MEJ Covers from the First 100 Years: Designing to Unite a Profession

Patrick K. Freer
Georgia State University, pfreer@gsu.edu

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MEJ Covers from the First 100 Years: Designing to Unite a Profession

The 26 images displayed in the next few pages represent just 4% of the 638 MEJ covers published since 1914. It was quite a difficult task to choose representative covers from such a large body of work. Even as this commemorative issue went to press, I continued to wonder if I’d chosen the best images. I decided to select covers that represented various milestones in the history of the journal with emphasis on significant changes in the artistic design of the covers. My favorite MEJ cover of all time (October 1979) didn’t make the cut because it wasn’t original enough—though a miniature version appears on the front cover of this issue.

This collection is an outgrowth of a larger research project analyzing the covers of MEJ during its first hundred years. It turns out that there is no one library or archive collection that holds all covers of MEJ, and there is no online repository that contains all 638 images. As I worked to gather a complete set of the cover images, I gained an overwhelming sense of respect for those individuals who have designed “the look” of our journal. Ours is a proud history: we are the oldest and most widely read music education journal in the world. I know the day is coming when we will need to address the next 100 years. Will we remain a printed journal that is also accessible via the Internet, or will we move toward becoming an exclusively online journal? I have real concerns about that prospect, and that is a topic for thorough debate at another time. But, if we lose the printed journal, will we lose a sense of our past—our connection to the journal that helped build, unite, and define an entire profession? Will the artistry and communicative power of our covers be lost, much as the move to online distribution of recorded music has virtually eliminated the artwork that we identified with records and CDs of decades now gone?

For now, though, simply enjoy this view of MEJ as it developed over ten decades . . . and see if you remember any of these fascinating covers.
September 1914

This is the cover of the first issue of our journal (Volume 1, Number 1) in September 1914. The only available copies of the cover are reprints, and the exact color is unknown. The basic design of the first Music Supervisors’ Bulletin lasted eight issues (two volumes), from September 1914 to March 1916. The Bulletin changed in title to become Music Supervisors’ Journal in September 1915. It began as a quarterly publication printed in what is now known as “digest size” (approximately 6" x 9") with 32 pages—characteristics that did not change for many years.
September 1916

A note in the September 1916 issue indicated that the new cover design was provided by C.C. Birchard & Co., one of journal's most important advertisers. Advertisements for the publisher, later known as the Summy-Birchard Company, appeared on the back cover of every journal from 1914 to 1964 and beyond. This design, with the same image, appeared through the March 1918 issue.
October 1922

In September 1918, the cover design returned to a very basic format, not unlike the earliest issues of the journal. Various line drawings were added to the standard format of covers from October 1921 through May 1926. Changes in the drawings always occurred at the beginning of a new volume year each autumn. The October 1922 cover shown here is representative of this design scheme. It features a drawing of a female figure playing a flute while seated in a tree; the letters “MSJ” (the journal’s initials) appear in a white shield drawn parallel with the figure’s knee.
October 1926

The October 1926 issue was notable for the appearance of the first photograph on a cover. The image is of George Oscar Bowen, President of the Music Supervisors National Conference. This began a series of twenty issues featuring the same design with photographs of various MSNC national and regional leaders. The slogan, “Music for Every Child—Every Child for Music” appears on this cover. The motto was first printed on the May 1924 cover and appeared on all but two covers through December 1939. This particular copy of the journal was given to the NAfME archives by Gladys Pitcher in 1971, as indicated in the notation to the left of the photo.
October 1930

The October 1930 issue was the first to include color. This particular design lasted nearly four years, through the February 1934 issue. The March and May 1934 issues, the final issues titled *Music Supervisors Journal*, sported a related cover design. This issue also was the first to feature the full-size page dimensions similar to the MEJ of today.
Covers of *Music Educators Journal* and her predecessors have often marked significant anniversaries and milestones in the history of the National Association of Music Education. A notable exception was the lack of a cover celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the organization in 2007. The March 1932 cover incorporated elements of the then-current design, with modifications to the logo and page color. This was the first cover to include a full-cover background color—silver—in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Music Supervisors National Conference.
September 1934

The first issue titled Music Educators Journal sported a new cover design, with the masthead an artistic, though incorrect, representation of a musical staff. The specific design lasted less than two years. However, variants of the basic design plan continued for some thirty years. This cover is also notable for the inclusion of the logo of the National Recovery Administration and its motto, “We Do Our Part” (these appear at the bottom, alongside the “Every Child...” slogan). This symbol appeared on covers from October 1933 through May-June 1935.
This cover is one of the variants of the basic cover design begun in March 1934. The masthead placement and size, and the overall design remained fairly constant through June 1962. This variation featured the first full-cover photographic effect. The collage features various images of musical performers in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of Lowell Mason’s successful effort to include music instruction within the programs of the Boston city schools in 1938.
November/December 1942

This is a representative cover from the World War II era. Patriotic colors, war-themed photographs, and nationalistic content were prominent on all covers during the period from January 1942 through February-March 1945. This cover was one of several to feature a “V” for victory. Others pictured bands of the armed forces and instrumentalists in military uniforms.
January 1953

The January 1953 cover included the first color photograph. The image was of a school orchestra in rehearsal. Color photographic images remained rare for quite some time. The next color photographs appeared in April-May 1955 and October 1968. Although printing techniques and budgets allowed more use of color during this period, the effect was achieved through the use of artwork rather than color photographs. Color cover photographs became more common from 1968 onward.
February/March 1956

This issue was published midway though the 50th “golden” anniversary year of the Music Educators National Conference. It featured the color gold and an emblem locating the six regional divisions of the association. With its coloring and the use of multiple thin lines (here there are five, symbolizing a musical staff), the design complements the March 1932 silver anniversary issue.
February/March 1962

MEJ cover designs grew exponentially more inventive and unique until the early 1960s. Starting in 1961, cover designs became more uniform and conservative. This cover is representative of the design ethos of the time, though the inclusion of the photo makes it somewhat unique: it was the only cover to include a photo for nearly eight years. Other covers of the period were either extremely simple or featured various works of art—as seen in the next two cover images.
February/March 1964

This cover, with its single-color design, is emblematic of MEJ covers from the early 1960s. While covers from 1961 and early 1962 often contained little more than the journal masthead, music-related artworks were included on covers from September-October 1962 to May 1968. As shown here, covers in the early part of the decade through June-July 1966 featured particularly formal and stately masthead/logo designs.
September/October 1964

Only two covers in MEJ history have included a horizontal masthead placement. This one uniquely features a horizontal masthead within an overall portrait orientation. The only cover with a complete horizontal orientation (October 1972) also appears in this article.
October 1970

The 1970s marked a return to bold, inventive cover designs. There was no standard MEJ cover design for nearly twenty years. The only constant from cover to cover was the masthead placement—which only changed a few times during the period. The masthead font and design changed frequently, becoming less formal as the 1970s progressed and, conversely, growing increasingly formal through the 1980s. This cover is representative of the trend toward photographs of students and teachers.
May 1972

Many MEJ covers of the 1970s featured artwork with graphically bold color and striking imagery. The May 1972 cover was described this way: “This month’s Journal cover was created by artist Roland Lee of Washington, D.C. A jazz lover, Mr. Lee appears to be familiar with the work of Nick LaRocca and “Wingy” Manone, who, like the musician on the cover, were left-handed trumpet players. (Even the famed Bix Beiderbecke began playing as a southpaw.) His illustration reminds us that the jazz festival season is swinging upon us.” (p. 5)
October 1972

This is the only MEJ cover designed in landscape (horizontal) orientation, and it was one of only three covers in the past fifty years printed in black-and-white (the others were April 1972 and May 1974). This issue was also notable for its size: it contained 214 pages (tied for the most pages with the February/March 1966 issue), and it was devoted to the topic of “Music in World Cultures.”
September 1974

This issue marked the 60th anniversary of *Music Educators Journal* with a design showing representative cover images from 1914-1974. The images form the numerals “6” and “0.” The overall effect and intent is similar to the design of the cover of the current centennial issue, forty years later.
April 1981

Change came gradually to *MEJ* covers during the 1980s. Where covers of the 1970s collectively featured innovation and individuality, covers in the 1980s slowly became more and more similar. This April 1981 cover image was one of the last to feature artwork developed specifically for *MEJ*. As noted by the editors, “The subject of this month’s cover, painted by Virginia Walker from Baltimore, Maryland, is choral competition. The lights are hot, the judges are listening with pursed lips and squinting eyes, and the musicians and the conductor are about to show the judges what a first-rate performance should sound like” (p. 7). Drawings and paintings by Walker were featured several times on *MEJ* covers during the early 1980s.
By 1983, the style of MEJ covers had become a bit more formal, as seen in the masthead font. Color images, mostly photographs, were now found on nearly every cover, with some—like this one—depicting more literal imagery of musical activity than others. This cover was one of several in the 1980s to feature photographs of marching bands. No MEJ cover since October 1987 has included a photograph of marching band activity.
May 1989

The May 1989 issue marked the last of two major design elements. It was the last cover with the “block style” masthead and thin-lined “frame” that had first appeared in September 1984. And, it was the last in a 33-year series to feature a full-cover image with superimposed text—a style that had been ubiquitous since late 1966. Though this design style would reappear from time to time in coming decades, the trend moved from the simple “storytelling” of photographs and artworks toward the use of multiple elements (text, color blocks, photographs) on the same cover.
Beginning in late 1989, MEJ covers featured a centrally placed photograph or, occasionally, artwork with a heavy frame of color or white space. The September 1994 cover draws its bold framing color from hues in the photo to create a cohesive effect—possibly symbolizing the unifying opportunities envisioned by the “Children's Bill of Rights in Music” announced in the text at the bottom of the cover. The visual foci of the child and adult are oriented toward the center of the page, also evoking a sense of unity and shared experience. Though simple, the combined effect of multiple design elements made this cover one of the most memorable in MEJ history.
September 1994

The September 1994 issue introduced the newly adopted National Standards for Music Education to music teachers. The cover is an example of the trend toward structural uniformity that has guided MEJ cover design for the past 30 years. In this case, the masthead and surrounding white space remained constant, with only the photograph and printed text changing from issue to issue. The design remained exactly the same for a decade (1992-2002). One benefit of the uniform design was that covers began to include information about some of the articles contained in the issue—an effort to draw readers to the increasing levels of scholarship found in MEJ's featured articles.
March 2004

The next style of MEJ cover appeared from 2003 to 2008. It featured a block of color with the masthead at the top of the page and a large image below. A few issues with this cover design blurred the boundary of the color block and the image. For instance, the March 2004 issue featured an article about the teaching techniques of Leonard Bernstein. The cover included a collage of images from Bernstein's career that extended into the masthead area.
March 2010

The last major design change in the first 100 years of MEJ occurred with the September 2008 issue—the first to be designed and printed by SAGE Publications, though production and editorial control remained the responsibility of NAfME and its membership. The March 2010 cover printed here is typical of the design, with its large masthead, bold color contrasts, and prominent photograph of an instrument. Covers from September 2008 to June 2011 featured an inset photograph of a person.
making music. The inset photo was eliminated in September 2011 to allow for more text announcing the contents of the issue.

June 2014

And here we are, celebrating our first 100 years! The cover images selected for the cover of the anniversary issue were chosen purely because of their visual interest. Together with the covers in this article, they provide a glimpse into our past and an idea of our future.