

Who Loves Music?

Many prominent artists have been active in their support of music education. Jazz saxophonist **Branford Marsalis** recently lobbied members of Congress to support music in our schools, as did Sesame Street's **Bob McGrath**... recording stars like **Meatloaf** and **Brandy** credit school music with getting them on the right path in life... actress **Meryl Streep** learned the violin and backed up her Academy Award-nominated role in *Music of the Heart* with advocacy of real-world music education, just as **Richard Dreyfuss** did after he played his own instruments for his Oscar-nominated role in *Mr. Holland's Opus*... **Sheryl Crow** was a grade-school music teacher before she became a successful recording artist.

Many people you don't think of as musicians support music and music education. Real-estate mogul **Donald Trump** champions music education, even though he says it "didn't turn out so great" for him.....Hollywood columnist **Army Archerd** is an accomplished piano player, and political scribe **William F. Buckley** says, "My keenest disappointment is when I enter someone's house and see no piano in it".....author **Madeleine L'Engle** goes to the piano whenever she's stuck in her writing.....football great **Marcus Allen** also plays the piano, and world champion baseball player **Bernie Williams** travels with a classical guitar.....in fact, Williams is one of several present and retired baseball stars, including **Ozzie Smith**, **Paul O'Neill**, **David Wells**, **Sandy Alomar, Jr.**, **Jack McDowell** and **Ernie Banks**, who appear on a new all-baseball music album.....Today co-host **Katie Couric** has played the piano on the air.....ABC's **Hugh Downs** not only carries a portable CD player with him when he travels, he reads musical scores for fun.....New York City **Mayor Rudolph Giuliani** is a devoted opera fan.....television host **Montel Williams** sings and plays the trumpet and bass guitar.....Minnesota Vikings head coach **Dennis Green** keeps one set of drums at home, and one in his office.....syndicated humorist **Dave Barry** plays lead guitar for an all-author band, *The Rock Bottom Remainers*, that also includes **Stephen King** (rhythm guitar, vocals), **Amy Tan** (vocals), **Robert Fulghum** (backup vocals), **Roy Blount Jr.** (backup vocals) and others (the band's motto: "We play music as well as Metallica writes novels").....author **Ken Follett** plays bass guitar in a band called "Damn Right I Got the Blues" (named for a Buddy Guy album).....mentalists **The Amazing Kreskin** plays the piano as part of his on-stage demonstrations.....broadcast journalist **Charles Osgood** loves to play the piano, just like Oscar winner **Jack Lemmon**.....retired **General H. Norman Schwarzkopf** says music was his only opportunity for relaxation during the Gulf War.....His Airness, **Michael Jordan**, has taken up the piano.....late President **Richard Nixon** tinkled the White House ivories on more than one occasion.....which brings us to the nation's First Saxophonist, President **William J. Clinton**

Ensuring the Best Music Education for Your Child

--Steps You Can Take in Your Community--

As with any subject a child studies, parents bear the ultimate responsibility for the success of their children's music education. However, not every parent is proficient in music—just as some parents may lack proficiency in math, science or foreign languages. According to American Music Conference Executive Director Joe Lamond, any parent can help foster a budding musician by observing a few guidelines.

"The most important thing is to insist on personal involvement," Lamond says. "You can take part in your child's homework, get to know his or her teachers, and participate in the community decision-making process that determines what resources will be available."

Your child's decision regarding what instrument to study may have far-reaching effects on his or her enjoyment, success and eagerness to continue. You can help by making it a process of inquiry and explanation. Find out what kinds of sounds your child enjoys making and hearing. Let him or her try out a variety of instruments, and ask your child's teacher what instruments would be best suited to his or her size and facial structure.

You'll never get to fine-tune the details of your child's music education if your district doesn't have adequate offerings to begin with. Go to school board meetings, read the newspaper and know your district budget. The district should have a written music curriculum based on established local, state or national standards; the courses should be taught by qualified teachers; and there should be adequate facilities for the district's music program.

At home, set up a special place for your child to play, and establish a regular time for playing music. Be involved: ask your child to explain what he or she is learning, and offer plenty of praise. Take your child to see professional musicians at work, especially ones that play the same instrument. And never react negatively to your child's attempts to make music. It can be hard!

If your child takes part in private lessons, make sure the instructor makes you feel welcome to observe, and make sure the lessons take place at an appropriate place and time. Watch to see how comfortable your child is with the teacher. The teacher you choose should belong to one or more professional organizations, and you should check the teacher's credentials in the particular area of music—jazz or classical, for example—that your child wants to study. It may surprise parents that good sheet music can be expensive—the music for a course of study may cost as much as several of the lessons. Rest assured that it's an investment that will be important in your child's progress.

"Even if you don't have any music knowledge or ability, you don't have to surrender such an important part of your child's upbringing to "experts,"" Lamond concludes. "You can still decide to make a difference in your child's introduction to the world of music. In that respect, music is no different from any other core subject."

Music Education in America

American music education is at a turning point in its history, and poised for a modern renaissance. After decades of budgetary neglect as an "elective," music is reasserting itself thanks to a growing body of scientific data that shows how vital it is to student success and lifelong wellness.

There was a time in America when the ability to make music was thought to reside only in a select few. In New England in the early years after independence, these talented people attended private "singing-schools," which had their roots in the desire for competent singing at church services. Though many early American public schools began to offer music as an elective subject, the extension of regular music education into public schools dates from 1838, when the Boston School Committee voted to make music part of the core curriculum in the city's schools, under the direction of educational pioneer Lowell Mason.

That historic decision contained many hints of what was to come. The Boston School Committee had to decide whether music education was a public or private function. It had to decide whether it belonged in the schools as an elective, or as an essential subject for all students. And it had to wrangle with community leaders over who should pay for it all. Possibly those Boston trustees in 1838 thought they had settled the issue once and for all, but the same questions reverberate through American music education more than a century and a half later.

Other communities followed Boston's lead, adding music education to their public school curricula throughout the mid-1800s. A common curriculum was more or less established by the time of the Civil War, and new teaching philosophies and the rise of mass music publishing helped consolidate that achievement in the later years of the century. Professional music educators formed the Music Teachers National Association in 1876 and Music Educators National Conference (MENC, today's National Association for Music Education) in 1907.

With the rise of professional associations in music education, formal standards were promulgated. MENC's Educational Council adopted the first national standards for elementary school music instruction in 1921. These are the forerunners of the "National Music Education Standards" and "Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Music Technology" that MENC makes available to educators today.

Though constantly evolving in theory and method, music education remained strong at mid-century. After the Second World War, however, the Cold War focused the nation's energy on competition with the Soviet Union. Educational reformers felt a renewed emphasis on "basic subjects" such as math and science was vital to the nation's survival, and music and the arts were left behind. The effect deepened after Sputnik was launched in 1957, and the space race gave official—even presidential—sanction to a science-centered curriculum well into the 1960s.

If the 1950s and '60s diminished music's slice of the curricular pie, the 1970s shrank the whole pie. The economic downturn that affected the entire nation weighed on school budgets as well, and when the post-war "baby boom" outgrew the public schools, declining enrollment led to even more belt-tightening. In an environment marked by school closings and teacher layoffs, the "elective" known as music education was at its nadir.

A combination of factors is beginning to change that situation today. The sustained economic growth of the last decade has manifested itself in public spending, including school budgets. The federal surplus isn't mirrored in every community, however, and school boards in many areas are still faced with difficult decisions.

Technology is changing music education as well. Synthesizers and other electronic music-making apparatus that were expensive laboratory tools 30 years ago are now readily available, and their ease of operation has made it possible even for preschoolers to have their own portable keyboards. This new technology has made it easier for teachers to demonstrate a variety of musical styles, and for students to experiment with them.

The most significant technological change in music education has been the rise of the computer, and with it the Internet. Computers give students and teachers a host of new ways to experience and share music: they can use interactive CD-ROM applications, correspond about topics of interest, take advantage of digitized musical notation systems, and even compose original music on the computer. MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), which was introduced in the early 1980s and has developed in power ever since, allows students to link musical instruments to computers and to each other.

The increased role of technology in music education cannot ensure that every child receives that education, however. Neither can the loosening of fiscal restraints in certain areas. In the end, the curricular role of music education is a question of priorities—of community decision-making. For that reason, recent scientific advances loom large.

What if it turned out music education was as important to students' future success as math or English? Recent studies show this may be the case. One important center of this research has been the University of California at Irvine, where Drs. Gordon Shaw and Fran Rauscher have found that active music making improves children's math skills. Shaw is a physicist who found that the inner workings of the human brain operate in patterns that resemble musical structures, and he suspects that music may be the key to understanding intelligence.

Other research supports the value of music participation. At McGill University in Canada, researchers found that kids who take piano lessons showed improved general and spatial cognitive development, and studies at a Miami Veterans Administration hospital have quantified the ability of music making to improve the brain's natural production of regulatory hormones like melatonin. In autumn 2000, a study led by noted neurologist Barry Bittman, M.D. found that certain types of group drumming activities were linked to an increase in the activity of "natural killer cells," part of the mechanism through which the body combats cancer and other diseases.

In the days of the New England "singing-schools," people valued the teaching of music because it was good for their souls. We've learned a lot since then. If music really can make kids better at math, science and engineering, can we keep treating it as an elective? If the nation's economy is letting some school districts make easier choices, shouldn't we make them? Today, we know more than ever about the power of music education. And it's still good for your soul.

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