT. THE SUBSTANCE OF OUR MESSAGES, NOT JUST THE MEANS FOR CONVEYING THEM, MUST BE FOREMOST IN OUR THINKING.

IDEAS, DECISIONS, AND MUSIC STUDY

A FOUNDATION IN IDEAS

Personal decisions are the foundation of all decision making. But in any large, structured society, the decisions that influence policies for music, education, and cultural development are usually grounded in group action. These groups may be public or private and, like individuals, may be influenced by any number of factors, including prevailing ideas and values, economic conditions, demographic changes, and political expediency. Legislation, administrative action, advertising, and direct funding are among the means often employed to shape the decision-making process and to have an impact on our social, cultural, economic, political, and educational environments.

But those who try to influence decision making without anchoring their efforts in the world of ideas are doomed to fail. Almost every policy decision represents an exercise of values based upon ideas, many of which lack empirical proof. Proof is not the issue; acceptance is. To change an individual's mind in favor of music study, his or her ideas about its purpose and benefits must be challenged. Many people, for example, including many who make educational policy decisions, believe that music study is "nice" but not basic. Casual experience alone is not enough to change such attitudes. Our rebuttal must be sustained, compelling, and intellectually secure.

The complexity of decision making can lead any of us who care about the future of music study in one of two directions. The first is to decide that these matters are so complex that no amount of effort on our part will be enough to produce sound, workable educational policies. The second is to recognize that our success in promoting the study of music depends on understanding these matters so thoroughly that we can influence how resources are used. Is there any doubt as to which course committed musicians, teachers, and other citizens should choose?

THE COMPETITION FOR ATTENTION

American society is freighted with messages designed to influence individuals and groups. Many bypass reason, relying on appeals to guilt, greed,

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compassion, or fear. Others are based on faith, morality, or principle. Still other messages are grounded in education, which historically has attempted to bring reason and emotion into balance through ordered work in the world of ideas.

The competition for attention that we face in trying to promote music study is especially intense in our demographically fragmented, media-saturated society. Consider message repetition alone: A Fortune 500 corporation can easily spend tens of millions of dollars a year on advertising just to keep the name of one product before the public. If the music community had similar resources, music study would be more secure. But such resources are unavailable and other means must be employed to influence decision making. Our challenge is to learn how to accomplish this effectively.

Consider a current situation. Many ideas in the education reform movement have been generated by policy analysts and theoreticians who are virtually unknown to the general public. Their work has been accepted by key individuals and groups who have the power to make or change educational policies and to garner public attention. Yet much of the music community's advocacy is conducted as though these policy-development relationships did not exist. Significant emphasis is given to mobilizing *after* legislation has been drafted; too little is devoted to shaping the climate from which legislation springs. This failure is costly. Such an approach emphasizes the reactive protection of interests rather than early advancement of strong ideas and principles to which we can subscribe as a community.

Misplaced faith in public opinion polls represents another challenge to developing sound strategies in support of music study. Polls tell decision makers where those polled stand, not whether that stand is the right place to be, now or in the future. True leadership is accomplished not by following polls, but by creating and encouraging ideas and values of such force that they cannot be ignored. Anyone hoping to promote music study must develop and present such ideas and values if they are to influence those who decide what constitutes a strong general education and how resources will be expended. To do otherwise is to be always on the defensive.

EXPERTISE AND ACTION

Individuals associate with organizations and institutions whose ideas and values are consistent with their own. For many, ideas and values are often formed in the crucible of experience and may not reflect formal study.

Because no one can be an expert in everything, most people in positions to make policy decisions rely on others whom they trust to guide them. They seek both expertise and assurance that their own views are tenable.

Tremendous energy is expended in American society creating images of expertise and trust, particularly as these translate into political, social, or economic power. Over the last twenty-five years, expertise in arts education has been claimed by a wide variety of public and private philanthropies, arts councils, and advocacy organizations. Many of these groups have been organized primarily to influence arts support at local, state, regional, and federal levels. This is in contrast to decades-old organizations of musicians and music teachers who banded together in the cause of professional development and program advancement. We must recognize that if expertise is equated with anything other than professional ability, music and music study lose position to other priorities. Fashion, personality cults, and unilateral pursuit of credit for patronage can come at the expense of effectiveness.

Assuming that we have the necessary expertise in the music community to convey our messages, and assuming that our strategies are founded on strong ideas and values, where should we put our efforts – at the national, state, or local level? The answer is difficult and always evolving, but one thing is clear: Individual commitment and local solidarity are instrumental in preserving broad opportunities for music study worthy of the name. Nationally promoted ideas and programs favorable to music study can only reinforce local commitment, not create it. Where local commitment and solidarity have eroded or are missing altogether, music study looks ornamental and expensive. Nationally promoted programs that favor passive experience over study then become attractive because the image of music in education is provided but at reduced cost. Unfortunately, it is American students and American culture that are short-changed.

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WHAT MUST BE DONE

First, the music community must develop powerful ideas about music study that command attention and, when actively promoted, that reinforce the distinction between serious programs of study and those that are superficial. Second, we must master the means of influencing policy based on in-depth analysis and sophisticated strategy. Without these capabilities, plans to reach educational decision makers are likely to be random, uncoordinated, reactive, and ineffective.

Questions for us to consider as we develop our strategies include the following:

- What are some of the most important “sectors of influence” that affect decisions about music study – for example, parents, policy-development networks, the media, and so forth?
- How do ideas flow into and out of these sectors of influence? To whom do these sectors of influence turn for expertise at the local, state, regional, and national levels?
- Which sectors need what kinds of attention? How should basic messages about music study be tailored to reach these various sectors effectively?
- Can the music community influence policy decisions across a broad front? What should be the scope of such an effort given the resources available? How can we best balance short-term and long-term objectives?
- What kinds of coordination and collaboration are natural in the music community as we attempt to influence decision making at various levels? How can other alliances be created, and how long will that take? What kinds of coordination and collaboration are too difficult to be attempted?

Both the “what” and “how” – the content and process of promoting music study – are essential. The music community and its committed supporters must pursue this double initiative with intensity, intellectual rigor, and unshakable determination. No one else, after all, will do this for us. The alternative is unacceptable: to leave the health and scope of music study to chance or, more correctly, to the random actions of isolated individuals. The challenge before us is to maintain a higher level of thought and work about our promotional efforts, a deeper understanding of the nature of decision making, and a more durable commitment to the best artistic, educational, and cultural values. Can the music community rise to this challenge on its own behalf?

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The Foundation of the Advancement of Music was established to promote the following purpose: "to advance music education and to increase public understanding of the importance of education in music education which increases the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills in the public and private schools." "By organizing and maintaining organizations and companies already engaged in programs and enterprises that promote music study, the foundation works to provide a background of information on which long-term promotional programs and action may be formulated. The program of the foundation focuses primarily on analysis, research, and the development of recommendations concerning policy issues surrounding the promotion of music study. In this work, the Foundation seeks to:

- 1. Maintain a forum among organizations and industries concerned with music study whereby analyses and recommendations about policy issues can be broadly shared and discussed.
- 2. Encourage the development of common ground on policy issues, thus establishing a basis

for increased cooperation and collaboration with programs and individuals in the music community.

Provide research assistance concerning the promotion of music study to the program staffs for US schools containing similar programs of music education, planning, and administration. The foundation does not compete with other similar efforts.

The foundation also provides general information and materials to schools and teachers through direct connections between the study and the field. The foundation's ultimate potential is unlimited.

The Foundation is funded by the contributions of organizations, companies, educational institutions, and individual professionals who are concerned with music study. The foundation and its members shall have three objectives:

- 1. To assure that every individual has an opportunity to study music.
- 2. To increase the time devoted to teaching and learning that music.
- 3. To enhance the quality of music instruction.

The Foundation of the Advancement of Music is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. It is a public charity and is eligible for the charitable deductions provided by Section 170(e) of the Internal Revenue Code. The foundation is not a religious organization and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, or religion.

For information on how to donate to the Foundation or to participate with us, please contact:

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