

NASM

FAEM Brochures

The ABC of Education in Music

*T*HE ABC OF EDUCATION IN MUSIC



FOUNDATION FOR  
THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF EDUCATION  
IN MUSIC





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Each publication in this series  
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the development of programs  
of public music education  
affairs. The purpose of this  
document is to provide  
information on the  
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Humanities.

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*M*usic 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

*Y*OU ARE ABOUT TO READ THE CASE FOR EDUCATION IN MUSIC. THIS CASE IS IMPORTANT, FOR UPON IT RESTS THE FUTURE OF MUSIC AND OF OUR INVOLVEMENT IN IT, BOTH AS A PEOPLE AND AS INDIVIDUALS.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO CONSIDER MUSIC—AS A MEANS OF RELAXATION AND ENTERTAINMENT, AS AN EXPRESSION OF NATIONAL OR ETHNIC AWARENESS, AS A MEDIUM FOR THE COMBINATION OF MIND AND EMOTION THAT RESULTS IN HIGH ART, TO NAME BUT A FEW. ALL OF THESE VIEWS ARE IMPORTANT, BUT NONE OF THEM CAN HAVE ANY REALITY WITHOUT A PROCESS OF EDUCATION—WHICH ONLY MEANS A WAY OF LEARNING HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE ABILITIES AND RESOURCES WE HAVE.

THIS BROCHURE IS ABOUT THE REASONS FOR BEGINNING THIS PROCESS OF EDUCATION, THIS WAY OF LEARNING. IT SPEAKS OF WHAT WE CAN HOPE TO GAIN FROM MUSIC STUDY, AND OF WHY WHAT MUSIC STUDY CAN GIVE US IS SO NECESSARY. TO FIND OUT MORE, TURN THE PAGE.

## THE ABC OF EDUCATION IN MUSIC

Need we argue the cause of education in music? Yes, we must, because we live in a time when the simplest things seem difficult, when the most fundamental human values appear too complicated and hidden to grasp. Fine music and its study is exactly such a simple and direct matter.

To begin, we must have a working definition of a musical education. At its core is learning, playing, and listening to good music—music that has withstood the test of time, and music being written today to stand the test of time.

There are many ways into music. Of course, one can just sit down at a piano and pick out a few notes, or sit in a concert or in front of a stereo system and bathe in wonderful sound. For many, such casual, almost accidental contact is enough to embark on a lifetime of musical satisfactions. Even for these lucky souls, however, what begins as a pleasure can always be deepened into greater fulfillment by learning how music is made and communicated. For those who have not yet found the joys of music on their own, education—regular, dedicated, and rewarding—can be the royal road to a lifetime of enrichment, not just from music, but from all art and learning.

One principle is central to a musical education that enriches by expanding mental and physical capacities. It is a principle applicable to achievement in all areas: what is done must be done with purpose, with full consciousness that the task is important and of long-term value and effect. This consciousness must be developed and supported by teachers and parents alike. But to study with purpose hardly means the drudge-like repetition of dry formulas. It means application, commitment, diligence, and disciplined cooperation between teacher and student. It also means a full measure of the joy that comes from the development of understanding and control over the previously unfamiliar. For teachers and students alike, to work purposefully means seeking musical content beyond immediate self-satisfaction—adding new dimensions to what may have been a single-dimension subject. It means keeping achievable, measurable goals constantly in mind. It means continually working to raise one's level of musical competence. It means constantly

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striving to master more and ever better music. It means developing a deepening comprehension of the relationship among how music is created, how it is structured, and how it is communicated.

So far we have talked about basic attributes of music study—something important, profoundly enriching, and worthy of personal effort. But there is another side to music. To talk of music only as something serious is to be just as wrong as those who talk about music as nothing but entertainment. Making music and listening to what we have made is marvelous fun: it is no accident that we speak about *playing* a musical instrument, *playing* for friends, *playing* a concert.

Education in music makes the important connection between dedicated application and the joy of fulfillment. Music study is a life-enhancing pleasure because it renews our spirits as it trains our bodies and our minds. It is necessary to have education in music to understand the interrelationships of study, comprehension, and fulfillment and the application of these to high aspirations for civilization. It is also necessary to study music in order to become a well-rounded human being.

Through generations of commitment and effort, we in the United States have the most completely developed system of music education and performance in the world. Our professional schools are of the highest international rank. American artists are admired everywhere. Our orchestras and our choruses are famous wherever great music is played. Our conservatories, colleges, and universities have renowned music programs, and trained teachers come from them in profusion. Our private teachers are legion and bring to young and old, at every stage of musical development, the personal care and interest that only one-to-one contact can provide. Our audiences, too, are large and appreciative, as well as generous in supporting musical activity with their money and volunteer time. Nor can we forget the development of musical instruments that has added new dimensions to musical expression, or that high-quality recording systems—and sophisticated reproducing systems on which to play performances back—are everywhere inexpensively available.

With so much wonderful music so accessible, and with so many people playing and listening to it, why is there such deep concern about the overall health of education in music? We face a fundamental crisis because we Americans find it difficult (as so frequently happens with the significant things in life) to state convincingly just why it is that what we instinctively know and *feel* to be important about music education *is* important. Music

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study, perhaps because it has been so available for so long and seemed such an accepted part of our lives, is too often taken for granted. Like anything taken for granted, music study tends to become devalued, even as passive musical activity increases. Devaluation leads to neglect, to encroachment from trendy educational prescriptions and, all too often, results in outright opposition to genuine teaching and learning: students stop studying when instant gratification ceases; school boards cancel music education programs; aspirations turn from artistic and intellectual development to superficial entertainment. Eventually, musical activity becomes nonexistent or empty of content. A great field of individual and national culture becomes debased and is denied not only its rightful place in education but also its spiritual and civilizing power.

How far have we traveled along this tragic path? Far enough to see warning signs of the dangers of continuing our present course.

In education as a whole, loss of seriousness and diminished concern with content has engendered a reform of extraordinary intensity. Now, at a time when more Americans understand the importance of education in general, our problem in music is one of values: quite simply, why education in music, now and in the future? Why should precious school time—and precious after-school time, too—be devoted to the study of what is so easily available, and, in fact, is everywhere in the air? What can possibly be the significance of learning ideas, facts, and skills that produce no tangible goods, that for most can lead to no jobs, and that cannot in any way have a monetary value put on their emotional, intellectual, and spiritual influence on individual lives?

So the question comes from all sides: why education in music? Because it teaches the value, the reality, and the interrelationships of what might be called a great ABC: Activity, Beauty, and Civilization. Those who have profited from this great musical interrelationship know how lucky they are; those who have yet to learn music are in the enviable position of people who are about to come into a rich inheritance. What is the nature of this inheritance, and how can we ensure that all receive it?

## ACTIVITY

Let us begin with Activity, and specifically with activity in terms of children. All of us, when we offer ourselves to learning, are in some sense children, in spirit if not in body. Children at whatever age have marvelous stores of energy and curiosity. They do everything in large quantities: they

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run, they jump, they yell, they feel, and they think. For children, everything seems possible: the world lies before them, in the words of the poet Matthew Arnold, "like a land of dreams, so various, so beautiful, so new. . . ."

But so overpowering are children's energies that they always threaten to burst the bounds of the possible and even of the ideal. To channel these energies; to provide a reality for children's dreams; to establish a structure of thought and process in which children may aspire to, and work for, achievement; to teach children the place of the individual within society, and the place of society within the individual: these are the highest goals for all truly general education. Such an education aims not just to teach each student a profession, but to teach rationally based, productive, and ethically founded ways of thinking and living.

Counterposed to these aspirations are conditions in contemporary society that encourage passive spectatorship instead of active mental and physical engagement. These conditions produce a cultural laziness that, in the aggregate, has a negative effect on the climate for enterprise in all fields.

What then is the role of music in the kind of general education that places activity in service to our highest goals? First, it is to encourage children to engage and master a world of infinite variety, contrast, and vitality, a world whose structure and content mirror the wider natural, emotional, and intellectual universe they see but do not yet possess. To the desires of children for activity, music presents its own abundant response, its ceaseless exploration of past and future, its creative use of new and old melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and tonal colors. Second, music study directs children's bounteous energies and provides a fulfilling purpose for them. To sing or to play music involves becoming aware of one's body not just in its capacity to accomplish complex tasks, but in its capacity to block their accomplishment. It involves teaching the muscles to obey the mind. Even more, it involves teaching the mind, in its function of learning, to obey the mind in its willing of *order*.

Why is this important in a democratic society? After all, it is too easy to think of order as "orders," as unwanted and unexplained directives administered at someone else's whim and for someone else's profit. It is equally easy to think of order as soulless regimentation and mindless discipline. But to conceive of order only as imposition or repression is to discard the blessings it confers by organizing our individual and collective energies for productive purposes.

Music study creates understanding of these distinctions by making order not only in the child's world of sound, but also in the child's very way of thinking. Consider what takes place when music is heard: different sounds that always go together; high notes and low notes, long notes and short notes, voices and instruments, winds and strings, melody and accompaniment, all under conditions of equal participation, assumed cooperation, leadership on some occasions, deference on others.

Music does vastly more, though, than provide an ordering of the activities and thoughts of those who compose, perform, and experience it. It provides access to an intricate world of formal organization, of balance and contrast, of natural and man-made structures that enable us to recognize, appreciate, and remember what we play and hear. These structures carry the names harmony, counterpoint, sonata, symphony, concerto, aria, fugue, and all the many others familiar to those who study music. Each contains a wealth of assumptions and expectations based on relationships between order and communication. These relationships make music—once we have made an effort to decipher its welcoming codes—familiar and comprehensible. Indeed, it is in this establishment of a world of familiarity and comprehensibility through education, that music achieves its most perfect transformation of activity into heightened consciousness.

## BEAUTY

This miracle of consciousness and the second element in our great ABC is Beauty. Doubtless the exact beauty of art is difficult to define, but we can easily recognize the sudden rush of feeling, the warmth and excitement, with which we react to a masterly painting, an immortal poem, or a classic novel. Music, of all the arts, appeals to us perhaps the most immediately. The rise or fall of a melody, the richness or spice of a harmony, the excitement or placidity of a rhythm, the sudden reappearance of something we recognize in an altered guise: all of these speak to us of a good we had not known before.

There is our reaction to beauty, too, a capacity for making us know the kind of awe that we regularly experience in the presence of something larger than ourselves. What is so wonderful about artistic beauty is that the awe it inspires does not distance us from the objects of our contemplation, but brings us to them, and into them. It is this *personal* connection to the beauty of ordered sounds that so marks the educated music lover's relationship to

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what he hears. Perhaps the great nineteenth-century encyclopedist Sir George Grove put it best when he wrote that Franz Schubert, this composer of so many melodies that, once heard, stay forever in the heart and mind, is to his listeners “not only a great musician, not only a great enchanter, but a dear personal friend.”

We are often told that beauty, if it is anywhere, is in the eye of the beholder. This would seem to suggest that there are no commonly accepted standards for artistic beauty. But before such beauty can get into the beholder’s eye (or, in the case of music, ear), someone must create it, make it available, and do both in a way that communicates a universal content to many people at the same time. The very process of making beauty would not be possible if there were not among us all a large measure of agreement as to what is beautiful and what is not.

Today, there are those who will tell us that musical beauty is an exclusive possession of certain limited classes, peoples, or races—that because artistic beauty is a product of cultivation, its enjoyment and understanding are restricted to the few lucky enough to have exposure to what is so often woundingly called “the finer things of life.” Not so. Musical beauty, though assuredly one of the finer things of life, is not owned by any individual or group. The capacity to appreciate it, no less than the capacity to create it, is within everyone.

For example, there is little doubt that what we term “classical music” satisfies our definition of beauty. This is true not just in the European-oriented places from which it comes, but all over the world. We see passionate acceptance of this music in Japan, China, and Korea, and by numerous musicians of Oriental origin studying in our own country. We take pride in the extraordinary triumph of black American singers in opera houses both here and abroad. Clearly, works of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi, and scores of other distinguished composers speak across cultures, backgrounds, and individual circumstances, just like the great music of all peoples, places, and times. The beauty of such music, like the beauty of all the greatest art, is truly universal.

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## CIVILIZATION

In discussing wonderful music, where order and beauty constantly increase each other’s communicative powers, one often finds oneself using the word “great.” In the case of music, this much-overused word is charged with

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meaning. The greatness of music is a supreme example of the progress and greatness of Civilization, the third element of our educational ABC.

By “civilization” we do not mean the day-to-day flow of human life with all its accidents and imperfections. We mean, again quoting Matthew Arnold, “the best that has been known and thought in the world.” To Arnold’s “known and thought” we must add “felt,” for art, and especially music, is the domain of feeling as well as of thought. The key word here is “best.” By “civilization” we mean, in music as elsewhere, those achievements that are imperishable because they comprise and sum up our highest common property—the most perfect results of human activity and, in the arts, the most disciplined creation of beauty.

Consider for a moment compositions so wonderful, so much a part of our heritage that they seem familiar to us even on first hearing. Some of these—the “Air on the G String” of Bach, the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven, the *Pathétique* Symphony of Tchaikowsky, to name only a few—speak to us all of a world of lyricism, strength, and nobility in suffering. Here are works that produce the warmth and power of emotional revelation. Here are melodies and moods that generations have kept in their hearts not only to give pleasure and convey beauty, but also to enable the mystery, the frequent harshness, and even the cruelty and injustice of the world to be understood and made constructive in a way that cold reason alone cannot make possible.

There are many other connections between music and civilization. For example, great music, like all great art, carries the highest values of individual and social life that our history has commended to us. We ignore these values at our peril. Consider the great religious music of our Judeo-Christian tradition: the chanting of church and synagogue, the incredibly complex part-singing of Renaissance polyphony, the Protestant hymns so influenced by folk music and so influential on the religious works of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. All of these explore relationships between mankind and the transcendent power of the spirit. In the secular world of opera, often derided as mere spectacle, there is Beethoven’s hymn to freedom in *Fidelio*, Wagner’s depiction, in the four operas of the *Ring*, of the immortal gods brought down by greed and treachery, and Verdi’s tribute, in *Aida*, to the victory of love over purposeless war and hatred. Even where music does not use words to convey values, it speaks powerfully for one of the highest aspirations of civilization—the harnessing of human activity in the service of the most lofty ideals of order and permanence.



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When we think of the rational and emotional fruits of music study, we cannot forget what composers have done to convey and enoble the traditions of the countries and societies that gave them birth. Here we think immediately of Italian opera, so flavorful in communicating the tenderest sentiments of a people and, particularly in the works of Verdi, their aspirations toward nationhood. In the orchestral works of Tchaikowsky and Rachmaninoff we find not just a multitude of passionate melodies, but the very soul of Russia. In the music of the modernist Bartok, no less than in that of the more romantic Dvorak and Smetana, we have our most permanent embodiments of the folk music of the peoples of Central Europe. And then there is the role of great music in communicating our own uniquely American sense of country. Here one need only mention the immortal *Rhapsody in Blue* of Gershwin, so brilliant in combining jazz and Broadway in symphonic form, and Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* and his modern dance score *Appalachian Spring*, both of which exemplify our own national synthesis of folk and art music traditions.

As in the case of beauty, there are those who worry that there is nothing intrinsically good about civilization and what it teaches, or about the great music that is so much a part of civilization and its mission. They argue that true civilization should not be thought of as a careful selection of human activity, but as everything everyone does—the low and the high, the bad and the good, the transient and the permanent. They tell us that the values of civilization and the values it teaches are relative, not absolute, and particular, not universal. They ask whether it is not true that everything, everywhere, is appreciated by someone. Many go so far as to say that the very word “great” is elitist, that its use inescapably involves usurpation, the assumption by a minority of its superiority and dominance over the majority.

All this simply flies in the face of the evidence of our ears and eyes, and of our minds and hearts. Each of us, upon reflection, makes careful distinctions between what we like and what we dislike, what we wish to experience again and what we wish to discard. We must pay others the compliment of assuming that they do the same. Civilization is built by making and synthesizing these judgments both individually and collectively over long periods of time at ever higher levels of knowledge, skill, and sophistication. Modern societies that lose their aspirations for this capability jeopardize the strength of their cultural foundations and their potential for artistic achievement. It is here, in this connection, that education in music,

like education in the other arts and in the humanities, becomes a vital component of our nation's future and a task worthy of our best efforts.

This task will not accomplish itself. The human capacity to create and understand significant work is innate, but like all innate capacities it depends on careful and gentle nurturing for its fulfillment. In all societies, this nurturing is based on education. In American society, education is a critical matter for without a successful educational effort we have no chance of making our dream of *E pluribus unum*—out of many, one—a reality.

## RESPONSIBILITY

How, then, *is* this great educational task for music to be accomplished more completely in our democracy? Who is to be responsible?

Perhaps the first thing we must realize is that music study is not just for the richly talented, for those to whom music seems from the outset to be a second language. These lucky few deserve training commensurate with their gifts, and we must be sure that they get it. But general education in music must be concerned with bringing the blessings and benefits of this unique art to all. Music, and great music especially, speaks to everyone, and some degree of musical talent is present in all of us. Similarly, just as sports—the benefits and pleasures of competition, exercise, and the acquisition of skills—are meaningful from youth to maturity, so, too, the joy of musical involvement brightens and enriches every individual life it touches.

There is no one prescription which alone brings this joy. Education in music will always be pursued successfully in different ways, particularly since our nation is blessed with many professionally capable individuals who devote their lives to teaching music. Thus, we propose no national formula, no foreign or domestic panacea, no program or organization whose crusade obscures the central importance of music itself. What we *do* propose are principles for application in local and individual circumstances—principles previously outlined that recognize the power of music in personal and cultural formation, principles that enable each of us to act wisely as responsible stewards of this power. Such stewardship is based on a fundamental understanding: the acquisition of basic musical knowledge and skills is essential for the connections among Activity, Beauty, and Civilization to work, even though individual use of this basic competence will vary.

Many musically capable individuals perform for themselves and for others. Many more find fulfillment in listening with comprehension and a

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sense of discovery to the work of others. Many will spend time analyzing great compositions and learning about their form, their history, and the lives of those who created them. Some will apply their conceptual understanding of musical organization to nonmusical problems in the humanities and the sciences, in government and commerce, in education and cultural development.

But for everyone—amateur performers, dedicated listeners, and problem-solvers alike—music becomes richer, more meaningful, and more useable when it is learned in a planned and structured way. Music classes in school, from kindergarten (and before) to college (and after), should be supplemented by instrumental and vocal lessons, playing in ensembles and singing in choruses, and attendance at a spectrum of performances ranging from family occasions through school productions to professional concerts and operatic presentations.

And so all of us—parents, school teachers, private teachers, artists, government, patrons, advocates, and students—have something vital to contribute to making the study of music come alive. Parents must plant in their children a love of learning and support them in learning music. Teachers, both in and out of school, must revel in the thought that in their work lies our musical and cultural future. Artists must make clear by their example how much music means to them above and beyond their work as professionals. Government must use not just its funds but its moral credit to encourage learning that is based on musical content and skills. Patrons must be willing to give a helping hand to worthy efforts at music teaching, especially in poor districts where budgets and hopes are low. Advocates of the arts must realize that their highest reward can never come from highly publicized, short-term successes, but rather from solid growth in student capabilities. Students, as always, must be willing to put in hard work and even, on occasion, to forego other pastimes in favor of music study.

A special word about the support of education in music by the music trades, composed as they are of enlightened business leaders who understand that investment is the key to future economic prosperity. Publishers and instrument makers have a long and honored history, not only of making printed music and what is necessary for its performance available at affordable prices but also of backing composers and performers as they struggle to come before the public and teachers as they work to establish educational activities. Music stores, too, function as centrally located and important

centers for the dissemination of music in their communities. These businesses, large and small, must come forward more visibly and persistently than ever to help explain to their customers and the American people the role of music study in American cultural development and in the lives of individual Americans of all ages.

Above all, we must never forget that music, as part of our living heritage and national promise, is everyone's business. We must not allow a false opposition between democracy and elitism to distract us from the great ABC of education in music and the educational goals it implies. We should listen to those who have the development of our children as a primary interest. Let us be guided by what informed parents, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, of all races and ethnic backgrounds, want for their descendants. Let us offer them the clear choice of art and civilization. Let us ask them whether they want for their children what is great, or what is simply current and ordinary. Let us ask them whether the purpose of education, in their view, is to improve us or merely to produce satisfaction with the way we are.

Can anyone have any doubt what the answer will be? All Americans, including generations of immigrants, have always demanded from education and from American life that which they themselves did not have. Does anyone not believe that American parents today, no less than in the past, see education as a passport not only to a better material existence but also to a better cultural life, a more active and refined life of the body, and of the mind?

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The advancement of music study lies at the heart of this better cultural life. Teachers who devote themselves to inducting children into the ordered mysteries of beautiful sounds know this. Every parent who sacrifices to give children music lessons, to buy children costly musical instruments, and especially to watch over their practice, is making both a statement about the value of great music and a *commitment* to its value. To watch a group of children wrapped up in coaxing agreeable sounds from musical instruments; to watch an audience of parents bursting with pride as their offspring sing and play what are recognizably sweet sounds; to watch adults straining to sing together not just in tune but in the same tune: to see all this is to know that human progress can be ours. It tells the story of just what this great art means to the millions of people who love and work with it not for show, not for social advancement, but for music and life itself.

## THE FOUNDATION

The Foundation for the Advancement of Education in Music was established to fulfill a single purpose: to assist the music community in its efforts to increase public understanding of the importance of education in music—education which stresses the acquisition of basic knowledge and skills in both public and private settings.

Recognizing that many music organizations and companies are already engaged in programs and campaigns that promote music study, the Foundation works to provide a background of ideas and information as a basis on which long-term promotional planning 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:

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

for increased cooperation and collaboration among groups and individuals in the music community.

- Provide ideas and assistance concerning the promotion of music study to music organizations for use in their ongoing promotional programs, long-range strategic planning, and with their memberships. The Foundation's role is noncompetitive and nondirective in nature.

The Foundation also distributes general promotional materials targeted to a variety of audiences that describe connections between the study of music and the fullest development of human potential.

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 share three objectives:

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



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