Discovering Music

Developing the Music Curriculum in Secondary Schools

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Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd
London

Typeset by Tek-Art Ltd, London SE20
and printed in Great Britain by
Billing & Son Ltd,
Worcester
for the publishers
Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd
an imprint of B T Batsford Ltd
4 Fitzhardinge Street
London W1H 0AH

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Swanwick, Keith
Discovering music.
1. Music–Instruction and study
I. Title II. Taylor, Dorothy
780'.7'2 MT1

ISBN 0 7134 4065 1

Acknowledgment

We wish to thank those teachers whose work is a frequent source of encouragement and has influenced the development of ideas in this book. We also acknowledge the secretarial and typing skills of Margaret Clements who cheerfully and effectively sorted out our manuscripts into legible documents.

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Foreword

The approach to the secondary and middle school curriculum outlined in this book is based on substantial teaching experience and involvement in teacher education. It is a new approach in the sense that curriculum suggestions usually either provide materials or confirm or challenge existing practice, while we are attempting to engender a *style* of curriculum development based on the simple principle of staying close to music. This, we hope, will help teachers to generate their own classroom strategies and assimilate these suggestions and others into sound and purposeful practice. What is not new, and can be found in the work and writing of all effective music educators, is the attempt to understand what is involved in music itself and what motivates human beings to learn.

Today it seems to matter more than in the past that we can be articulate about what we do in schools. We have to justify our decisions and negotiate our way in a world of shrinking funds and growing demands. Because of this we have given reasons behind our practical suggestions and have put forward a rationale within which specific curriculum activities can find a place. This is especially so in the first and last chapters and 'practical' people may be inclined to skip them. We would, however, urge readers to tackle these sections and, if necessary to read them more than once. They have been *written* more than once and we believe that they are important!

Keith Swanwick
Dorothy Taylor

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Purpose in Music Education

One of the most urgent tasks for teachers of music, especially those teaching music in schools, is to find some kind of basis on which to build a worthwhile and purposeful musical curriculum. The lack of purpose that is so often evident communicates itself to pupils in school, especially those in secondary schools, and makes music appear to be an aimless and rather arbitrary subject which varies enormously from school to school and teacher to teacher. The rediscovery of purposefulness is therefore a prime need at this time. However, along with a sense of purpose must go the flexibility required for different groups of children, different types of school and widely differing teacher strengths and weaknesses.

MAKING A CURRICULUM

There are several different ways of setting about the task of making a music curriculum. The most common way, and the least structured, is for teachers to amplify their own enthusiasms, to notice which of these seem to be accepted by classes and to work on this. Unfortunately the result of this approach is a kind of 'rag-bag' of activities where any sense of purpose is very weak. There will inevitably be many flat spots during the time given over to music, if this curriculum model prevails, due to the arbitrary selection of activities.

A second way of constructing a music curriculum is to identify particular skills and concepts and to develop these through appropriate activities. Unfortunately, this often results in second-hand activities where music itself becomes subordinate to teaching something else. For example, we might find ourselves choosing particular tunes, not for their musical quality but because they illustrate some point of notation or because

they are examples of a particular style or composer or because they develop certain rhythmic skills. The most highly organised and systematic of such courses would be something along the lines of the Kodaly system of carefully graded material. However, we ought to remember that Kodaly was a composer of considerable stature and it is not surprising that the Kodaly Choral Method contains a wealth of satisfying music, even though much of it was composed for didactic reasons.

The approach to curriculum building advocated in this book is one which stays very close to first-hand musical experience for the teacher and the pupils. We are taking as a basic assumption the view that music education is essentially about developing what might be called musical *appreciation*. By this we do not necessarily mean using records or tapes of music along with details and information about the composer or the work itself but rather the ability, and it *is* an ability, to perceive what is going on in music and to respond to it with enjoyment and possibly delight. Whatever our pupils do out of school and when leaving school, we would want them to respond to a wide range of music in a positive and lively way. They may or may not be actively concerned in the world of amateur music-making, or become composers or professional performers. They may find their way into types of music that may not have featured very large in the school curriculum but we would hope that the work in school has developed the sense of the value of music and some glimpse of its power to engage us, to speak to us, and at the highest level to move us profoundly.

If we can accept that the main objective of all music education is to enable people to appreciate music, that is to value music as a life-enhancing experience, then we have not only the best possible basis on which to build a curriculum but also the only really satisfactory justification for music education that exists. We all recognise that human needs are not fully met by the provision of physical and material well-being. People need to make sense of their lives, to find living a rich and worthwhile experience. Evidence for this can be seen in the pervasive myths, rituals, ceremonies and artistic activities that are powerfully present in all cultures, whether in the East, in the Third World or in the Western tradition. Music, along with the other arts, satisfies a basic human need to make sense of life and to engage in rich experiences. Music is not an alternative to living but an enhancement of life. The role of a music teacher is therefore to develop the ability to respond to music in the ful-

lest possible way across the widest range of experiences. Only the exceptionally gifted teacher can manage this intuitively and without prior thought, and it is impossible to conceive of any other profession that relies entirely on such exceptional gifts. However, most of us are 'good enough' teachers if we think out clearly what we are about and test what actually happens against some form of yardstick, noticing when we succeed and, perhaps more important, when we fail. Only in this way can we be said to be truly professional. In a quite frightening way teachers stand between pupils and music, sometimes acting as a window or an open door but at other times functioning only as an impediment, blocking off access to music itself. We can no longer afford to be amateurish.

MUSIC AND KNOWING

It may be that much of our difficulty comes from not recognising the different kinds of knowledge that are involved in musical experience. This is not as complicated or academic as it may sound. For example, it is very necessary at times for us to *know how* to do things, to operate a lathe, to spell a word, to translate a passage, to put our thoughts into a structured form, to manipulate a musical instrument, to use musical notation. Knowing how to do things is essentially the use and development of particular skills. The second most commonly understood kind of knowledge is *knowing that*. For example we may know that 2 + 7 makes 9 or that Manchester is 200 miles from London or that 'avoir' is the verb 'to have', or that Beethoven wrote nine symphonies, or what a note-row is. A further way of knowing is sometimes called knowledge by acquaintance, or in other words *knowing him, her or it*. For example, we may know Renoir's painting *The Rower's Lunch*, or know a friend or pupil, or know a city. This is the most important kind of knowing for music teachers. In music it is the specific knowledge of a particular musical work, the one we are listening to or the one we are composing or performing. For example, we might know *how* to manipulate technically a musical instrument and we might know *that* the piece we are playing is by Bartok but we would also need to know the piece *itself* and become aware of its particular character – its expressive quality and its structure – the way in which one part relates to another. The fourth way of knowing we might call knowing *what's what*, knowing what we really like, what matters to us; in other words – what we value. In case this seems somewhat

theoretical let us consider a practical example. A child learning to play on the piano an easy piece by Bach, may be able to cope with the skills involved in playing the right notes at the right time. In other words she will know *how*. But she may also know *that* it is by Bach and may have some idea of what it is to play Bach in an appropriate style. However these kinds of knowing are by themselves insufficient. The pupil will also have to know *it*, the piece itself, the way in which the phrases are shaped, the way in which each note relates to each other note, the form determined by the cadences and something of the expressive potential of the piece which might be achieved by a choice of a particular speed and levels of loudness at different times. However, even if she knows how, knows that, and knows it she may well say 'But I don't like it'. In other words, the piece does not count as a valued experience. It does not fit in to the pupil's idea of *what's what*, but at least she will have reached a point where she can choose on a basis of experience.

The same kind of analysis can be applied to any musical activity in classrooms. For example, a class may play a twelve-bar blues improvisation at a fairly low level of skill (with very little know-how) but communicate the expressive qualities of the piece (knowing it). At the same time they may have more or less information about this particular musical form (knowing that) and may vary from individual to individual as to whether they find it of value or not (knowing what's what). Or again, when a small group is composing using a note-row the members might be very skilful in handling the instruments and the row, achieve a good sense of structure in the composition, be well-informed about serial techniques but find the activity boring – that is to say of little value for them. 'Knowing' is quite complicated and it is difficult for us to understand what is involved at times. It may be helpful therefore to keep these four rather crude categories in mind and we shall return to them later on. There is obviously a good deal of linking between them and for most pupils it will probably be true to say that if they achieve some skills, along with relevant information, while getting to grips with actual music (knowing it), then there will be a strong tendency to enjoy and value the activity. After all, we all tend to 'like what we know' as well as 'know what we like'.

Merely knowing how to do things or knowing something about music is no substitute for knowing music itself and finding enjoyment in the experience. Yet a tremendous proportion of teaching in music is devoted to knowing how or knowing

that, while very little attention is given to knowing it, the music itself, partly because it is very difficult to find an appropriate language in which to discuss what happens in music itself. It is certainly not possible to come to the fourth way of knowing (knowing what's what) through direct teaching or persuasion. The way in which we value things has a great deal to do with our own personal development as human beings, our age, our social attitudes, the type of personality we are and the previous experiences we have undergone along with all the associations with music that have been built up. We can however do a great deal more than we often manage to achieve in the development of a vocabulary, a workshop language that enables us, where necessary, to talk with one another about music itself. Knowing *it* is our real goal and our language must serve this aim.

THE ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

Basically, as we hinted earlier, there are two elements to be taken into account. All music has *expressive character* or quality. That is to say, it is more or less active or fluid or angular or stationary, more or less dense or heavy, driving forward or holding back. Music can be spiky or flowing, smooth or cutting, expanding or contracting. Most of these and other expressive elements will not be revealed in traditional or any other form of notation. They are brought out by the manner of performance or develop in the aural imagination of the composer. Some conductors have the gift of communicating through gesture, the kind of weight and size, the ebb and flow of the music that makes it meaningful, that gives it expressive character. The second element is the *perceptible structure* of the music that is being experienced as composer, performer or listener; fundamentally the relationship between different materials and ideas. This involves the awareness of the significance of change, recognition of the scale on which events take place, a sense of what is normal in a particular context and what is surprising or strikingly different. We shall call the perception of these elements *musical understanding*. Because this is such an important concept we must consider it further at this point.

MUSICAL UNDERSTANDING

Musical understanding obviously depends to some extent, on various kinds of skill and information, but it goes beyond these and is able to be described in terms of structure and expressive character in the following way:

1 *Structure*: the relationships of part to part and part to

whole. Structural understanding implies more than labelling musical forms such as Ternary or Rondo. It involves perceiving the way in which one idea follows another and what the effect of repetition is or how strongly contrasted parts of the music are. There can be no musical understanding away from *particular* pieces of music, whether we compose, perform or listen to them.

Repetition and contrast are the main features of musical structure and the most easily understood. All other structural devices are derived from these. The following are examples of this:

Repetition	*Contrast*
ostinato	change of figure
motif	extension, fragmentation
theme	middle section, episode
tonic key	transposition, modulation, chromaticism
beat	off-beat, syncopation
'air'	variation
recapitulation	development
fugue subject	augmentation, diminution
note-row	inversion, retrograde motion
'natural' sound	electronic distortion

These kinds of repetition and contrast can be identified in conventional musical forms such as binary structures in simple songs; binary short movements in Bach, Handel, Purcell; extended binary movements as in Scarlatti piano Sonatas; the extension of binary to simple sonata form, as in the first movement of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nacht-musik*, or in simple variation form, rondo, fugue, or the contrasts and similarities of pitch, timbre and levels of loudness in a work such as Berio's *Sequenza V*.

2 *Expressive character*: mood, atmosphere, changing levels of tension and resolution, display of feeling or emotion, impression, dramatic and operatic devices. Expressive character is most obvious in opera, oratorio and programme music and in the works of 'Romantic' composers where there is some connection with nature, the composer's life, literature or stories. However, even the 'purest' music, such as a Bach Fugue or Invention has a clear character that can be grasped or missed by the performer or listener. It may be bold, lilting, resolute, flowing, march-like, lively, solemn, etc. The expressive character of music can be explored in many simple ways, for example, by varying the speed and loudness of a well-known song or by composing a short piece (perhaps in a group) using only three

notes but controlling the speed and loudness and texture (two or more notes at once) to achieve a building up of tension.

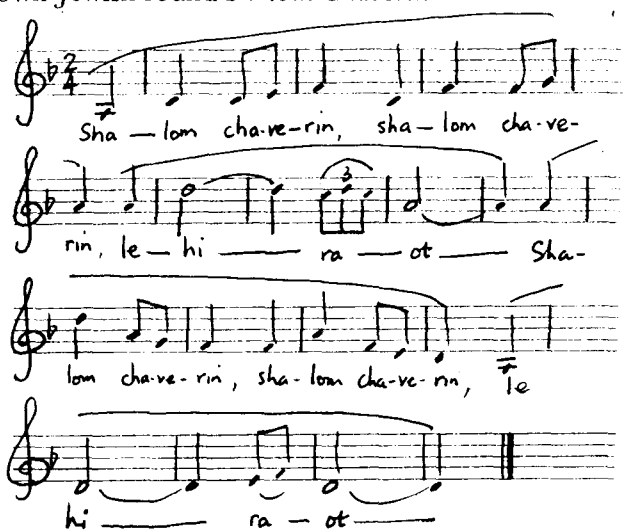
Expressive character is determined by such things as pitch register, pitch intervals, phrase shapes, *tempi*, rate of acceleration or retardation, degree of smoothness or detachedness, accentuation, metre, density of texture. It is important that children explore these things for themselves, making choices in performance and composition, as well as identifying them in other people's music. When recorded music is used it is best to find pieces that are strongly characterised, especially for younger children, not too long and with some changes of character that can be identified and discussed. Several listenings will be required to attain the necessary familiarity to identify the more subtle aspects of the particular character of any piece of music. The range of styles ought to be as wide as possible including the traditional works but including also different kinds of ethnic, folk and pop music, and the music of contemporary composers. It is better to discuss rather than tell classes what to expect. We can ask 'What is it like?' and 'How is it done?' For this reason heavily pre-scripted works, such as *Peter and the Wolf*, have less educational value.

Bearing in mind that what we have called Musical Understanding is central to music education, it becomes obvious that this understanding can only result from direct contact with music as *composer*, *performer* and *listener*. Alternative activities, such as copying down notes on the lives of great composers, or answering questions on instruments of the orchestra, or undertaking a project from resource books on acoustics or opera should always be related to direct musical experience in one of the three central activities.

When we perform, compose or listen to music we are not of course necessarily conscious of expressive character and structure as separate entities. However, because teachers stand between music and other people, and because it is essential to develop helpful ways of talking about music with one another, we shall find it useful to bear in mind expressive character and structure as two sides of a single coin. Our own critical faculties will be sharpened, and, in the best sense of the word, a teacher will often be functioning as a kind of *critic*, acutely perceiving what is happening and responding to it in an appropriate way. We should at least be able to ask good questions. What would it be like if you left out this section or made it longer? What would happen if we took more time over making this crescendo?

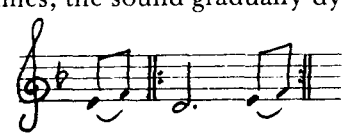
What difference does it make if the lower instruments play louder and the higher ones quieter?

We can see what happens if we take as a simple example the well known Jewish round *Shalom Chaverin*



WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF?

What would happen if we sang this tune as a brisk march? What would it be like if we sang it with a heavy accent on the first beat of the bar as though it were a work song or a stomping dance? How would it be if we sang it very quietly, smoothly and slowly, as though it were a distant memory gently coming back to us? If we were teaching this song to a class we might well want to raise these kinds of questions and find words like 'heavy' or 'driving' or 'holding back' or 'gentle' to describe the expressive character of particular performances. We might also want to explore the structural elements by having the second alternate phrases sung by different sections of the class to point up the answering function of these phrases, or to compare the 'unfinished' quality of the second phrase with the stronger finality of the last. The fusion of expressive and structural elements is felt in the movement out and up towards the middle of the tune and the retracting, returning movement to the end. The sense of arrival and finality can be enhanced by repeating the figure several times, the sound gradually dying away.



So much is now open to us. The class might get into small groups and choose their own way of performing the song, bringing out its expressive possibilities – like a march, a dance, a lament, flowing, spiky, heavy, light. Or they might compose a free texture of sound that has the same kind of structure – statement followed by response. Or using a few notes of a mode or scale they might compose and perform their own tune with a 'going away' and 'coming back' to the home-note. Or the words can be taken and used as sound materials for a voice composition: each of the nine syllables has its own special sound and fascinating pieces can be composed using just three or four of these.

The richness of possibilities stems from knowing *it*, the round itself. Knowing *how* has played its role incidentally; knowing how to pronounce the words, how to sing in tune and in time. Knowing *that* may also take its place; knowing that the song has a Jewish context, that it is in $\frac{2}{4}$ time, that it is in the Aeolian mode, though all this seems less essential than knowing how. Ultimately though, both these ways of knowing stop short of the experience and possibilities of this song, this particular 'it'. Only when we begin to think about its expressive and structural elements does a world of implications open up for us. Instead of being driven into dead-ends of skills and information *for their own sake*, the road ahead becomes open with a multitude of alternative ways leading off in various directions. Teachers and pupils are all learners, exploring the possibilities generated by an encounter with a particular tune.

DISCOVERY

What we are advocating then is that all encounters with music ought to have about them an element of *discovery*. The problem is that for many of us elements of discovery and the excitement of discovering are buried beneath knowledge that has been acquired in other ways and at other times. Many children, let alone teachers, are ready to give up the effort of discovering and put in its place an acceptance of received information. We all too easily sell our birthright of natural curiosity in exchange for the comforting certainties of the familiar. Effective teaching depends in part upon the recognition of this and requires us to structure carefully what we do, to maximize the potential for truly musical encounters in the classroom. The succeeding chapters in this book give some ideas for developing this approach in a purposeful rather than an aimless and careless way.

One of the bonuses of adopting the notion of discovery as central to music teaching, is that it cuts across all kinds of arguments and problems that have perplexed people for many years. Discovery can happen whether we are composers, performers or in audience. Discovery can happen whether the music we are handling belongs to the classical tradition, the East, jazz, pop, rock, reggae or the many shades of contemporary music. We can rediscover something we thought we already knew or open up a totally unexplored territory. To get on the inside of this experience it is important for teachers too to feel a sense of curiosity and discovery frequently and powerfully. Too often we are content with the second-hand and the second-rate. We use course-books or other peoples' ideas mechanically and sometimes blindly. We set our pupils tasks that are unmusical, unexciting. We become dulled and stale by repetition. The procedures we are suggesting here may help to rejuvenate teaching and to give it direction, purpose and imaginative quality.

Because teaching is demanding and complex we need a fundamental, simple and powerful set of working principles. The first of these stems from the discussion so far. We must be true to music, that is to say we must provide our pupils with experience of the stuff itself, knowledge of *it*, the integrity of the particular. The second principle has to do with what motivates pupils as people, with the mainsprings of human behaviour, the dynamic forces that propel us all.

MOTIVATION

Basically and naturally and in the beginning everyone wants to learn, to achieve mastery, to develop. Unfortunately this natural impulse is often stunted by pressures exerted by teachers and schools. Children are put through an incredible series of 'educational' hoops: heavy timetables, rigorous social and academic demands, days spent switching from the thought processes of one subject to another and yet again another. We impose a whole range of extrinsic reasons for learning, that is to say not to do with the quality of the experience itself but with success in tests, examinations, in the achievement of good reports and so on. Yet surely we ought to be searching for the deep wells of human motivation that spring out of the qualities of the activities themselves. The stick and the carrot may be necessary at times but they should never be regarded as fundamental. We

can gain insights here from the thinking of one of our most influential psychologists, Jerome Bruner.

'The will to learn is an intrinsic motive, one that finds both its source and its reward in its own exercise. The will to learn becomes a 'problem' only under specialized circumstances like those of a school, where a curriculum is set, students confined and the path fixed. The problem exists not so much in learning itself, but in the fact that what the school imposes often fails to enlist the natural energies that sustain spontaneous learning – curiosity, a desire for competence, aspiration to emulate a model, and a deep-sensed commitment to the web of social reciprocity.' (Towards a Theory of Instruction, page 127)

This passage has about it a certain 'ring of truth' and we would do well to consider the implications for teaching and learning in music.

If we are to tap those natural sources of energy then every learner has to become *involved* and active. So much music teaching seems concerned with handing out information. How often do we ask children what they notice in music rather than tell them what they should 'know' about it? How frequently is there note-taking rather than discussion – a dialogue of discovery? Music is especially unsuited to this approach. Coming to musical perceptions, making choices and decisions in composition and performance, recognising the preferences of oneself and other people; these are much more central to musical experience than providing 'correct' answers. How are we to engage in music education unless we provide frequent opportunities for the development of these elements? Long ago the Greek philosopher Socrates saw this clearly. The ultimate and ever-present objective in teaching is to guide the learner to the point where he sees things for himself, one could say, to a point where teachers become redundant. This affirms that learning in music ought to be a succession of discoveries linked with a feeling of personal mastery, thus drawing on what Bruner calls curiosity and a desire for competence. Because these discoveries take place alongside other people, especially in the peer group of a school class, the 'commitment to social reciprocity' of which Bruner speaks is also engaged. There is a substantial difference between the competition of tests, examinations and reports, and the stimulation of the achievements of others along with the sympathy engendered by any difficulties experienced by them.

The 'aspiration to emulate a model' is also part of the fabric of peer-group interaction. There are important implications here for the development of small group work.

The teacher him or herself of course is a crucial model and this demands that whatever is done should be done, as far as possible, in a way that is true to music, totally musical. The teacher is much more than a benevolent ring-master as he directs, guides and shares discovery with his pupils. In demonstrating his *own* curiosity, desire for competence, admiration for good models, and commitment to the group, a powerful motivating force is released.

A MODEL OF MUSICAL KNOWING

Finally, we need to clarify ways in which pupils become active in music and the roles they play. These have been discussed in *A Basis for Music Education* (Keith Swanwick 1979) but it may be helpful now to remind ourselves of the model suggested in that book. There are five parameters of musical experience – three of them directly relating to music and two more having supporting and enabling roles, easily remembered by the device C(L)A(S)P.

C Composition	formulating a musical idea, making a musical object
(L) Literature studies	the literature of and the literature about music
A Audition	responsive listening as (though not necessarily in) an audience
(S) Skill acquisition	aural, instrumental, notational
P Performance	communicating music as a 'presence'

This way of identifying the activities relating to music has proved helpful in many ways. For example, it reminds us of the centrality of *Audition*, that particular kind of listening when we are really *understanding* music and not just spotting tunes, or dominant sevenths or identifying composer or performer. It also picks out the three clusters of activity when we directly relate to music; composition, audition and performance. Observations made in large numbers of classrooms suggest that teachers spend most time trying to improve skills or adding to knowledge of literature studies, more time than they in fact predict or estimate. Some teachers have found it helpful to pre-