

"It Ain't Over 'til the Audience Sings"

Angela Krajnek, WMEA State Chair, Collegiate MENC

The title of this article exemplifies the beliefs Will Schmid has lived by as he connects people and music. After a 28-year teaching career at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Will Schmid will retire after this spring semester. He is a past national president of MENC and of the Wisconsin Music Educators Association. He has been involved with the Wisconsin CMP project, the development of the "World Music Drumming Curriculum," the development of the "Get America Singing ...Again!" campaign, and the development of guitar teaching in the schools. Will has been a champion of teaching secondary general music.

Will began teaching in 1962 in River Falls. Although his major instrument was the cornet, he quickly learned to play guitar because he did not have a piano for classroom accompaniment.

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Will. It was a great experience for me to learn about his many involvements throughout his career. He is more than just a professor on campus; he is someone who has made a difference in the way music is taught all over the nation and the world. In the years to come, Will's influence will endure as he continues to present workshops on teaching guitar and "World Music Drumming." We have not seen the last of Will yet!

—Angela Krajnek

What are the most important innovations in music teaching that you have seen throughout your career?

I think one of those innovations is clearly the change toward a much more inclusive repertoire of music. The whole movement after the Tanglewood Symposium of 1967 toward multicultural musics, toward more inclusive music, pop music, jazz, and world musics has made a huge difference. We are in a much different place today than we were back then. I would say that the comprehensive musicianship movement has changed the face of the way perfor-

mance groups are taught. Probably the other main innovation would be in the areas of the use of technology, in new instruments, MIDI, capability with sequencers, etc. The introduction of the National Standards in about 1993-94 has made a big difference. What that did was to codify what a lot of people considered to be a comprehensive view of teaching, but it gave us a clear sense of what our strengths and weakness were in the profession. Since that time, for example, there has been a lot of effort put into National Standards #3 and #4 (improvisation, composition and arranging) that have clearly been shown to be weak areas for almost all teachers. Some of the big changes that have happened as a result of that I think have been that we have had to look for new ways to "beef" up those areas in existing publications. For example, the Silver Burdett and Macmillan publications for general music have included more material in that direction. I think the publications like "Essential Elements" for band, choir, and orchestra have included much more of that type of material than previous to the standards.

What was your involvement with the Wisconsin CMP project?

Well, most curricular projects come and go. They are here for maybe 5-10 years maximum, and then they are gone. People lose interest, they move away and move on to the next "fad," whatever that happens to be. Wisconsin's project on Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance started in 1977 and of course is still very much alive today – 24 years later. That is just a remarkable longevity.

I think a lot of the credit for that goes to Mike George, executive director for WSMA and WMEA, who saw the crucial element in keeping it alive. That was to keep renewing the staff, keep on putting more new pilot teachers into the project. Therefore, you had a constant changing wave of people coming through the project. There have been a number of people who

have stayed with the project the entire time, or almost the entire time. I have been involved for the whole 24 years, as is Mike George, but there are also others who have been around a long time and that has made a big difference. Jan Tweed is one of the people who has been a mainstay with the project and is now working in the Associations' office to help with the continuity there.

What was your involvement with guitar in the schools and the development of the importance of secondary general music?

Let me start with the second part of the question first. Secondary general music is admittedly the weakest area of the music curriculum. We lose students after they choose not to be in band, choir, or orchestra. Around the middle school we start to lose them and by the time we are at graduation we are down to 20 percent or fewer in some schools. So we have to do a much better job on that and clearly one of the corrections for secondary general music that everyone is pointing to now is the series of active options like guitar, world music drumming, keyboards, synthesizers and computers. The kind of thing where students can really get their hands on things and not just be the receivers of music. They can be the doers and the makers of music.

The guitar project, sponsored by MENC, GAMA (Guitar Accessories Marketing Association) and NAMM (National Association of Music Merchants) began in 1995. It is an idea that I put together as a grant proposal and GAMA got behind it and they convinced NAMM to also get behind it. Over the six years in which this project has been running, we have managed to educate over 208,000 students in middle schools and high schools (taught them how to play guitar). 650 teachers have received a scholarship of \$500 and that is actually going up to \$600 for this summer to attend one of the six summer workshops and to learn how to teach guitars in their schools.

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How were you involved in the development of the curriculum for world music drumming?

Well, I got involved in doing African drumming as a result of my doctoral dissertation at Eastman, which I finished in 1971. It was very clear to me at that time that world musics needed to be a bigger part of the curriculum at all levels, so I put together a dissertation that had to do with that. Shortly after going out to teach at the University of Kansas I decided to spend a summer in 1972 back in Connecticut at Wesleyan University and studied African drumming with a master drummer there. After that experience, which was so appealing to me, I just wanted to do African and Caribbean drumming every opportunity that I got and later wanted to share that with other people – with students and the general public.

As I was finishing my two years of the MENC presidency from 1994-96, I realized that I needed a project to really capture my attention after I was finished with that experience. I was able to talk the Remo Drum Company and Remo Belli (wonderful CEO of that company) into funding a two-year pilot project that went from 1996-1998. Remo put \$140,000 into that pilot project, not knowing whether it would produce anything that would be useful for them, but Remo believed that it might involve many more students in becoming music makers.

We established 20 pilot sites, starting here in Milwaukee, with five pilot sites in the Milwaukee Public Schools and adding 15 more in the summer of 1997. That pilot experience of two years gave us the chance to thoroughly put together a curriculum, which was then tested in all 20 schools – diverse schools all over the country – everything from inner-city schools, to Hispanic schools, to suburban, little towns in Montana, just the whole spectrum. It included kids and teachers of all sorts. At the end of the experience, when Hal Leonard finally published the World Music Drumming publications in 1998, we knew that it worked. We knew that they were based on solid, successful experiences that had been seriously modified by the experiences and suggestions of the pilot teachers. It has been gratifying to me

to see that today, three years later, we now have a ground swell of interest with thousands of schools teaching it all over the country and Canada.

How was the Get America Singing...Again! project started and what was your involvement with that?

Well, it does not take a very keen observer to notice that fewer and fewer people in the American public are singing. Just as one indicator of that, in our guitar classes here at UW-Milwaukee, which are offered to the general student population, we have found that it is more and more difficult to get students to sing every year. More and more students are coming to us and saying "I don't sing," "I am a non-singer," all of those negative kinds of things. In 1995, when I was still MENC President, we launched a campaign to try and make a difference in that. We started by getting partners like the Barbershop Society (SPEBSQSA), located right down here in Kenosha and the Sweet Adelines. They were vitally interested in getting involved and helping and they thought this idea was a great idea and that their chapters would all get involved, which they have. The American Choral Directors also got involved in the early stages and put some effort into it, but not as much as the barbershop societies or MENC. We did a lot of polling of our own members of MENC and people from the other Barbershop societies and people from the general public and eventually put together a list of 43 songs that were included in a publication by Hal Leonard Publishing, right here in Wisconsin, which was called "Get America Singing...Again!"

Our slogan for the campaign was "It ain't over 'til the audience sings." We even had bumper stickers to that effect published by MENC. Four years after that initial publication was introduced at the national convention in Kansas City in 1996, volume 2 was introduced at the Washington D.C. MENC convention, just last year. Another 45 songs were included in the second volume and Hal Leonard again published it. What effect has that had?



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I know that hundreds of thousands of copies of those books have been used by not just music teachers, but by clubs, boy scouts, and groups all over the country and I think that it has gotten people's attention. We could still do a lot more with it. It is an idea that is just in its emerging stage and hopefully every teacher will realize that "It ain't over 'til the audience sings."

Are there any ideas as far as the next steps in the project?

Pete Seeger and I have regular phone conversations about this, which has also been one of the fun parts for me. This is a guy who sings songs to you over the phone asking, "Do you know this one?" "Have you ever heard this one?" "This is a really a good song." He's always thinking "Well, what's the next volume, what should be included?" He is very practical about the whole thing. He is the honorary national chair of the "Get America Singing ...Again!" campaign. He has written a forward in both of the books.

What do you think have been the important "isms" in music teaching? Who have been the big trendsetters as far as approaches, methodology and strategies in teaching music?

The main "isms," methods have not changed a lot in the last 25-30 years. Some of the main approaches to the field have been well established, like the Orff approach and Kodaly method that were established a long time ago. Suzuki is not a new idea. It has been around since I was in graduate school in the 60s. A lot of those so called "isms" have been around a long time. I think what we do not see as much of anymore is innovation in the form of "isms." What I see as more interesting would be things like students being more involved in instrumental music with an aural approach at the beginning...with singing and other things like that and having opportunities to not start an instrument just by opening a book and playing whole notes or quarter notes. I am seeing much more creativity at the early stages of introduction of instruments. All the new methods are way ahead of where things used to be years ago.

Were you involved with Vision 2020?

I was one of the original resource people that gathered down in Tallahassee, Florida. I think that document, like the Tanglewood Symposium of 1967, will be one of the most influential documents over the next 20 years. I think it will be widely used, particularly at graduate levels at universities. I hope that public school teachers will actually read it and get some good ideas from it. To me, one of best ideas in Vision 2020 is the whole notion of transitional teaching, which looks very hard at what we are doing in a classroom, what we are doing in the K-12 arena and how that can transition students into being lifelong music makers by teaching the skills and the attitudes and the kinds of things that enable people to be independent lifelong music makers. To me, that is one of the strong points of the Vision 2020.

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