

Tuning In: Educating, Making Music, and Knowing in Feeling

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“Knowing in Feeling” is an evocative essay that raises important questions not only about music education theory and practice, but more generally about agency and structure in an aesthetic experience, judgments of quality, and teaching and learning as forms of communicative social relations. We offer our response in the hopes of moving the conversation forward.

The essay is deeply resonant with the work of Bennett Reimer, the central theorist in the contemporary philosophy of music education since his groundbreaking *A Philosophy of Music Education*.¹ In a later edition of this text, *Advancing the Vision*,² Reimer argues that one of the goals of music education is to educate feeling. He writes, “Creating music as musicians, and listening to music creatively, do precisely and exactly for feeling what writing and reading do for reasoning.... In this profound sense, creating music as musicians and listening to music creatively educates feeling.”³ This education of feeling requires that teachers “make room for, and give all due recognition to, what our students add to the experience from their own perspective.”⁴ In this view, the music classroom, like any classroom, is an open space where knowing in feeling is a consequence of the shared practices and responsibilities of making judgments of quality. And these spaces where judgments of quality are learned in association open beyond the classroom into the public world. Public education is making music together, an idea to which we will return.

The relationship between making music and public ideals is as old as Plato. In “Democracy versus the Melting Pot,” Horace Kallen writes, “a musical symphony is written before it is played; in the symphony of civilization the playing is the writing, so that there is nothing so fixed and inevitable about its progressions as in music, so that within the limits set by nature and luck they may vary at will.”⁵ This echoes a central theme in Paul Standish’s essay about the roles of chance and contingency and the dialectic of agency and structure in modernist music. Responses to the avant-garde in music from both the “traditionalist” and “theoretic” stance became automatic, suppressed judgment, and limited opportunities for composers, performers, and listeners to take chances. The aesthetic object was viewed as “having meaning,” rather than “being meant.” Instead, musical work, like Kallen’s symphony of civilization, should be seen as an opening or space for educational and democratic chance-taking and judgment-making. In this view, composer, performer, and listener, and their pedagogical counterparts of curriculum-developer, teacher, and student, must be encouraged to embrace mistakes and take risks in making music together.

This idea has profound implications for practice. Contemporary practice in music education, like so many other forms of educational practice, is mired in technicist assumptions, worn-out categories, and neoliberal rhetoric about what “knowledge” is of most worth. Music educators are being pressured to deskill themselves and their students — as learners, artists, and citizens — by a transmogrification of what they know into “reducible information,” “truth tables,” and standardized test scores. The master-apprentice model upon which much of music education is built continues to dominate curriculum and instruction at all levels, particularly the collegiate and professional. New technology has not only challenged assumptions about the very nature of musical experience, but also challenged music educators to invent alternative paradigms of learning and teaching. One alternative would fundamentally challenge the foundational metaphor for the social relations of music-making and educating. Kerry Burch argues “the jazz-as-democracy metaphor seems to have the potential to transform how we rethink through many of the predicaments that confront the negotiation of American identity.”⁶ That is, instead of thinking of music-making within the constraints of a role-bound set of agents trying to dis-cover the authorial intent of “having meaning,” a metaphor derived from jazz or improvisation would enable the kinds of chance-taking, mistake-making and responsible judgments about what is “being meant.” As Burch writes, “Good jazz, like good democracy, requires environments of free exchange, discovery and surprise, spaces in which individuals are encouraged to listen, collaborate, and revise.”⁷ In the same spirit of invention, Estelle Jorgensen writes of music education as a “crafty art”⁸ that requires both knowing *about* and knowing *how*. And in the intersection of craft, art, expertise, and presence that defines good teaching, the music educator “seizes the moment and capitalizes on serendipitous opportunities . . . past experience and a repertoire of ideas and techniques to bear in playing imaginatively and intuitively with musical ideas and evolving a musical train of thought that draws from the live performance as much as from ideas in advance of it.”⁹ In this sense, in the sense that as Stanley Cavell writes that describing one’s experience of art is itself a form of art and that the burden of describing it is like the burden of producing it, the music teacher, or any teacher, aims to open a space for knowing in feeling through the conduct of knowing in feeling.

How does this happen? In 1951, the social phenomenologist Alfred Schutz published an essay, “Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationships.”¹⁰ His aim in this essay was to present a phenomenological description of social relationships that have a formal semantic system, that is, a system of notation, symbols, grammar, and syntax, but the meaning of which is not bound to this conceptual scheme. How do we communicate meanings that are extraconceptual? Schutz notes other social relationships in which these “pre-communicative,” “nonconceptual,” or “prehistoric” dimensions of meaning-making come to the foreground, including wrestling, fencing, pitching and catching, marching, making love, and dancing, while focusing the essay on making music together.

For Schutz, all of these activities require the “mutual tuning-in relationship upon which alone all communication is founded. It is precisely this mutual tuning-in relationship by which the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’ are experienced by both participants as

a ‘We’ in vivid presence” (MMT, 79). Schutz also echoes the importance of the role of chance, luck, and risk-taking in aesthetic performance. As he writes, “All musical notation remains of necessity vague and open to manifold interpretations, and it is up to the reader or performer to decipher the hints in the score and to define the approximations” (MMT, 84). The quality, creativity, and inventiveness of interpretations depend on the general level of musical background in a culture. The lower the level of knowledge of general musical culture, the more emphasis put on reproduction of authorial intent, the more limits on the “performer’s freedom of interpretation” (MMT, 84). By contrast, “A social theory of music therefore does not have to be founded on the conventional character of the visual signs but rather on the sum total of ... musical culture against the background of which the reader’s or performer’s interpretation of these signs takes place” (MMT, 85). Thus, the importance of musical education is to allow performers and listeners freedom to make music together. This activity of making music together creates a new common in emergent time. For Schutz, composers and listeners experience music in an “inner time” that cannot be measured in the same units as “outer time” (MMT, 89). In the social phenomenology of making music together, the listener participates quasi-simultaneously in the composer’s stream of consciousness, and though separated perhaps by hundreds of years, is “united by a time dimension common to both, which is nothing other than a derived form of the vivid present shared by the partners in a genuine face-to-face relation” (MMT, 90). For Schutz, “this sharing of the other’s experience in inner time, this living through a vivid present in common, constitutes ... the mutual tuning-in relationship, the experience of the ‘We,’ which is at the foundation of all possible communication” (MMT, 92). Making music together, which requires the integration of knowing about symbol systems with the knowing in feeling of being in tune in inner time, the integration of the formal, conceptual elements of communication with the non-conceptual foundation of all possible communication, and the integration of the “I” and “Thou” into a vivid and novel “We,” is a metaphor for the very idea of a public education.

We began by noting how Standish raises evocative questions not only about music education and aesthetic judgment but also about enabling teaching, authentic learning, and what might be called a public education. All of these are not only under siege but are also targeted for elimination in the current climate of so-called educational reform during these death throes of advanced capitalism. In these times, there is hope in Schutz’s beautiful idea that true communication and authentic teaching, where we become partners in each other’s inner and outer time, are like “growing old together” (MMT, 97). But, here in Memphis, we also need to think hard about what Buddy Guy once said: “If you don’t think you’ve got the blues, just keep living.”¹¹

1. Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970).

2. Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*, 3d. ed (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003).

3. *Ibid.*, 93.

4. *Ibid.*, 89.

5. Horace Kallen, “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot,” *Nation*, 100 (February 25, 1915): 194.

6. Kerry T. Burch. *Democratic Transformations: Eight Conflicts in the Negotiation of American Identity* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 173.
7. *Ibid.*, 169.
8. Estelle R. Jorgensen, *The Art of Teaching Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).
9. Estelle R. Jorgensen, *Transforming Music Education* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 96.
10. Alfred Schutz, "Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship," *Social Research* 18, no. 1 (March 1951): 76–97. This work will be cited as "MMT" in the text for all subsequent references.
11. "Buddy Guy accepts award Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Inductions 2005," Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Museum video, <https://rockhall.com/story-of-rock/video-series/video/5317/>.