

CHARLES R. HOFFER • MARJORIE LATHAM HOFFER



# TEACHING MUSIC IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM



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# **TEACHING MUSIC IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM**

**CHARLES R. HOFFER**

Indiana University

**MARJORIE LATHAM HOFFER**

Monroe County Community School Corporation,  
Bloomington, Indiana



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**TEACHING MUSIC  
IN THE  
ELEMENTARY  
CLASSROOM**

*To Allan and Martha, ours by birth  
and  
Donna and Don, ours by marriage*

# Preface

*Teaching Music in the Elementary Classroom* is a book about the ways in which classroom teachers and music specialists can effectively teach music to elementary school children. The suggested teaching procedures contained in it are based on the premise that music is a subject worthy of study by children, and that successful classroom experiences with music will increase their enjoyment of it.

Part One of the book discusses the value of music in the elementary school, the organization and operation of the elementary school in relation to music instruction, the roles of the classroom teacher and music specialist, and guidelines for planning music instruction.

Parts Two and Three describe practical methods for teaching music to children. These chapters are organized so that they consider the ages of the children while exploring the musical elements of rhythm, pitch, timbre, and loudness. Information is presented according to two general levels: primary and upper grades. Such a division recognizes the increases in musical learning that should be achieved as children progress through school, and yet it keeps the discussion from bogging down into lengthy lists of activities for each of six or seven grades. (Such specific lists are of limited value because they still have to be adapted to accommodate the many differences among classrooms and children.) The allocation of topics to either primary or upper grades corresponds in general to the appearance of those topics in current music series books and to conclusions drawn from research studies.

Part Four explores ways in which teachers can individualize certain aspects of music instruction, incorporate other fine arts into music teaching, tailor musical experiences to special students, and evaluate teaching and learning in music.

Although activities such as singing, creating, listening, and music reading are discussed and encouraged in this book, they are not in themselves the ultimate goal of music education in the elementary school. That goal is the gaining of musical understanding. For this reason, the book emphasizes the teaching of rhythm, melody, and other aspects of the music itself *through* activities such as playing instruments, singing, and moving to music. These activities can contribute to musical learning, but they should not substitute for it.

Throughout the book, the suggestions for teaching music are varied and realistic. Teaching procedures are carefully described, and many of them are demonstrated in dialogues from typical classes. All chapters conclude with review questions and with optional activities through which the reader can become directly involved in the topics being studied.

Because classroom teachers and music specialists possess different strengths and limitations when it comes to music instruction, this book takes those differences into account. First, the book does not assume prior study of music. Technical information is discussed in such a way that the material can be understood by nonmusicians, and an appendix on music notation is provided for those who need help in interpreting the written symbols of music. Second, because most elementary schools provide at least some help from specialized music personnel, the book advocates complementary roles to utilize most effectively the musical knowledge of the specialist and the classroom teacher's greater understanding of the children involved. Third, it encourages the utilization of elementary school music series books, because they provide instructional aids and are a resource in planning for the teaching of music.

The book is eclectic in its approach to the various methods of music teaching; it owes no allegiance to a particular system. Instead, it presents a balanced view of the various methods that are appropriate in elementary school music classes, including ideas adapted from the *Orff-Schulwerk*, the Kodály-Hungarian Singing School, Jaques-Dalcroze, and others when they seem pertinent. Nor does the book follow the curriculum sequence presented in any particular series of elementary music books. There is no way of knowing which series will be available to a beginning teacher. Further, such books are subject to frequent revision and to replacement because of changes in textbook adoption policies within a district or state.

In short, *Teaching Music in the Elementary Classroom* seeks to give prospective teachers a knowledge of principles, procedures, and materials that will be useful in a wide variety of music teaching situations.

We are grateful to the School of Music of Indiana University for the use of its library. We also want to thank the following persons for their reviews of the manuscript: Dorothy McDonald of the University of Iowa, Marilyn Vincent of Ball State University, and Linda Damer White of Indiana State University.

CHARLES R. HOFFER

MARJORIE LATHAM HOFFER

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**PART**

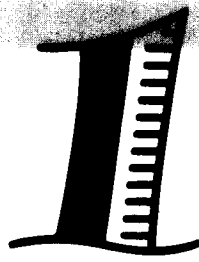
# ONE

## FOUNDATIONS FOR TEACHING MUSIC IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Part One presents fundamental topics that influence the teaching of music in the elementary school. As a basis for examining these topics, it is necessary to consider the reasons for including music in the elementary school curriculum. Unless a substantial and satisfactory case for music is understood by teachers, attempts at music instruction will be of limited value, if they are undertaken at all. Chapter 1 examines the importance of music in the elementary classroom.

An understanding of the somewhat different roles of music specialists and classroom teachers can contribute to the success of music instruction in the elementary school. Since most schools designate a cooperative-complementary arrangement between specialists and classroom teachers, both types of teachers should understand what each can do better. These matters occupy much of the discussion in Chapter 2.

Later sections of this book describe specific procedures that have been successful in teaching music to children. The suggested methods are based on broad principles derived from educational psychology. Chapter 3 outlines the fundamental guidelines on which the recommended teaching methods are based.



# Reasons for Teaching Music in the Elementary School

Music is important in human life. All over the world people spend countless hours listening to music and performing it, and they spend vast amounts of money for instruments, records, and record-playing equipment. People dance, sing, play instruments, and create new tunes in every part of the globe. It is estimated that in America more than 30 million people play musical instruments regularly. More than 54 million people attend concerts of popular music, and 27 million attend concerts of classical music.<sup>1</sup> That is a greater number than attend sports events such as major league baseball and college football games.

Music has also been present in every age. The walls of ancient Egyptian buildings show people playing instruments and singing, and the Bible tells how David soothed King Saul with his music. In the Middle Ages a courtly gentleman was likely to serenade the lady of his choice, and competitive guilds were organized to reward excellence in music performance. The breadth and depth of mankind's interest in music are indeed impressive.

Why are music and the other fine arts so important? There are several reasons, but a most significant one is that music and other arts represent a fundamental difference between existing and living. Animals exist in the sense that they manage to survive. Humans live; they attempt to make life interesting, rewarding, and satisfying. Humans are



not content merely to survive in a cave and grub roots for food. They notice sights and sounds and have feelings about them, and they find life richer because of these feelings and experiences.

The cave paintings at Lascaux, created during the Cro-Magnon period more than 15,000 years ago, show remarkable grace and artistry. The motivation for the work may have been functional—a way to invoke favor from a god of the hunt, or an illustrated lesson for young hunters. But for those functions, a stick figure of an animal would probably have been sufficient. The painter provided an aesthetic dimension, revealing a sensitivity to color, shape, and motion.

People have always been looking at beauty in the world about them. They are fascinated by the shifting surf, the color of a sunset, and the shape of a flower. They create beautiful and artistic objects. They value paintings, symphonies, and poetry, and they seek artistic quality in their everyday surroundings—in their clothing, homes, furniture, automobiles. A cardboard carton could serve as a lamp table, and it would have the virtue of being far cheaper than a piece of furniture. But humans do not want to live with objects that are merely functional. The human spirit needs to appreciate and create things of beauty. This compulsion to reach beyond immediate needs is not a luxury; it is a basic element of being human.

Why do humans seek the “good life,” which includes music and other arts? Philosophers have pondered that question for a long time. It seems impossible to answer the question to everyone’s satisfaction. One theory holds that in music and other arts, people reexperience in a symbolic way the feelings associated with events in life. This theory proposes that in the recurrent rise and fall of intensity in the music, the performer or listener relives in a roundabout way the emotions associated with personal experiences. Another theory claims that music is “transfigured Nature,” transcending the world and revealing “the realm of the ultimate Will (God),” to cite two phrases from the nineteenth-century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the reasons, people do find life richer and better because of the arts.

## WHY ARE MUSIC AND THE OTHER ARTS TAUGHT IN SCHOOL?

The role of the school is to teach the subjects and skills that enable a person to function successfully in society. When mathematics, music, science, and other school subjects move beyond a rudimentary level, they exceed the teaching capabilities of most families. There are too many things to learn and they are often complex. It is no coinci-