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MEJ – December 2011
From the Academic Editor
by Patrick K. Freer, Georgia State University, Atlanta

SPIRITUALITY AND MUSIC EDUCATION

“Members of the Music Educators National Conference . . . if you realize the *possibilities* of your work in revitalizing the spiritual life of mankind and in assisting man to tap the ultimate source of spiritual values and inspiration, you will deserve to be canonized with the saints.”¹

Encouraging as these words may have been when offered by Earl Enyeart Harper in the pages of *Music Educators Journal* nearly five decades ago, they allude to difficulties faced by music educators when attempting to reconcile unseen purposes of education with more readily tangible outcomes including musical performances and varied assessments of knowledge and skills. Other than Iris Yob’s feature article in this issue, Harper’s is the only other in *MEJ*’s 98 years to specifically focus on the spiritual aspects of music teaching and learning. Readers may recall many articles dealing with religion and the music classroom, but those again highlight the difficulties embodied in Harper’s analysis. What are the relationships between, for example, morality, spirituality, religion, ethics, dispositions, aesthetics, culture, and values? Yob’s article is positioned to stimulate conversations among music educators that may result in clarifying how religion and spirituality are similar . . . and how they are not.

Actually, this conversation has been occurring in earnest for approximately ten years within the worldwide community of music educators. Estelle Jorgensen writes, “The arts allow one to engage important existential questions: ‘Who am I?’ ‘Where have I come from?’ and ‘Where am I going?’ that point outside oneself while also coming to a more profound sense of oneself. It is not that the arts explain these things so much that they present, enact, and clarify them for our understanding.”² As Yob noted in an earlier essay, musicians often remark that their experience of music is spiritual—rather than religious—even when performing literature composed for sacred purposes.³ These experiences have been variously described, with Deanne Bogdan identifying a “Shiver-Shimmer Factor” in her examination of how spirituality might be an appropriately broad concept that can authentically link such issues as aesthetics (e.g. Susanne Langer and Bennett Reimer), optimal peak experiences (e.g. Abraham Maslow and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi), and critical thinking in music.⁴

The role of spirituality in education is receiving attention beyond music in ways that readers may find relevant to their work. Lisa Hart writes from the perspective of a classroom teacher whose primary goal is to “nurture the whole student.”⁵ Hart admits that this is a broad goal, made even more difficult by myriad student individualities in her classroom, including particularized manifestations of spirituality. Teachers such as Jennifer Motha also seek to define both differences and points of intersection between religion and spirituality.⁶ From her vantage point as an elementary school teacher, Motha writes in a personal, approachable manner.

She offers her thoughts as though writing in a diary or journal, and readers are invited to share in her process of discovering how aspects of spirituality ground her daily work with children. In another teacher-focused essay, Frances Schoonmaker builds on the growing research about children's spirituality, noting that educators need to recognize that it is "part of children's being in the world, and honoring it in the classroom requires providing opportunities for its expression within the ordinary events of classroom life."⁷

As you turn to the following pages and consider Yob's provocative essay, it might be illustrative to keep the following sentence in mind. The complex sentence opens Peter London's recent commentary about the role of spirituality in art education:

"And yet there is a strange silence, an absence in the literature and practice of art education that is all the more remarkable because of what is so abundantly in evidence all throughout the entire history of art, of all times and places and people, the spiritual intentions of art, is absent in the teaching of art and the preparation of art teachers."⁸

Does this apply equally to music education? And, if so what does that imply for our work with children, repertoire, and pedagogy?

Notes

1. Earl Enyeart Harper, "Moral and Spiritual Values in Music Education." *Music Educators Journal* 40, no. 6 (1954): 13-15, 56-57.
2. Estelle Ruth Jorgensen, "Editorial." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 14, no. 2 (2006): 100.
3. Iris M. Yob, "Why is Music a Language of Spirituality?" *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 18, no. 2 (2010): 145-151.
4. Deanne Bodgan. "The Shiver-Shimmer Factor: Musical Spirituality, Emotion, and Education." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 18, no. 2 (2010): 111-129.
5. Hart, Lisa. "Nourishing the Authentic Self." In *Spirituality, Education & Society*, ed. Njoki N. Wayne, Energy L. Manyimo, and Eric J. Ritskes, 37-48. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2011.
6. Jennifer Motha. "Spirituality and Its Relevance for the Contemplative Educator." In *Spirituality, Education & Society*, ed. Njoki N. Wayne, Energy L. Manyimo, and Eric J. Ritskes, 49-68. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2011.
7. Frances Schoonmaker. "Only Those Who See Take Off Their Shoes: Seeing the Classroom as a Spiritual Space." *Teachers College Record* 111 (2009): 2713-2731.
8. Peter London. "Concerning the Spiritual in Art Education." In *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*, ed. Liora Bresler, 1479-1492. The Netherlands: Springer, 2007.