

WHERE IS THE MUSIC EDUCATOR?

It seems to me that as musicians our primary obligation is to listen. I do not mean simply to listen to what we normally accept as 'music', but that the act of listening should be a quite natural state of being with us. This necessarily implies that we have got beyond the stage of re-acting to our sound-experience. A non-reactional state of listening is where real musical creativity begins. The response then becomes a creative act, which may exhibit itself within us as understanding and may in turn be transmitted as composition or as a performance.

Given this, not as an intellectual premise but as an ontological fact, then it would appear to be necessary to re-structure the whole of our thinking about musical education. For if, through listening, we become aware of our *necessity* as musicians to attend to sound, then something happens. We recognise the illusory nature of the discrimination between 'music' and 'noise'. (Noise' is what I do not want to hear; if I listen without reacting to it, by definition it is noise no longer—in fact I am not even thinking that it is noise no longer: it just *is*.) There is no barrier between 'art' and 'life'; the sounds we attend to may be the result of a person's activity, or of a group of people together, or of a natural event, but the intentionality or non-intentionality of the sounds does not obstruct our listening. In other words, 'music' becomes an expression of our total being, which includes performing, composing and listening but is centred in the latter.

It should now become clear that musical education is primarily a continuing *self-education* through the listening process. For if I am not myself aware of the sounds about me, then there can be no response, and therefore no music, or at best a fragmentary music. The musician's responsibility (= 'response-ability', ability to respond) must be to the whole sound-world in which s/he lives. To allow oneself to become dulled to life-sounds because they are not 'Music' is a basic dishonesty with oneself, with

the facts of one's own experience. It seems that insofar as the existing institutions of music-learning have failed to recognize this, they have made themselves obsolete by their fragmentary approach to musical education. Either the institutions, or rather the individuals within them will change, or the true musical education will take place elsewhere, within groups of creatively-minded individuals. Optimistically we might foresee a situation in which the words 'department of music' would connote not only a place where the material means of making music were housed, but also a meeting-ground for student and working musicians, creative artists, where each can contribute to the development and understanding of our collective sound-world through their composition, performance and research activities.

By and large, the great musical developments of the past, including the very recent past, have taken place oblivious of educational institutions. This need not be, unless we continue to accept what has become almost an axiom; that education must always look back. But education should be a *leading-out*'. It seems to me that we have been missing what education *is*.

The fundamental problem of tackling the whole re-structuring of musical education I could not and do not intend to deal with here. Since the root of the problem, and therefore its solution, lies with the individual, I should like to suggest a possible series of activities which school music teachers can experiment with, and discover for themselves the validity of an approach based on the necessity of learning from the whole of one's sound-experience.

Firstly, we see that this will be a primarily *aural* approach. We start from the sounds themselves,

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rather than teaching a notation and attempting to relate our musical experience to that. In general, we might say that where a notation is necessary, as clearly one often will be, then it should evolve from that need. But let us begin from situations where there is no notation, and, at any rate to begin with, no need for notation.

Where we have a group, a class, there is a great value in collective improvisation. An enormous amount can be learnt from that. The total freedom of the individual within the improvisation is learnt. It seems that the first impulse is to dominate, to be heard. So the first class improvisation (unless the children are very inhibited) will be very loud. Only after one or a number of improvisations does the individual begin to discover his freedom to be silent as well as to be heard. If each member of the group learns this (discovers for himself!), we can expect an entirely new subtlety to enter into the improvisations;; we find an attitude of discovery: the discovery of new sounds, of new instruments and sound-makers, of new ways of performing the instruments (development of technique); a determination to make sounds 'tell' without the need to dominate; a growth of the response to the sounds of the other members of the group. In short, an understanding of the totality of musicianship begins to arise. Thus 'improvisation' becomes 'intuitive music'.

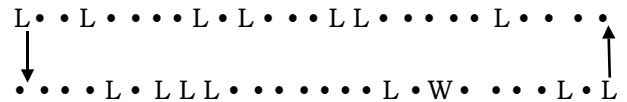
After the discovery of the freedom within intuitive music it may be helpful to contrast this with a *directed* improvisation. Here, some kind of limitation is imposed on the group. Limitation of each member to a particular instrument, or all to the same instrument or to the voice, would be one example. The limitation itself may be a broad one, or it may be narrow; it may be constant or it may vary. All possibilities can have an appropriateness. For a vocal group, one could limit the sounds to sibilants only, to vowels only, or to the sounds contained within a particular word or phrase; or the sounds used could be a selection of words from a prepared list—a kind of 'mode-poem'.

I give below two examples of pieces which might be regarded as notated examples of controlled or directed improvisation made during my recent visit to Australia and which were performed by a number of groups with varying degrees of success! 'Cantata' is adapted from the final section of a work for voices and electronics called 'Sampling Afield'.

CANTATA

For a group of 8-12 voices.

Begin together on any L. L = Lead with a new note, sung to any vowel. • = follow another's note (or octave relationship). Durations should be varied between the full length of a breath and very short staccato). Aim to create a continuous texture. The overall dynamic should be *piano* with the 'L's slightly accented. Vary the vowel from note to note. W = one Word, freely chosen from a previously prepared list, spoken clearly and more loudly than the sung notes.



RING

A sound-game for a large number of people

Array the group in a large ring, side-by-side. The first voice, head turned to the right, begins a sound and sustains it while s/he turns the head slowly to the left, holding head and sound there until the next-in-line picks up the sound by imitating as closely as possible and passes it on in the same way. The first sound is thus passed gradually round the ring. Meanwhile, a second sound is started, and so on. Another possibility is that several sounds can be started simultaneously.

Another more complex possibility is that if two sounds are started simultaneously in different directions, when the two meet each must be modified to incorporate aspects of the other before passing these on as before.

Neither of these pieces is intended to be self-contained—they may be taken as raw material which can be added to, changed and adapted by anyone who wishes to use them. There have already been adaptations of this sort—on one occasion it was felt that another 'W' in 'Cantata' would improve it, so one was inserted, while 'Ring' has been adapted in several ways. With a very large group, two rings were made, one inside the other, the sounds of one group revolving clockwise, of the other anti-clockwise. Combinations of body-percussive rhythms (clapping, stamping, etc.) and voices have been tried. Limitation of the vocal sounds to pure pitches, producing a revolving chord, resulted in a beautiful effect. The 'rules' of the game can be modified in any way.

Let us suppose that we have encouraged the class-group to 'find' a sound. Each member of the

class has brought along a sound which he has discovered for himself. We can use these sounds as the basis for musical activity. The first essential is to listen to them. We can use them in improvisation, or we can allot a length of time—one or two minutes—during which each sound is to be heard once (and once only!). For this latter exercise it is useful to have a visual indication of the time's passing—a good method is to use a circular movement of the arms as the hands of a clock (as is suggested by John Cage for the role of conductor in his 'Concert for Piano and Orchestra'). Having become more familiar with the sounds, we can then begin to discover (or create) relationships between them. We can suggest that each sound is to find a partner, or that similar sounds are to group together. For this it is recommended that free spatial movement be employed (shoes off!) so that the sounds are free to move and 'attract' or 'repel' each other. When the groups have formed themselves, it will be interesting to enquire by what criteria the groups were made. If the criterion is changed, do the groups change? Groups may be formed according to pitch similarities, or to timbre, or to degree of loudness, or to manner of execution (including rhythmic articulation) ... and so on ...

Let us suppose that we now introduce the idea that one of these sounds is a 'soloist', that all other sounds are accompaniment. How would we demon-

strate this idea in performance? Try different sounds as 'soloists'—does the accompaniment change? Should it? A more elaborate version of this could be made by employing a conductor to indicate 'tutti' sections, 'solo' sections (with different sounds as solo) and so on. By now there should be enough familiarity with the sounds and the ways in which they can interact to introduce 'duos' and 'trios' into the improvisatory framework.

Through group or class sound-activities such as the ones I have suggested here, I believe it is possible to encourage an open-minded attention to sounds which is the basis of all true musical education. For ourselves we find that the listening becomes a source of creative energy. By allowing the child to discover his or her own ability to respond to sounds, to create differently structured musics from that response, we shall foster an ever-present adventurous musicianship. And most importantly this learning will be directly from experience. The student will bring to composed works the same quality of attention that has been learnt in daily life. He will listen.

¹ For composed pieces which relate to this idea, see Robert Ashley's 'She was a visitor' (1967, published by Composer/Performer Edition, 330 University Avenue, Davis, California 95616) and Christian Wolff's 'Song' (Prose Connection, 1968, published by Experimental Music Catalogue, 26 Avondale Park Gardens, London W.113).