Letters

Editor's note: With this issue we inaugurate a new feature: Letters to the Editor. We solicit any communications dealing with the history of music education or its research. It is our hope that this feature will contribute to increased discussion of topics and problems of interest to all our readers. GNH

Editor:

Joanne Rutkowski's article, "The Child Voice: An Historical Perspective," [HRME, VI:i, January 1985] contains a statement which reads: "A publication issued by MENC [The Study of Music in the Elementary School] suggested specialized vocal groups for the elementary school as opposed to involvement by all the children." (p. 10)

Nothing could be more misleading. Even the small chapter on "The Elementary School Chorus" mentions that specialized groups "have their roots in an effective program of music instruction in the classroom." How could potentially superior singers be chosen if no singing was going on? More important is the fact that throughout that volume, the Elementary Music Study Commission used expressions such as "the ability of her pupils to sing and play expressively, accurately and with beauty of tone;" or "singing songs with melodic direction (p. 53);" or "discover polyphonic texture through singing rounds (p. 61)." There are many more such examples.

Singing has been at the heart of American school music since its inception. Certain figures, such as Benjamin Jepson and Francis Howard, have become associated with special care for the young voice; but, I
know of no professional who ever advocated an elementary music program that consisted only of specialized groups. It's downright un-American.

Charles L. Gary
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Editor:

Dr. Gary's interpretation of and concern with my statement is indeed valid. The sentence quoted does not imply that singing was not recommended by members of the Elementary Music Study Commission as a part of the regular elementary general music curriculum. Therefore, I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Gary for bringing this interpretation to my attention and thereby allowing me the opportunity to clarify the statement.

I agree with Dr. Gary that "singing has been at the heart of American school music since its inception." In fact, that sentiment is expressed in the opening sentence of my article. However, the degree of emphasis placed on singing and the child voice in the elementary music curriculum has not remained consistent. Specifically, during the Curriculum Reform Era (circa 1957-70), music curricula focused upon the development of music concepts. While singing remained a widely used activity in the elementary classroom, other types of musical involvement, especially listening, received more emphasis. This trend was evident in The Study of Music in the Elementary School. Concern for the child voice and for teaching all children the skill of singing was not emphasized during this era. Reflecting this trend, characteristics of the young voice and techniques for remediation were not included in that publication. Furthermore, vocal performance and use of the singing voice received limited treatment and only in the section, "The Elementary Choirs," which was intended for students selected for specialized study. Consequently, my conclusions that vocal training was reserved for specialized choral groups during this era were not intended as judgmental but rather as an historical reflection of the degree of emphasis placed on singing and the child voice.

Since singing has been and remains a widely used activity in the elementary general music classroom, it is encouraging to me that the child voice and techniques for its remediation have been an area of concern recently and that the subject has prompted this type of dialogue. I welcome further input and discussion regarding this subject.
area which has been central to my research these past few years.

Joanne Rutkowski
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