

**PRINCIPLES**  
**OF**  
**MUSICAL EDUCATION**

**BY**  
**JAMES L. MURSELL, PH.D.**  
Department of Education, Lawrence College

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## **PRINCIPLES OF MUSICAL EDUCATION**



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### **PRINCIPLES OF MUSICAL EDUCATION.**

By **JAMES L. MURSELL**, Ph.D., Department of Education, Lawrence College.

TO  
GLADYS IVES BRAINARD  
AS A MARK OF MY  
ESTEEM AND REGARD



## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

ONE hears it said frequently that as a people we are devoid of musical intelligence and sensitiveness. It is claimed that we do not and probably cannot discriminate between good music and the dance-hall type. There is a wide-spread belief that the young and the old alike in other countries gain more pleasure and benefit from music than we do, and are also more skillful and competent in singing and in performing on musical instruments. Musical teachers among us usually seem to be making a great effort to awaken the interest of their pupils in understanding the meaning of music and in musical execution. Musical leaders at conventions often appear to be worried because their audiences show but little enthusiasm in singing and do not manifest a lively desire to participate in programs put on for the purpose of arousing good fellowship in a gathering.

There is another complaint relating to the musical situation in our country which is very persistent and somewhat disturbing. Taxpayers are saying that funds spent for musical instruction in public schools are largely wasted. The present writer was an auditor recently at an educational meeting in a mid-western city called for the purpose of protesting against the amount of money that was being expended in the city on the maintenance of public education. A majority of the citizens who spoke on this occasion stated that the teaching of music in the schools was costing the taxpayers many thousands of dollars but that little if any good came from it. The children do not enjoy their lessons; they do not sing or perform on musical



instruments outside of school and especially after graduation ; and the musical instruction in the schools has had no effect in curtailing the popularity of jazz music. One citizen declared vehemently, "The more we expend in teaching children music in the schools, the more they go to places where they can hear only uncouth and barbarous music. They will not attend concerts where really good music can be heard. They do not seem to show any interest in or appreciation of music that would do them some good."

Mention may be made of still another complaint. Parents often lament over the fact that they spend a considerable amount of money for the musical training of their children in private studios and colleges but that they cannot see that the children are benefited in proportion to the cost of this education. Apparently, private agencies have not been more successful than the public schools in developing in the young musical intelligence or sensitiveness or skill in producing music. There can be no doubt that musical instruction in our country has been too static for the most part. It may have been successful in cultivating a certain amount of technical skill ; but it has failed to develop in high degree musical intelligence and musical feeling, for which skill should be only a means of expression. To put it in another way, musical instruction in our country has, speaking generally, left our young people musically neutral and inert. What skill they have acquired has lain dormant, because there has not been back of it either understanding of the meaning of music, or feeling for musical values, or desire to produce music for the exhilaration of performance or the promotion of the pleasure of auditors.

It is a commonplace, of course, that the American people seem to be more devoted to the type of music known as jazz than are any other advanced peoples. Musicians, psychologists, and laymen have offered explanations relating to the popularity



of jazz in our country; but whatever the reason may be, it is evident that musical instruction in our public and private schools has not been very effective in developing musical intelligence and appreciation. It is probably not going beyond proper bounds to say that musical culture is at a low ebb in our country; and by culture is meant an understanding of the meaning of music and a sensitiveness to the qualities of good music as distinguished from mere jazz.

The author of *Principles of Musical Education* deals with all these problems and shows why more gratifying results are not secured from our musical instruction in public and private schools. No one who will read this book can fail to become convinced that emphasis placed upon the externals, so to speak, of musical training cannot develop musical appreciation or even train young people in musical skills in an effective way. Professor Mursell shows that mere tricks in performance on the piano, violin, or other instrument, or even in the use of the voice cannot be regarded as musical education in a true sense. He makes it clear that we will always be disappointed in the outcomes of our musical training if we do not aim at musicianship in our educational programs; and musicianship is primarily mental rather than motor. It has to do with understanding and feeling rather than with manual dexterity.

The reader should be told that Professor Mursell is an accomplished musician on several instruments. At the same time he is a psychologist who has given particular attention to the development of educational method based on modern experimental psychology. It would be rare to find any one who is so well equipped as is Professor Mursell to treat the problems of musical education so as to achieve the objectives which teachers of music should keep in view, — the awakening of musical appreciation, the development of musical intelligence and feeling, and the cultivation of technical skills.



In this volume, the problems which every one who is interested in musical education, whether as teacher, as parent, or as student, would encounter are treated in a concrete way in the light of all that has been done experimentally in the study of musical ability and method in musical education, and in view also of the principles of modern psychology that relate to the types of learning, appreciation, and performance involved in musical education. Fortunately, the author is gifted in the use of an unusually clear and attractive style which, in addition to his musical accomplishments and his psychological and educational understanding and experience, has enabled him to produce a book of interest and merit for all who, as learners, teachers, or laymen, are interested in the acquiring or promoting of musical education.

M. V. O'SHEA

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN,  
Madison, Wisconsin.

## PREFACE

THIS book has been written in the attempt to meet in some measure what has long seemed to me a most remarkable omission in educational literature. A very considerable amount of research material bearing on the teaching of music now exists, but for various reasons it is not accessible to the ordinary music teacher, and still less so to the average student. Yet there is not the least doubt that music teachers and students alike can benefit enormously by a sane and scientific approach to their work. As a matter of fact there are few pedagogical fields where scientific methods can be more precisely applied than in music. And so it is to be hoped that an organized presentation of what is actually known about musical-mindedness and its development may be found of value.

The development of great musical skill can never be an easy undertaking. But it is safe to say that a very great deal of the teaching done in studios and classrooms makes it actually impossible. This is due, not to bad intent, but to lack of knowledge of the aims and methods properly involved in musical training. For this the best corrective must be a wider dissemination among the musical profession of knowledge of the scientifically established facts regarding musical education.

The somewhat general title, *Principles of Musical Education*, has seemed appropriate because, although the chief content of the work is an analysis of the psychological factors underlying musical training, questions of administration have also been discussed and an attempt has been made to present a systematic and rounded account of what musical education ought to be.



My sincere acknowledgments are due to my father for his assistance in preparing this volume for the press.

The extent of my indebtedness to my various music teachers for what appears in these pages can hardly be estimated with precision, but it is very great. Particularly I owe much to Mr. Percy Brier, of Brisbane, Australia, and to Mr. Gordon Short, of Adelaide, Australia.

My especial thanks are due to Professor M. V. O'Shea, of the University of Wisconsin, whose unfailing encouragement and kindly criticism have done very much to make this book what it is.

J. L. M.

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# PRINCIPLES OF MUSICAL EDUCATION

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### THE AIM OF THE PRESENT WORK

In the following pages we shall try to present a comprehensive study of the methods, the aims, and the agencies of musical education, based on our current scientific knowledge of the psychology of music. In America at the present time there is an exceedingly widespread interest in music. Musical organizations, ranging all the way from pretentious and costly symphony orchestras, opera companies, and choral societies to small town bands, glee clubs, and church choirs, flourish everywhere. Conservatories and schools of music are filled to overflowing and independent music teachers find little difficulty in attracting all the pupils they can handle. Our public schools are not only introducing music into their programs of studies, but are busily enlarging their curricular offerings in the field. Our colleges of liberal arts and our universities often permit a major in music toward the degree in Arts. And although our musical culture may not yet equal that of the leading European nations, yet the demand here is so great, and our people are so wonderfully liberal in their financial support, that the United States has become the Mecca of the foreign musician.



Now all this can mean only one thing. It means that we are coming to see that musical culture can play a great part and possess a great value in human living; that musical education, whether given formally by teachers, or informally by concert courses, by participation in musical organizations, and so on, is exceedingly desirable. Such a strong popular demand imposes a great obligation, and constitutes a great opportunity for musical leadership. What the public needs above all else is guidance, and guidance made sane and sound by a broad vision of what musical education ought to be.

There are four groups for whom an analysis of the basic principles of musical training has definite value. They are the teachers of music in the public schools, the studio teachers of music, the music students, and, that broader and less well-defined class, the musical public. Let us try to understand the specific needs of each.

To begin with teachers and supervisors of public school music, we have here a group of musical workers who are to an unusual degree intelligently responsive to problems of method and much concerned to develop psychologically correct procedures. The field is a new one and as yet far from being completely explored, mapped, and standardized, and it is natural that those engaged in it should be sensitive to discussions of fundamentals. Indeed it is not too much to hope that the musical profession as a whole will benefit greatly from public school music, gaining from it a psychological and pedagogical insight that has been somewhat lacking.

But there is one central need which the training of our public school music teachers has not as yet adequately met. While much is made of method and procedure, altogether too little emphasis is placed on those general and basic principles of musical education on which any sound method depends. Methods and procedures may vary — principles remain the same.



Moreover, to try to teach method without principles is rule-of-thumb work, and even a good method so imparted will degenerate into formalism in the hands of the majority of teachers. In teacher training, principles are always more basic than technique and device. The public school teacher must ask not only "How shall I mediate musical material to my pupils?" but also "What are the great aims of musical training? What are the mental functions upon whose improvement progress in music depends? And how can class work be organized to achieve these aims and improve these functions?" It is precisely these questions which we shall attempt to answer.

Turning to the studio teacher, his great and even crying need is, again, not to be presented with a cut-and-dried "method," but to understand the living and immutable principles of his work. As a matter of fact, we have far too many special "methods" of teaching voice, piano, violin, etc., and, indeed, we have reached a situation that is positively dangerous educationally and that constitutes a menace to musical progress. It is almost a standing joke that any pupil who changes teachers finds that he must spend six months to a year in simply unlearning much of what he has already acquired, to fit into the arbitrary, rule-of-thumb procedure favored by his new instructor.

Let us say, then, that we have before us a studio teacher responsible for the musical development of a pupil. If he is a conscientious musical learner, with a truly educational viewpoint, some of the basic questions he must ask are these: "How can I know whether my pupil's abilities are such as to make his further musical training a worth-while enterprise for him? Just what capacities ought I to try to develop to lead him on toward the goal of competent musicianship? How in detail ought I to go about developing those capacities so that he may capitalize to the full his native powers? Just how