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## Music Supervisors' Bulletin to MEJ: A "Protective Force" for Music Education (1914-1939). [From the Academic Editor]

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[September 2013 MEJ]  
From the Academic Editor  
by Patrick K. Freer, Georgia State University, Atlanta

***Music Supervisors' Bulletin to MEJ: A "Protective Force" for Music Education (1914-1939)***

This issue begins the 100<sup>th</sup> volume year of the *Music Educators Journal*. Our journal is the oldest continuously-published journal in the field of music education, and it has the largest circulation of any similar journal in the world. We will mark our anniversary in numerous ways through the issues in our centennial volume. Each of the four issues will highlight a quarter-century of publication by reprinting a significant article from that era. These articles have been chosen by *MEJ's* past and present Academic Editors. The first reprinted article, drawn from our first 25 years, is by Lilla Belle Pitts (page XX). Each of the "From the Academic Editor" columns will highlight changes in our journal as it developed during the corresponding years. And, we will close the volume with a special, commemorative issue in June 2014.

***Our Beginnings***

The first words in our journal, from Volume 1, Number 1 (1914), appeared under the simple headline, "Salutatory!":

Greetings, Reader! Unless we have been misinformed, you are a co-worker with the publishers of this Bulletin of the National Conference of Music Supervisors. So here's a hand-clasp and a welcome of brotherhood! And we are a goodly company. This issue is going to more than six thousand addresses of men and women who, we are told, are interested in school music education, all over the country . . . This Bulletin is intended primarily to serve as a medium of interchange of ideas between present and future members of the National Conference of Music Supervisors and all other persons who are interested in the question of music in schools. We want to print the best material we can obtain, and we expect every reader to assist in this desire. (p. 2)

Edwin B. Birge (editor from 1930-1944) summarized the early history of our journal in his September 1934 column:

The need for an official magazine or bulletin began to be vaguely felt by members of the National Conference very early in its existence, but the subject was first formally discussed at the Minneapolis meeting in 1914, with the result that Peter W. Dykema was instructed to edit and publish a magazine four times a year under the title *The Music Supervisors' Bulletin*. In 1915, at the Pittsburgh meeting, the editors reported that a total of 25,000 copies of the *Bulletin* had been printed and distributed in quarterly installments. In 1916 Dykema announced that the quarterly circulation had reached 9,000, and that the *Journal* 'has been sent to all individuals who are known to be associated with public school music teaching and to all others who have indicated that they were interested in it.' (p. 13)

### ***Our Multiple Names***

The names of the organization and our journal changed numerous times during the early years. The organization began in 1907 and was known through 1919 as the National Conference of Music Supervisors. The printed pages of the organization's publication, the *Music Supervisors' Bulletin*, were approximately half the size of today's journal.

The first name change was announced at the start of the second year of publication:

With the approval of the officers and the executive committee, the *Music Supervisors' Bulletin* with this number becomes the *Music Supervisors' Journal*. The new name it is felt, more adequately describes the scope of our publication, and more definitely distinguishes it from one or two other publications with which it was confused on account of similarity of names. (September 1915, p. 2)

The organization's name changed to Music Supervisors' National Conference (MSNC) with the January 1920 issue of *MSJ*. Publication frequency increased to five issues per year in 1920. The journal's second editor, George Oscar Bowen (from 1921 to 1926) commemorated the tenth anniversary of the journal:

You are about to read Number 1 of Vol. X, of your Music Supervisors' Journal. We hope that you may be pleased with its appearance, and sincerely pray that you will approve what you find between the covers. We know that you will be interested in the splendid articles that are to be found within these pages, for they were written by people whom you, and everyone else who knows them, respects. (*MSJ*, October 1923, p. 1)

The May 1934 issue of *MSJ* contained two announcements: first, that at the organization's Chicago Conference of 1934, its official name had been changed to "Music Educators National Conference" following a three-year deliberation, and that a new name for the journal would debut with the twenty-first volume in the fall of 1934. Though the specific title was not mentioned, these words introduced the change to *Music Educators Journal*:

This magazine appears for the last time under its present title. The change of name to conform with the recently adopted title of the organization which the magazine represents will be made with the next issue . . . With the closing of the current fiscal year, details and formalities will have been taken care of—and the Conference and its official magazine will be duly rechristened. (p. 10)

In the same issue, MSNC President Osbourne McCarthy noted that despite allegiance to the name "Music Supervisors' National Conference," the eventual membership vote to shift from "Supervisors" to "Educators" was:

. . . but another commentary on the progressive spirit which has made the Conference what it is today. We live in the present with eyes toward the future. Traditions and achievements of the past have no dead weight to restrict progress, but rather they are the foundation stones upon which greater achievements are built. (*MSJ*, May 1934, p. 10)

Coinciding with the September 1934 title change to *Music Educators Journal*, publication expanded to six annual issues and a circulation of 15,000. By comparison, the present print circulation of *MEJ* exceeds 66,000.

### ***Revenue and Subscriptions***

This journal has been dependent on its advertisers since inception. In October 1923, the editorial comments included, "And, last, but by no means least, you are going to be interested in what our wonderful group of advertisers have to say to us." The inclusion of advertising was initially a necessity because the journal was available without charge. For the first eight years of publication, the *MSB* and *MSJ* were entirely funded by advertising dollars. Starting in year nine,

readers were asked to voluntarily contribute to a fund supporting the publication. A note in the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue (October 1923) related that \$142.50 had thus far been contributed to the Journal fund, and the note was followed with a list of the most recent contributors . . . including individuals from Colorado and Iowa who had each contributed 25 cents (the largest contribution was \$2.50).

Beginning in 1930, the journal was no longer freely available. Copies of the *MSJ* were distributed to MSNC members (annual dues of \$3.00) or with an annual subscription costing \$1.00. Concurrent with this change in financing, the page size of the journal was doubled to standard magazine dimensions.

Editor Birge commemorated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the journal in his October 1933 column. He began by praising the journal itself:

Since the first issue, some twenty years ago, the magazine has been an important and increasingly powerful factor in the school music development. It is, and will continue to be, the backbone of the nationwide promotional and protective force which, through the Conference, operates automatically for the benefit of everyone interested in music education. *Journal* prestige is unquestioned.” (p. 10)

Birge continued with several paragraphs about the role of the journal’s advertisers and why they were critical to the organization’s funding. After describing the quality of the advertisers, Birge wrote,

These facts are more or less obvious to the observer who is at all familiar with the field of music education. It is also fairly obvious that in the very nature of things publishers, manufacturers, and dealers comprise an important, not to say indispensable, factor in this field. They provide the equipment and materials which serve as the tools of our profession. (p. 10)

Interestingly, the only mention of the journal’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary came in a column by Birge that contained a perfunctory explanation of the journal’s purpose, scope and funding

sources. Birge wrote that the preceding volume year of *MEJ* was “the most successful season in the history of the journal” as measured by advertising dollars. (September 1938, p. 15)

### ***About that Missing Apostrophe...***

One of the most frequent questions I hear is, “Why doesn’t *Music Educators Journal* have an apostrophe?” Yes, it should, and yes, it did. What happened? The journal and its organization’s titles included apostrophes in their early years: Music Supervisors’ National Conference and *Music Supervisors’ Bulletin*, for example. The apostrophes in both titles disappeared with publication of the October 1926 *MSJ* (Volume 13, No. 1) when Paul J. Weaver assumed editorial responsibility for the journal. He served from 1926 to 1930 and appears to have offered no recorded explanation for why the apostrophes went missing or who decided upon their removal.

The *Music Educators Journal* (no apostrophe!) continues to serve as a “protective force” for music education, music learners, and music teachers. As Edwin J. Birge wrote in the inaugural issue of the newly-renamed *MEJ*, we “look forward with confidence to a future for the journal worthy of its previous history.” (September 1934, p. 13)