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Minette Mans' Living in Worlds of Music: A Review Essay

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Introduction

Today, many music educators are fascinated by the diverse musics and cultures of the world and feel that multicultural music education can enhance our understanding of the music and culture of people from other ethnic origins. However, it is easy for practitioners to easily fall into an oversimplified view about teaching world musics if we do not take care to consider the complexity of the issues relating to it.

Living in Worlds of Music draws our attention to the intricate relationships between music and culture. According to Mans, the purpose of this book is “to formulate a theoretical framework that can serve as a guideline for research in music (arts) education, popular culture, and ethnomusicology” (p. 5). Indeed, the strong emphasis on establishing a theoretical basis for discussion of music and culture is evident. Mans’ systematic presentation of theories and their persuasive justifications based on an extensive literature review and her ample real-life experiences are clearly the strength of this book.

A number of common beliefs and ideas about music and music education are questioned in the book, leading the readers to think about and hence realize the complexity of the issues. It is not possible to answer all questions raised in this book, and in fact, the readers may be left with even more unanswered questions at the end. Through Mans’ diligent questions and discussion, the readers are led to a new understanding of the issues surrounding music and culture. The comprehensiveness, diversity and depth of perspectives that are presented make this a unique book on music and culture. It is definitely an eye-opener for educators interested in multicultural music education.

Mans’ discussion on music and culture is timely for the field of music education. In moving away from the Western classical or traditional approach to music education and towards a multicultural approach, many educators are inspired by the processes of ethnomusicologists in trying to understand music as it exists within the context of the people who make the music. The significance of such a development was recently highlighted by the renowned ethnomusicologist, Bruno Nettl, at his keynote speech at the 2010 International Society for Music Education World Conference. He advocated for a harmonious relationship between music education and ethnomusicology and felt that the two groups of specialists have a lot to learn from each other. The approach used in the book is clearly an illustration of Nettl’s argument, as demonstrated by the in-depth understandings on music and culture derived from the findings of ethnomusicological studies that are so important for music educators in enhancing the teaching and learning processes. This larger discussion about music, education, culture, and values has been greatly enriched by Mans’ extensive ethnographic research on various cultures in Namibia, South Africa and Botswana. This work is supplemented by contributions from international scholars who shared insights from real-life stories that they, as insiders of their cultures, encountered in many cultures of the world, including Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Hong Kong, Ireland, Namibia, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, UK and USA.

Furthermore, it is timely to address the values and meanings of music education as music educators are struggling to justify the position of music in the school curriculum in many parts of the world. The conception that music at school is not relevant to the lives of students is a

fact that we cannot deny. Mans has boldly questioned a number of common practices in music education and re-examined how they need to be changed in order to make music learning meaningful and relevant to students. Such critical analyses of the existing music education system are exactly what we need to make progress in our field. It is therefore crucial for us to address the fundamental issue of meaningful music learning, challenge our prior conceptions of music education which may not be applicable to the current students and contexts, and find a way to connect formal music education in schools to students' musical worlds outside of school.

In addition to the significance of the issues addressed, I am also impressed by a number of features that are present in the book. The musical stories drawn from Mans' depth of knowledge and experiences in African cultures, the extensive literature (in particular those from outside the realm of music education), the "phenomenological reflection" research approach that was so skillfully implemented, and the interdisciplinary perspectives that Mans brought to the discussion (including music, dance and arts education, anthropology and ethnomusicology, psychology, music sociology, music philosophy, and popular music studies), are to be applauded.

Chapter Overview

The book is organized into five chapters. The first three chapters provide the theoretical foundations, whereas the last two chapters focus on the application of these theories into music education practice.

Chapter 1, "Why a Musical World?", sets the scene, provides definitions, and includes the position statement of the book. According to Mans, a musical world is "customs of musical practice based on a system of knowledge, understanding, and behaviors brought about by individual and collective musical experiences within a given cultural context(s)" (p.14). Based on socio-musical theory, Mans attempts to understand the nature and functions of music through studying what people do as they take part in musical activities. She argues that there is a lack of understanding of the social purpose and aesthetic values of music in contemporary formal education. Yet such understanding of music can be "transformative knowledge" (p.6) which can have an impact on music education.

Chapter 2, "Thinking Music: Processes of Musical Cognition", investigates the socio-cultural processes of musical thinking. Three underlying principles of musical practices in societies were presented: (1) Music has both musical and extra-musical purposes that are related to cultural practices and customs; (2) These purposes are socially motivated; and (3) Musical sounds are categorized. Categorization is a musical cognition whereby attributes in sound and

meaning are recognized and systematized. Musical templates are the range of variations within musical elements that allow the music to subsist from one generation or area to another. The songs and musical examples used in both formal and informal music education come from our own culturally defined musical templates. In musical development, a child needs to first develop a sense of music recognition through knowing the cultural template of his/ her culture, before working with other types of music.

Chapter 3, “A Functioning Musical World”, puts forth a theoretical model of social musical organization. There are three levels of organization existing within the framework of social conventions and rules of the environment that guide musical performances:

1. Macro-organization focuses on the purposes of music as determined by society and its systems. They include music that marks different life stages (birth, death, childhood, adulthood), seasons (dry, rain, hot, cool), and psychological states (loneliness, war, patriotism, praise).
2. Meso-organization classifies music into repertoires, the music that people make.
3. Micro-organization involves the actual sound and processes of the music.

In Chapter 4, “Inhabiting a Musical World”, Mans argues that musical worlds function as learning systems that help to construct musical identity. Thus, inhabiting a musical world and living by its rules defines our musical identity, which resides in the meaning and value of music for an individual guided by his/ her cultural norms. It is both personal and collective, influenced by changing socio-cultural contexts.

Here, Mans raises a number of concerns for contemporary music education. First, the common belief that values can be instilled through arts education is questioned, as the transmission of social values often takes place through informal music education in family and communities rather than formal education in school. Moreover, the assumption that musical values are universal and shared among musicians and educators is also in doubt, as different cultures have different criteria in judging a musical performance. Furthermore, tradition and norms are no longer efficiently transmitted to the new generation and young people are losing ties with their traditional culture and values as they move from rural to urban environments. They need to change their musical identities and become a member of the new society. Therefore, Mans found it important to consider sensitivity to the values we evoke in music, particularly when educators apply aesthetic criteria.

In Chapter 5, “Educating in Living Musical Worlds”, Mans expressed her disappointment that the field of music education is failing in the goals of developing transferable and lasting musical skills and understandings and to instill a deep love for music. There is a conflict between how music education exists in schools (formal education) and it exists in the musical worlds of our students (mainly informal education) because the former grows out of national and political needs and policies, whereas the latter arises from societal needs and practices. As a result, educators often find difficulty in connecting formal music learning with socio-cultural practices in the environment.

Mans contends that learning needs to occur in a meaningful context. Thus, school music experiences should be related to out-of-school experiences. Teachers need to “move out of their comfort zone and address the many different musical arenas that surround most school environments” (p.184). For instance, most musical learning of children nowadays is informal through television, radio, recordings and internet, and such experiences have to be considered by teachers. It is therefore crucial that teachers give meaning and value to these learning processes by drawing on the meanings, purposes and values of musical systems. It is “by understanding values within a musical culture that true appreciation begins to develop” (p. 183). Through understanding the way musical worlds are made and function, teachers, following Mans’ guidance, will be better able to create contexts for learning based around intercultural activities that engage students and facilitate learning. Such an approach can accommodate a wider range of learning outcomes appropriate for learners, including those who want to become experts and invest more time and energy, as well as those who merely want to participate. This approach can help in achieving the goal of providing a music education relevant and engaging to all.

Finally, Mans offers recommendations for music teacher education. She believes that teacher educators should reinforce an understanding of (1) the social purposes and environments of music; (2) the different types of music repertoires; (3) performing skills and theoretical knowledge in the micro-structure of music; and (4) the framework of societal and aesthetic values and meanings.

Final Note

In this book, Mans has successfully demonstrated the complexity of studying music and culture, casting the issues in a new light towards better understanding. The theoretical framework she established is a significant contribution to research in both music education and ethnomusicology. The criticism of and recommendations for current music education practice are enlightening for educators. *Living in Worlds of Music* is a book that I would

recommend to music educators, ethnomusicologists and anyone who is interested to enrich their understandings of music and culture.

About the Author

Lily Chen-Hafteck, PhD, is currently Associate Professor of Music Education at Kean University, NJ, USA. She has published numerous journal articles and book chapters on the topics of music and language in early childhood, children's singing and multicultural music education. She is the director and founder of *Educating the Creative Mind* project that advocates arts-based education for children. She has served on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Music Education*, *Asia-Pacific Journal for Arts Education*, *Music Education Research International*, and as Chair of ISME (International Society for Music Education) Young Professionals Focus Group, member of its Board of Directors and chair of its Early Childhood Commission.

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