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The Past is Prelude: MENC Begins its Second Century

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The Past is Prelude: MENC Begins its Second Century

During MENC's golden anniversary year of 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the first human-made satellite to orbit Earth. MENC's director of publications responded by asking, "...what are we going to do to continue to merit the place of music in the educational program as it will be revised to meet the conditions and needs of the new age?"¹

This query, though prompted by a momentous event, was not unlike many other questions raised in the pages of *Music Educators Journal* during the 50th anniversary year.² Those pages were filled with articles that simultaneously celebrated the organizational achievements of MENC, lauded the development of music education in the United States, and cautioned readers against complacency during the next fifty years. Those five decades have now passed, yet many questions raised in 1957 still resonate today, among them:

- What IS music education?
- Where are we now – in the sense of quality, as well as quantity?
- What are our critical needs?
- What are our next steps?
- What should be our goals?
- What are the nature and significance of musical growth?
- What is the needed research in music education?
- Are we geared for social change?
- Is music in the schools justifiable if it is based on fun?
- Have we emphasized enough in the schools the creative process?
- Are we concerned about the exceptionally talented student?
- Do the school [officials] of today respond more readily to the music education program than they did twenty-five years ago?
- Is . . . the training of teachers for general music classes also not the most difficult and crucial part of the teacher education program?

- Why do many students like music very much but at the same time do not like music they receive in the schools . . . ?
- Do we sometimes “drag our heels” due to too many traditions?
- Have we changed life for young people?
- If we really believe in music education, do we not need to be more articulate about our beliefs with our administrators, the parents of our students and with the people in the communities in which we work and live?³

Each article in the “Centennial Series” is offered in the spirit of the conversations that marked 1957’s golden anniversary. Bennett Reimer’s first *MEJ* article was published fifty years ago, and the series begins with an overview of how his writings have reflected the changing music education field during that time. Other articles in the series will explore the leadership roles of women in MENC, the gradual evolution from teacher-centered to student-centered music instruction, and how MENC is situated within music education across the globe. The series will conclude with an analysis of issues confronting the field as it prepares to enter a second century of service to the United States and the world.

The *MEJ* Editorial Board of 1957 must have anticipated that their commemorative articles would shape the profession for years to come. It is similarly the hope of the current *MEJ* Editorial Committee that the “Centennial Series” will prove to have been as influential when MENC celebrates its bicentennial in 2107.

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NOTES

1. William B. McBride. “Before Sputnik – and After,” *Music Educators Journal* 44, no. 3 (January 1958): 19.
2. Lawler, Vanett. “50 Years (1907-1957): Look to the Future,” *Music Educators Journal* 43, no. 5 (April-May 1957): 33-38.

3. "Preparing for the Years Ahead: A Report to the Membership of the Music Educators National Conference," *Music Educators Journal* 44, no. 3 (January 1958): 20-23.