

Introductory Paper: Opening A Formal Dialogue

The cultivation of music through organized instruction is centuries old. Great teaching traditions and histories of high artistic achievement influence, inspire, and provide content for each other. The Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project builds on this historic record and seeks to nurture the aspirations that produced it by encouraging cooperation among those presently responsible for sustaining and advancing higher music education in Europe and the United States.

Expanded Opportunities

Music is critically important in European and American culture and education. On one level, exchange is vast. The development of transportation technologies over the last 125 years has increasingly made music an international profession. The movement of professional artists across boundaries in everything from short tours to lengthy residencies to major artistic directorships have become commonplace. These relationships continue to be particularly strong between Europe and the United States. The level of exchange on the professional level has been extensive. At the professional education and training level, geopolitical circumstances, financial challenges, language barriers, varying objectives, strong views about continuity of study, and differing methodologies have had varying influences. Contacts between music teaching institutions in Europe and the United States have been limited in number and, for the most part, highly informal.

Although challenges still remain, conditions in Europe and the United States have evolved to create expanded opportunities for dialogue and cooperation. Geopolitical conditions have changed and are providing new conditions for exchanges of all kinds. Technology is bringing the world closer together and this closeness is producing recognition of the value of understanding and reciprocity. There is an improved understanding of how to respect differences and a greater willingness to let the exploration made possible by different experiences produce new educational and artistic richness for students, faculty, and institutions.

Over the past two years, the Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project, organized under the auspices of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) in the United States and the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) in Europe, has taken advantage of these and other new conditions to make the environment for individual, institutional, and professional exchange more analytical, more regular, and more nurturing of specific relationships. This measured increase in formality is intended to promote and serve the individual creativity in many settings. The project has produced dialogue among institutional leaders within Europe and within the United States and between leaders in Europe and the United States. It has established a new level of partnership between the pre-eminent associations of music schools in Europe (the AEC) and the United States (NASM). In developing this dialogue, the project has opened and identified the vast potential for expanding cooperation to enhance the artistic and intellectual abilities and contributions of individuals, institutions, and the field of music as a whole.

Research and Policy Analysis

From the beginning, the Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project recognized that the most productive dialog is based on careful research and analytical interpretation. The project developed a number of studies on transatlantic exchange and on student achievement and evaluation. Areas of curriculum content were also addressed, recognizing their central position in understanding the requirements and expectations to be built into exchange programs.

Cultural understanding was also considered. Clearly, European and American cultures have much in common. For example, immigrants from every European country have brought the strengths of their cultures to the United States. Even so, ways of working, habits of mind, and organizational structures are different. Many of these differences are deeply cultural. What's more, obviously true, and joyously embraced, a wide variety of approaches work. This project reaffirms the importance of different approaches. At the same time, it confirms the importance of understanding the natures of these differences and how each approach can fulfil overarching educational and artistic goals.

Curriculum Development

All music-teaching institutions face a common reality: all aspects of musical practice are expanding, but time is not. The breadth of knowledge and skill required of professional musicians grows year after year. This condition puts severe pressures on the development of courses of study and associated requirements. During the course of this project, curriculum has been considered in terms of both content and process. It has been reviewed as a way of prioritizing and integrating the various elements of music study, both overall and in the programme requirements of specific institutions. Curriculum expectations have also been reviewed as a basis for evaluation.

The project has found that the common challenge of curriculum development in each institution benefits from various perspectives derived from European and American practice and that there is significant commonality in content and significant variation in process. All institutions seek to develop the highest competencies in performance or composition. Specific priorities vary in areas such as musicianship, music theory, and music history. Evaluation mechanisms are allied with curricular content and priorities. Although the details of evaluation methodologies vary, examinations and performances are commonly viewed as critically important. The project also found that current and evolving technologies hold promise for joint coursework development. However, the most obvious curriculum-related cooperation can be found in exchanges of faculty expertise, both in person and through electronic master classes. Both involve bringing international faculty perspectives to competency development and evaluation.

The project also discovered common concerns between Europeans and Americans regarding the future of music and the multiple futures for the graduates of higher music education institutions. The challenges posed by current and projected working contexts for musicians have implications for curricula and need to be the subject of further study.

Institutional Cooperation

The Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project began with the idea of helping institutions in Europe and the United States work together to develop student and faculty exchanges. As we have said, there is a commonality of goals, but significant differences in organization, funding, and procedure.

Even though response to the Bologna Declaration (see www.aecinfo.org/bologna/bolognaprocess) is moving European schools toward a more common framework, it is important to preserve conditions that support local creativity. In the United States, where the common frameworks have existed for decades, there is a significant variety of approach and procedure. Such differences create a situation that requires two or more specific institutions to make decisions on cooperation. On a large scale, AEC and NASM can provide information useful to institutions as they create various kinds of cooperative ventures. In this way, the larger communities of music schools in Europe and the United States can serve the initiatives of specific schools that wish to work together. This project is only a beginning. It has created a number of documents concerning student and faculty exchanges and provided analyses that promote understanding of curricular expectations, evaluation mechanisms, and definitions of quality and assessment. These become starting points for the transatlantic efforts between individual schools.

In reaching its conclusions, the project has demonstrated that common effort to understand and serve produces information and incentive for institutions to combine their resources. It has also demonstrated that such combinations can provide artistic and intellectual leadership that benefits students, institutions, and the field of music as a whole.

The conclusions reached seem logical and right because they are consistent with the nature of music itself. Almost everything in music involves contributions from more than one person. Much of the field centres on ensemble. Ensembles develop compatibility and musical depth; members work intensively together, musician-to-musician. The Music Study, Mobility, and Accountability Project has shown that these same fundamentals, applied to relationships between institutions in Europe and the United States, can raise the levels of contributions these institutions are making in their nations, their regions, and the world at large.