

Book Reviews

Saving a Place for the Arts? A Survey of the Arts in Primary Schools in England by Dick Downing, Fiona Johnson and Satpal Kaur. Slough: NFER, 2003. 71 pp, £10.00, paperback.

This publication reports on a survey carried out in 2002, in 1,013 primary schools in England, and was triggered by the response to an earlier study which surveyed the state of the arts in secondary schools (Harland *et al.*, 2000). The aim of *Saving a Place for the Arts* was to investigate the attitudes of staff in primary schools towards the arts, the purpose of the arts in primary education, and the nature of human resources available to teach them. Data were gathered by means of questionnaires completed by the head teacher and one class teacher (ideally one without responsibility for an arts subject) from each school, and a smaller number of interviews with a purposive sample of 50 of the head teachers.

The authors acknowledge that there is likely to be 'distortion in the degree to which [the sample] accurately represents all primary schools' (p. 3). Inviting head teachers to pass on the questionnaire to a member of staff may have resulted in fewer reaching their expected destination; and some head teachers may have ignored the request to identify a 'non-arts' teacher (44% of class teacher respondents were responsible for either art or music). It is also inevitable that in research of this kind teachers who are interested and committed to the arts are more likely to respond than those who are not. However, this should not detract from the picture that emerges, which is one of enthusiasm and commitment amongst staff, tempered by perceived lack of support for the arts in the curriculum by policy makers. Regarding the latter point, there seems to me to be an unspoken view

amongst policy makers that music in school taught by teachers is something of a failure (with, of course, some shining exceptions), and that music provided by musicians through special projects or out of school activities is successful.

The report is well written, with insightful analysis and careful attention to presenting both quantitative and qualitative findings. The authors are careful to consider nuances and complexities in the nature of the responses, and what sense can be made of them.

Lack of curriculum time, lack of commitment from policy makers and a shortfall in expertise available for teaching the arts are all highlighted as major concerns. Much of the report relates to the general perceptions held by members of the music education community about the weaknesses in primary school music, which we might identify as follows:

- increased emphasis on literacy and numeracy reduces time and teachers' energies for other subjects;
- tests and league tables can distort the school year for children and their teachers (Year 6 abandon their normal timetable in some schools from January onwards to prepare for Standard Assessment Tests (SATs));
- a direct result of this is a decrease in awareness and attention given to music, and a loss of the hard-won musical and pedagogical skills developed amongst generalist teachers in the late 80s and early 90s;
- in recent years there have been very few opportunities (and little demand) for professional development in music, with school funding for in-service training being directed elsewhere;

- the perception of music as perhaps the most specialist subject and therefore best left to the specialist – so where there is no specialist it is perhaps best left untaught.

The findings of the report are at the same time encouraging and depressing. It is encouraging to find that staff in the schools surveyed by the report really value the arts and want to 'secure the place of the arts in the face of what they perceived to be considerable threats' (p. x). However, the issues addressed two decades ago by those of us involved in advisory and teacher education work are, depressingly, still with us. Despite the fact that the reasons have changed, the results are broadly the same: inconsistent quality and quantity of musical opportunities and experiences for children in these primary schools.

In some ways research such as this begs a question: by asking teachers to give their reasons for valuing the arts we suggest that perhaps there is some question as to their place in the curriculum. I'm not sure that researchers in maths or science would ever ask teachers whether those subjects have value or not! But perhaps we put ourselves in a defensive position by drawing on extrinsic purposes for music learning, thus perpetuating the idea that we must constantly justify our existence. In this survey the researchers asked teachers and head teachers to list the top five reasons for teaching the arts in their schools. Eighteen possible reasons, or aims, were given and the top five were identical for both groups, ranked the same except for the 4th and 5th places, which were reversed for teachers: 'creative and thinking skills'; 'communication and expressive skills'; 'pleasure'; 'to experience a sense of achievement'; and 'to develop artform skills'. An interesting further analysis of responses showed that there were distinct differences

between schools. In less affluent areas the social benefits were rated higher than in schools with a more affluent intake, where skills acquisition and learning were ranked more highly. A further analysis of head teachers' responses showed that where the arts had high status in the school, 'pupils' self-esteem' and 'community enhancement' were most frequently cited. Where the arts were perceived as being in decline, the 'non-academic route to learning' and 'pleasure' were endorsed.

I wish we could remove the notion that there are academic (i.e. intellectual) subjects and non-academic (i.e. mind-less) subjects. There is a rather odd conundrum thrown up by this view: at an elementary level the arts are viewed as very valuable for the less 'academically' able, but at the same time musical ability is seen as an uncommon 'talent' leading to only a very few teachers and children becoming practitioners. At what point does music for all become music for the very few? Or is it that the majority can only expect to engage in limited ways which do not demand much intelligence?

Independent reports on the state of music in the primary curriculum which gather evidence with rigour and awareness of context are always welcome, as they offer ammunition for the continuing campaign to establish the arts as a fundamental and indispensable element in the education of all children. This can only be achieved through provision that reaches every child and is characterised by the best possible expertise providing leadership for colleagues. We need generalist teachers who are unafraid of working musically with their classes, and specialists who are confident and flexible in their own musicianship to support them. In this study, out of all the arts it was music that had the highest number of coordinators, and many head teachers expressed anxiety about finding and retaining music specialists.

It is difficult to get an accurate picture, but there are now only around 12 institutions in the whole of the UK offering undergraduate primary teacher training degrees in which students can specialise in music, and only two institutions offering postgraduate specialist training. From 2000, primary teacher training no longer requires students to have a specialist subject, and this is likely to have a profound impact on expertise and leadership in Foundation subjects, especially those that have strong skill-based practices such as the arts and Physical Education. The argument put forward by policy makers is that specialist training in these subjects can be sought once teachers are in post – but from whom? Existing specialist teachers will eventually move on, Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers are likely to shed specialist staff, or buy in the few hours needed to cover basic requirements, and not all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) have music advisory staff able to provide courses. If specialists gradually disappear from schools, where will new teachers find models of practice to emulate? The 'Music Manifesto' (a document recently published by the Schools Minister, David Miliband) is to be welcomed for drawing attention to the importance of music in young people's lives and the need to make opportunities available to all, but it does rather skate over this central issue of specialist training. We are in danger of dismantling the core structures of music education in the primary sector which, this research makes clear, are built on active leadership and enthusiasm from head teachers and confident, committed teachers, who together generate a virtuous circle of high-quality activity which raises expectations for all.

Extra-curricular activities and special projects involving partnerships with professional musicians work best when there are well-informed and committed staff on the school side. Teachers who can mediate

and develop the work of artists are a key component in successful collaborations. However, the authors of this report found that 'initiatives such as Creative Partnerships . . . have not featured in the discourse of respondents [and that] the imperatives of key stage tests and performance tables are perceived to outweigh any such efforts and lead to relegation of the arts' (p. 51).

The questions raised by the authors at the end of this report are challenging and sharply focused. School-based staff, LEAs, ITT providers and policy makers are each given issues to address. Anyone concerned with the development of music education in the primary sector should read this report, discuss these issues in the context of their professional work, seek to strengthen the place of the arts in the curriculum for all children, and where possible challenge the rhetoric of policy makers.

Reference

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Bridging Experience, Action and Culture in Music Education by Heidi Westerlund. Helsinki: Sibelius Academy Music Education Department, 2002. No price given, paperback. Available from the Ostinato Bookshop of the Sibelius Academy: ostinato@ostinato.fi

This is an important book, and one that is timely in the present climate of music education. It is quite clearly a PhD thesis in its origin and layout and this at times makes it a dense text to read and comprehend fully. It is a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the philosophies of music education set out by Bennett Reimer and David Elliott, mostly

drawing on their texts *A Philosophy of Music Education* (1970) and *Music Matters* (1995), although there is some examination of the development of these authors' thought since the publication of these books.

Westerlund focuses on the relation of these philosophies to the work of the philosopher John Dewey (1934), as in her critique of Reimer's listening approach for its absolutist basis: 'Reimer's emphasis on listening as the final end is not in line with Dewey's notion of means–ends continuum' (p. 186). The comparison with Dewey serves to focus and sharpen the critique of the foundations of the philosophies that have underpinned contemporary music pedagogy.

Westerlund starts from the decontextualisation of the musical experience:

The thesis of this book is that Reimer's theory and also to some extent Elliott's theory does not pay enough attention to the actual social-cultural context of education, to the situatedness of music as experience. (p. 227)

The critique of Reimer is summarised as follows (p.115): (a) The individual transformation is set as a solemn end in itself; (b) The subject–object relationship is established by distancing oneself from the 'non-musical' (practical, social, etc.); (c) The listening mind is set beyond the acting body; (d) Musical meanings are different from and beyond everyday meanings. Reimer's universalist position is contested, and Westerlund uses Hall's (2000) work with the Kaluli people to support her argument: 'Context and meaning are different aspects of a single event' (p. 134). The comparison made between Reimer and Elliott hinges on the distinction between music education as aesthetic experience, and music education as action.

The thesis starts quite rightly from a critique of the Cartesian notion of self as

separated from the surrounding culture. This is compared with the African concept of selfhood:

The African conception of selfhood is centrifugal, complex and permeating other selves in a relationship, whereas the western reductive and nominalistic conception of the person approaches the (mental) self as enveloped within the shell of a person's physical being. (p. 139)

The rest of the ideas spin off from this challenge. Some synthesis is sought between the individualism of the discipline of psychology, particularly as constructed in relation to musical development, and the collectivism of sociology. The call is for a greater collective approach to the philosophy of music; the result is a more holistic perspective than has been traditional in texts of music education. Westerlund supports this by drawing on Dewey:

For Dewey, musical sounds, as having multiple meaning connections within a situation, form an event and an experience where *all parts are in relation to other parts* . . . Musical sounds work then as value objects, which have temporal power to develop actions and experience toward certain cultural and situational results and goals. (p. 130)

She challenges objective approaches to musical works drawing on 'African' theorists who claim that we cannot truly understand a work of art by detaching ourselves from it.

In developing this idea Westerlund attempts to support the often vilified referential approaches to music. This she traces to Dewey:

Dewey's experience as art is not simply something good that we engage with primarily for its own sake. Art involves a sequential development of experience in which the means are internal

constituents of their ends . . . Artistic action, such as musical performing, can therefore be both means and end so that its means-elements are an intrinsic element of the end-product. (p. 185)

So she is able to criticise Reimer for defining the 'practical, religious, therapeutic, moral, political and commercial' aspects as non-musical. I am sorry here that she was not familiar with some of my own models in this area (Boyce-Tillman, 2000). In her struggle with music and meaning she would have been helped by drawing on the wider arts literature of the dilemma of 'meaning' in the arts, like Barthes (1985).

There is useful conceptual writing in the use of multicultural material in the classroom. Drawing on Willis (2000), Westerlund challenges the high/low art division particularly as it has underpinned music education, and she draws on Shusterman (2000) in drawing a distinction between high and low art in terms of effort and resistance. She sees this as the potential anomaly in Reimer's philosophy. Her conclusion here is that the 'search for a core essence of music' needs abandoning in favour of multiple perspectives (p. 147). Finally, she states her own view:

My intention was also to show that music could be a genuine way to *create* situations, to *construct* social relations in situations, to *communicate* in a holistic way that combines body and ethics, individual and community. (p. 144)

Westerlund acknowledges the potential for critiquing the lack of clarity in Dewey in 'his general meliorist search for continuities and bridge building between dualistic distinctions' (p. 234), and sees her work as 'an effort towards a "travail of thought"' based on her experience in music education (p. 235).

In general the text reads well, although some strange mistakes have happened in the translation, like the use of 'vue' for 'view' and 'clews' for 'clues'. I hope that it will be produced in a format more accessible to the non-academic reader as it is both a good summary of the development of music education in the closing decades of the twentieth century and also a valuable guide to ways of redressing the worst excesses of Western individualism in music education in the years ahead.

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Sounds in Space, Sounds in Time by Richard Vella. London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2000. 238 pp, £24.99, paperback with CD.

Sounds in Space, Sounds in Time describes itself as 'a ground breaking exploration of the

world of sound and music'. Intended for upper secondary and tertiary students, it is essentially a students' book and CD for stimulating improvising, composing and listening to music. It was originally designed for a general course in music for Maths and Science students at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia.

Arranged in seven 'modules', each of which contains three chapters, the book introduces students to the big musical concepts such as sounds, instruments and textures. These are explored in the examples of music provided on the CD and there are lists of music that would supplement the CD tracks. There are ideas for improvising and pre-improvisational activities, such as saying the word 'splash', listening to the sound of the word and notating it in a way that shows the envelope of that sound. Each module has a composition project which encourages students to use the knowledge they have learned, and there are 'special topics' in which various aspects of the main text are explored further. These include Miles Davis's use of articulation and Greg Schiemer's use of interactive computers. And at the end of each chapter there are questions such as 'What is reverberation?' and 'What is a sound sculpture?' which are intended to test students' knowledge. There are nine appendices, each of which examines aspects of composing, and there is also a section, about halfway through the book, on strategies for teaching improvisation.

The principal author is a composer, and the book reflects his philosophy of composing as 'fundamentally intuitive and often non-sequential', but following an overall process which involves 'design, implementation, testing and revision'. He says there are no rules in composition and, for the purposes of music education, the process of composing is as important as its products. Spontaneous music-making, through improvisation, is important, both in

its own right and as a precursor to composing. Through using the book, the author hopes that students will 'develop a sense of musical thinking based on doing'.

I found the volume quite difficult to read because I kept bumping into bits of John Paynter's books. Some of this was clearly acknowledged – the introduction begins with a quote from *Sound and Silence*. But other bits weren't: the second composition project, for instance, bears a striking (unacknowledged) similarity to a project in *The Dance and the Drum*. The experience was like reading those Swanwick books that refer to his own previous work – you know you've read it before, even if you can't quite remember where.

Another difficult aspect was the complexity of the text. For example, 'Techno has broadened the appeal of acousmatic music, creating a new, widespread listening paradigm shift'. There is some verbosity:

While our tastes, preferences and experiences make a distinction between music, noise and sound, our eardrums do not. All sounds are received indiscriminately. Our eardrums are designed to pick up everything. Every sound event, whether it be music or noise, is heard. . . .

And yes, the sentence does end with a new idea (vibration), but it struck me as rather laboured.

That said, there is a lot of good in the book. It evinces a real understanding of current technology, providing clear explanations of concepts such as frequency and pitch, resonance and amplitude. Musical examples are extremely wide-ranging and recognise no distinction between styles, although perhaps readers in the UK will find a bias towards Australian music. The inclusive philosophy, which takes students back to the nature of sound and develops their skills from this most basic starting point, is worked out in practical and

engaging activities that would be both fun and challenging – educational in the best sense of the word. The complex structure of the book is well presented and the author is both experienced and widely read. Once I'd got over my gripes, I found it very interesting.

So I ended up converted, but wondering, nevertheless, who would use the book. Although there is quite a lot of graphic notation, there's a good deal of staff notation too, so users will need to be fairly able readers. Although addressed primarily to the student, the section on teaching improvisation is clearly meant for teachers. The book claims that it is suitable for 'composers, musicians, teachers, sound designers, architects, film makers and screenwriters', but this seems overambitious to me. It was probably ideal for its original target audience but, in a world in which every course is examined, it might be difficult to integrate it into existing courses, although it might well find a niche as a 'dip in' book for teachers.

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Sir Arthur Somervell on Music Education:

His Writings, Speeches and Letters

edited by Gordon Cox. Woodbridge:
The Boydell Press, 2003. xv + 144 pp,
£25.00, hardback.

Sir Arthur Somervell (1863–1937) was a composer of some repute in his day and significant as an HMI (the Inspector of Music on the Board of Education), a post he held for 27 years from 1901. Gordon Cox alerted readers to the importance and significance of Somervell in his 1993 book *A History of Music Education in England, 1872–1928*. In this volume Cox provides an updated and expanded version of his work on Somervell which provides the major part of an introduction to a selection of Somervell's writings, speeches and letters on music

education. In addition there is a posthumous piece by that pioneer of writing on the history of music education, Bernarr Rainbow. The book has been published in the series *Classic Texts in Music Education* with support from the Bernarr Rainbow Trust. There is also a foreword by the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard, Somervell's granddaughter, and the key person in making her grandfather's writings available for study and publication. This is a rich mix and compelling reading for anyone interested in the history of English music education.

Elizabeth Jane Howard remembers her grandfather as a kindly and, she felt, unassuming man, an idealist and a romantic. His portrait at the front of the book shows him as a dignified Edwardian, serious looking with a wing collar, imperial beard and moustache. Bernarr Rainbow gives the background to the post of government Inspector of Music as part of the General Introduction: Somervell was only the third person to hold that job after John Hullah (1872–1882) and John Stainer (1882–1901). Like all Rainbow's work, the piece is well informed and highly readable, but it is written in a way that tells the reader that he or she is being presented with the absolute truth about which there can be no possible question. I once spent a train journey from Leicester to London in Rainbow's company. It was a most interesting experience. I remember thinking that even if I could get more than a sentence into the conversation he simply would not understand what I was on about. Yet I liked the man, even though we seemed to come from different ends of the universe. Rainbow was the key figure in the creation of music education history as a serious field of study in this country and it is fitting that his Trust furthers this work after his death. His lively piece seems to cut off at the point that a critical evaluation of Somervell's work should begin.

Gordon Cox's essay 'Arthur Somervell: His Life and Work' is a very good account of the man. Informative, descriptive and critical, it portrays Somervell as an important figure in shifting the nature of music education in his lifetime but one who was also willing to see his own shortcomings. Cox's essay covers Somervell's early life including his education under Parry and Stanford, his successes and failures as a composer (where he came to be considered rather a conservative), and his work as an HMI and educationalist (which contained elements of liberalism and progressivism which are quite fascinating for his day). Cox explores the elements of his thought well and sets up the various writings by Somervell that follow in an excellent way. It is difficult to imagine that we will ever get a better account of this man and his work. The presentation of this account with some of Somervell's surviving writings means we can explore his thought in the context of a very good account of his life.

If I can take a slight personal detour at this point, I think an important stage in my own intellectual development was reached when I relinquished the idea that the passing of time could be equated with human progress. In reading pamphlets by seventeenth-century writers many years ago, there came a moment when I felt that these people were just as intelligent, just as sane as we are, that these were people with whom I could sit down and have a productive conversation. I might not agree with their ideas, but, in a sense, they were just as reasonable as my own.

There seem to be two basic responses that happen when one reads writers and thinkers from the past. One is a feeling of strangeness – these are words from a different time, when different assumptions about the world were made. The thought of even our recent ancestors can be quite alien to us. The other feeling is one of recognition, of connection, of knowing that we have

some things in common, some points of understanding.

In Somervell's case I find the Hellenism (the idea that the ancient Greeks somehow got it 'right'), the belief in the educational effects of 'the rhythmic arts' (a belief Somervell shared with a significant group of aesthetically inclined intellectuals), his caricaturing of 'Puritanism' and his implicit (sometimes explicit) racism (almost universally shared with his early 20th-century contemporaries) are elements in Somervell's thought with which I find I have little or no sympathy.

To give a sample of this thought, let us take the example of Somervell's ideas on 'race inheritance'. Somervell sometimes holds interesting variants on common early 20th-century themes:

In this race inheritance there must lie dormant in varying proportions every conceivable experience passed through in the long history of the race. (p. 45)

Cox usefully identifies this feature of Somervell's thought as 'racial recapitulation', 'the view that children repeat in miniature the development of the human race' (p. 25). I think Somervell's view is a touch more specific than that. When Somervell writes of 'the long history of the race' I am not at all sure he is writing of the human race in general but rather drawing on ideas of the specificities of racial experience that can be traced back to Herder and 18th-century Romanticism – he is writing of 'his own race' (p. 47). Writing in 1906 (at the high point of British imperialism), Somervell believed that this 'racial inheritance' is 'subconscious material . . . which the child has the capacity to feel' if the child is made sensitive to it. This can be done, he believed, through the 'power of song' (p. 46), particularly 'national songs'. Yet Somervell's nationalism was not really the narrow Englishness (or perhaps Anglo-Saxonness) exemplified by some of his contemporaries, rather it was made to

contribute to a notion of Britishness, in this case particularly Irish and English mutual understanding:

I believe that we have as yet no idea of the power of national song in the formation of character. I believe three generations of Englishmen, familiar from childhood with Irish song and story, and three generations of Irish, equally familiar with English song and story, would produce two nations who would understand one another and would be able to agree how to live, either together or apart. (p. 47)

Here we have the philosophy of *The National Song Book* (1906) encapsulated.

Somervell was not the first or the last to have high and misguided hopes for the beneficial effects of aesthetic experience, nor to base those hopes on fanciful reasoning – there is plenty of that still around today. Within ten years of the writing of the above passage Irish nationalists would embark on a campaign that would eventually sever the greater part of Ireland from British rule (but also, because of the division of Ireland, the process would create a running sore of human misery for the best part of a century). Somervell's appeal is to a sort of limited multiculturalism, but based on what we might call today a strong cultural identity:

I think it is self-evident that a man's capacity for response to these expressions, in the manner of his *own* race, is the measure of his recognition of them as expressed by another race. (p. 47)

Here, it seems, we are in much more interesting territory – in regions that seem very relevant to us today. Some recent discussions about the sort of disaffected white youths who cause trouble at football matches and support fascist parties hinge around notions of cultural self-esteem. If we mentally substitute the word 'culture' for the word 'race' when reading quite a lot of early 20th-century writing, we at least stand a

chance of treating such work with a degree of sympathetic understanding. But then I feel we have to reverse the process and realise that they were actually talking about race, but in a way that has strong overlaps with modern usages of the word 'culture'. You do not build a mighty empire on notions of liberty, equality and fraternity! Reading such writing from almost a century ago does not teach us any 'lessons from history', but it does give us an understanding that certain issues and problems run deep and have to be rethought and fought over again in changing situations.

Elsewhere Somervell writes of 'the suppression of national musical expression' and 'the blight of the foreign exploiting musician' (p. 108), and we are in the familiar territory of the rhetoric of the 'English musical renaissance'. Cox's interest in Somervell was in part stimulated by his interest in Cecil Sharp (as is mine), a contemporary, sometime associate and at times someone with whom Somervell had bitter controversies. What comes over strongly in Somervell's writings is the similarity in outlook of the two men – similarities that made their disagreements over the practical ways of materialising their visions all the more bitter. In the national song versus oral folk song debate the two men were trenchantly opposed, Somervell claiming, reasonably I think, that Sharp 'abused me violently' (p. 130).

Yet it becomes clear from Somervell's writings that he was probably a significant influence on Sharp's ideas, or at least that they breathed the same intellectual air and sometimes said very similar things.

It is possible for an individual to do the right thing for the wrong reason. Somervell justified his thoughts on early education on the evidence of Greek civilisation – though I think that the study the Greeks called 'music' bore little resemblance to what happened in early 20th-century classrooms under the aegis of HM Inspector of Music. Yet the area

in which I find myself most sympathetic to Somervell's thought is his notion that aesthetic education should play a key role in the primary years and that this provides a better basis for further development than the premature forcing of academic learning.

We all recognise, perforce, that the first occupations and training of the nursery and kindergarten must follow the natural lines of the child's development. But there is nearly always a prepossession in favour of trying to stimulate the power to read and write, and pass on to more intellectual matters as soon as possible . . . Invaluable time is being spent in trying to hurry a process unrelated as yet, to assimilated experience; and the desired result is postponed as inevitably as would be the case if a gardener tried to force open a flower bud. Meantime, the opportunity is being lost of training through the habit of artistic treatment, or design making, in regard to the mass of sense experience already assimilated. (p. 55)

This seems to me to strike a chord with key issues in modern education, with the 'creative music' movement within music education, and stands in stark contrast to the ideas of the utilitarians and curriculum designers who now seem to be in control of things. I think it is in this area that we can see the progressive aspect of Somervell's thought and his potential influence for good most clearly.

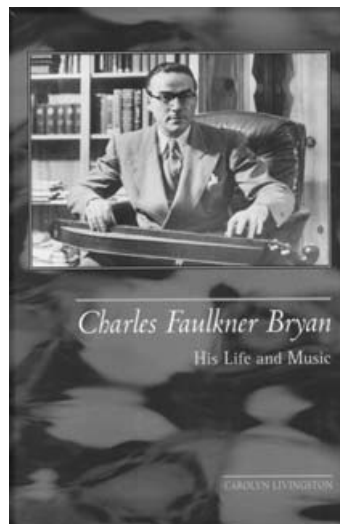
One wonders how such ideas filtered down to teachers and pupils in early 20th-century classrooms. It is easy to observe the filtering, manipulation, and in some cases destruction of good ideas in modern classrooms. The problem of the process through which ideas become action represents the big challenge to music education history. Yet before we can begin that job, we need to know about the ideas

that were in play as well as the customary classroom practices of a given period. The time of Somervell's tenure as government Inspector of Music was a time of significant change in music education. With the support of the Bernarr Rainbow Trust and through the efforts and guiding insights of Gordon Cox, we now have access to a significant body of material by Somervell. This is very welcome.

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Still Growing: English Traditional Songs and Singers from the Cecil Sharp Collection compiled and edited by Steve Roud, Eddie Upton and Malcolm Taylor. London: The English Folk Dance and Song Society in association with Folk South West, 2003. 121 pp, £12.99, paperback.

Charles Faulkner Bryan: His Life and Music by Carolyn Livingston. Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003. xv + 368 pp, no price given, hardback.



In August 1903, Cecil Sharp (1859–1924), a music teacher from South London, noted down his first folk song from a vicarage gardener in Somerset. Sharp went on to collect nearly 5,000 tunes in England and America. *Still Growing* commemorates the centenary of this significant event.

In his informative introduction, Vic Gammon provides us with some reflections on Sharp's significance, and brings us up to date with recent scholarship. In particular he isolates three complexes of ideas which provide a key to Sharp's thought: romantic nationalism (he put forward a racial theory in which a new national music should be founded upon folk song); aesthetic Darwinism (Sharp suggested that the evolution of folk song involved continuity, variation and selection); and national regeneration (he believed fervently that folk dance and song could play a large part in such a plan, and schools were crucial in this respect). Gammon judges Sharp's educational influence as significant 'in the short term', but argues that it was his experience as a teacher that structured the way he thought both about the world and about what he should do with the material he was later to collect. This is an intriguing insight which merits further investigation.

Still Growing includes 50 songs from Sharp's collections, but what is unique is that each song is accompanied by a photograph of the singer (usually taken by Sharp himself), together with a thumb-nail biography. The latter provides us with illuminating descriptions of musical life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two excerpts must suffice to whet the appetite:

[Frederick Crossman, Huish Episcopi, Somerset] has an inexhaustible repertoire of folk-songs, gathered in childhood from withy-strippers in Wagg Drove. As a boy he saved his money for

Bridgewater fair, to spend, not on 'fairlings and such trade', but on the ballad-sheets sold by the ballad-singers whom the noise of the new roundabouts had driven away. (p. 42)

[Lucy White, Hambridge, Somerset] sang from a very young age. As a child she sang the songs along the country lanes of a summer's evening, but eventually had to restrict herself to singing them at home due to complaints from 'the Methodies'! (pp. 92–3)

Both the singer and the song are afforded equal prominence in this delightful collection, and there are detailed notes on both.

It was in 1916 that Cecil Sharp travelled to the United States and assembled his great collection of *English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians*. The Appalachians became classic folk song collecting territory, mostly from uneducated rural working people of modest means living in isolated settlements.

These songs became something of a driving force in the creative life of Charles Faulkner Bryan (1911–1955), the American composer, music educator, researcher and administrator, as Carolyn Livingston demonstrates in her affectionate and meticulously researched biography. Bryan was born within 75 miles of Nashville, and it was his upbringing in Tennessee that exerted a lasting influence. It was a region, Livingston observes, more likely to produce a country musician than a future 'high-art' composer. With less affluent parents Bryan would probably have entered the country music industry rather than the conservatoire.

Bryan held a number of teaching posts during his lifetime, both in schools and in teachers' colleges. His listing of the six contributions of music in general education is characteristic of his open-hearted philosophy: to enhance happiness, to

develop minds that rise above the obvious and the literal, to open the door to one's heritage, to develop social consciousness, to place all students on an equal level of response, and to expose the individual to new values. He was an active composer, too, taking lessons from Hindemith on the recommendation of the conductor Dmitri Mitropoulos. By the end of the Second World War he had developed his own version of the Southern Americanist musical style, drawing on the unique music of the South in such works as the folk opera *Singin' Billy*, intriguingly based on the life of an itinerant singing master.

It was the folk music of Bryan's southern roots that continually acted as a well of inspiration. He made musical arrangements of folk songs for high schools and wrote articles about folk music and education. One of his concerns was that teachers should not condemn the increasingly popular country music, which he called 'pseudo-folk', but they should certainly not, in his opinion, mistake it for real folk music. Bryan was also an accomplished performer on the dulcimer, about whose history he wrote several key articles.

Livingston helpfully sketches the context of the American urban folk revival of the late 1930s and 1940s. Bryan had useful connections within this movement. He was a close friend of George Pullen Jackson, a pioneer in the research of white Appalachian folk music. He was also associated with musicologist Charles Seeger, whose wife, Ruth Crawford Seeger, wrote the remarkable *Music of American Folksong* (published posthumously in 2001). The Seegers, together with Alan Lomax, were key figures in the New Deal federally funded cultural agencies and the associated programmes for

emergency public employment in the Depression. The group fervently believed that the cultivation of American folk music could help promote cultural unity.

It was Charles Seeger, according to Livingston, who confirmed the appointment of Bryan as State Supervisor of the Tennessee Music Project (TMP), itself an offshoot of the Works Progress Administration. The inclusive idealism of the New Dealers permeated Bryan's work. Classes and lessons in music were held in settlement houses, government housing projects and churches, and offered to both whites and blacks. Bryan wanted to establish new music organisations in the growing cities and towns located near army camps and armament factories. He intended that the overall programme of TMP should embrace both the folk music of Tennessee and the music of American composers. In addition to all this he established himself as something of a pioneer in the development of class piano teaching.

What is particularly fascinating for music educators about these two very different books is the powerful relationship established between folk music and education, a connection which influenced profoundly the ways in which Charles Faulkner Bryan and Cecil Sharp thought about and acted in the world, and impacted at least for a time on educational practice in the USA and the UK.

Reference

- Seeger, R. C. (2001) *The Music of American Folk Song and Selected Other Writings on American Folk Music*, ed. L. Polanski with J. Tick. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester.

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