

MUSIC AND AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

DOUGLASS SEATON

This introductory essay offers a quick overview of music in higher education in the United States. It begins with some general history, a summary of where music in higher education has come from, followed by a snapshot view of where music in higher education stands today. It then suggests some of the future directions and trends that can be anticipated. Finally, it offers a brief philosophical perspective.

THE PAST

The development of American higher education is a fascinating topic. Information about music's role in this development still awaits a full treatment by historians of our discipline.¹ It is clear, though, that music was not always a priority for those designing courses of study in American colleges and universities, and that the relatively secure place that music enjoys on our campuses today is the achievement of a century of devotion and hard work by faculty, administrators, and their national organizations.

Yet music has not always been a secondary subject. From the end of the Roman empire and through the age of the medieval European universities, the advanced liberal arts — the quadrivium — included arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Music enjoyed an exalted status as a vital component of a proper education and a civilized world. It was viewed as a mathematical and philosophical discipline, however, not a practical one. In Europe up to the eighteenth century practical music was studied in the church and in an apprenticeship system.²

American higher education has developed in several stages. The founding of colleges in the North American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was motivated by the need to advance learning and train clergymen. The post-Independence era paralleled the Industrial Revolution and led to the development of professional schools and teachers' colleges. The rise of the research university was made possible by the merging of colleges and professional schools in the late nineteenth century, and the adoption of the idea that it was the university's business to increase knowledge as well as to transmit it. In this context, from 1636 to 1900, music had a tenuous and uneven existence on the American college campus, and in no way could music study be considered in terms of national practice or standards. Music in the college was largely oriented to the chapel and the glee club.

The discipline of music in higher education began to flower after 1900, at the beginning of our current era of expansion, specialization, and diversification. Over the past century music has been accepted as a standard discipline in a generally supportive college and university environment. During this century we have developed curricula; improved research methodologies; refined teaching pedagogies; built buildings to house our study materials, classrooms, studios, practice rooms, rehearsal halls, and public performance spaces; and worked hard at the transmission of what we know and at research into what we would like to discover. We look back with pride on the accomplishments of the past five generations of musicians in higher education, and we appreciate what they have entrusted to us.

THE PRESENT

Today, still in the wake of the G.I. Bill of Rights passed at the close of World War II, which radically changed the culture of higher education, we find enrollment in U.S. higher education at 14.3 million students in over 3700 institutions, 2.7 million people employed in the enterprise, and an annual budget of approximately \$185 billion dollars. 7% of the adult population of the United States is enrolled on our campuses each year.

Adding to that current enrollment the 13% of the adult population already holding baccalaureate degrees from our institutions, we find that higher education has directly impacted the lives of a full 20% of the American adult population. This 20% has had an enormous impact on American and global life.

Music's share in the higher education enterprise is about 1.6%. Our total expenditures last year were \$2.7 billion dollars at the 1830 institutions with programs in music. 41% of our resources were devoted to the teaching of the general student — those not majoring in music and whose primary interaction with music will be as active listeners — leaving about \$1.7 billion dollars to serve the 285,000 musicians enrolled in our programs. Thus, about 1% of higher education's budget was devoted to the 2% of its students majoring in music.³

Today, thanks to the efforts of our academic forebears, literally every aspect of music has been embraced by academe, and all musicians are welcomed to the campus. The three major components of the art of music — creating, presenting, and listening — are all part of every music program on every campus. The areas of composition, ethnomusicology and world music, music education, music in general studies, music history, performance, and music theory, as well as over one hundred musical subspecialties from the most ancient to the just-emerging, co-exist remarkably peacefully while vying for resources of all kinds. American higher education offers the public the opportunity to encounter literally any music of the world, to approach it in a wealth of complementary ways, and to embrace it at any level of complexity. Moreover, the commitment to teaching is vast, embracing everything from early-childhood to post-doctorate study. Our institutions and their faculties are devoted to local, state, and national efforts to provide music study for children and youth — in schools, in private studios, and in community education programs. Although it is only one facet of the musical responsibilities of our campuses, the training of more and better public school teachers continues to be a top priority.

THE FUTURE

We must now recognize that the era that began in 1900 is coming to a close. Many fine things have been established during this century, and new and important ways of looking at the world have been formed. The start of the new millennium promises to be a challenging and rewarding time in very new ways for American higher education. New realities are having dramatic impacts on our curricula, infrastructure, faculty hiring and retention, and cooperation with international universities and communities of scholars. New educational models are emerging in response to new situations.

The make-up of the higher education community is changing in radical ways. We can clearly see that in the future we will have to serve more students, and these students will be older than in previous generations, more likely to be female, demographically more diverse, more likely to attend part time, and more likely to attend a two-year or proprietary institution.

We are living through the knowledge revolution. Knowledge has become the world's most important commodity. Our institutions of higher education have become a major economic resource, for they generate knowledge, today's most important product.

Further, the learning environment that allows us to increase knowledge is undergoing a revolution. Scholars and students now need on-going access to global information resources from both the education and business communities in order to become educated, to develop critical intellectual and social capacities, and, as life-long learners, to contribute to business and professional life.

The pace of change has become so rapid that the understanding and management of change itself is now one of our principal tasks. Think what the world — and the world of knowledge and education in particular — was like for our parents and grandparents on the one hand, and what it is for our children or our students on the other. It is obvious that we are dealing with changes so great that even the kinds of changes themselves are changing with dizzying speed. Such acceleration, not of changes but of the rate and nature of change itself, demands that we continually develop our abilities and facilities for teaching and learning.

Looking around and ahead, then, we can see that at least four factors will both shape our enterprise and offer us new opportunities and challenges:

- First, our environment will become increasingly electronic. This already affects our teaching and our music. We must think very carefully about what can most effectively be done through technology and what should be face to face in the classroom, in the studio, and on campus.
- Second, knowledge will go on exploding. We will have to make choices about (and help new generations discover) where we can afford to focus and specialize and where it is important to have a larger but less detailed picture of the world. We will have to learn (and help others learn) how to get access to information we cannot hold directly. Most importantly, we will have to develop (and teach) the ability to judge the values of and to apply knowledge. Specifically in music, for example, we will have to find ways to sustain our existing heritage, to continue to bring to life neglected parts of that heritage, and to promote the lively production of new music that speaks to its own present.
- Third, awareness of cultural diversity will increase. We will have to balance the Western heritage with the wide world in our musical lives and in our learning and teaching. We will have to allow for integration of diversity in our music and yet not trade the integrity of different musics for some characterless, generic hybridization.
- And fourth, change itself will continue to accelerate. We need to learn to thrive on change, to see opportunity when it is still only a glimmer, to make intelligent judgments, and to meet the surprises of our future with a sense of fun rather than fear.

However any of us may personally feel about what these principles imply, or however hard we may have to struggle to cope with the consequences, it is clear that the entire music community — creative artists, educators, business and industry — will be affected by their pervasive influence.

MUSIC, IMAGINATION, AND OUR COMMON LIFE

In conclusion, I'd like briefly to offer a philosophical perspective on our work. It is this: the most important thing that musicians bring to the world is our special ability to join others in a shared imaginative life. By participating in music in any way — including listening, dancing, studying, and so on — we join others in a shared imaginative world. When musicians sing and play in ensembles we link our musical imaginations; when we study historical performance practice, we gain by sharing more closely in earlier musicians' experiences of musical performance; when we study musical cultures distant from ours in geography or history, we bring to life the musical imaginings of others in our imaginations and in our lives. Whenever we share theoretical analysis and teach music to our students, we reach out to the musical imaginations of others. When we compose, we challenge others to engage their imaginations with ours. We bring our differences to the music, and we integrate music into our own selfness in unique ways, but what we integrate into ourselves and give to our listeners truly is part of each one's imagination.

Musicians know and live this special experience of shared imagination every day. This carries with it a moral obligation to use imagination to make human connections, to move beyond musical experience to foster community, understanding, and empathy in every sphere.

As musicians, we have much to offer to our communities, our nation, and the world. The more we make music an active, vital part of the lives of our families, our college and university campuses, and our society, the

more imaginative engagement among people will be, and the healthier and richer our life together. By making and teaching music, those of us who work in music in higher education make the world better. (Though our paths are different, we arrive at a sense of music's value for personal and social good not unlike that of Boethius when he wrote of *musica humana* fifteen centuries ago.)

Making our own music does not fulfill our responsibility. We must cultivate opportunities for sharing musical imaginations. That means that our colleges, universities, and conservatories must deal with the real world of musical experience, not withdraw from it into ivy towers. We must not avoid vernacular musics — world musics and popular music. If we denigrate or reject other musics, we tolerate the culture of division. Not all music is equally good, but our communities will never raise the quality and mine the depths of musical experience unless we engage all our society with our musical imaginativity, holding ourselves open to all sorts of music and effectively sharing the music we love.

In addition, music in higher education must articulate the moral value of what we do. We must make the special humanizing nature of music — the best medium for imaginative sharing of experience — understood by everyone we can reach. We can do nothing more important than hold high the importance of music in education at all levels. Nothing is more vital than that we persuade our students, fellow faculty, and fellow citizens of the importance of active involvement with many musics throughout our colleges and our communities.

Finally, our responsibility extends to the moral use of imagination beyond musical experience to foster community, understanding, and empathy in every sphere. Musicians can do this better than anyone. If we hide in our studios and on our campuses, and even within our music-making, we are not giving the world our greatest gift — the ability to model the use of imagination to relate more intimately to the experiences of others. As Plato argued 2400 years ago, music is a crucial element in the culture of strong civic leaders. If musicians do not take leadership roles in civic life, our society will be the weaker for it. Morally speaking, this continued expansion of community will always be the most important challenge for musicians in American higher education. By bringing music, musicians, and musical values into the forefront of our local and national life, music in higher education builds a better world.

NOTES

1. Much interesting material on this history can be found in Edward Brookhart, *Music in American Higher Education: An Annotated Bibliography*, Bibliographies in American Music 10, published for The College Music Society (Warren, Mich.: Harmonie Park Press, 1988).

2. An excellent history of music's place in the early universities is Nan Cooke Carpenter, *Music in the Medieval and Renaissance Universities* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958).

3. For statistical information, see the American Council on Education *Fact Book on Higher Education*, 1997 ed.; American Council on Education, *American Colleges and Universities*, 15th ed.; *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Almanac Issue, 28 August 1998; The College Music Society, *Directory of Music Faculties in Colleges and Universities, U.S. and Canada*, 1997-98 ed.; National Association of Schools of Music, *Higher Education Arts Data Services: Music Data Summaries 1994-95*.

DOUGLASS SEATON is the Warren D. Allen Professor of Musicology at The Florida State University. His principal research interests are in the music of Felix Mendelssohn, the Classic/Romantic period, and relationships of literature and music. Dr. Seaton was President of The College Music Society 1997-1998, having previously served as secretary and as editor of the *CMS Newsletter*. He has also served on the Council of the American Musicological Society.