"The Right Place of Music in Education": Some Ideological Aspects of Music Education in England, 1872–1928[1]

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Music education in England between 1872 and 1928 was dominated by a powerful set of music educationists. Three music inspectors were key figures, all of them in Her/His Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMI): John Hullah (1812–84; HMI, 1872–82), John Stainer (1840–1901; HMI, 1882–1901), and Arthur Somervell (1863–1937; HMI, 1901–1928). The group also included the composer C. V. Stanford, the editor and assistant inspector W. G. McNaught, and the folk song collector Cecil Sharp.

The years between 1872 and 1928 witnessed tremendous growth in the teaching of music in English schools. Education officials were, however, cautious about music. Their attitude provided a continuous bureaucratic counterpoint to the work of the music inspectors. The inspectors developed their thinking on "The Right Place of Music in Education"[2] to counter the entrenched view that music was a subject of minor importance undeserving of a major place in the curriculum. Their thinking reflected a variety of ideological positions concerning music and education.

On the face of it, ideology has little to do with music. After all, the one is in the theoretical and political realms, and the other in the practical and aesthetic. This separation is under challenge. Janet Wolff contends that art is always ideological, because culture is a social product.[3] Indeed, various social groups use their "cultural capital" to confirm their social position. Such capital generally favours an elite culture. This elite culture is spread partly through institutions, and as Green[4] points out, music teachers are part and parcel of the dominant ideological mechanism in schools.

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[1]This is a revised version of the paper presented to the Eighth Biennial Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association, St. John's, Newfoundland, 1994.

[2]Arthur Somervell, unpublished manuscript, 1932, Somervell Papers, International Centre for Research in Music Education (ICRME) Archive, University of Reading.

[3]Janet Wolff, "The Ideology of Autonomous Art," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. R. Leppert and S. McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1–12.

[4]Lucy Green, *Music on Deaf Ears: Musical Meaning, Ideology and Education* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 57.

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Three aspects of the music education ideological complex of the time deserve particular attention: belief in music as a civilizing and humanizing force in education; establishing and maintaining the hegemony of the national song genre in schools; and a view of childhood and music based upon the racial recapitulation theory. Finally I shall point to similarities in the contemporary debate about music's place in the National Curriculum with the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century discussion.

A GREAT CIVILIZING AND HUMANIZING FORCE

The belief in music as a moral force, able to refine and cultivate individuals and encourage a sense of value and worth in the community, was central to the ideology of music education in the nineteenth century. It was John Hullah's transformation of amusement into instruction that brought him to the attention of Victorian Christian Socialists, who believed social suffering might be alleviated by Christian works of charity and by the elevating consequences of popular education. Hullah believed that the practice of music promoted positive moral qualities including patience, power of attention, presence of mind, self-denial, and punctuality.[5] Music could revolutionize family life.

The problem with Hullah was that he espoused moral virtues identified with those in authority. In this sense music was to serve as a legitimating force. The process was one-way: there was little possibility of an open interaction between individuals possessing these newly acquired virtues and the community: in ideological terms, music was in danger of being treated as a moral commissary.

Both Stainer and McNaught refrained from making exorbitant claims for music in education.[6] Their thinking was embodied in their practice, which was the teaching of singing through tonic sol-fa. McNaught declared his musical friends no better ethically than his non-musical acquaintances. Of course, he conceded, there may be an indirect influence through the emotions, and there was certainly intellectual value, but music did not get rid of original sin!

In contrast Somervell threw caution to the winds.[7] His use of rhetoric to bolster his ideological views was powerful. He held a passionate belief in the "Whole of Things" and subscribed to the Platonic view of the True, the Good,

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[5] John Hullah, *Music as an Element of Education* (London: John W. Parker, 1854).

[6] See *School Music Review*, October 1896, 96.

[7] Arthur Somervell, "The Basis of the Claim of Music in Education," in *Proceedings of the Musical Association* (London: Novello, 1905), 149–66.

and the Beautiful, maintaining that we needed a balance between science, art, and moral ideas. This unity of experience could heal divisions in society.

He was convinced that rhythm lay at the heart of things. As rhythm was the source of all power, it connected nature to existence. It followed from this that music education's purpose was profound—to make the nation sensitive to the greater rhythms. Such sensitivity should enable individuals to understand more effectively "the instinct of relationship" and hence to be able to distinguish between politicians and statesmen.

This combination of rhythm, imaginative power, and social relationships meant that Hullah's divide between the intrinsic and the extrinsic was being bridged. It may be helpful here to draw an ideological distinction between music as a moral agent and as a humanizing force. We have seen that Hullah's attempt to link music with very specific moral qualities implied the outcomes were prescribed. It was Somervell's achievement to broaden the frame to insist on the relation to the individual and to society. It was a revival of the old humanist notion of literature as an energizing moral force.

This in turn connected with another key idea in the latter part of the period: that education might promote self-realization. Music could play an important part in this process because it encouraged an instinctual response arising from music's elemental character and presence in nature.

This function is nicely illustrated in Edmond Holmes' influential book *What Is and What Might Be.*[8] Edmond Holmes had been Chief Inspector for Elementary Schools and was one of a number of prominent educationists cultivated by the English folk song collector and teacher Cecil Sharp. Holmes had maintained an interest in Sharp's work in schools. The book described Holmes' ideal school, Utopia, and its teacher, Egerie. The ethos of the school was summed up in the phrase "self-realization."

But for Holmes, and probably for Sharp, the idea of "self-realization" did not strike radically at the established order:

> I was once present when the Utopian children were going through a programme of Folk Songs and Morris Dances in the village hall. A lady who was looking on remarked to me: "this is all very fine but if this sort of thing goes on where are we going to find our servants?" The selfishness of this remark is obvious. What is less obvious but more significant is its purblindness. In point of fact the Utopian girls make excellent domestic servants and are well content to "go into service";

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[8]Edmond Holmes, *What Is and What Might Be: A Study of Education in General and Elementary Education in Particular* (London: Constable, 1911).

> Last year one of the boys on leaving school, found employment in a large field on the lower slopes of the hills, where he had to collect flints and pile them in heaps, his wage for this dull and tiresome work being no more than fivepence a day. But he found the work neither dull nor tiresome; for as he marched up and down the field, collecting and piling the flints with cheery goodwill, he sang his Folksongs with all the spontaneous happiness of a soaring lark.[9]

Such statements fit neatly with what Lucy Green identifies as the ideology of aesthetic autonomy, expressed in such notions as universality and immortality. Indeed, she specifically warns about the use of folk song in this way: "The idea of self-consciously using [it] to overcome social problems treats poverty as an atomized aspect of society that can be sugar-coated by the fragmented celebration of itself . . . It thus expels any concept of class or conflict from consciousness in general."[10]

Present material conditions are made acceptable by emphasizing the moral growth of individuals, who, by virtue, may reach a superior spiritual world. Behind all the rhetoric about music as a moral force, there was little suggestion of fundamentally re-ordering society: the most that could be achieved was social amelioration.

THE HEGEMONY OF NATIONAL SONG

One of the strongest weapons in the music educators' ideological arsenal was the genre of the national song. My contention is that the national song was advocated to maintain the dominance of the classical style against folk song, popular song, and the music of different cultures.

What was a national song? Well-known examples popular in schools during this period were "Rule Britannia," "The British Grenadiers," and "The Roast Beef of Old England." They were to express the emotions of a people, were long-established, and were individually composed, frequently by esteemed musicians. The national song was "popular by destination."[11] As far back as 1842 the relationship between music and national feeling had been reckoned to be important from an educational perspective: as many national

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[9]Ibid., 8; 9.

[10]Green, *Music on Deaf Ears,* 113.

[11]R. L. Greene, *The Early English Carols* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), xcviii.

legends were expressed in songs, the teaching of singing could fix the words in the children's minds.[12]

The school text that consolidated the national song in all of its power and glory, and by 1917 was to be found in most schools in the country, was *The National Song Book,* much influenced by Somervell, and edited by his teacher C. V. Stanford.[13] Stanford believed national songs could show the finer aspects of English nature, including patriotism and self-reliance. But we find a hidden agenda, too: in music we had "the most powerful living agency for the refinement of the masses."[14] The kind of music to be used was clear: "without doubt, national music is the music which from the earliest times has grown up amongst the people."[15]

The eight most reprinted songs in six collections of national songs aimed at schools during the period have the following themes: the need to respect authority, contempt for one's enemies, superiority over others, a looking back to the rural life, and the values of the past.[16] A warning light appears: a relationship is being established between a specific musical genre and values which are to be imposed upon the pupils.

Associated with this sense of national identity was a defensiveness about the music of different cultures or races. Too-hasty progress in approaching other cultures could be disastrous: "Exotics have always a fascination about them which it is hard to resist, and you must train your children to appreciate daisies before you present them with orchids."[17]

Somervell agreed. Racial identity was an inheritance, not a prison: "That man's the best cosmopolite who loves his native country best."[18]

The principal resistance to the hegemony of the national song in schools was the folk song. This was generally reckoned to be communally composed expressing the feelings of the collective soul, springing from the oral tradition: "popular by origin."[19]

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[12]John Hullah, *Wilhem's Method of Teaching Singing Adapted to English Use under the Superintendence of the Committee of Council on Education* (London: John W. Parker, 1842), iv.

[13]C. V. Stanford, ed., *The National Song Book* (London: Boosey, 1906).

[14]C. V. Stanford, *Studies and Memories* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), 45–46.

[15]Stanford, *Studies and Memories,* 53.

[16]See Gordon Cox, *A History of Music Education in England 1872–1928* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1993), 78–79.

[17]Stanford, *Studies and Memories,* 59.

[18]Somervell, unpublished manuscript, 1932, 9.

[19]Greene, *Early English Carols,* xciii.

The oral tradition which promulgated folk song without the aid of notation understandably threatened music educators whose main aim was to encourage the ability to sing at sight from notation.

The two traditions collided in the controversy of 1905, when the Board of Education published a list under Somervell's supervision of "national or folk songs."[20] Cecil Sharp was furious about the bracketing together of the two categories. The list contained "scarcely a single genuine peasant made folk song."[21] He was to wage the battle for a genuine folk-song repertoire in schools for the next twenty years. It is ironic that folk songs eventually became part of a rigid orthodoxy that linked them inseparably with the values of national songs.

But whatever the pros and cons of folk songs as against national songs, everyone agreed music education had to fight the pernicious effects of popular culture; in particular this meant music hall songs. Somervell's position was that national songs were morally superior, and that popular music vulgarized and exerted a harmful influence upon character. Bad music was popular because it was attractive.

Somervell was delighted in hearing of a headmaster who had taught his pupils all 200 songs from *The National Song Book.* When Somervell asked what the effect had been, the headmaster smiled: "I haven't heard a music hall song within half a mile radius of the school for six months."[22]

Lucy Green maintains that classical music has long held a hegemonic position of cultural superiority, and this sustains the dominance of elite music institutions which are made to seem superior. It does this by "propagating the appearance that there is a musical mass which . . . is not very musical."[23] This attitude pervaded music inspectors' hostility to popular taste for music hall songs and folk songs. Somervell, for example, wished to share his culture, without comprehending the consciousness of the people themselves. The national song, with its emphasis upon printed or literary sources combined with national sentiments, was a powerful agent for maintaining cultural capital.

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[20]Board of Education, *Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned in the Work of Public Elementary Schools* (London: HMSO, 1905).

[21]*School Music Review*, June 1906, 1.

[22]Arthur Somervell, unpublished manuscript, 1917, 33–34, Somervell Papers, ICRME Archive, University of Reading.

[23]Green, *Music on Deaf Ears*, 11.

CHILDHOOD, MUSIC EDUCATION AND RACIAL RECAPITULATION

It was characteristic of Hullah and Stainer that their musical treatment of children and adults was similar: the task was to inculcate the population with the ability to sing at sight. This was attempted through systems, like the fixed doh and tonic sol-fa, which developed their own power bases and ideological constructs. The purpose was to train children and adults to take their places in the ranks of amateur choral societies, then at the height of their popularity and influence.

Toward the end of the period, however, notably with Somervell and Sharp, we can detect a significant shift in the understanding of childhood and the nature of music teaching. Both men subscribed to the racial recapitulation theory: children repeat in miniature the development of the human race.

> Anthropologists tell us that every individual in the course of his development must pass very rapidly through the same stages and in the same order that the human race has painfully and laboriously traversed in the course of centuries.[24]

Added to this idea of nature was the notion of instincts. Somervell believed that music's great appeal was through the senses and instincts rather than the intellect.

Sharp went the furthest in this direction, and equated early human with musical development. The folk song as "the wild flower of nature" matched in its primitiveness the evolutionary stage of childhood. Because music and dance were so instinctual they were, according to Sharp, ideal vehicles to transform the education system. His evolutionary view of music and mankind had clear implications for music teaching. Because the communal folk tune appeared first and was the seedbed for national songs and art music, it should be taught first. The natural order would be: folk tunes, tunes made up by individuals on the pattern of folk tunes—national songs—and finally part songs. To invert this order would be to commit a grave educational error.[25] Because folk songs were essentially instinctive, pupils needed only a minimum of preliminary training to sing them effectively. Sharp believed that if technical instruction was withheld from children until the age of eleven and if they concentrated on memorizing folk and national songs, the nation would overcome its much-vaunted musical shortcomings. Too much emphasis on

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[24]Cecil Sharp, *Folk Singing in Schools* (London: The English Folk Dance Society, 1912), 12.

[25]Ibid., 12–13.

notation and voice production detracted from the development of imaginative and aesthetic sensibilities.[26] Sharp's advice on teaching a folk song was to "Sing it as simply and straightforwardly as possible and . . . forbear . . . from actively and deliberately attempting to improve it by the introduction of frequent changes of time, crescendo, diminuendo etc."[27]

This teaching style derived from his understanding of the racial recapitulation theory. However, the theory was misguided and educationally speaking led to a musical dead-end. Bantock, in discussing Rousseau, notes the danger in equating the natural with the socially limited: the potentialities of human nature become ignored.[28] Malvern makes a similar point: "The identification of the child with the original and the primitive makes growth conditional on stasis and links a progressive ideal to a regressive system of control."[29]

Ideologically speaking, the racial recapitulation theory confirmed that music was autonomous and natural, and linked to feeling rather than to reason. We should forget the skills and techniques, rules and formulae of classical music, and concentrate on authenticity and self-expression. Sharp above all wanted to break the stranglehold of the literate tradition on music education in England. But Green accuses such anti-notation ideology as reactionary, as if music has no independent material existence, but rather is an immediate reflection of our "innermost soul." We should, she warns us, stop yearning after an unmediated and immediate musical experience.[30]

Such arguments clarify the implications of Sharp's thinking: his stress on the purity and naturalness of the culture of the rural working class in conjunction with his view of childhood as a primitive state resulted in an educational synthesis through folk song. But there was no scope for development: folk song had become an educational dead-end. In retrospect, what had appeared to be the espousal of the potentially radical ideology of racial recapitulation by Somervell and Sharp contained within it the seeds of reaction and regression.

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[26]Cecil Sharp, undated Board of Education (London) minute, 7, box 7c, Cecil Sharp Papers, Vaughan Williams Library, Cecil Sharp House, London.

[27]Sharp, *Folk Singing in Schools,* 18.

[28]G. H. Bantock, *Studies in the History of Educational Thought: Artifice and Nature 1350–1765* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), 266–86.

[29]Susan Malvern, "Modernism, Primitivism and the Child: Universal Aesthetics and the Art Teaching of Franz Cizeck and Marion Richardson" (revised version of a paper read to the International Seminar on the History of Art and Design Education," Bournemouth, 1989).

[30]Green, *Music on Deaf Ears,* 129.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

In concluding, I touch briefly on three aspects of the recent intense debate about the place of music in the National Curriculum in England and Wales.[31]

First, the idea of music as an agent of social reform was present in the early discussions of the National Curriculum. Music was viewed as a social activity operating in a social context.[32] Participation in music was thought to develop such social skills as co-operation, resourcefulness, perseverance, tolerance, and self-confidence. Closer connections were called for between music making inside and outside the school. Music was regarded as "a positive force for cultural tolerance."[33] Most of these ideas have disappeared during redraftings.

Second, the traditional dread of popular music and pluralism, which we noted in connection with the rise of the national song, has characterized the debate. Anthony O'Hear's onslaught on the cultural relativism of the working group is representative:

> Should not the fact that a lot of rock music is violent, nihilistic, drug-oriented and sexually explicit have been in front of the committee's mind from the start? Should they not have been aware that not all music is equally good, equally civilising, equally humane?[34]

All this is in line with our Inspectors' concern to civilize and refine. But O'Hear, like Hullah, Somervell, and Sharp, has fallen into the trap of cultural labelling by stereotyping music making that belongs to another class, generation, or culture. There is still an echo of the related notion that the musical mass is not very musical in the comment of Kenneth Clarke, then Secretary of State for Education:

> I am also concerned about those pupils—of whom I think there may be many—with a real appreciation of music but perhaps a limited aptitude for its practice.[35]

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[31]See Gordon Cox, "Music in the National Curriculum: Some Historical Perspectives," *The Curriculum Journal* 4, no. 3 (1993): 351–62.

[32]Department of Education and Science (DES), *National Curriculum Music Working Group Interim Report* (London: DES, 1991).

[33]Ibid., 53.

[34]Anthony O'Hear, "Out of Sync with Bach," *Times Educational Supplement*, 22 February 1991, 28.

[35]DES, *National Curriculum Music Working Group Interim Report*, passim.

Shepherd and Vulliamy[36] characterize the debate about the place of music in the National Curriculum as "the struggle for culture." The *Interim Report* did not contain the image of England that Thatcher's Conservatives had in mind, therefore they contested it. The result was that the final version maintains the hegemony of the classical tradition: musical pluralism is still elusive in educational practice.

Finally, there was an attempt to place music literacy in the half of the curriculum designated as Knowledge and Understanding. This was a rearguard action designed to overturn the assumption that music in schools should be fundamentally a practical study.[37] Children would have been treated like adults. This was overturned, and the curriculum is now presented as an integration of Composing and Performing, Listening and Appraising. The place of musical notation and its associated view of childhood has been sensibly contained within the context of musical activity.

CONCLUSION

Music in schools is often marginalized. Its advocates have had to develop a powerful rhetoric to defend and promote its interests.

I have sought to demonstrate that an ideological explanation may assist the music education historian in identifying taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of music and its place in education. In the fifty-year period under consideration I have traced how the following three ideas came to dominate music education: the symbiotic relationship between music and moral education; the belief that a musical education with the help of an appropriate repertoire of national songs could help civilize the masses; and a conviction that there was an evolutionary connection between childhood and musical development. These issues still resonate in current thinking on music education. To clarify them in an ideological framework creates the condition for a sharper critique of past and present practice, and of future policy.

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[36]John Shepherd and Graham Vulliamy, "The Struggle for Culture: A Sociological Case Study of the Development of a National Music Curriculum," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 15, no. 1 (1994): 27–39.

[37]National Curriculum Council (NCC), *Music in the National Curriculum: A Report to the Secretary of State for Education and Science on the Statutory Consultation for Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study in Music* (York: NCC, 1992).