Comprehensive Musicianship: Some Encouraging Words

David Willoughby
Eastern New Mexico University

The author is Former Assistant Director of the Contemporary Music Project

In the Fall 1980 issue of SYMPOSIUM A. Cutler Silliman shared "Some Cautionary Words" about comprehensive musicianship. My comments are shared in the spirit of continued dialogue.

THE CM CONTEXT

To understand the meaning and context of comprehensive musicianship (CM) it would be helpful to know something of the history and mission of the Contemporary Music Project (CMP).

First, comprehensive musicianship is a symbol—jargon if you will. It was given definition to focus on perceived needs in the profession. The needs were articulated as the result of direct experiences in the Young Composers Project, later the Composers-in-Public Schools program and the Professionals-in-Residence program. These programs were integral parts of the Contemporary Music Project which was funded by the Ford Foundation from 1958 through its conclusion in 1973.

Given the foundation funding, CMP was in a position to develop and promote ideas nationally. We who worked with the Project would like to feel that we promoted with vigor and effectiveness, yet we were always aware of our place—a small group of people promoting big ideas for as long as funding would keep us going.

Silliman described the definition of CM as stated in my book (CMP6) as "sweeping." You bet it was—and consciously so. We were not intending to promote the status quo. We wanted to promote the ideal to the fullest extension of the concept, the boldest approach—in hopes that even small results would be obtained. We were in a position to draw attention to a concept that symbolized needs in the profession as perceived by those associated with the Project.

CMP attempted to forge new or renewed links: teachers with students, educational institutions with communities, teachers with performers and composers, one culture with other cultures, and the future with the past.

CMP served as a catalyst for questioning past values and practices. It promoted the communication and cooperation among professionals from all parts of the music world; it promoted a revitalization and revision of music curricula at all levels; it promoted the nurturing of creative approaches to teaching and learning; and it promoted growth in understanding the processes of music. Probably more than anything, CMP promoted an expansion of knowledge and attitudes beyond that which most of us acquired in our formal education.

By their very nature these pursuits created problems and risks. For many people the suggestion of change meant that what was happening was not quite good enough. Defensiveness and protectiveness rather than growth too often was the result. Great ambitions and idealistic aspirations came easy—but fulfilling them was a different matter.

We knew that a few schools or a few teachers would respond with the fullest possible implementation of CM principles. We hoped that many more would respond with at least a small degree of expansion in the way they looked at music or at the teaching and learning of music. We had no illusions of grandeur. At best we hoped for a small contribution to the betterment of our profession.

THE CM CONCEPT
The concept of CM developed between 1965 and 1969. From 1969 through 1973 the concept was refined and promoted. In the grand scheme of things, three years of promoting change is hardly sufficient.

Those of us closely involved with CMP have frequently been asked how CM stands now: Who are the good CM teachers? Where are the good CM programs? These questions cannot be answered easily or accurately.

CM was promoted as an attitude, an approach, not as a method or an easily identifiable package of musical learning that could be purchased and used totally or not at all. Many teachers or schools now incorporate CM principles, perhaps extensively, without labeling their approach "CM." Conversely, teachers or schools can label their programs "CM" without incorporating many of its principles. Both circumstances obscure any attempt to assess the status of CM teaching.

Philosophies, methods and approaches designed to assist teachers in fulfilling their goals come and go, but CM principles remain evident today in published materials such as textbooks and anthologies for general music classes and college music theory courses, in convention programs, and in music curricula at all levels. To cite one example, the College Music Society in its 1978-80 Directory of College Teachers lists ten areas of teaching assignments that were not listed in its 1972-74 Directory. They are Music of Africa, Afro-American Music, Music of the Amerindian, Music from Asia and the Pacific, European Folk Music, USA Folk and Pop, Music from Mexico and Central America, Music Iconography, Lute, and Aesthetics of Music.

It should not be presumed that all broadening of repertoire as symbolized in the expansion of teaching areas cited is attributable to CMP, but the Project did contribute to raising the consciousness of a global perspective in the selection of repertoire in music teaching.

In fact, many people misunderstood the scope of the Project by thinking that the sole interest of the Contemporary Music Project was in the promotion of contemporary (post-1950) music. In reality, the interest was in broadening the repertoire commonly used in music study both forwards and backwards, to include Medieval, Renaissance and early Baroque music as well as twentieth-century music and music from other traditions and cultures. The title was a carryover from a previous phase in the life of CMP.

Another problematic perception of the CMP philosophy was that CM, because of its implied breadth, results in superficiality. This risk is inherent, but when combined with areas of study supplemented by a wide variety of illustrative examples, such an approval could be acceptable. This suggests that superficiality under certain conditions (as related to a core topic) can be quite acceptable. To sample Medieval, Japanese, or American folk music in the context of an intensive study of melodic or rhythmic organization brings a breadth (approved superficiality?) to the experience that can be beneficial in terms of both knowledge and motivation.

Certain aspects of CM have been part of the commitment of many teachers and of many schools for many years. Again, these disparate principles were collected by CMP and placed under an umbrella for purposes of national focus and attention, an umbrella that was called comprehensive musicianship.

CM EXTENDED

Although most of the applications of CM principles were in theory and general music classes, extensions of these principles were advocated by CMP beyond the traditional classes. Again, the context was the addressing of certain perceived needs in the profession.

Three particular issues to which national attention was drawn through invitational forums remain pertinent today: (1) the education of performing musicians, (2) the education of music consumers, and (3) the education of college music teachers. The comments that follow are derived from the published reports of these forums.²

The Education of the Performing Musician³

The professional musician is usually thought of as one who receives money for performing music for the public and aspires to do so as a career. Assuming this musician can presently earn a living by performing, will he be able to do so in 20 years? Where will he perform? How many symphony orchestras will be left to provide employment for the classically trained musician? Will television or video tapes supplant the live
performer? Will classical records still be made? Will specialization on one instrument cause such refinement as to extinguish oneself from a performance career? Can a performer afford to be educated only in an elite language intended for a relatively few connoisseurs? Can the performer's repertoire include both classical and popular styles?

A conclusion: Performers must be versatile in order to be successful as a professional in today's world.

To Bethany Beardslee, singer, versatility means the solid grounding in twentieth-century techniques and repertoire to avoid an unbridgeable gap in the ability of performers to perform music of their own time.

To Richard Clark of Affiliate Artists, versatility means the ability to relate to an audience as a person as well as an artist, that is, the need to develop a performing personality.

To Stephen Sell, then an arts administrator and now an orchestra manager, versatility means the ability to perform different kinds of music in different size ensembles before different types of people in the most different kinds of settings.

The versatility embodied in comprehensive musicianship would not lower standards of performance by dissipating the talent within each individual but would allow a flowering of creative energy that, according to pianist Claude Frank, would allow performers to be "emotionally specialized" while adding breadth to their whole musical background, so that the catholicity of a student's musical education both develops from and relates to his central interest.

To prepare musicians for professional careers both now and in the future, the following areas of experience would be most helpful and indeed necessary:

1. Experiences that are analogous to the professional world, at least in part acquired through internships with professionals. These guided experiences need to include interviews and auditions, factors relating to contracts, marketing, management, copyright, and practicalities of concert arrangements and programming.

2. Guidance in developing personal attributes, including working relationships with other performers, showmanship factors such as stage poise and dress, the creation of an image, and the ability to communicate verbally with a variety of types of audiences.

3. Promotion of open-mindedness, flexibility, adaptability to change, the avoidance of snobbism, the discernment of quality in any musical category, and the humanization of the musical experience.

4. Preparation of music in many styles and the development of fundamental skills that allow for coping with diverse styles.

5. Information and experience in the music industry: television including cable, the recording industry, and other areas of the entire commercial complex.

6. Awareness through career counseling of alternative careers in music and changing circumstances in the professional world.

7. Capacity to adapt to the impact of the media on the general public and its need for a variety of stimuli, increased visual orientation, tendency toward informality, and satisfaction with uncomplicated, readily enjoyable products.

8. Encouragement of a balance between specialization and versatility.

In summary, the aspiring professional performer will undoubtedly teach in some way, be it through the classroom, studio, concert hall or Kiwanis Club. The teaching potential of artists must be nurtured throughout their careers.

The aspiring professional performer needs to be actively curious about his chosen profession, to "know what's going on," to be aware of the "tricks of the trade."
The aspiring professional performer needs to be versatile, adaptive and accommodating in repertoire and style of presentation, and yet must strive continually to be discerning in artistic judgments.

The reader is encouraged to consult the report of the Task Force on the Education and Development of Professional Artists and Arts Educators, published by the National Endowment of the Arts, December 1978 which provides basic premises, recommendations, and further thought regarding the education of the performing musician and other aspiring professional artists.

_The Education of Music Consumers_4

A "consumer" of music is one who wants musical experiences for purposes other than a profession—the audience, the person who does not major in music, those who participate in musical activities for purposes of enrichment or entertainment.

John Eddins of Southern Illinois University questioned this choice of words and wondered if "consumer" reflects unfortunate attitudes about those who are to be educated about the nature of musical experiences provided them. It is an analogy with material consumption which sets apart "producers" and "consumers," and could imply the kind of condescension, manipulation and exploitation which are common in the producer/consumer world.

The concept of "consumer" may also encourage or be reflective of the attitude that academic music departments exist essentially for music major programs, and not for the rest of the college or university. These "service" courses are too often considered peripheral and non-essential, are too often assigned to junior faculty or to those who need to "fill out their load," and exist for the purpose of generating credit hours sufficient to pay for the more expensive instruction necessary for music majors (albeit, a very important purpose).

Nevertheless, while attempting to avoid a condescending separatism regarding consumers, the issues of their education will be considered in three interrelated contexts: (1) the importance of educating consumers, (2) identifying new constituencies, and (3) educational strategies.

Regarding the importance of educating consumers, it is very difficult in higher education not to be pragmatic and self-serving in reaching out to find new and more consumers—to build audiences, to fill classes, to generate dollars, to compensate for the declining enrollment of the traditional college student. But philosophically, is it important to educate the consumer? Are they needed? Is there a demand or can a demand be generated by an effective teaching and learning environment—whatever that may be?

It can be assumed that virtually all humans need music; they want to experience it and to respond to it—in some form, and for some purpose. Music is for everyone, and the nature of the musical experience is essentially the same for everyone. Whether composing, performing or listening, the differences in experience are a matter of degree, not of kind—for the music major and for the "consumer."

Herbert Spencer has observed that music more than any other art "ministers to the human welfare." Music schools and school music programs have indeed a unique opportunity to "minister to the human welfare" of the non-music major, that "other 80%," the so-called consumer. It is a philosophical responsibility of music educators and their programs to provide opportunities for musical experience for consumers—those in school and those beyond the walls of the university or the general music classroom.

In attempting to reach out to new constituencies, preparatory programs, ensemble participation, and concert and recital attendance are traditional and good ways of providing musical experiences for the community, but new avenues are being explored—for the aging and the young, frequently through noncredit programs. Examples are nontraditional music courses in such diverse areas as recreation and leisure, the educationally disadvantaged, society and culture, and non-Western repertoires.

Special projects or workshops can be made available to "take music to the people." Concerts by nontraditional performance ensembles, visiting artists in residencies designed for community interaction, and participation in such activities as jazz groups, recorder ensembles, guitar classes and music theater productions should be provided.

Participation by consumers in planning musical experiences can be helpful, and their education should not
be restricted to formalized learning and the acquisition of information. For many people music is among the most intriguing and most powerful of life's enjoyments, and perhaps enhancing enjoyment should be the primary purpose in the education of the consumer. Through substantial, creative experiences with actual music in which the consumer can be personally and enjoyably involved, learning will take place, and such experiences in formative years can lead to lifetime participation in and appreciation for music.

It is always appropriate to reexamine our educational strategies in music. Music can be defined as organized sound and silence that exists in time, or, as Robert Trotter states, "Sound becomes music when I want it and let it be music." In introductory music courses the emphasis has been too much on music as a historical product, on music as the lives of great (to whom?) composers, and on music as key signatures, scales and chords. "Many of these courses have been at best a bore and at worst a deterrent to musical growth."

All musically related behaviors relate to composing, performing, and the all-pervasive one—listening. Providing opportunities for developing amateurs and connoisseurs of music through the nurturing of these fundamental behaviors must be a primary aim of instructional activities for the consumer. Such opportunities, according to Robert Trotter, begin with experiencing music, then seeking to develop students' desire and capacity to reflect on that experience and to talk with others about it, and assisting them to learn how to arrive at their own assessments of artistic worth. A goal must be to stimulate them to continue to learn and to participate in music as an important part of their lives.

The possibilities for experience are endless. Examples are the study of musical structures through individual or group compositions (remember, differences of experience are of degree, not kind), music criticism through critiquing, electronic music through exploring the possibilities of synthesizers, and music and social change through interacting with other university departments.

Hard work, courage, patience and commitment are requisite to mastery of teaching courses that will motivate and excite the consumer. Faculty may need to be retrained; curricular offerings and course syllabi may need to be refocused and redesigned; consultants and visiting professors may be needed to supplement faculty initiatives; and basic research into the ways people experience and respond to music must be recognized and applied in order that more effective teaching procedures may be developed.

*The Graduate Education of College Music Teachers*^5^

Preparing aspiring professionals to teach in colleges and universities is, again, related to career opportunities, to changing economic and curricular circumstances in higher education, and thus to the need to be versatile and adaptable.

The NASM Basic Musicianship Statement is appropriate as a basis for graduate as well as undergraduate study, suggesting that graduate programs should strive for:

1. Balance between depth and breadth in competence and perspective.

2. Awareness of an expanded repertoire that is representative of many musical styles and cultural values.

3. Incorporating pedagogy into all disciplines.

4. Ideological cohesion and sense of common purpose among the various segments of the music school.

The issue of pedagogy needed in all disciplines is derived from a recognition that teaching will be a probable vocation for most graduate students, hence the need for a commitment to the development of skills in communication, particularly in the preparation of college music teachers.

The best way to learn to teach is to teach—under the supervision of master teachers—with progressively increasing responsibilities. Graduate students, regardless of degree or major program, can observe model teachers working with music majors and general college students, can engage in microteaching responsibilities under direct supervision, and can participate in internship programs. Supervised teaching can involve applied music study, theory or literature classes, or ensembles, and it can take place on
campus or in neighboring community colleges or private music schools. But of critical importance are
guidance, supervision, and opportunities for dialogue and for reflection on teaching or observation
experiences.

The education of future college music teachers must begin not so much with graduate curricula as with
present graduate school faculty as they influence future teachers. Faculty, students and administrators
must be aware of the importance of pedagogy in programs other than public school music and must
promote a consciousness of and desire for excellent teaching for all students, particularly future college
teachers who someday will be exerting influences—for good or ill—on other graduate students.

SUMMARY

The Contemporary Music Project, in promoting the concept of comprehensive musicianship as it applied to
the study of music from elementary schools through the university, was aware that it assumed the role of a
catalyst for thought and reassessment regarding the nature of music and the use of musical processes in
teaching and learning.

CMP was aware that CM principles were not new to many teachers and were in fact not accepted by
many. Yet it recognized a need in the music profession to create an awareness and a national
consciousness of these principles. Thus CMP refined and promoted the concept of comprehensive
musicianship.

Any approach to teaching and learning that demands an expansion of attitudes and knowledge, that
requires continued study and contemplation about music and music learning, and that involves extensive
risk-taking and perhaps failure does intimidate many teachers. The tendency is to carve out a comfortable
rut and feel cozy in the security of the known and proven.

Back to Mr. Silliman's "cautionary words." He notes that comprehensive musicianship "appears to be
evolving in collegiate institutions," and he endorses "attempts of creative musicianship to incorporate new
educational ideas" into the curriculum.

Two of his words are symbolic and of value to those of us who worked with the Project—"evolving" and
"ideas"—ideas about the nature of music and evolving strategies about music teaching and learning. CMP
promoted ideas, and they were always in a state of refinement and evolution. The Project itself evolved in
stages as new needs were identified. Perhaps that is why CMP titled one of its publications,
Comprehensive Musicianship, an Anthology of Evolving Thought.

1Comprehensive Musicianship and Undergraduate Music Curricula, published by The Contemporary Music
Project through MENC in 1971.

2The reports are available for purchase through NASM.

3Derived from the Report of an Invitational Forum sponsored by the Yale School of Music and the

4Derived from the Report of an Invitational Forum sponsored by the National Association of Schools of
Music and held in Houston, Texas, February 1974.

5Derived from the Report of an Invitational Forum sponsored by CMP in cooperation with the Center for the
Teaching Professions and Northwestern University, January 22-24, 1973.

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