

The most important reason why music is essential in school is that it exalts the human spirit.

By Zelma Edwards

The adage, "Music is a universal language," became literally true at the International Society for Music Education XVIII International Conference, held in Canberra, Australia, July 17-23, 1988, attended by 800 delegates from more than 100 countries. In addition, 47 performing groups, numbering hundreds of children and young people, demonstrated the high quality of music education in the many countries represented.

Nearly all the performing groups consisted of children from eight years old to young adults. Choirs, orchestras, bands, and smaller groups came from as far away as Iceland, Canada, England, Europe, Africa, China, Japan, and of course, Australia. Many of the conductors held workshops demonstrating how the skills and techniques were learned by the children, for many of the works performed were difficult and required advanced skills in intonation, part singing, playing, and interpretation.

Unfortunately, no Seventh-day Adventist group performed, although two highly skilled organizations from the U.S. had been in Australia just before the conference. In addition, only six Adventist music educators were present—one a university professor from Brazil, three professors from Avondale College in Australia, and two Australian Adventists who are living and teaching in the United States.

One of the plenary speakers was Paul R. Lehman, professor of music and associate dean for graduate studies in the School of Music at the University of Michigan. A past president of the Music Educators' National Conference, he has wide experience as a teacher and educator on all levels. His address was entitled "A Music Education View of the World." Following are some of the points from his speech.

"One of the most fundamental pur-

poses of education has always been to transmit our culture from one generation to the next, and music lies at the core of every culture. Music is one of the most powerful, most compelling, and most glorious manifestations of every cultural heritage. Any child who is allowed to leave school without studying music has been cheated just as surely as if he or she had been allowed to leave without studying language or history."

Schools must help every child to develop his or her potential, and music potential is one of the most basic abilities in every human. Howard Gardner, in his

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book *Frames of Mind*, identifies musical intelligence as one of the seven autonomous intellectual competencies that he argues must be developed in every student.

Other reasons why music is important, Dr. Lehman says, are that (1) it provides a needed outlet for creativity and self-expression; (2) it offers opportunities for success for children who have difficulty with other subjects; and (3) the study of music helps us to better understand our own nature and that of humankind. He


says, "for everyone, a school with music is a better place than one without it."

Music also addresses the problems caused by television's compelling influence on young people. Dr. Lehman recognizes this problem, saying, "Someone asked whether television is reflecting our culture or shaping it. I'm afraid that the answer is neither; television is *becoming* our culture, and that prospect is grim indeed. Neil Postman has said that civilization is in danger of entertaining itself to death. But young people are searching for something deeper than the shallowness and superficiality of show business.... The task of the music teacher is simply to show the student what beauty exists in music...."

Dr. Lehman adds another important reason for teaching music in schools: "It is one of the most powerful and profound symbol systems that exist. Suzanne Langer observes that humans have developed four great symbolic systems: language, literature, mathematics, and music. Each of these represents a different aspect of reality, but the function of each is to help us understand our environment. Just as everyone should study the symbolism of language, literature, and mathematics, so too should everyone study the symbolism of music. According to Langer, the ability to create symbols and the obsession to use them is what makes mankind uniquely human. Symbol-making is an activity more fundamentally human than that earning a living.... Music is by no means merely an adornment of life; it's a basic manifestation of being human."

Two more considerations for educators shaping the music curriculum are (1) contradicting the right-answer imperative and (2) exploring the dimensions of the human spirit. To quote Dr. Lehman again, "One of the things that schools teach implicitly is that every question has a

TEACHING STUDENTS TH



right answer. Our obsession with right answers is reinforced every day by an endless stream of multiple-choice and true/false exams in every classroom. Compare these conditions with those that exist outside the school. The contrast is shocking. The most important questions facing society almost never have clear-cut answers. . . . Life is full of ambiguities that students must learn to cope with. There are often several acceptable solutions to a musical problem, or several different interpretations of a musical work."

Music and art are different from the other basic disciplines since they do not reflect a preoccupation with right answers. In this respect music and art are more like life itself than are the other academic disciplines.

But perhaps the most important reason why music is essential in school is that it exalts the human spirit. It enhances the quality of life and transforms the human spirit. It brings joy and peace to ordinary activities. It is an indispensable adjunct to

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the happiest and most solemn occasions. Music is a basic instinct in every human being. This is why it has been so important in the cultural fabric of every civilization. And that is why it holds such enormous potential to motivate and uplift the human race.

The International Society for Music Education was founded in Brussels in 1953. Its aim is to stimulate music education throughout the world as an integral part of general education and of community life. It recognizes all musical cultures, folk musics as well as art musics. The board of directors and honorary members are leading music educators and musicians from many different countries. The society's aims are implemented primarily through its regular international conferences and seminars.

The next ISME conference will be held in Helsinki, Finland, August 7-12, 1990. For information about the conference, please contact (Finland) P.O. Box 1031, 00101, Helsinki, Finland. For information on joining the society, write to Ronald Smith, Secretary General, ISME, 14 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3JG, England.



Therefore, every student should study music. In fact, the understanding of music and the ability to perform it have long been the mark of a well-educated individual. Regardless of whether a person has obvious musical talent, he or she can develop aesthetic sensitivity. The study of music contributes to all phases of the human life, bringing with it a quality of life that cannot be found in any acquisition of material goods, labor-saving devices or other accoutrements of the "good life."

Dr. Lehman concluded his address with this challenge to all teachers of the arts. "We have it in our hands to give the young people of the world skills and knowledge that they can use to improve the quality of their lives regardless of their occupations or roles in life. Our efforts to this end can be every bit as

effective as the efforts of any other teacher of any other subject. The schools can't do everything that's expected of them these days. He who thinks they can probably also believes in Santa Claus and the tooth fairy. But they can do this, and they must. Learning how to earn a living should not be emphasized at the expense of learning how to live life. Success is not earning money. Success is being able to live life as you wish....

"Too many young people today are suffering from musical malnutrition. Too much starvation of the spirit. The world needs more music education. It needs it desperately. Music is something very special. . . . You and I have something to give to the youth of the world that no one else can give them. And once it's given no one

can take it away. It's the beauty and joy of music. Let's make the most of this marvelous opportunity."

Can we do less for the children entrusted to Seventh-day Adventist schools? Ellen G. White wrote, "The human mind is susceptible of the highest cultivation. A life devoted to God should not be a life of ignorance." She added this thought-provoking statement: "The capability to appreciate the glories that 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,' will be proportionate to the attainments reached in the cultivation of the faculties in this life."—*Review and Herald*, June 21, 1877. □

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