

Forum

A Tribute to *JRMME* Founder Allen Purdue Britton

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Allen Purdue Britton (May 25, 1914–February 17, 2003) was born, worked on his father's dairy farm and in his ice cream business, participated in school, university, and semiprofessional bands, earned a bachelor of science degree in music education and a master's in English, and married his former high school classmate Veronica Fern Wallace—all in the state of Illinois. Along the way, he taught music and English in the Indiana and Illinois public schools. After serving in the U.S. Army in World War II, he earned a doctorate in musicology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. As a young faculty member, he shepherded the development of Michigan's doctoral program in music education, where he eventually directed some 51 dissertations. The authors of those dissertations went on to form the nucleus of the cadre of researchers in the history of American music education. His own dissertation and numerous other publications, many of which deal with early American tunebooks, still stand among the best and most influential scholarly works in American music and music education. Britton was also a driving force in the movement within higher education to firmly establish music education research and Americanist musicology.

Britton's "notion of developing a [doctoral] program in music education that would equal in quality the program in musicology, already well established" led him, together with Warren S. Freeman and Theodore F. Normann and especially his Michigan colleague and MENC president (1950–52) Margeruite V. Hood, to found the *Journal of Research in Music Education* in 1953. Decades later, he wrote of that accomplishment: "It wasn't easy, but it wasn't too hard either . . ." He edited the *JRMME* for its first 20 years (1953–72), even through his own MENC presidency (1960–62), after which he relinquished the editorial post to become dean of the University of Michigan School of Music.

I am one of the many who benefited personally from Allen Britton's prolific work as a scholar, editor, teacher/mentor, and administrator, but his legacy extends well beyond the realm of former students and countless other individuals, and even beyond his enormous contributions to the two journals that he helped found and edit (*JRMME* and *American Music*) and the several organizations he served with distinction (most notably MENC and the University of Michigan School of Music). He was a colossus who stood astride the fields of musicology and music education, both of which he influenced profoundly, and undoubtedly for all time. Ultimately, this may prove to be his greatest legacy.

Readers who want more information should consult a special issue of the *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* (volume 22, April 2001), edited by Marie McCarthy and Bruce D. Wilson. This testimonial, which contains papers from the Allen P. Britton Symposium (held at the University of Maryland, College Park on March 6, 2000), also includes numerous citations of works by and about Allen Britton, selected photographs and quotations, and lists of his publications and doctoral committees chaired.

I close with two of my favorite Britton quotations:

Our first duty is to the children of America, to keep before them life's finest ideals and the highest standards of human conduct And our second duty is to the art of music, one of the most glorious products of the human mind and spirit. To strive for the highest excellence in this art is to do the most honor to our best natures, for we are never so human as when we forget our petty and personal concerns in the contemplation of truth and beauty. It is our high privilege as music educators to assume this unique combination of obligations. ("Music Education in the Nineteen-Sixties," *Music Educators Journal*, volume 47, June–July 1961, p. 26)

I side with those who believe that the effort [in research] itself is what counts, providing only that it seeks the greatest good for mankind, the most beautiful in music, the most kindness in teaching, the most truth in scholarship. Or something like that. ("Founding *JRMME*: A Personal View," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, volume 32, Winter 1984, p. 242)