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TEACHING MUSIC HISTORY IN THE MARGINS

JAMES A. DAVIS - JESSICA LOTYCZEWSKI - HENRYK LOTYCZEWSKI – *Introduction*

Music is often seen as incidental to the “core subjects” in public schools, and the academic study of music is treated as secondary to performance. At the collegiate level, music history and theory are kept on the perimeter of the music education curriculum, while college history and theory teachers tend to ignore the role of music history in teacher preparation and its potential within public school classrooms. This marginalization of music history requires that public school and collegiate music teachers look for creative ways to present musicology “in the margins” of their current curricula. This article offers examples of how to bring music history into non-traditional settings and how teachers can demonstrate, by their actions, that music history is a pervasive and important part of musical performance and the liberal arts in general.

We were excited to receive an invitation to share our views on the interaction between collegiate music history and the public school music curriculum.¹ Much to our surprise, our preliminary discussions proved to be both enlightening and frustrating. We had what seemed a relatively obvious topic to examine – how we use music history in our classrooms to build cultural connections, and how what happens in the college classroom impacts what happens in the public school classroom. But as we exchanged ideas, we found ourselves talking more about the broad picture of music education and the realities of what we do every day as teachers. As public school music teachers Jessica and Henryk are faced with limited resources to teach a subject that many colleagues and administrators view as unimportant. In addition, the realities of their workload, and the emphasis on performance over academic studies, create a situation that is not conducive to complex or extensive lesson plans.

In her keynote address at the conference *Musicians and Musicologists as Teachers* in 2014, Professor Giuseppina La Face Bianconi spoke of the “unnatural divorce between musicology and music pedagogy” and the “evident marginalization of

¹ Following American convention, we use ‘public school’ to refer to any pre-college teaching situation, and we use ‘general music’ to refer to academic music courses where ensemble performance is not the priority.

music teaching”.² The words ‘margin’ and ‘marginalization’ seemed to capture much of what we were struggling with: ‘margin’, denoting a place outside the conventional; and ‘marginalize’, which denotes the action that pushes something to the side. First, it is largely true that music is seen as a subordinate discipline in public schools. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, general music, and music history in particular, are often treated as secondary to performance within the music curriculum. What happens at the collegiate level is oddly similar: music history and theory are kept to the margin of the college music education curriculum, while at the same time, college history and theory teachers ignore the role of music history outside of their classrooms, unintentionally isolating music history from teacher preparation and its potential within public school classrooms.

One result of this marginalization is that discussions about teaching music history in the public school classroom often rely on ideal, predetermined situations where a music history topic is concisely presented to interested students as part of an integrated curriculum. Unfortunately, such situations do not make up the majority of what professional music teachers face every day. So instead of focusing solely on the perfect setting to teach music history, the three of us also looked at the margins, to see how music history can be part of a liberal arts education and make cultural connections even when confronted with limited time and non-traditional settings.

JESSICA LOTYCZEWSKI – *Music History from Baseball to Broadway*

Looking back on my collegiate experience I feel that undergraduate music majors, and music education majors in particular, are overloaded with coursework and music history and musicology are certainly not the focus. The focus is on the process and application of teaching, not on the content. I found the study of music history fascinating and therefore enrolled in numerous electives to pursue this interest. I *believe* this interest is now evident in my classroom, even though much of my focus is necessarily still on performance. Thankfully, New York State (in conjunction with NYS Music Educators) has created a set of standards to guide music teachers to create a learning environment that is inclusive of numerous musical elements, be it in the classroom or rehearsal (see Fig. 1). This includes a standard specifically on *connecting* art to history and culture (see Standard 11 in Fig. 1).

² G. LA FACE BIANCONI, “Musicology and Music Pedagogy: An Unnatural Divorce”, *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, V, 2014, pp. 157-163: 159, <http://ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/168> (last accessed, 29.09.2019).

New York State Learning Standards for the Arts Conceptual Framework			
Shared by All Arts Disciplines			Discipline-Specific Performance Indicators
Artistic Processes		Anchor Standards	
Cr Creating Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.			1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
			2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
			3. Refine and complete artistic work.
Pr	Performing Music Dance Theater	Realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation.	4. Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
	Presenting Visual Arts	Interpreting and sharing artistic work.	5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
	Producing Media Arts	Realizing and presenting artistic ideas and work.	6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
Re Responding Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.			7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
			8. Interpret meaning in artistic work.
			9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
Cn Connecting Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.			10. Relate and synthesize knowledge and personal experiences to inspire and inform artistic work.
			11. Investigate ways that artistic work is influenced by societal, cultural, and historical context and, in turn, how artistic ideas shape cultures past, present, and future.

Figure 1 – From the New York State Education Department. “Conceptual Framework for the 2017 New York State P-12 Learning Standards for the Arts.” Internet. Available from <http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/curriculum-instruction/2017-implementation-guide-9.2-.pdf> (last accessed, 22.09.2019).

Even though the final objective of most American and New York State music classes is heavily designed to focus on performance, these standards are intended to help create a balance of learning.³

I currently teach in a rural district in Central New York. The Waterville district is a small public school; the senior class at our graduation ceremony on June 16, 2018 consisted of 57 students. We have 4 music teachers in our district and I teach a variety of classes in 7th to 12th grade (12-year-olds to 18-year-olds) including two choirs scheduled during the school day and a general music class for 7th grade students. I also direct and produce the annual musical production and have a number of co-curricular (after school) ensembles.

In my general music class, I have the most time strictly devoted to the study of music history. This includes a “Music History” unit that focuses primarily on the Classical Period and the study of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Students begin to make cultural connections during the discussions that naturally arise on a daily basis and the unit culminates with a research project: *The Composer Baseball Card*. For this project, students select a composer from a list and research their composer’s *stats*. Most students are familiar with the format of a baseball card, and athletics – especially “America’s pastime” – are heavily ingrained in American children. All of the students present their completed cards to one another in the class; this includes an illustration of the composer drawn by the student, the composer’s birth and death dates (if applicable), where the composer lived, what instrument(s) the composer played, the genre for which the composer primarily wrote, notable works, the historical period of the composer, and one piece of information that the student found interesting about the composer. At the end of each presentation, the class listens to a piece by the composer, and students are surprised at how many of the pieces they already know from popular culture. General music rounds out part of the curriculum with similar units on American Musical Theatre (including a final presentation researching a Broadway musical and writing a journal response to “If you were asked to create a Broadway musical, what would it be?”) and Pop Music (with a final project researching pop groups from the 1980s and 1990s).

In choir, the focus of the class is on rehearsing and performing. While I would love to delve into the cultural influences of our repertoire, given the limited amount of rehearsal time it simply is not an option. I try to spend some rehearsal time on cultural connection (“What is a *gollivog*?”; “How is the mood of Walt Whitman’s poem *O Captain! My Captain!* reflected through the music?”; “What kind of

³ For more detailed information regarding the New York State Arts Learning Standards, see <http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/arts-standards-implementation-resources> (last accessed, 19.09.2019).

environment does Sydney Guillaume’s music suggest for carnival season in Haiti?”). While I may feel it is necessary to address these connections in order to address the NYS Standards or to help my students better understand a piece, I find that they will ask questions relating to the culture or history of our repertoire. While musicology may not be the focus of the performing ensemble, it is still information that my students genuinely want to understand.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of developing this presentation was the realization that my students are making the most organic cultural connections in our co-curricular ensembles, most notably the annual musical production. Each show allows us to investigate and explore a different culture every year. While rehearsing *Anything Goes*, I had students asking for an explanation of all the references Cole Porter makes in the song *You’re the Top*, which then led to natural discussions about what life was like for different social classes during the 1930s. One of the sillier moments occurred during *9 to 5: The Musical* when a student was frustrated that he was getting tangled in one of the office phone cords; this was a part of the intended choreography and I had to explain that with corded phones, your privacy only stretched as long as the phone cord. We also discussed the professional work environment of the 1970s and briefly investigated the prolific songwriting career of Dolly Parton. *West Side Story* lent itself to the exploration of the connection between Bernstein’s score and the choreography in *Cool*, as well as the similarities and differences between *West Side Story* and Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Finally, one of my colleagues hosted a workshop for his cast of the musical *Aida* on traditional African dance, which was then incorporated into their choreography for the show and gave the cast members a better understanding of the importance of dance and drumming in African cultures.

I was surprised to find how organic and natural these interactions were. Sometimes it would start with an anecdote I knew, or a student would ask an intriguing question, and the next thing I knew the entire cast was listening and wanting to know more. I hope that some of this fascination stems from my own interest in music history and musicology, and that my excitement to learn or share my knowledge with my students piqued their own interest. As public school teachers know, some of the highest praise one can receive from a student is: “I already knew this, but before I didn’t care that I knew it... I didn’t realize it was so cool”.

HENRYK LOTYCZEWSKI – *Research, listen, play*

As I reflect on my undergraduate education, I remember being interested in music history and musicology but not often concerned with its practical application in my future classroom. Perhaps that was because I could only imagine what the classroom looked like or perhaps it was because I was consumed with my education

courses and the theory behind teaching music. Although there was quite a bit of training on the periphery, there was little in actual curriculum design. Once the imaginary teaching position became reality, it was up to me to infuse music history and musicology into my curriculum. Still, the majority of my position is ensemble-based with a heavy emphasis on performance. Although incredibly important, it is not always conducive to implement all the standards within each lesson when there are public concerts that loom large at the conclusion of each quarter. A holistic approach to music education is necessary regardless of specific foci demanded of me. This is where creativity is necessary.

I teach at the Sauquoit Valley Central School District. The district is a conglomeration of several municipalities within a fifteen-mile diameter found in Central New York. As of the start of the 2017/2018 school year, our K-12 student population was 1000. I am one of three full-time music teachers for the district. My assignment includes (but is not limited to): Beginning Band (grade 5), Junior Band (grades 7-8), the *pull-out* lessons that are included with each Band, General Music (grade 6) and as an extracurricular class: Middle School Jazz Band. I will discuss the ways in which I infuse music history and musicology into my Beginning Band, General Music, and Jazz Band curricula, respectively.

In Sauquoit, students are given the opportunity to start playing a band instrument in fifth grade. Despite the fact that they have *Band* within their schedules we can't actually start playing as a band until the fundamentals are taught within their pull-out lessons. It is roughly six weeks before students can start playing as a full band, or, about 4-5 total lessons. Within this time, I partner with the librarians to do a students' *Band Instrument Research Project*. The objective of this project is for students to learn about their respective instruments through directed research. Students will organize their conclusions by constructing a *Google Slide* presentation and answer the following essential questions: "Which materials make up the instrument?", "What are some ancestors of the instrument or When was the instrument invented?", and "How does the instrument sound in the hands of a famous musician specific to that instrument?". Through the use of *Google Classroom* and library media sources, students are able to listen, research, cite, and create their slides while gaining important research and technological skills that help them throughout their school careers. As for my particular class, students are able to gain more of an insight and appreciation of their instruments.

In addition to their research project, students gain historical insights into their music throughout the school year. Examples of this include the following pieces: Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, *Banana Boat Song* (Jamaican traditional) and *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (Norworth and von Tilzer). In the case of *Ode to Joy*, students listen to the entire 4th movement of the Beethoven's 9th Symphony and identify the number of

times Beethoven uses the theme as well as the specific instrumentation. We discuss the meaning that Beethoven might have intended for Schiller's poem. *Banana Boat Song* is centered around Harry Belafonte's performance of the song on *The Muppet Show*. Through the video, students learn of the geography of where bananas grow and how bananas are harvested. Students get a taste of Caribbean music as well as learn about various Latin percussion instruments. The students also enjoy the opportunity to make some noise on these instruments. *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* is a joint venture with the local baseball team. Students play the piece during the 7th-inning stretch of a Utica Blue Sox game. While learning to play the piece, students listen to the original song and learn the form of the song. Although they take the sport for granted, they find out much of modern American culture can be attributed to baseball.

6th Grade General Music is a semester-long class. The curriculum for each class is the same, with the exception of one special unit per class: the first semester class participates in a *Nutcracker Unit* and the second semester class does a *Blues Unit*. Within the Nutcracker Unit, students learn the meanings of terminology such as Romanticism, programmatic, and individualism. Students listen to examples of music that reflect these terms and make brief comparisons to musical eras which preceded the Romantic Era of music. Two class periods are devoted to the life of Tchaikovsky so that they better understand the composer behind *The Nutcracker*. I supply the students with a score of the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* and students follow the score while listening to the excerpt. I have a guest speaker (the Sugar Plum Fairy herself) come in to discuss the roles and requirements of the dancers as well as the different sections of the ballet. Students also get to see some of the *hardware* of the ballerina. As a grand conclusion to the unit, students see a live performance of *The Nutcracker* at The Stanley Theater in Utica, New York.

The second semester class has the opportunity to partake in the *Blues Unit*. This unit is a partnership with Hamilton College Music Professor, Monk Rowe. Monk comes into the classroom to teach the students about the form and the sentiment that make up *The Blues*. Students listen to various blues examples and are asked to define the general mood of each piece through a dissection of the lyrics. Students also learn of a 12-bar form and how the lyrics are set within that format. Students are then divided into groups of four or five and create lyrics of their own using the 12-bar blues format. It is often fascinating and entertaining to see the topics the students use for their lyrics. Topics have been as whimsical as school lunches as heavy as a family member's illness. Their "songs" are edited by Monk and myself, and in the final class Monk brings his blues band to perform the students' pieces with the students performing along with the band.

The Middle School Jazz Band is an extracurricular group that meets once a week in the evening and performs selections in each of the school concerts. Each rehearsal is divided into three sections: Listening-Snack, Improvisation-Warm-Up, and Rehearsal. The latter two sections don't often directly apply to music history and/or musicology but the examples used for learning the theory behind reading chord changes as well as our concert selections are all the sources of our Listening-Snack section.

In the Listening-Snack section students learn of jazz origins through music and culture. While students listen, they can enjoy a snack that a student brings to rehearsal based on a rotating schedule. Eating a snack while they listen often helps with interest and focus. After listening to an example, we discuss its style as well as its place and significance in history. A brief biography of the composer is provided prior to listening. As the year progresses, students start readily identifying defining characteristics of particular styles and make connections to various composers. In addition to learning about history, styles, and composers, some students start to learn how to approach their music from a performance standpoint. Through listening, discussion, demonstration, and improvisation, students are able to better "authenticate" their performance of their concert pieces.

My hope is that students can learn more and have an enriching music experience through addressing music history and musicology within the curriculum. Although the lives of students are infiltrated with a barrage of *on-demand* music, it holds little meaning without historical and cultural context.

JAMES A. DAVIS – “Saying” vs. “showing” Musicology

After many discussions about with Jessica and Henryk regarding collegiate music history and public school teaching, I decided to focus on something very basic for reasons that I hope will become clear. Let me say that I do not believe there is anything brilliant about this approach, nor do I consider my ideas to be revolutionary. Here is an extremely brief overview.

At some point my music history seminar, I will ask a question: “How would you teach this to an 8th grade music class”, or “Tell me how you would present this same material to a collegiate ‘Introduction to Music’ class”. This simple question, along with carefully chosen follow-up questions, achieves a number of objectives.⁴

Asking students to consider how they would present the information to others serves as an excellent capstone; students need to internalize, reflect on, then

⁴ Additional questions include “What part of today’s topic might be relevant to high school students?”; “Would you include this information in program notes? If not, why?”; or even “How would you explain this material to your parents?”.

demonstrate what we just studied. Then, they must organize that material into a coherent, streamlined form to “teach” it to a distinctive audience. They must decide what information is most important and how best to convey that. A key element to this is rewording or “translating”; to not rely on terminology and concepts that we are familiar with, but to find a way of communicating the information to those with little to no background in music history. At this point 2nd and 3rd order questions are particularly powerful, allowing me to guide students in useful directions or to follow-up on any noteworthy points they raise.⁵ If I have handled things correctly, the students are now balancing the information learned with a hypothetical audience – they are learning the *relative value* of information to a given population.

So there it is – nothing brilliant, though this exercise has been very successful. But what I learned working with Jessica and Henryk was that the potential benefits of this exercise may come less from the questions I have asked or the discussions that followed, and more from the situation in which the activity occurred. It was not what I was *saying*, but rather what I *showed*, that mattered.⁶ *Saying*, that is, verbally or visually presenting information or leading a content-based lesson on music history is undeniably valuable. *Showing*, that is, doing or demonstrating, can have even deeper and enduring impact. In my case, telling students that musicology is something that can be included in the pre-college classroom might influence them to some degree, but doing it myself demonstrates that I see no separation between the world of academia and the public school classroom. The same is true for public school teachers in a much more focused and pragmatic fashion. When Henryk made the history of the Blues part of his rehearsal, he *showed*, by his actions, that knowledge and practice were intertwined, above and beyond what he may have said to his class. For Jessica, by addressing specific cultural topics that arose organically from a musical rehearsal, she *showed* that cultural understanding was a natural part of the performing process. In both cases, Jessica and Henryk were demonstrating that studying music history is not something that exists only in the margins. They were *doing* musicology.

The same should be considered by college teachers. Are we not guilty of marginalizing our own discipline? What Henryk and Jessica showed me was that by

⁵ 2nd and 3rd order questions might include “What does your audience already know that you can draw upon?” or “Are there any problems you foresee that you can avoid?” For a more in-depth exercise, ask one student to suggest a lesson plan for 8th grade students, then ask a second student why the first student’s suggestions would or would not work for a class of adult learners.

⁶ Here I am borrowing loosely from Wittgenstein’s distinction between ‘saying’ and ‘showing’ first introduced in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922).

casually introducing public school teaching in a music history seminar I can break the boundaries between the margin and the mainstream; I can *show* that public school teaching should not be kept apart from the analysis, biography, or social investigations we pursue in my upper-level classes. In fact, this is why I will start including pre-concert lectures, program notes, and other situations as part of my method. By doing it myself, by *showing* that public musicology is a normal part of my discourse, then I can display for my students that musicology is not something that occurs only in the music history seminar. It reaches beyond our campus and can – and should – be a part of our profession at every level.

Jessica, Henryk and I are excited by current efforts to strengthen musicology in the public school system. There is a real need for designing great assignments and new approaches for bringing music history to the pre-college classroom. But we feel it is also necessary to consider the potential for marginalization in what we do. If we limit our activities only to those classes where music history traditionally appears, then we run the risk of permanently imprisoning the study of music history in the margins.

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