

MUS 735

Discussion - Hitchcock, Chapter 1

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1.17.21

In the Colonial times we see the beginning of a music education movement. Discuss what you feel are the most critical aspects of the influence churches and the early singing schools had on how we view and utilize music education today.

As settlers moved from England to America, they were not able to bring the art music with them, due to the fact that most of the settlers did not partake in that music, and the impossibility of moving the necessary instruments to perform that music. Thus, the two types of music that emerged in early America were folk music and sacred music. Early church music was based on psalms, which is songlike poetry from the Bible. Several psalters, or books of psalms, were compiled into the Bay Psalm Book, which was the first psalm book to be printed in America.

The combination of the psalm books containing no written music and the general decline of singing quality in churches led to a call for reform by the Puritan ministers, and the singing schools were created. The purpose of these singing schools was to help people learn to read and sing music at sight, rather than singing by rote. This push for music literacy was the biggest detail that stood out to me, as teaching to read and perform music at sight is an important component of my job. Learning by rote is fast and immediately effective, but it does students very little good long-term, as there is little or no transfer to new music when students learn by rote.

Find and post a performance of a William Billings piece that you could/would use in your teaching. Explain how you view its musical value/relevance then and now.

I have a Del Borgo arrangement entitled Chester Variations by William Billings that I have used with my middle school bands. Here is a link to it:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quIRO-rZpG4&feature=emb_title

When I've used this piece in the past, I've explained that this piece is significant, as it was America's first patriotic war song, and it was the precursor to the era of military songs. This arrangement is particularly nice, in that it offers opportunity for lyrical performance and

phrasing, which contrasts well with the more dramatic, energetic feel starting at measure 20. I find that it works well for a 6th or 7th grade band.