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A Philosophy of Music Education according to Kant

ADRIAN DARNELL BARNES

Since the 1950s, the philosophy shared among many in the field of music education is that music education should “develop the aesthetic potential, with which every human being is endowed, to the highest possible level.”¹ This philosophy, presented by Charles Leonhard and Robert House in *Foundations and Principles of Music Education*, highlights theirs and others’ philosophy of music education and the arts as a whole. Most notably, John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* (1934), Susan Langer’s *Philosophy in a New Key* (1957), and William C. Hartshorn’s “Integrity in Music Education” (1959) all played a key role in shaping the past and present theories of music education. Hartshorn, who seems to be the most deliberate in his argument about the purpose of music education, states this in the opening paragraph of his article:

The surest way to preserve music’s quantitative position in the curriculum is to maintain musical quality, and the best way to maintain the status of music in the curriculum is to preserve its integrity as an art rather than to dissipate its aesthetic potentialities in order to serve non-musical goals, no matter how worthy they may be.²

The intent of Hartshorn’s philosophy, and that of others, was to redefine and reassert the importance of music education in a “well-rounded” curriculum and to dispel nonmusical or utilitarian goals for music education. Another commonly accepted philosophy was presented by Harry S. Broudy in “A Realistic Philosophy of Music Education.” His philosophy, while pragmatic, holds that music education is meant to “design and shape the musical skill, knowledge, and taste of the learner.”³ Most, if not all, of these philosophies became vital due to the strong emphasis placed on math and science after the launching of the Russian Sputnik in 1957. While this philosophy has undergone many changes since the original publication of Bennett Reimer’s

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A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision in the 1970s (third edition, 2003), the core beliefs of the current philosophy of music education are built on the previously stated theories.

In *Foundations and Principles of Music Education*, Leonhard and House define music education specifically as the teaching of aesthetic education and, from this, comes the acronym MEAE, which I will use for the remainder of the paper to reference music education as aesthetic education. This idea assumes that, given a sound musical education, a person will be able to do the following:

Establish working standards in his valuation of music, bring imaginative vision to all his experience with music, develop the resources for the heightened quality of symbolic experience available through music, attain the highest level of musical understanding of which he is capable, and gain sufficient proficiency in singing and in playing an instrument to make it possible for him to be an active participant in music throughout his life.⁴

While there have been many arguments made to inform us of what music education should do, such as the ones pointed out by Leonard B. Meyer in *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, music educators believe these traits, especially experience, are the essential traits in obtaining an aesthetic education. This is an idea taken directly from Dewey's *Art as Experience* in which he explains that experiencing the arts leads to having an aesthetic experience. More precisely, he states, "[N]evertheless, the experience itself has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement. This artistic structure may be immediately felt. In so far, it is esthetic."⁵ While Dewey's philosophy is sound, accepted by many, and is at the core of the beliefs of music education, I believe that the view that a music education, which allows students to have the appropriate skills to judge and evaluate music, is an aesthetic education that teaches true aesthetic judgment should be examined further.

In *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Meyer points out an argument essential to mine: hedonism, which he describes as "the confusion of aesthetic experience with sensuously pleasing."⁶ He is attempting to clarify ideas of true aesthetic judgment and remove sensuous pleasures from being aesthetic. Further, Meyer's idea is similar to a theory that I have accepted and deem valuable to the field of music education, that is, Kant's philosophy of pure aesthetic judgment. Kant's philosophy does not require an experience, a formal education, or any other skill; rather, it requires a subjective, nonconceptual judgment of an object, or in this case, music. Under this philosophy, it would seem that the musically educated are incapable of making purely aesthetic judgments and that this skill is granted only to the nonmusically educated or, during the time of a performance, the listener. Further, Kant's philosophy challenges the current, and past, goals of MEAE and suggests a divide in the present philosophy

of music education. This divide separates the performer, the composer, and the listener, or audience, and allows certain people at certain times to make pure aesthetic judgments on the beautiful. This calls into question the true goal of music education. Insofar that we believe MEAE, we must consider this question: are music educators teaching aesthetic education or music appreciation? To rectify this conflict, I have created a working philosophy of music education, presented later in the paper, as well as a chart that demonstrates music education's place in the hierarchy of the fine arts. In addition, the chart also defines the following: the person who is capable of pure aesthetic judgment; and the purpose of the music educator, composer, student, performer, and layman, as it relates to creating and or judging the beautiful.

As stated earlier, the MEAE philosophy was an attempt by music educators to validate the importance of music in educating the entire person and to remove the notion of utilitarian benefits of music. However, one specific trait mentioned by Leonhard and House tends to be useful in Kant's theory. The objective "bring imaginative vision to all his experience with music," which is closer to Kant's "free play of the imagination" idea, seems to be equal ground upon which I can begin to rebuild a true philosophy of music education and to obtain what I think is vital to experiencing and enjoying music, pure aesthetic judgment.

According to Kant, pure aesthetic judgment of taste is to be subjective and nonconceptual. Alternatively, music educators believe that judgment of taste comes by way of musical intelligence, which is saturated in concepts. Establishing musical intelligence is at the core of the MEAE philosophy and is a philosophy explained thoroughly by Abraham Schwadron in *Aesthetics: Dimensions for Music Education*. Here, he explains the common belief of the "aesthetic-musical-education complex" and provides a personal definition of aesthetics. Schwadron defines aesthetics as "that branch of speculative philosophy which attempts a broad theoretical description and explanation of the arts and related types of behavior and experience."⁷ Again, this idea coincides with Dewey's, specifically the emphasis placed on experience rather than the judgment of taste. Further, Schwadron summarizes the "aesthetic-musical-educational complex" as the following:

The aesthetic function of music is inherently bound up with the uniqueness of the organization and deliberate control of sound, notated by means of symbols, and characterized by the relationships of music to the human senses and intellect. Man's relationship to music becomes educational when succeeding generations are assisted in becoming critically intelligent about musical styles and forms, about the organization and design of sound, and about the social emotional and physical phenomena which characterize music as an art form.⁸

This statement, viewed through the lens of Kant, suggests that, once a person becomes "critically intelligent of musical styles and forms," he is no

longer capable of pure aesthetic judgment. Further, Schwadron implies that the study of aesthetics is vital for the musician and affords him the ability to understand the many facets of his art. In addition, Schwadron states, “[F]or the musician, in general, the study of aesthetics affords a unique opportunity to examine the nature of the musical arts: its meanings, its implied emotionalisms, its effects, and values in relation to derived beliefs of reality and of truth.”⁹ While I do believe Schwadron’s view that the musician should understand historical and conceptual aspects of music, these views should not be classified under aesthetic, rather, under appreciation. In addition, I believe that, in order to attain Kant’s view of true aesthetic judgment, which should be the essential goal, and develop a sound musical intelligence, there must be a divide among responsibilities in music. However, before we can examine these divides and provide a true definition of the responsibilities of music education, we must examine Kant’s philosophy.

Kant’s philosophy places importance on taste and defines it as such: “the ability to judge an object or a way of presenting it by means of liking disliking devoid of all interest.”¹⁰ Further, he describes taste as being split between the beautiful, the agreeable, and the good. Under the MEAE model, music educators define taste as the ability to “establish working standards in valuation of music.”¹¹ Establishing a valuation is meant to create standards on which an object is to be judged. However, the MEAE model does not go a step further, as does Kant, in defining types of judgments, implying that all judgments are meant to define the beautiful. This is a major flaw in the MEAE model. It would seem impossible that all judgments of taste are purely aesthetic. As a practicing musician and music educator, I am positive that many of my judgments frequent along the lines of good or agreeable more often than beautiful. According to Kant, an object can be defined as beautiful when the judgment is subjective and nonconceptual. Further, Kant believes the following:

[I]f we wish to decide whether something is beautiful or not, we do not use understanding to refer to the presentation to the object so as to give rise to cognition; rather, we use imagination (perhaps in connection with understanding) to refer to the presentation to the subject and his feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Hence a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment and so is not a logical judgment but an aesthetic one, by which we mean a judgment.¹²

Thus, any other type of judgment of an object, according to Kant, is not aesthetic, rather agreeable or good. Kant defines “agreeable” as something that the “senses like in sensation”¹³ and the “good” as something “we like through its concept.”¹⁴ This is another idea not distinguished in the MEAE model. In the MEAE model, any judgment toward music, as long as it is aligned with standards, is considered aesthetic. These standards, at times, were used as a way to distinguish between what music educators called good music and lesser music. This idea of good and lesser is similar to

Kant's good and agreeable and would, in fact, clarify that the MEAE model does not teach aesthetic valuation of music; rather, it teaches judgment of the good. Further, under Kant's view, any genre of music, no matter if considered lesser or good (good as used in the MEAE model), can be beautiful once a person has judged it purely. In addition, the MEAE model, because of standards, fits better under Kant's idea of music's being agreeable or good. Insofar that the music educator applies standards to the evaluation of music, the judgment is not aesthetic; instead, it is pleasing to the senses or liked through concept. In Kant's view, this would be defining music as good or agreeable, however, not as beautiful. I believe this is an idea that music education philosophers should consider during their constant attempt to justify the ends and means of music education. In addition, we as music educators must allow students to construct subjective views on the beautiful, while also teaching the necessary skills needed to create. In my opinion, this is the ideal goal of music education. Allowing students to make subjective, nonconceptual judgments of taste allows them to judge not by concepts or standards but by free play of the imagination and innate understandings of sound. This garners a personal interpretation capable of moving the "affections," thus allowing an object, or music, to have meaning. Meaning, which every human attempts to find in the arts, can be developed through listening and creating; listening and creating are essential aspects of experience, taste, and judging music. The listeners and the creator's position in music are divisive yet interchangeable. They are the true foundation of a philosophy of music education. It is with these two elements, the listener and the creator, that I define my philosophy of music education.

My philosophy of music education is defined as follows: music education should teach music appreciation to a human being. It should not attempt to teach aesthetic appreciation as aesthetic appreciation, or judgment of taste, as this cannot be taught; it is an individual, subjective, nonconceptual phenomenon that happens among art, the individual, and the free play of the imagination. It is the job of music education to divide a person's responsibilities in music between the learner, performer, composer, and the listener. It is also the job of music education to allow every human the opportunity to experience music through creating, or *technè*, and listening to music. Again, *technè* and listening are not attempts to teach aesthetic appreciation; they are opportunities to create, or, in the words of Dewey, "to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience."¹⁵ When considering music of the Western world, music education must teach the proper skills needed to create, analyze, and understand Western music. However, Western techniques must not be applied to the music of other cultures. Music education should not attempt to use Western standards to analyze music of non-Western cultures; rather, music education should implore each person to discover how a culture organizes sounds based on belief systems and values. Lastly, music

education, using Kant's theory, should explain the difference between judgments to truly understand what an aesthetic judgment is: good, being liked through its concept; agreeable, being pleasing to the senses; and beautiful, being a nonconceptual, subject judgment requiring free play of the imagination. In conclusion, teaching appreciation of music is the job of music education; judgment is the job of the human being. It is with this idea that I explain each person's responsibility in music education.

Purpose in music education is split between the educator, the genius, and the layman. We further split these titles into the student/performer, the composer, and the listener. It is the responsibility of the student/performer to learn important concepts and history vital to the music and demonstrate their understanding through lecture, performance, and other endeavors. It is the job of the genius, considered by Kant as "the talent that brings rules to the arts," to create the literature that the student/performer will learn, teach, and recreate.¹⁶ It is the job of the layman to be the audience or the listener of art. As the listener, the layman is to judge music as good or agreeable and relinquish cognition to judge the beautiful. While these are all interchangeable positions, the job of music education is to teach that anyone can fit into these roles; these roles are not exclusive. For example, Beethoven's genius allowed him to rewrite the rules of composition in music of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century; however, his position as the student/performer allowed him to learn vital concepts and apply them to performances on the piano, while his experience as the listener privileged him to hear new sounds, make judgments, and experience true aesthetic judgment. As you can see, Beethoven, at one time or another, spent time in each role, and it was because of this experience as the student/performer, genius, and listener that he became one of the greatest composers of Western music.

On the following page, I have provided a chart that demonstrates a clearer view of my philosophy of music education. In my opinion, this schema is perfect for not only providing a philosophy of music education but also for continuing to question our philosophy of music education.

Notes

1. Charles Leonhard and Robert House, *Foundations and Principles of Music Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959), 1.
2. William C. Hartshorn, "Integrity in Music Education," *Music Educators Journal* 46, no. 1 (September–October 1959): 1.
3. Harry S. Broudy, "A Realistic Philosophy of Music Education," in *Basic Concepts in Music Education*, ed. Nelson B. Henry (Chicago: The National Society for the Study of Education, 1958), 62.
4. Leonhard and House, *Foundations and Principles of Music Education*, 2.
5. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin Group Inc, 1934), 39–40.
6. Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), 5.

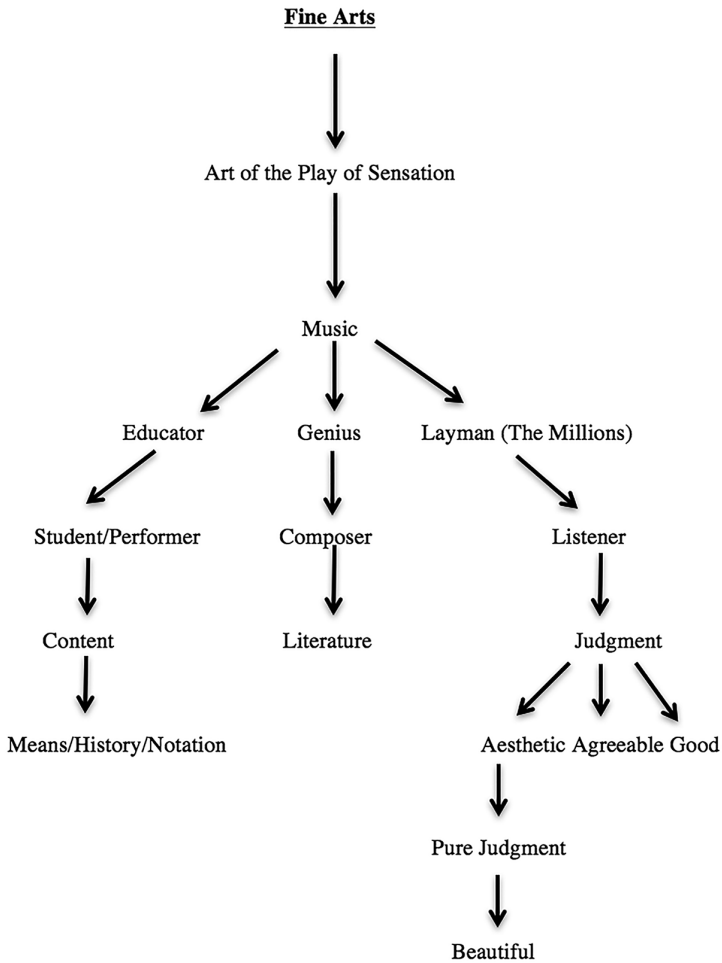


Figure 1. Separation of roles in music.

7. Abraham D. Schwadron, *Aesthetics: Dimensions for Music Education* (Washington, DC: Music Educators National Conference, 1967), 4.
8. *Ibid.*, 5.
9. *Ibid.*, 4.
10. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 53.
11. Leonhard and House, *Foundations and Principles of Music Education*, 2.
12. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 44.
13. *Ibid.*, 47.
14. *Ibid.*, 48.
15. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 56.
16. *Ibid.*, 174.