

JAMES VINCENT MAIELLO
Winnipeg, Manitoba

A PRAXIAL APPROACH TO MUSICOLOGY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

For Dave Pratt

School music teachers and musicologists alike will almost certainly acknowledge that musicology is in some way valuable for music students at all levels, but it is unclear what exactly that means and exactly how musicology may be integrated effectively into the school music classroom. As James Davis and I have both noted, the ‘liberal arts component’ of musicology has continued to lose ground in curriculum and instruction, with school music programs focusing most heavily on performance.¹ The traditional ‘music appreciation’ course of the secondary school curriculum has become what American music education calls ‘general music’, and even that has minimized the content and skills with which musicology as a discipline is occupied. This is due in part to the fact that music education relies on an antiquated notion of the nature, methodologies, and practices of musicology and related disciplines, but that is beyond the scope of the present essay. The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) revised the former Music Educators National Conference (MENC) National Standards for Music Education in 2014 to make them even more focused on performance, recognizing “performing, creating, and responding” as broad domains and reinforcing the dominance of an aesthetics-based philosophy of both music and music education.²

Praxial theories of music education may offer some redress. Since their emergence almost thirty years ago, these philosophies have gained acceptance with scholars and become popular with music teachers at all levels. From my perspective as a teacher of music history and musicology, the approaches I will outline presently offer exciting and potentially transformative opportunities for pedagogy in the university, a case I have argued at length elsewhere.³ In this

¹ See J. V. MAIELLO, “Toward an Extension of Regelski’s Praxial Philosophy of Music Education into Music History Pedagogy”, *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, IV, n. 1, 2013, pp. 71-108, <http://ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/85> (last accessed, 19.09.2019); J. A. DAVIS, “Music History Pedagogy on the Ground Floor”, this journal, VI, 2016, pp. 19-26: 21, <https://musicadocta.unibo.it/article/view/6562> (last accessed, 19.09.2019).

² See the National Association for Music Education’s website, in particular <https://nafme.org/my-classroom/standards/> (last accessed, 19.09.2019).

³ See MAIELLO, “Toward an Extension of Regelski’s Praxial Philosophy of Music Education into Music History Pedagogy” cit.

paper, however, I will suggest that a praxial philosophy provides a compelling rationale for incorporating musicology into the secondary school curriculum and that it offers a road map for designing effective instructional experiences focused on musicological praxis. First, I will argue briefly that musicological praxis is congruent with praxial philosophies of music education and that it is appropriate and beneficial for inclusion in the secondary music curriculum. Second, I will offer a set of criteria and recommendations for applying this philosophy and integrating musicological praxis into that curriculum. Finally, I will use two brief examples by way of illustration. I hope that this paper will outline at least one path for making musicology a more integral part of curriculum and instruction and that it will provide a broadly applicable philosophical framework.

A Brief Overview of Praxial Theories of Music Education

Praxial theory represented the first serious alternative to “Music Education as Aesthetic Education” (MEAE), an approach rooted in Kantian aesthetics and aesthetic formalism, of which the most prominent proponent was Bennett Reimer. MEAE was essentially an education in feeling and connoisseurship, relying on the same premises that drove the traditional college music appreciation course, among them the idea that one had to be knowledgeable and literate about music and its intrinsic qualities to “appreciate” it and that students had to be taught what constituted “good” music. Moreover, despite acknowledging the existence and efficacy of extra-musical referents, he argued nonetheless that “the artistic meaning and value is always and essentially above and beyond whatever referents happen to exist in a work...”⁴ In short, Reimer put music as an aesthetic object at the top of a hierarchy of ideas, which has driven the nature of music education for decades.⁵

Praxialism, on the other hand, privileges a hierarchy of practice. Philip Alperson first challenged the aesthetic approach in 1990, arguing instead for a “contextual, but not relativistic” philosophy that privileged not music as an aesthetic object, but rather “just what music has meant to people”.⁶ David Elliott followed, criticizing Reimer’s narrow definition of art as “fine art” and proposing a broader, more inclusive view of music.⁷ Drawing in part on the concept of “musicking” originated by David Walhout and popularized by Christopher Small, Elliott defined music as a fundamentally human endeavor, not an

⁴ B. REIMER, *A Philosophy of Music Education*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1989, p. 27.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 133.

⁶ PH. ALPERSON, “What Should One Expect from a Philosophy of Music Education?”, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, XXV, n. 3, 1991 (Special Issue: *Philosophy of Music and Music Education*), pp. 215-224: 227.

⁷ D. J. ELLIOTT, “Music Education as Aesthetic Education: A Critical Inquiry”, *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, II, 1991, pp. 48-66: 49.

aesthetic object.⁸ He also tied the value of music to human consciousness and self-growth, invoking psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concepts of 'flow' and 'optimal experiences' to characterize the practice of making music.⁹ Thomas Regelski offered his own praxial philosophy, which advocated an exceptionally broad definition of musical praxis.¹⁰ Regelski built on the Aristotelian concept of praxis, using Ellen Dissanayake's writings on art to address the intrinsic value of music in enhancing the lives of students.¹¹ He emphasized the role of music in action and on musical praxis as part of a life well lived.¹² Regelski also encouraged instructors to design "reasonably realistic real life experiences" that students can replicate outside the classroom.¹³ Praxial approaches represent not only rigorous alternatives to MEAE, but also a way to mitigate some of the philosophical weaknesses that scholars like Elliott, Regelski, and Wayne Bowman have identified in the aesthetic education model.¹⁴ Although *Music Matters* does not address musicological praxis explicitly as such, it does provide a foundation for its inclusion; Regelski's work on "music appreciation as praxis" is an ideal useful point of departure from which to advocate for musicology in the secondary school curriculum.¹⁵

Musicology as Musical Praxis

Even a cursory examination suggests that musicological praxis aligns with the central principles of praxial music education. First, musicological praxes are as legitimate musical experiences as performance, composition, and the other broad definitions of 'music' accepted by praxialists. This extends to what

⁸ See D. J. ELLIOTT, *Music Matters: A Philosophy of Music Education*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 49. See also D. WALHOUT, "The Nature and Function of Art", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XXVI, n. 1, 1986, pp. 8-20; CH. SMALL, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Hanover, NH, University of New England Press, 1988.

⁹ ELLIOTT, *Music Matters* cit., p. 114.

¹⁰ See TH. A. REGELSKI, "Music Appreciation as Praxis", *Music Education Research*, VIII, 2006, pp. 281-310; ID., "The Aristotelian Bases of Praxis for Music and Music Education", *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, VI, n. 1, 1998, pp. 22-59.

¹¹ See TH. A. REGELSKI, "Prolegomenon to a Praxial Philosophy of Music and Music Education", *Canadian Music Educator*, XXXVIII, 1997, pp. 43-51; See also E. DISSANAYAKE, *What is Art For?*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1988; EAD., *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why*, New York, Free Press, 1992.

¹² REGELSKI, "Prolegomenon to a Praxial Philosophy of Music and Music Education" cit., p. 44.

¹³ TH. A. REGELSKI, *Teaching General Music: Action Learning for Middle and Secondary Schools*, New York, Schirmer Books, 1981, p. 18.

¹⁴ See, for example, W. D. BOWMAN, "An Essay Review of Bennett Reimer's 'A Philosophy of Music Education'", *The Quarterly*, II, n. 3, 1991, pp. 76-87.

¹⁵ See REGELSKI, "Music Appreciation as Praxis" cit., *passim*.

Lawrence Levine called “highbrow” and “lowbrow,” including art and vernacular musics, as well as Western and non-Western musics;¹⁶ it applies also to musicological endeavors that address these musics, such as ethnomusicological praxis. Second, musicological praxis serves one of the core purposes for making music (and by extension music education) that Elliott articulated, namely that it is a fundamentally autotelic action for self-actualization. In Csikszentmihalyi’s terms, musicological praxis functions as a means for individuals to engage in “optimal experiences” to effect “flow” and “self-growth”.¹⁷ As the core of a praxial music curriculum, Elliott prescribes “genuine musical challenges” and charges the instructor with developing in students “the musicianship to meet these challenges through competent, proficient, and artistic music making”.¹⁸ Although legitimate on its own as an “optimal experience”, one of the benefits of “doing” musicology is that it allows for more informed, robust, and indeed, more *phronetic* decision-making, a concept central to the Aristotelian foundations of praxial theory itself.¹⁹ Moreover, the knowledge and skills developed through musicological praxis are essential for the type of music making Elliott advocates. Turning finally to Regelski’s focus on music as part of a life well-lived, the value of musicology in the secondary curriculum rests ultimately with the individual student. Regelski’s approach depends on pragmatic and existential understandings of metaphysics and epistemology in which an individual constructs knowledge and meaning and in which an individual determines value. Thus, musicological praxis is inherently valuable to any student who considers it valuable, something neither teachers nor students can know *a priori*. Rather than creating an axiological free-for-all in which everything has value, I contend here that this premise reveals the duty of praxial educators to provide as broad a range of musical experiences as possible, of which musicology is a key component. The greater the variety of musical experiences offered to students, the more they can find music of value in their own lives. Moreover, self-actualization is an integral part of a life well lived and the pinnacle of Maslow’s venerable hierarchy of needs.²⁰ Thus, musicological praxis also reflects Regelski’s fundamental criteria for the intrinsic value of music and music education. I am confident that even this brief consideration demonstrates that musicological praxis correlates with

¹⁶ See L. LEVINE, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1990, *passim*.

¹⁷ ELLIOTT, *Music Matters* cit., p. 34. See also M. CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, New York, Harper Collins, 1990 *passim*.

¹⁸ ELLIOTT, *Music Matters* cit., p. 260.

¹⁹ For a clear examination of the relationship between Aristotle’s ideas and praxial philosophy and the concept of *phronesis*, see REGELSKI, “The Aristotelian Bases of Praxis for Music and Music Education” cit.

²⁰ See A. MASLOW, “A Theory of Human Motivation”, *Psychological Review*, L, n. 4, 1943, pp. 370-396.

the core principles of praxial music education and that as such, it appropriate and beneficial to include musicological praxis in the secondary music curriculum.

Adapting Musicological Praxis for the Secondary Music Classroom

In adapting musicological praxis for secondary music students, it is critical to acknowledge that musicology is already alive and well in classrooms all over the western world in a panoply of manifestations. To dismiss this is ignorant and would be a profound insult to practicing music educators. Moreover, such an attitude smacks of disciplinary colonialism. My first recommendation, then, is a general principle: Musicologists must be assistive to school music teachers, not prescriptive. We must develop genuine, collegial relationships with music educators and we must understand our role as a resource. Musicologists might, for example, facilitate the development of “more optimal experiences”. We can work with in-service music teachers to ensure access to the latest research and methodological approaches in the content area. We can collaborate to design curriculum and instructional strategies that get students “doing” musicology in the classroom. We can create and facilitate valuable professional development opportunities. Conversely, music educators are exceptional resources for improving pedagogy at the post-secondary level. My second general recommendation is that musicological praxis be aligned, insofar as possible, with existing models of curriculum and instruction, at least in the initial stages of integration. This will make it easier to integrate musicology into curriculum, facilitate the legitimation of musicology in the classroom, and make advocacy easier and more effective. Although these curricula often focus on MEAE, which undervalues musicological praxis in its core philosophy, I still believe that it is better to work from within rather than try and disrupt entrenched beliefs entirely.

Turning to criteria for musicological praxis in the secondary classroom I will echo similar recommendations I have made elsewhere for praxialism in the post-secondary music history curriculum:²¹

- 1) Curriculum and instruction should strive to be as student-centered as possible. Students should have input and choice in curriculum and instruction, to be sure, but “student-centered” is not merely about choice. Rather, instructors must consider carefully and systematically how curriculum and instruction connect and intersect with the lives of students and benefit those lives;
- 2) Musicological experiences must be “genuine” musical and intellectual challenges in order to effect flow and self-growth. This is to say that, insofar as possible, classroom activities should be drawn from authentic musicological practices and not contrived solely as didactic exercises. Instructors should

²¹ See MAIELLO, “Toward an Extension of Regelski’s Praxial Philosophy of Music Education into Music History Pedagogy” cit.

- scaffold instructional units and design optimal experiences that simultaneously allow students to experience true success and to experience challenges at increasing levels of difficulty and sophistication;
- 3) Classroom experiences should, as much as is practically possible, reflect authentic musicological praxis, though they may be adapted for content, grade level, and so on. As a corollary to this, Regelskian praxialism emphasizes that one of most important aims of teaching music in primary and secondary schools is “to facilitate ongoing *amateur praxis*”, which in turn requires instructors to focus on functional, “*independent musicianship*”.²² In this case, I have given musicology the same status that is accorded amateur performance, that one may choose to engage in *doing* musicological activities not as a professional but as an interested amateur, for enjoyment and self-growth. This challenges the primacy of performance as the “most legitimate” musical practice favored by MEAE, and I suggest that listening and criticism, notation, and other musicological practices are just as valid for amateur practice as any other musical practice;
 - 4) Thus, classroom experiences should also be replicable outside the classroom so the student can continue to practice the activity as an amateur;
 - 5) Finally, instructors must engage regularly in critical reflection about curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and they must adapt accordingly. This last criterion is central to Regelski’s praxialism, which is heavily indebted to Frankfurt School critical theory, especially the work of Jürgen Habermas.

These criteria and recommendations are not exhaustive guide, but rather an initial, basic framework of principles and a starting point for praxial musicology in the classroom.

Musicology in the Secondary Classroom: Sample Applications

One of the most traditional and important of all musicological tasks has long been the transcription and editing of music. For example, I have found transcribing plainchant notation and secular monophony to be a straightforward and highly successful musicological activity for secondary level music students. Such an activity puts a premium on “doing” and it is best approached as guided discovery, making it a good fit for praxial instruction. It is inherently student centered and can be treated as a solitary activity, collaborative work, or both. Transcription is also an authentic musicological task that can be adapted to a variety of settings, skill levels, and age groups. For example, Cesarino Ruini has offered a plan for how and why to introduce beginning university students to

²² REGELSKI, *Music Appreciation as Praxis* cit., pp. 295 and 286 (italics in the original).

the joys of transcription, paleography, and editing.²³ I have developed and implemented instructional plans for musical transcription from medieval manuscripts for high school students and university undergraduates with positive results. Instructors may increase difficulty and complexity, providing consistently optimal activities for effecting flow. The task also lends itself well to differentiated instruction, making it effective even when students in a single class represent a wide range of skill levels. One might begin with Solesmes-style notation and move on to manuscript square notation as the student develops knowledge and skills. Diastematic and adiastrumatic notation provide additional challenges, as do comparative editions, etc. Advanced students can move on to forms of mensural notation, from which the options are virtually unlimited. Moreover, the music itself becomes a point of entry to explore other musicological issues like socio-historical context and use, issues of performance practice, more interpretive issues like politics and gender, and other topics that reflect the current state of musicology and related disciplines.

Returning to Regelski, what is all this “good for,” how does it enrich a student’s musical life? First, there is the practical benefit of being able to create one’s own performing editions from original notation. Additionally, is imperative to eradicate the notion that secondary students simply will not find this kind of work interesting or fulfilling. The popularity of Sudoku and other puzzle games, brain teasers, and so on suggests that treating intellectual activities like transcription and editing as autotelic, optimal experiences will resonate with students on their own merits. I have also witnessed the excitement of students of all ages at seeing facsimiles of early music manuscripts in physical and digital media. Transcription as a collaborative undertaking also creates a sense of community, underscoring the praxial view of music as a social endeavor. Indeed, one of the most rewarding experiences of my master’s work was a collaborative edition, done in a notation course, of the *Missa Verbum incarnatum* of Arnold de Lantins. During the course, the class developed a shared sense of purpose and accomplishment. At the end of the project, we printed and bound our edition and sang through it together with great pride. Again, it is only our preconceptions of what students will and will not find rewarding (note that I did not say “fun”) that limit the options.

Two of ethnomusicology’s classic tasks, ethnography and oral history, provide other ways to integrate authentic musicological praxis into the secondary music classroom. High school students, for example, might construct an ethnography of their own musical lives or of a variety of musical settings from concerts of western art music to music at religious services and more informal social situations. Preparatory exercises might include writing “thin” and “thick”

²³ C. RUINI, “Teaching Medieval Music Today: New Approaches to Paleography and Music History”, this journal, VI, 2016, pp. 69-76, <https://musicadocta.unibo.it/article/view/6569> (last accessed, 19.09.2019).

descriptions of their own school day, and so on. A more involved project would be an investigation of the musical lives of their grandparents through a combination of library research, observation, and interviews in the same way ethnomusicologists examine music in specific populations or communities. Such a project should begin with an overview of research methods and the ethical considerations of working with human research subjects, with preparatory exercises like comparing overt/covert and active/passive observer roles and collecting brief oral histories. After this, students identify major trends in popular and art music culture during a specific period of their grandparents' lives using standard research methods and resources and work collaboratively to develop general interview questions. These might include prompts to invite respondents to share oral histories, discuss their impressions of the role music occupied in their daily lives, and so on. Students would also develop follow up questions specific to their individual case. After the fieldwork, students would then assess the data gathered and complete written accounts of their observations, assessments, and interpretations. The capstone of the instructional unit should mirror what ethnomusicologists in practice do and include one or more of the following: written ethnographies, poster sessions, and the comparison of all data to map common trends and outliers. Again, subsequent projects might vary in topic and increase in complexity.

As with the transcription project, these experiences align well with the core principles of praxial philosophy. They are student-centered and focused on action, and the emphasis of ethnography and oral history on the socio-cultural context of music correlates perfectly with praxialism's treatment of music as a social endeavor rather than simply an aesthetic one. Designing ethnographic projects around students' interests and lives, as in the examples I have just outlined, keeps the activity student centered, and it is replicable outside the classroom. In examining the role of music in someone else's life, students are equipped with the tools to examine and assess their own and musical experiences critically and those of other cultures and time periods, even if they are unlikely to engage in systematic ethnomusicological research as an amateur pursuit. We should not, however, discount the intrinsic rewards of intellectual and academic work. Such research is intrinsically valuable as an autotelic experience for self-actualization. The intellectual challenges presented by "doing" ethnography range from the very basic (e.g. observation and description) to the very complex (e.g. interpretation and analysis); they can be adjusted for students at all levels. In this way, it is possible to provide genuine challenges throughout the curriculum as students develop more advanced skills and knowledge, constantly effecting flow and self-growth.

Conclusions

I have tried make the case in this essay for musicology as praxis and for the inclusion of that praxis into the secondary school music curriculum. Musicological praxis aligns well with praxial music education. Because aesthetic philosophies privilege music as an aesthetic object, they minimize the aspects of musicology that are concerned with music as a cultural practice and provide an unnecessarily narrow view of musical praxis itself, aspect that have become central to the modern discipline itself. Indeed, some of the most important musicological discoveries and ideas – the connection of *L'homme armé* masses with the Order of the Golden Fleece, colonial implications of musical exoticism in Verdi's *Aida*, and issues of gender and "madness" in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* to name just a few – would find themselves cast aside if a rigorously aesthetic approach were applied.²⁴ In closing, I cannot overstate the importance of recognizing the work that music teachers are already doing in bringing musicology into their classrooms. By being assistive and supportive, musicologists can contribute significantly to the quality and quantity of these musicological experiences in the secondary music curriculum. In doing so, we also have the opportunity to benefit society in all the same ways that music education has advocated for its own legitimacy. This is an exciting prospect, and I hope this paper has shown that a praxial approach is an effective, if not the optimal, way forward in integrating musicology into the school music curriculum.

James.Maiello@umanitoba.ca

²⁴ See W. F. PRIZER, "Music and Ceremonial in the Low Countries: Philip the Fair and the Order of the Golden Fleece", *Early Music History*, V, 1985, pp. 113-153; R. P. LOCKE, "How 'Eastern' is 'Aida'?", *Cambridge Opera Journal*, XVII, n. 2, 2005, pp. 105-139; S. MCCLARY, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1991.