

History of Music Education in the United States

James M. Novak

Department of Graduate Studies, Northern State University

MUS 775: Foundations of Music Education, History/Trends

Dr. van Gent

January 31, 2021

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

History of Music Education in the United States

Music has been an important part of our lives before the United States was even formed. Immigrants brought their personal experience with music and blended it with other cultures. The growth seen in music education has been tremendous in our nation over the past 300+ years. Music education is so common now that the vast majority of public schools offer it in some capacity, but this was not always the case.

As settlers moved from England to America, they were not able to bring their traditional 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 (Hitchcock & Gann, 2000). 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 (Birge, 1928). The first singing school opened its doors in 1717 in Boston, Massachusetts at the prompting of Reverend Thomas Symmes. The purpose of these singing schools was to help people learn to read and sing music at sight, rather than singing by rote. In 1721, Reverend John Tufts published *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes Using Non-Traditional Notation*, which is seen as the first music textbook in colonial days. From there, more than 375 tune books were published spanning 1700 and 1820, including authors Samuel Holyoke, Francis Hopkinson, William Billings, and Oliver Holden. Tunebooks, textbooks

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

containing choral music instruction, were also a vital part of early music education. It is reported that over 1,700 tunebooks were published and used in colonial times (Mark, 2008).

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 little good long-term, as I find there is little or no transfer to new music when students learn by rote.

While formal music education was available only to the elite early on, Lowell Mason's musical background and expertise allowed for its widespread expansion (Birge, 1928). In addition to his proficiency on several instruments – organ, piano, flute, and clarinet – Mason was heavily influenced by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss education reformer. Mason used Pestalozzi's philosophy to form the backbone of music education in America: student-teacher relationships. He opened the Boston Academy of Music in 1832, which was the first school devoted specifically to children's music education. Students worked with teachers to learn to sing music, but also explore related theory and music studies. This event helped to popularize the idea of offering music as a school subject (Mark, 2008). Mason served as the Superintendent of Music in the Boston school system from 1837 to 1851, where he was able to broaden music education to all levels of public education (grammar, primary, and high schools).

Mason's success as a music teacher in Hawes School officially solidified the concept of music education offerings in public schools for children of all ages (Birge, 1928). This also was critical to the development of music methodology at Normal Schools, which is what teachers' colleges were called at the time. By the end of the 19th century, four-year degree programs were

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

created, and Oberlin Conservatory was the first college to offer a Bachelor of Music Education degree.

In the second half of the 1800s, school bands began to gain popularity (Neller, 1987). Higher enrollments in public education led to a greater number of bands with a variety of member compositions at school parades, sporting events, and World War I & II troop entertainment. John Philip Sousa, prolific composer and US Marine Band director, contributed to bands' popularity with his upbeat and patriotic marches.

Entering the 20th century, music education tenets began to expand into specific teaching methodologies and establish associations dedicated to promoting its interests. While there were several teaching methods in use, I will focus on what I feel are the four most important methodologies: Dalcroze Method, Kodaly Method, Orff Schulwerk Approach, and Suzuki Method.

Swiss musician and educator Emile Jaques-Dalcroze created a music education teaching method emphasizing all the senses, particularly kinesthetic, and compared music to a language learned by the human brain (Mark, 1996). The Dalcroze method had 3 main concepts: use of solfege, improvisation, and eurhythmics. Eurhythmics, known as "rhythmic gymnastics" was the central theme of this method, as it teaches music concepts such as rhythm, structure, and expression through physical movement.

Zoltan Kodaly, a Hungarian music educator and composer, strove to develop a lifelong love of music through physical instruction and response (Mark, 1996). The Kodaly method is viewed as an enjoying and engaging educational style that teaches music theory and notation

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

using solfege hand signs, musical shorthand notation (stick notation), and rhythm solmization (verbalization).

While viewed as more of an approach than a method, German composer Carl Orff engages students' innate abilities using basic rhythms and melodies (Mark, 1996). The Orff Schulwerk approach emphasizes improvisation over repetition by the teacher, allowing for self-discovery and growth of the student. To further enable and encourage students, Orff modified several percussion instruments including the glockenspiel, xylophone, metallophone, and drums.

Shinichi Suzuki believed that learning music can enrich lives and develop desirable character traits and virtues (Mark, 1996). The Suzuki Method is highly uniform and includes elements such as love, high-quality examples, praise, rote training and repetition, and a learning timetable set by individual student's readiness. Suzuki emphasizes the need to have a music learning environment that is extremely similar to the language-learning environment.

Simultaneously with the development of methodologies was the emergence and fortification of music advocacy entities. In 1894, the National Education Association (NEA) created a specific music division. But, in 1907, the Music Supervisor's National Conference was founded with the sole purpose of promoting the study and teaching of music (*Fifty Years of Music Education in America*, 1950). Although the name changed over the years – Music Supervisor's National Conference, Music Educators National Conference (MENC), and The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) – its mission has remained solid and unchanged. Using its influence in music education, NAfME has most notably standardized the singing of the national anthem, published “A Child's Bill of Rights in Music” (children have the

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

freedom to explore their musical abilities), and formed the National Standards for Music Education. Many developments and symposiums occurred in the mid-to-late 1900s to organize music education and discuss the effectiveness of specific teaching techniques, including:

- 1953 – American School Band Directors Association established
- 1959 – Contemporary Music Project – Ensures children are exposed to quality composers and performers in their learning environment.
- 1961 – American Choral Directors Association established
- 1963 – Yale Seminar – Julliard Project collects quality music literature from important eras to be utilized in classrooms.
- 1965 – National Endowment for the Arts – Federal financial aid cements support for music education.
- 1967 – Tanglewood Symposium – Proposes collection of unified and diverse music education including youth music, special education music, urban music, and electronic music.
- 1969 – GO Project – MENC creates 35 objectives for fostering quality music education programs in public classrooms.
- 1978 – Ann Arbor Symposium – Discusses the positive impacts of music education with regard to auditory perception, motor learning, child development, cognitive skills, memory processing, affect, and motivation.
- 1990 – Multicultural Symposium in Music Education – Addresses the increasing diversity of the American public school by creating new teaching materials encompassing more world cultures.

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

- 1994 – National Standards for Music Education – MENC introduces new standards to aid in the reform and accountability of all subjects.
- 1999 – Housewright Symposium/Vision 2020 – Examined current philosophies and practices and laid out how music education should look in 2020
- 2007 – Tanglewood II: Charting the Future – Studied the changes in music education since the first Tanglewood Symposium 40 years earlier and sets objectives for the next 40 years.

The Tanglewood II Symposium is a great example of how music education continues to evolve every day. Music education continues to be valued and expanded to the population as a whole. Today, 94% of elementary schools and 91% of secondary schools offer music education instruction, according to a 2012 National Center for Education Statistics report (Parsad & Spiegelman, 2012).

Typically, in elementary schools, children start their music education on keyboards or recorders, sing in choirs, and learn about music, sound, and theory with a general music class. Special attention is given to non-Western music to give the students a more well-rounded education and understanding of the world around them.

Primary and secondary schools expand music opportunities by adding musical ensembles including choir, orchestra, concert band, marching band, or jazz band. More extensive music classes are largely offered as well, and many times are required by the school curriculum.

Colleges and universities offer much variety for the continued pursuit of musicianship and learning. Most institutions have musical ensembles such as choirs, orchestras, and bands that include participants from several areas of study. Non-musician students can earn credit for taking

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

a music history or music appreciation course. Many institutions offer degrees in music education ranging from proficiency to teach beginning level music to collegiate employment. These degrees, which may offer interdisciplinary options, require the completion of varied technique classes, private instruction, numerous ensembles, and in-depth observations of music educators.

The variety and breadth of available music education opportunities and advocacy organizations in today's world is certainly very impressive. I wonder if Mason and other early music education advocates believed that such development would be possible. I am proud to be a part of music education history. I fully believe that music is not only a large part of the human experience, but it also develops so many other skills in my students, from actual curriculum like math, to social skills in learning to work together as a group, to developing positive character traits like timeliness, accountability, and persistence.

UNITED STATES' MUSIC EDUCATION HISTORY

References

- Birge, Edward Bailey (1928). *History of Public School Music in the United States*. Oliver Ditson Company.
- Hitchcock, H. Wiley and Kyle Gann (2000). *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*. Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Mark, Michael L. (2008). *A Concise History of American Music Education*. MENC: The National Association for Music Education.
- Mark, Michael L. (1996). *Contemporary Music Education*. Schirmer Books.
- Neller, George (1987). Music Education History: A Short, Selective Bibliography. **Music Educators Journal**, volume 74, issue 4: pp. 24-25.
- Parsad, B. and Spiegelman, M. (2012). *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-10 (NCES 2012-014)*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.
- Fifty Years of Music Education in America*. (1950, April 1). **Music Educators Journal**, volume 36, issue 5: pp. 23-26.