



*Map of the world, showing the geographic areas described in the text.*

# TEACHING MUSIC FROM A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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A multicultural approach to learning centers around organizing educational experiences for students that develop sensitivity, understanding, and respect for peoples from a broad spectrum of ethnic-cultural backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> If students are to learn from a multicultural perspective, teachers must develop an educational philosophy that recognizes the many cultural contributions made by different peoples. That philosophy centers on developing an understanding that there are many different but equally valid forms of cultural expression and encourages students to develop a broad perspective based on understanding and tolerance for a variety of opinions and approaches.

Multicultural music education reflects the cultural diversity of the world in general and of the United States in particular by promoting a music curriculum that includes songs, choral works, instrumental selections, and listening experiences representative of a wide array of ethnic-cultures. It also encourages the interdisciplinary study of different cultural groups through not only music but also art, dance, drama, literature, and social studies. Performances by choral and instrumental ensembles, as well as stories told by

storytellers, dramatic presentations, puppet shows, and folk dances, are some of the experiences that enliven classroom study based on a multicultural curriculum. The ultimate challenge in multicultural music education is to provide avenues of exploration so that students can gain a better understanding of the world and of their American heritage.

### Rationale

A multicultural approach to music learning in American schools is important for many reasons. For one thing, the United States has an extremely diverse population. People from more than one hundred world cultures now reside in the United States, and many ethnic groups now number in the tens of thousands and some in the millions.

Major changes in the patterns of immigration to this country have occurred in the nearly four centuries since the founding of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, when American Indian nations were the only diverse cultural groups. The largest number of immigrants has come from European countries, first from northwestern Europe and then from southeastern Europe. Substantial numbers of peoples from the African continent also arrived during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today, approximately 15 percent of United States immigrants come from Europe, 37 percent from Asia, and 44 percent from Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup> The 1990 census revealed a nation of fewer than 1 percent Native American peoples, 3 percent Asians, 9 percent Hispanics, 12 percent African Americans, and 75 percent of people of European or mixed ancestry.<sup>3</sup> By the year 2050, the population distribution of the United States is projected to be 10 percent Asian, 16 percent Black, 22 percent Latino, and 52 percent of European heritage.<sup>4</sup>

The United States currently has a population of approximately 258 million people, which includes 50 million Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Many geographical areas throughout the country now have large ethnic populations, some of which have been increasing at dramatic rates in recent years. Cleveland identifies itself as a "city of nations," and this description is surely appropriate for metropolitan regions such as New York, Washington, D.C., Houston, Chicago, Miami, and Los Angeles. Ethnic diversity has also spread beyond major metropolitan areas to now affect large numbers of smaller communities throughout the nation. Florida, for example, currently has 153 distinct cultural groups,<sup>5</sup> and demographers predict that by 2010, California will be the first state, with the exception of Hawaii, "to have a population whose majority is made up of minorities."<sup>6</sup>

At one time it was fashionable to speak of America's cultural diversity in terms of a "melting pot," but the acceptance of this myth is clearly waning. The civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s stimulated ethnic revitalization: Groups that had previously denied their cultures now proclaim their unique identities. Thus, the United States of today is best described as a country composed of a mosaic of various ethnic communities that contribute to the national culture as they maintain distinct identities.

The dynamics of cultural diversity are reflected at all levels in American schools. More than one hundred languages are now spoken in the New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Fairfax County, Virginia, school systems.<sup>7</sup> Some of America's major school systems, like those in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, now offer instruction in a dozen different languages. The superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools remarked that in a visit to one school, the pupils displayed a sign that said "welcome" in twenty-seven different languages, because those languages are represented at that one school.<sup>8</sup>

Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, stated that "what is coming toward the educational system is a group of children who will be...more ethnically and linguistically diverse" than ever before.<sup>9</sup> It has been predicted that by the year 2000, one out of three United States school children will be either Black or Hispanic and that in fifty-three major cities the majority of students will be nonwhite.<sup>10</sup>

As Americans become more aware of their nation's ethnic diversity, curricula in all subject areas are now being designed to encourage the broadest cultural perspectives. Educational administrators and school faculties have placed a major emphasis on designing study programs that help students develop an understanding of the cultural diversity of their world and their own country. The former is designed to help students develop international perspectives that will prepare them to live in a global environment; the latter focuses on the very nature of the United States itself, a country composed of a large variety of different cultures that must understand each other and work together for the common good of the nation.

In music, a multicultural approach to education is clearly in keeping with perhaps the most significant trend of the past half century: the growing understanding of music as a global phenomenon in which there are a number of highly sophisticated musical traditions based on different but equally logical principles. Many who have studied a variety of the world's musical cultures have come to realize that the often-used phrase "music, the international language" has little validity. In summary, our world contains many musical "languages," and we must learn the operative principles of these traditions in order to understand them.

In the past, as a result of emphasizing selected aspects of Western European and American classical and folk music, teachers have often led students to believe there was only one major musical system in the world, the Euro-American system. By stressing the importance and perhaps "superiority" of that system, educators have taught by implication the relative unimportance, if not the actual inferiority, of other musical systems. Today's scholars have clearly demonstrated that educational institutions at all levels need to ensure that music curricula contain balanced programs that are representative of the world and also of the multicultural nature of the United States itself.

Many teachers are now aware of the need to present a broad spectrum of music to their students. The Music Educators National Conference has given priority attention to the multicultural mandate in music education with numerous sessions on various musical traditions being presented at national, regional, and state conventions. The 1990 Washington Symposium on Multicultural Approaches to Music Education, cosponsored by MENC, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the Smithsonian Institution, and attended by nearly three hundred music teachers from all educational levels throughout the United States, was a seminal event. The symposium resolution for future directions and actions clearly articulated the breadth of responsibility that music educators have in addressing the issue of multiculturalism in music education:

- Be it resolved that music teachers will seek to assist students in understanding that there are many different but equally valid forms of musical expression.
- Be it resolved that multicultural approaches to teaching music will be incorporated into musical experiences from the very earliest years of music education.

- Be it resolved that instruction in *multicultural approaches to teaching music* will incorporate both *intensive experiences in other music cultures* and *comparative experiences among music cultures*.
- Be it resolved that music instruction will include not only the *study of other musics*, but also the *relationship of those musics to their respective cultures*; be it resolved further that the *meaning of music within each culture* be sought for its own value.
- Be it resolved that we will seek to ensure that *multicultural approaches to teaching music* will be incorporated into every elementary and secondary school music curriculum. These should include experiences in singing, playing instruments, listening, and creative activity and movement or dance experiences with music.
- Be it resolved that *multicultural approaches to teaching music* will be incorporated into music curricula in all educational settings including general, instrumental, and choral music education. Such studies will involve both product and process.
- Be it resolved that *multicultural approaches to teaching music* will be incorporated into all phases of teacher education in music: music education methods classes and clinical experiences, music history and literature, theory, composition, and performance.<sup>11</sup>

A number of other national and international organizations, including the Society for Ethnomusicology, the National Association of Schools of Music, and the International Society for Music Education, have strongly endorsed the study of world musics at all levels of instruction.<sup>12</sup> The release of the National Standards for Arts Education in 1994 further stressed the importance of multicultural perspectives. These Standards, developed by a consortium of national arts education associations, state that students should:

- Sing from memory a *varied repertoire* of songs representing genres and styles from *diverse cultures*.
- Demonstrate perceptual skills by moving and by answering questions about and describing aural examples of music of *various styles representing diverse cultures*.
- Identify the sounds of a variety of instruments, including many orchestra and band instruments, and instruments from *various cultures*.
- Identify by genre or style aural examples of music from *various historical periods and cultures*.
- Describe in simple terms how musical elements are used in music examples from *various world cultures*.
- Identify and describe the roles of musicians in *various music settings and cultures*.
- Perform music representing *diverse genres and cultures*.
- Analyze the uses of musical elements in aural examples representing *diverse genres and cultures*.
- Describe distinguishing characteristics representative of music genres and styles for a *variety of cultures*.
- Compare, in *several cultures of the world*, functions music serves, roles of musicians, and conditions under which music is typically performed.<sup>13</sup>

To support the increasing interest in multicultural approaches to music education, domestic and international book, record, and film companies have produced numerous materials on world musics. Contemporary music series text books for elementary and secondary schools have now embraced a music curriculum based on examples from a wide variety of music cultures. Clearly, the concept of studying music from a multicultural perspective is becoming an integral part of music instruction at all educational levels.

### **Some musical benefits of multicultural music education**

Although many people have encouraged an investigation of world musics as a way to promote intercultural and interracial understanding, multicultural music study can also provide a number of strictly musical benefits. First, students are introduced to a great variety of musical sounds from all over the world. Their palette of musical experiences is expanded as they come to realize the extraordinary variety of sonic events worldwide. An early exposure to a large array of musical sounds is important in helping students become receptive to all types of musical expression.

Second, students begin to understand that many areas of the world have music as sophisticated as their own. Until recently, peoples of both Western and non-Western cultures believed that Euro-American classical music was “superior” to other musics.<sup>14</sup> Today, composers, performers, and teachers are coming to realize that many equally sophisticated music cultures are found throughout the globe and that Western classical music is just one of the many varied styles.

Third, students can discover many different but equally valid ways to construct music. For many students, this may be one of the most important gains derived from a study of music in its multicultural manifestations. They discover that music from a given culture may have principles that differ significantly from those principles contained in the music of their own culture and that one should learn the distinctive, inherent logic of each type. What would be an unacceptable practice in Western music may be perfectly acceptable in music from another area of the world. Also, the terminology used to describe Western music often is not appropriate for describing another musical tradition, so more global-oriented nomenclature is needed.

Fourth, by studying a variety of world musics, students develop greater musical flexibility, termed by some as “polymusicality.” They increase their ability to perform, listen intelligently, and appreciate many types of music. Some teachers find that when students gain a positive attitude toward one “foreign” music and are able to perform and listen intelligently to that music, they become more flexible in their attitudes toward other unfamiliar musics. Through their involvement with other musics, students develop a number of vocal and instrumental techniques. Their capacity for learning different musics grows, and they are able to study and perform new musics with increased understanding and ease. Furthermore, with this flexibility, they are much less prone to judge a new music (whether Western or non-Western) without first trying to understand it. In addition, by studying the function of such elements as melody, rhythm, texture, timbre, and form in producing various musics, students begin to reappraise Western music and often come to view it in a completely different manner. When students study a variety of musics, they become more aware of aspects of their own music that they have previously taken for granted.

### **Instructional approaches**

Teaching from a multicultural or global perspective can be done in a variety of ways. Music specialists, working in conjunction with classroom teachers and subject specialists, can develop curricula for the study of a number of cultures, both from the world at large and from the United States. While there are a number of approaches, teachers may wish to consider organizing study units around cultural groups highlighted in the social studies curricula at each grade level. At the elementary level, the musical study for each of these units might include singing songs, making and playing instruments, improvisation, movement or dance, and focused listening. In conjunction with the art teacher, the students may study visual art examples from the culture currently under study. The physical education teacher may be solicited for assistance with dance and other movement exercises. Classroom teachers, and teachers of social studies and language arts, bring other dimensions to the study of a culture by having students read folktales, poetry, and other literature; produce dramatic productions; view films and videotapes; write reports; and design bulletin boards. These experiences help students learn not only the history and geography of another people but also the unique ways in which music and other art forms are expressive of that culture.

While young children are in the early stages of their musical development, upper elementary, middle school, and secondary school students are at a pivotal point in their development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward music. They possess the coordination and strength needed for performing vocally or on instruments. They can think in abstract, critical, and analytical ways. They are often intrigued by the new and unfamiliar and may be fascinated by a comparison of “new” to “known” phenomena. These students have the potential to examine musical cultures beyond their immediate surroundings. They do not easily change their preference for their own music, but they may explore with enthusiasm various musics through active participation.

In addition to gaining a more global perspective, students can learn that many musical styles of the world are represented in the United States. This nation of immigrants provides ample opportunities for discovering the music, literary and visual arts, cuisine, and various customs of different cultural groups. Students who experience a variety of what now constitute “American musics” will gain a new understanding of the cultural plurality of their country. The study of this plurality has become an important curricular theme in the upper elementary grades and in secondary schools nationwide.

The following are some of the approaches music teachers may wish to consider in broadening musical study for their students.

*Music concepts.* A music curriculum based on multicultural musical experiences can focus on the study of the fundamental concepts of music. A musical concepts chart can be made on the chalkboard, a poster board, or as a bulletin board, and as students learn a new music through performance experiences and directed listening, they are asked to “fill in” information on distinctive aspects of melody, rhythm, timbre, texture, dynamics, and form.

Organizing musical study in terms of a concepts chart provides an effective way of summarizing how distinctive treatments of melody, rhythm, timbre, texture, dynamics, and form identify a particular musical style. It also allows students to focus on contrasts among different musical styles, which lead to an understanding that there are many different but equally logical ways to construct musical sounds.

*Performance.* Multicultural music study should be approached through various perfor-

mance experiences in singing, playing instruments, and moving to music. Through performance, students become actively involved in experientially discovering how musics of various cultures are constructed. The pedagogical principles of Europeans Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, Zoltan Kodály, and Carl Orff provide teachers with excellent models for designing multicultural musical experiences. In addition, the musical skills of teachers developed through many years of ear training, conducting, and applied lessons are invaluable in the engagement of students in music-making experiences.

From preschool and the primary years onward, children can learn to sing songs that represent numerous cultures. These songs should be taught as authentically as possible and often in the original languages. Children enjoy learning to pronounce new words, and they may best identify with the cultures and people by using a song's original languages. In secondary school choral ensembles, students are capable of performing multi-part pieces with sensitivity to the nuances of both music and language. Their performances can be further enhanced by the addition of gestures and movement associated with the vocal tradition. Teachers should avoid using harmonic piano accompaniments when they do not resemble the practice of the original cultures; many traditional songs may be most accurately performed without accompaniment or with basic rhythmic patterns.

In addition to singing, students can also learn to play musical instruments from various cultures. Native instruments from many areas of the world are now available in the United States and can be used effectively in schools. For example, schools can purchase an African *mbira* (plucked idiophone), *shekere* (gourd rattles with a netted covering of beads), and *agogo* (iron bells). These instruments, or replicas of them, are effective in teaching students about musical heritages from sub-Saharan Africa. Likewise, xylophones are key when playing traditional music from Cambodia to Zimbabwe and can be easily played by both young and older students. Other percussion ensembles, including those from West African, Caribbean, Latin American, and even Chinese cultures, can be organized to perform important drum and gong traditional music that uses available classroom instruments.

In school systems that do not have access to authentic musical instruments from various cultures, teachers can frequently create instruments that simulate the sight and sounds of real instruments. By coordinating performance on handmade instruments with pictures (slides, color transparencies, posters, films, or videotapes) of the original instruments, teachers can provide effective and valid presentations of different musical cultures.

People from other areas of the world perform their own native musics in many areas of the United States. This is particularly true in urban areas and in college and university communities in which there are distinguished performers from many different cultures. Such persons provide an important resource for teachers and schools, and many are willing to instruct and perform.

Along with singing and playing instruments, students can experience various musical traditions by moving to music. Movement activities can center around developing an understanding of basic concepts such as rhythm and form. Students move to the beat, meter, rhythmic patterns, and tempo changes in music. They also learn to "feel" the form in a work by devising movement activities to illustrate different sections. Students can also experience different musics by learning the folk dances of these traditions. Because of the close relationship between motor activity and mental activity, movement is likely to facilitate and enhance conceptual learning. In music learning, the mind and body func-



tion together, and the sensory feedback from movement is connected to higher mental processes. Children create natural and spontaneous rhythms when they listen to music; these movements provide the impetus for expressive movement and patterned folk dance.

*Guided listening.* Along with experiencing the fundamental structural principles of other musics through performance, students are ready to listen perceptively to recorded performances of world musics. Listening to examples of many different musical cultures is an important component of any instructional program. A large number of recordings from most areas of the world are now available in the United States, and many excellent examples of world musics also appear on films and videotapes. In addition, a number of performing artists from other countries now live in the United States, and others come to visit this country each year. Thus, teachers can have actual performances in their classrooms. Such presentations are especially effective in helping children identify with the cultures from which the music is derived.

*Integrated learning.* Developing a cultural context of featured musical pieces or styles is an important part of a multicultural music program. Although students can explore other musics without investigating the cultures themselves, the most effective approach coordinates a study of the people and their music. Students enjoy learning about different peoples from both their own and other countries by studying unfamiliar customs, crafts, paintings, sculptures, architecture, literature, music, and dance. Through an interrelated study of many aspects of a culture, students develop new and important understandings of other peoples, and they begin to realize the inherent place of music and the arts in other cultures.

### Concept and content

This book includes information and suggestions for teaching students their musical heritages. It is designed as a practical experience-oriented guide for helping students develop a broad understanding of musics in their world and an appreciation of their multicultural musical heritage in the United States. The lessons are intended to serve as launches to the adaptation and development by teachers of one class period—or two or more classes—of students' knowledge of a musical culture. In this way, the book is a stimulus to the teacher's creative curriculum. It focuses on helping students discover some of the inherently different but equally valid ways in which various cultural groups organize musical events. Finally, this book is intended to help students learn to understand and appreciate their exciting world of music.

### NOTES

1. While some people differentiate between multicultural and multiethnic, we refer here to ethnic-culture and leave other cultural considerations (such as age, gender, religious affiliation, and lifestyle) beyond the scope of this discussion. See James A. Banks, *Multiethnic Education: Theory and Practice*, 3d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1994).
2. *Time*, 2 December 1993, 14.
3. *Monthly News from the U. S. Bureau of the Census* (Census Bureau, September 1991) 26, no. 9.
4. *Time*, 2 December 1993, 14.
5. CBS's "Sunday Morning," 4 September 1994.
6. "Patterns in Our Social Fabric Are Changing," *Education Week* 5, no. 34, 14 May 1986, 16.
7. *Time*, 2 December 1993, 14.
8. "Patterns in Our Social Fabric Are Changing," 16.

9. ABC News, "To Save Our Schools, To Save Our Children," 4 September 1984.
10. ABC News, "To Save Our Schools, To Save Our Children," 4 September 1984.
11. Synopsis of "Symposium Resolution for Future Directions," in William M. Anderson, *Teaching Music with a Multicultural Approach* (Reston, Virginia: Music Educators National Conference, 1991), 89–91.
12. See ISME Policy on Music of the World's Cultures, adopted July 1994, in *International Journal of Music Education*, 1995.
13. *National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts* (Reston, Virginia: Music Educators National Conference, 1994), 26–29, 42–45.
14. See Judith Becker, "Is Western Art Music Superior?" *Musical Quarterly*, 72 (1986): 341–59.