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MEJ – March 2012
From the Academic Editor
by Patrick K. Freer, Georgia State University, Atlanta

HAZING IN OUR MIDST

The November 2011 hazing death of drum major Robert Champion, Jr. has shined a light on an aspect of marching band that has been documented for many decades. Though individual occurrences of extreme hazing in marching band (and other performing ensembles) are uncommon, the circumstances surrounding the beating of the 26-year old student at Florida A&M University (FAMU) have focused the nation's attention on music education's response. This issue of *MEJ* includes a brief essay concerning the situation—and a definition of hazing—on page XX. I invite readers to consider the development of related, full-length articles suitable for publication in the pages of *Music Educators Journal*.

As this issue of *MEJ* went to press, the publicity surrounding the FAMU incident was increasing amid lurid charges and countercharges, with investigative reports chronicling the existence of hazing in marching bands at high school and collegiate levels.¹ The FAMU band director had been fired. DeKalb County Schools in Georgia had suspended all marching band activities pending investigation of alleged hazing incidents in two high schools.² Newspapers and academic journals were directing the public to previously obscure reports of hazing in marching bands.³ The website of the journal *School Band and Orchestra* included a snap poll in which 41% of viewers indicated they had confronted hazing issues in their ensembles.⁴ *MEJ* readers may wish to consult the sources listed at the end of this column for chronologies and details too numerous to list here.

The only mention of hazing in *MEJ*'s 98 years occurred in a 2009 article by Ryan M. Hourigan in which he explained that “the synergy of a group can outweigh the logical and caring judgment of the individual . . . students can find themselves in a situation that they will regret.”⁵ Nearly 70 years earlier, Karl Gehrken similarly wrote of music education's relationship to what he saw as the primary objective of human existence: “to make a better world for a larger number of human beings by means of more astute thinking and planning and through the development of a deeper and finer consideration for the welfare of all humanity.”⁶

Within the past year, two *MEJ* authors focused attention on bullying in music classrooms. Bruce Carter presented narrative descriptions of three music students who experienced bullying for varying reasons. As Carter stated, “only when students feel safe can they learn.”⁷ Donald Taylor looked at how music teachers could recognize and ameliorate potential harassment related to such gendered issues as instrument choice and choral singing. Though these may seem rather benign compared to hazing, Taylor used the term “bullycide” to refer to suicides prompted by an accumulation of these harassments over time.⁸

There is danger that instead of confronting the issue of hazing because it is uncomfortable for us to do so, we will instead extend a long-existing conversation regarding the value of marching band itself. This conversation has often been found within the pages of *MEJ*.⁹ The discussion can be had, but it is peripheral to the situation at hand. As Paul K. Garrison wrote for *MEJ*, marching band “remains among professional and scholarly musicians one of the most maligned aspects of American music education” (p. 49), which he countered with a detailed philosophy of music education capable of being realized through marching band activities.¹⁰

Supporters of marching band are passionate about their work and have labored to overcome negative stereotypes in the past few decades. Hazing is something different and needs to be addressed differently.

It may be that hazing and bullying simply happen. Or, in some instances, hazing and bullying may be an indication that something is amiss, whether specific to a circumstance or more broadly within the profession. In one of his early *MEJ* articles, Bennett Reimer highlighted how problems occur when philosophical goals are misaligned with the reality experienced within our classrooms and rehearsal halls. If the goals of marching band, or any other performing activity, are predominantly related to things other than music (i.e. social skills, teamwork, camaraderie, persistence, dedication, etc.), then those non-musical goals may create dissonance that undermines the value of the activities as appropriate for schools. As Reimer wrote in 1959, “Music education places itself in an extremely tenuous position when it justifies itself by pointing out its service to qualities which other fields can serve as well if not much better. Such justification is not only unnecessary, it is debilitating.”¹¹ This view suggests that a path forward can be found in a continual re-centering of music as the nucleus of our work and the experiences of the students in our care.

One of the reasons we might be reticent to acknowledge the hazing in our midst may be due to what Allen Britton termed the “politeness” of American schools and music education in particular.¹² This politeness can stifle questioning and hinder change. It can cause us to passively accept traditions and objectives that have little to do with education, music, or young people. Hazing is, by any definition, the antithesis of politeness. Perhaps it is time to have that impolite discussion.

NOTES

1. “Brutal Incidents Shine Light on Band Hazing Culture.” *Talk of the Nation*. NPR. 21 December 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/21/144077864/brutal-incidents-shine-light-on-band-hazing-culture>; ESPN, “Florida A&M Hazing Warnings Ignored?” ESPN. 30 November 2011, http://espn.go.com/college-football/story/_/id/7293620/florida-rattlers-fired-band-director-hazing-warnings-ignored
2. The Editors, “FAMU Must Consider Muting Marching 100,” *Orlando Sentinel*, January 15, 2012, <http://orlandosentinel.com/news/opinion/os-ed-famu-hazing-011512-20120113,0,7121367.story>; Richard Faucett, “Hazing Investigation is Sour Note for Georgia Marching Bands,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/17/nation/la-na-band-hazing-20111218>; Ty Tagami, “Bands to March While Parents Stew over Allegations,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 13, 2012, <http://www.ajc.com/news/dekalb/bands-to-march-while-1301972.html>
3. Elizabeth J. Allan, and Mary Madden, *Hazing in View: College Students at Risk: Initial Findings from the National Study of Student Hazing* (2008): Available: http://www.hazingstudy.org/publications/hazing_in_view_web.pdf; Chad William Ellsworth, “Definitions of Hazing: Differences Among Selected Student Organizations” (MA thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2004); Barbara B. Hollmann, “Hazing: Hidden Campus Crime.” *New Directions for Student Services* 99 (2002): 11-23; Scott R. Rosner, and R. Brian Crow, “Institutional Liability for Hazing in Interscholastic Sports.” *Houston Law Review* 39 (2002): 275-305;
4. www.sbomagazine.com, accessed January 10, 2012

5. Ryan M. Hourigan, "The Invisible Student: Understanding Social Identity Construction within Performing Ensembles." *Music Educators Journal* 95, no. 4 (2009): 37.
6. Karl W. Gehrkins, "The Lesson of the Century." *Music Educators Journal* 23, no. 1 (1936): 20.
7. Bruce Allen Carter, "A Safe Education for All: Recognizing and Stemming Harassment in Music Classes and Ensembles." *Music Educators Journal* 97, no. 4 (2011): 32.
8. Donald M. Taylor, "Bullying: What Can Music Teachers Do?" *Music Educators Journal* 98, no. 1 (2011): 41-44.
9. Marguerite V. Hood, "Our Changing School Music Program." *Music Educators Journal* 48, no. 4 (1962): 49-50, 74, 78.
10. Paul K. Garrison, "The Value of Marching Band." *Music Educators Journal* 72, no. 5 (1986): 48-52.
11. Bennett Reimer, "What Music Cannot Do." *Music Educators Journal* 46, no. 1 (1959): 42.
12. Allen P. Britton, "Music Education: An American Specialty." *Music Educators Journal* 28, no. 6 (1962): 28.