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## Reciprocity, Community, and Care in Music Education. [From the Academic Editor]

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

## **Reciprocity, Community and Care in Music Education**

This issue of the *Music Educators Journal* contains articles centered on young people's musical creations and interactions. We hope to provide students with creative and interactive experiences in our classrooms and rehearsal halls so that they will use the newly found skills to make music whenever and wherever they choose. The link between each of the articles in this issue is found in June Boyce-Tillman's essay where she offers, "Creative processes such as jazz and improvisation provide opportunity to focus on [music's] intrinsic values of reciprocity, community and care" (p. X). Boyce-Tillman urges music educators to return elements of spirituality to the core of artistic teaching and learning. Readers may recall a related article by Iris Yob in the December 2011 issue of *MEJ* ("If We Knew What Spirituality Was, We Would Teach for It"). Response to that article was exceedingly positive, and readers requested that we print additional content that developed the issue of spirituality from other vantage points. Boyce-Tillman offers music teachers a mode of thinking about teaching, musical creation, and musical re-creation that remains grounded in philosophical ideals.

The lead article in this issue explores characteristics of music education in Detroit ("Motown") during the 1960s as the city became the center of popular music for much of America. Marie McCarthy investigates how Detroit's school-based music education programs nurtured the creation of new music, blurring the lines between formal music instruction and informal musical practice in ways that reflected the tenets of the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium. This intersection has been examined in many past issues of *MEJ*, including the April 1991 special focus issue on popular music. The guest editor, Robert Cutietta, noted a general lack of curricular progress with regard to popular music, composition and improvisation, adding, "The challenge for the next twenty years is to include pop music in the curriculum in ways that have musical integrity" (p. 28). Twenty years later (as if on cue!), *MEJ* published Randall Allsup's "Popular Music and Classical Musicians: Strategies and Perspectives" (March 1991) that pointed toward how popular music has influenced global music education while remaining at the field's margins in the United States. Allsup's article included specific strategies for including popular music in classrooms led by teachers who are more comfortable with classical traditions. These pedagogical suggestions mirrored many of the techniques reported in this issue's article about Motown, popular music, and music education. Readers may also find value in the November 1969 report about that era's perceived divide between popular and curricular music in which MENC Present Wiley L. Housewright cautioned, "One musical art cannot repress another" (p. 45).

Composition and improvisation are primary topics for several articles presented in this issue of *MEJ*. Though written independently, each article reinforces the others in ways that teachers should find meaningful for their curricular planning. It is rather fascinating that none of the articles in this month's issue centers on the use of technology to support instruction about composition or improvisation. Instead, these articles focus on broader principles and techniques that function with or without the addition of

technological devices. *MEJ* last published an issue focused on composition and improvisation in July 2001. In that issue, Sam Reese wrote about computer-enabled technologies that can assist student compositional development (“Tools for Thinking in Sound”). Reese’s article remains relevant because it was about a teacher’s approach toward using technology rather than the application of specific software or hardware. The subsequent ubiquity of consumer-oriented composition software such as “Garage Band” makes it imperative that we provide students with musical principles that will remain applicable as technologies evolve. Readers will find much in the July 2001 *MEJ* issue that complements the articles in this issue, with very little content out-of-date despite the passage of twelve years. NAFME members always can gain free access to these and other archived articles through [www.nafme.org](http://www.nafme.org) (For Music Educators > Resources > Periodicals).

No commentary about *MEJ* and musical creativity would be complete without mention of the contributions Jackie Wiggins has made to our journal. The current articles by Clint Randles (“How Composers Approach Teaching Composition: Strategies for Music Teachers”) and Augusto Monk (“Symbolic Interactionism in Music Education: Eight Strategies for Collaborative Improvisation”) build upon Wiggins’ efforts to facilitate compositional activities in music classrooms. Wiggins’ seminal “Composition as a Teaching Tool” (April 1989) was written while she was an elementary general music teacher and drew directly from her experiences in six different school districts. This single article garnered so much attention that Wiggins was encouraged to explore the issues of composition and improvisation in more detail as her career progressed. Two of Wiggins’ later *MEJ* articles are relevant to this discussion, particularly “Teacher Control and Creativity” (March 1999) in which she wrote a sentence that has become iconic: “Because of our long tradition of teacher control and our assumptions that students do not really know very much about music, teachers sometimes construct creative assignments in ways that not only fail to promote creative thought but may actually hamper it” (p. 31). The other, “Fostering Revision and Extension in Student Composing” (January 2005), furthered the pedagogical techniques offered in the earlier articles. This latter article is also noteworthy for the presentation of a debate between Wiggins and Peter Webster, another leading scholar who explores composition in the classroom.

Webster contributed to the July 2001 *MEJ* focus issue mentioned above, co-authoring with Maud Hickey to write “Creative Thinking in Music.” Their closing paragraph opened with these sentences—key phrases that might guide readers as they engage with the authors in this issue of *MEJ*:

We are all born with the ability to think, act, and live creatively. Releasing creativity can occur in venues such as music composition and improvisation as well as listening, movement, and performance. Nurturing creative thinking in sound should be a core tenet of one’s personal music-teaching philosophy. (p. 23)