

MUSIC: PRESENT AND FUTURE
ITS EFFECT ON GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY'S
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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Preface

These observations are presented with the desire that our future School of Music becomes a magnet for both students and faculty of exceptional talent. It is written with the understanding that we all care deeply about both the technical and educational training of our students.

Music: Present and Future
Its Effect on Georgia State University's School of Music

The Georgia State University School of Music represents a small segment of today's musical scene nationally: A Crisis Amidst Promise! (A crisis amidst promise, the central theme of an article occurring in a recent Oberlin Alumni magazine, was the inspiration and basis for these observations.) There seems to be abundant signs suggesting that American music has entered its most dynamic period. Dozens of major symphony orchestras are situated across the United States. They are accompanied by scores of smaller regional and metropolitan ensembles as well as fully staffed ballet and opera orchestras. Festivals, summer music camps, and competitions abound. New careers are opening in the areas of chamber music, jazz performance or pedagogy and electronic music. A vast array of new techniques, styles, idioms and philosophies, along with radical experimentation and changing trends in popular music challenge all attempts to maintain historical authenticity in traditional mediums of performance. Add to all of this the fact that the "music business" in general has entered into a 'new age' of technological innovations where today's young musicians not only benefit from their new "electronic society", but they also actively participate in it's on going break-throughs.

Yet, amid all of the apparent growth in music's popular, traditional, and esoteric mediums, there are many signs of a deepening crisis. Audiences for classical music, although larger than past years, represent some of the smallest segments of society. Those segments are not broadening and are aging. Today's classical and traditional concert audiences include few that are under 16 years of age. Symphony orchestras, concert bands and chamber groups are in debt, if they have a budget at all. Opera companies, chamber orchestras, and professional choral groups suffer similar financial difficulties. The demand for classical, studio, and show musicians is being reduced or replaced by technological innovations. Singers face a similar plight unless they can survive on the salary of a church choir director, or as an "in demand" soloist. Career prospects in music promotion are only slightly better. It is likely that more than half of all recipients of baccalaureate degrees in music intend to go into primary or secondary school teaching. But primary and secondary school music programs are suffering severely. Music is no longer an academic pillar. In many places it has, in fact, been elbowed to the periphery of the school curriculum. Over the past few years, the erosion of music in the American school system is further noticed by a decline in musical instrument purchases, especially in the areas of strings, pianos and organs. Public and social singing, one more example of a great joy in music making, has all but disappeared. Our society is filled with consumers of music, yet fewer and fewer people are experiencing the art of a profession in actually making music.

Apparently oblivious to all of these trends, higher education continues to issue ever larger numbers of traditional bachelor, master's and doctoral degrees in music! Job openings in major

orchestras that pay a living wage, draw literally hundreds of applicants. Teaching positions, especially at higher levels are increasingly selective and competitive. Summary: Most people receiving music degrees today will never practice their art as a professional performer or teacher! These grim statements are in part the result of developments that reflect the first few years of the latest technological, social, and economic changes in society. Perhaps through such innovations and our cyclic natures, these changes may once again 'open doors' for the next generation of musicians. But for now, they describe a crisis.

The established music professional, not so unlike a large segment of the accompanying music industry, has largely avoided these issues. Leaders of the present American musical establishment have tried to carry on as if no problems existed, rather than seizing on the dynamic elements the problems created. Even worse, many professional musicians have already resigned themselves to whatever may happen. Summary: the present leaderships, (most of us) are failing while we wait for a new leadership to emerge.

It is inevitable that a small music school such as ours, dramatically feels the effects of the stated promises, and the stated problems, in most, if not all of our divisions. As faculty members, we are aware that our School of Music possesses many positive attributes. Some of those are listed as follows:

...We are located in a major metropolitan area which supports an active cultural arts community providing educational, as well as work experiences for our students.

...We offer a full range of traditional performance and educational degrees, as well as having an active jazz and commercial (university) music division.

...We have a faculty of active, professional applied teachers and nationally recognized researchers, musicologists, composers, theorists and educators.

...Our location provides easy access to our students, many of whom are on a work-study schedule.

...We can provide our students with a quality college education within affordable economic limits.

However, we must also acknowledge our school's negative attributes. Some of these follow:

...Our low enrollment cannot support ensemble programs to meet the performance needs of our students.

...We do not have an active job placement program available to our students.

...Many of our master's level courses are taught concurrently in undergraduate classes.

...Part-time faculty do not have permanent or regular studio and classroom space.

...There is a need for more full-time faculty.

...Our equipment, physical plant and scholarship needs are not receiving adequate financial support or are being cut.

...Recruitment of quality, incoming students is not pursued aggressively enough by all faculty members.

It is difficult to assess the focal points for individual successes or failures in our particular institution by any statements of generalization. Success or failure is determined gradually, often in future years, as a result of the one on one, mind to mind transfer from teacher to student. The strengths of one teacher will not necessarily enhance the performance of another in a different division. Similarly, one teacher's weakness will not necessarily diminish the effectiveness of another faculty member's success.

Our School of Music is far more than a listing of the good deeds accomplished by its students or faculty. Nevertheless, such accomplishments are important indicators of our institution's artistic and intellectual vitality. They not only reflect a strong commitment to teaching in general, but they also show the kind of special encouragements that are provided by teachers who are themselves successful performing artists

What is to be required of our school of music in the future?
Consider the following as a stimulus for the necessary discussions that must support and precede constructive action.

The GSU School of Music must confront and be a part of the rapid changes that are, and will continue to be taking place in American (and Western) music. It must produce graduates who have a knowledge of our musical heritage and possess the technical competencies necessary to perform the latest in musical sounds. Having knowledge of, and performing proficiencies in, a narrow repertoire of the classics is not enough to guarantee our graduates success.

Future performers, composers, educators, and critics will have to become masters of sounds and styles that were barely imaginable a generation or so ago. Only the well-educated will attain the necessary flexibilities. Our symphony orchestra, concert band, and choral ensembles are not museum pieces; they are the very heart of our institution. However, we must acknowledge that the global rise of rock music and the rapidly expanding use of synthesizers are profoundly transforming traditional music concepts. Therefore, the Georgia State University School of Music must equally train and educate its students in the music of the past, while preparing them for the music of the future.

Music comes near to expressing that which is inexpressible. Therefore, there will always be a need for music and there will always be a need for musicians to create and teach it. Serious music has drawn inspiration from popular music, just as popular music has so often been enriched by classical composers. We, as professional performers and educators must be open to great music without regard only to it being "nice" music, without particular consideration of the musical degrees held by its composer or without necessarily even being concerned with the composers's degree of refinement.

A music school that makes an effort to distance itself from the masses and their musical tastes is doomed! Rock and the use of electronic instruments are a global fact. Both mediums are calling upon so much raw musical talent that it is almost impossible not to conceive that some new and great music would result; therefore, Georgia State University's School of Music should be a forerunner in providing selected outlets for the majority of listeners of all ages. Our school might even consider establishing a professorship of synthesizer and invite world leaders in this important area of experimentation to our campus.

Remember: our new initiatives do not have to exist "instead of" our present offerings, they can exist "in addition to" them.

If our future music school is to be successful, we must be willing to become a very complex place. In order to meet far-ranging expectations, consider the following:

A. We need to create an organization that stresses interaction and integration.

This may call for revised departmental structures. We must ask whether the traditional course offerings are the most appropriate ones. We must be willing to consider logical alternatives. If revised divisions are established, they should work together to integrate their various programs. This could all possibly mean the establishment of a new core curriculum. If that is not possible, then at the very least, ties should be strengthened among our divisions as a whole and with those areas that are the most closely related to us i.e., commercial music, theater, art, etc.

This necessitates reassessing the progressiveness and appropriateness of academic programs. We should consider:

1. Expanding all band, orchestra, jazz, choral and chamber ensembles to enable broader community and university participation.
2. Integrating our efforts with the commercial music division as well as sponsoring rock and new experimental music concerts.
3. Combining the efforts of our school of music with the departments of theater and dance.

B. We need increased financial support for our present faculty and students, as well as a new basis of support for future faculty and new students.

First, an emphasis on full-time senior level faculty must be maintained! We should consider the establishment of funds for endowed professorship chairs and the possibility of using outside evaluation for tenure and promotion procedures.

Under gird these faculty strengths by finding major investors to support our academic and physical plant needs.

1. Establish special endowments to enable the School of Music to invite internationally known performers or composers to our campus for intensive and extended master classes.
2. Add new instruments to our collection; repair and improve existing teaching aids and school owned instruments.
3. Strengthen our audio-visual technical abilities.

Second, we need to provide talent-based scholarships. Without such, we will not be able to compete for our market share of the highest level, trend-setting students. These students certainly include desirable minority candidates as well as candidates from abroad. This can be accomplished by readdressing our recruitment procedure.

1. All faculty need to follow through with individual contacts of potential new students (especially phone referrals from music office).
2. Revise audition procedures to include state and regional (or beyond) auditions.
3. Provide talent and need based scholarships to attract and retain new students.

C. We need to reconsider the concepts contained in our Master's program.

Master's degree programs have maintained their importance in the structure of American education. The traditional master's areas could be noticeably changed as a result of an expanded undergraduate curriculum that is broader and more diverse.

1. We could consider establishing new majors in electronic and computer music.
2. We could also supply the needs of faculty and students by offering keyboard accompanying as a primary art and as a secondary skill.

Such new areas on the undergraduate level could lead to new master's programs that would enhance the vitality of our School of Music as a whole. Course work requirements and in-class experiences of the master's level students, however, should be clearly separate from, and independent of, the undergraduate programs and students, whenever possible.

D. We need to strengthen our links with the rest of the musical world - far beyond Atlanta and Georgia.

1. We could start by individual faculty re-establishing professional contacts with leading musicians in other major cities. For example, internships established for our music students at major recording studios or with major and regional symphony orchestras across the country would help to enhance our reputation nationally. This would eventually improve our success rate in helping to place graduates in appropriate jobs. In turn, the growing visibility of successful alumni would lead to increased contributions to the School of Music.
2. Continued touring by our faculty and major ensembles inside and outside of the United States would provide the necessary experiences on the student level for healthy survival as older professionals. Georgia State's connection with other major music centers will pay handsome dividends. (And would only be a short plane flight away.)

E. We must preserve the cause of music in our local primary and secondary schools.

Whatever we can do to become a positive influence and to provide badly needed, positive leadership for reviving school music programs is a must for our own future survival. Might that not also help solve the problems of secondary school systems who have little need for music teachers now and no need a decade from now? In order to provide a support system for the local school systems, consider the importance of the following:

1. Start a preparatory division at Georgia State University.
2. Allow these students to participate in an expanded university ensemble program.
3. Institute a summer youth music program including band, orchestra, choral, keyboard, jazz and rock program offerings along with the requisite history and theory instruction.

This would not only undergird the efforts of the local schools but would provide a valid "feeder" system for our School of Music.

Final Summary:

These observations cannot present a comprehensive picture of our music school any more than they can be an actual plan of action for our future. The real life of our school is not determined by evaluations, budgets, proposals, or any other "paper projects." Rather it is and will continue to be determined by that which results from the private and intense lives of instrumentalists and vocalists developing their talents, composers studying and creating scores, future teachers preparing for the next day's classes, and young musicologists prowling through our musical heritage. It is lived in the community setting of our ensembles rehearsing together, of young composers and critics involved in a tough debate over some new or old work, and of exhausted student musicians just "hanging out" in our lounges after a lengthy period of practice and study. All of this takes place when we have all created an environment where questions about our art really are taken seriously. Given our location, physical resources, collective capacities to train and educate our students, and the untapped potential that lies in front of us, we should be assured that the mounting hopes for our future can be realized.

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