Popular Music in the American Schools: What History Tells Us About the Present and the Future

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This chapter consists of a brief overview of the development of popular music in the United States and trends in music education history that relate to the teaching of popular music. The essay ends with some conclusions about the past and present and some speculations about the future of popular music in American schools.

Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (2001) gives eight definitions for adjectival uses of the word “popular.” Seven of the eight definitions refer to common, ordinary people: “people in general,” “of, pertaining to, or representing the people, esp. the common people,” “of the people as a whole,” “prevailing among the people generally,” “adapted to the ordinary intelligence or taste,” and “suited to the means of ordinary people.” One of the seven definitions uses popular music as its example: “suited to or intended for the general masses of people: popular music.” Interestingly, this definition does not take into account how a particular music is actually used, but instead deals with its suitability, or intended suitability, for the masses.

Popular music is defined in this essay as music intended for wide audience appeal. It is distinguished from classical music, whose aim may be seen as transcendence, and from traditional or folk music, “a sphere ruled by a belief in continuity.” It should be noted that not all writers on the subject agree with this categorization scheme. I myself find the scheme problematic because it relies on the apparent or assumed intentions of composers, performers, and producers, even though social conditions frequently cause some musics to shift between functional categories.

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3That musics and other cultural “products” can and do change functions as a result of social conditions is one of the main arguments in Lawrence W. Levine's Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of
In a 1955 survey, Gilbert Chase became the first notable historian of American music to treat popular music seriously.\textsuperscript{4} Writing in 1961, Allen Britton explained the roots of popular as opposed to classical music among the first permanent settlers in what became the United States:

...although they [the Puritans] were drawn from the rising mercantile classes [in England], their Calvinistic religious convictions made them critics rather than imitators of the conventions of social classes higher in status, and they never emerged as patrons, in the European sense, of music or of any other art. Such music as they had they made themselves, fitting it into the normal religious and recreational aspects of their lives. The function of music in the society they created has ever since required that the music be understandable to the majority, a situation that has fostered the development of popular forms but that has provided little encouragement for the growth of a high art.\textsuperscript{5}

The historical overview presented in this essay shows that popular music has been taught in the American school curriculum continuously from the beginning, arguably more so than in other countries. However, the American music education establishment did not acknowledge popular music as worthy of being taught until the "Tanglewood Declaration" of 1968.\textsuperscript{6} Before and even after that, popular music was taught for a host of "utilitarian" reasons, among them: (1) for its usefulness in church; (2) for its perceived role as a "hook" to bring students into music programs where they could study "serious" or "legitimate" music, or simply as a bridge toward "something better" (typically Western European and North American art music); and (3) to enhance school-community (public) relations. Not long after Tanglewood, leading arts education advocate Charles B. Fowler presented three reasons some music educators considered the twentieth century's leading type of popular music, rock and roll, unsuitable for the American school curriculum: "(1) Rock is aesthetically inferior, if it is music at all. (2)
Rock music is damaging to youth, both physically and morally. (3) School time should not be expended teaching what is easily acquired in the vernacular.  

This essay deals with the fact that school syllabuses in several countries mandate popular music, among them Australia, England, Scotland, and the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. Given the Tanglewood mandate and the importance of popular music in the school curricula of some countries, why does it continue to play such a minor role the United States, at least in formal curricula? The question becomes more significant when we consider that much popular music in the school curricula of other nations originated in this country.

**American Popular Music**

According to author Robert Pattison, the commonplace (or “vulgar”) in art appeared blatantly in the seventeenth-century paintings of Rembrandt, where the Dutch master depicted ordinary people with red noses, pockmarked faces, and other “common” features. Pattison believes that the sociological roots of modern popular music can be traced to the French and industrial revolutions, when “the vulgar mob . . . wrested power from its genteel rulers” and workers eventually gained some control over their work and lives, respectively.

Today, many writers include the phenomenon of commercialism in their working definitions of popular music, with recording technology and mass marketing usually figuring heavily in the mix. However, commercialism in music did not begin with recording technology. Musicologist Richard Crawford credits a tunebook published in 1761 as the first “to bring psalmody straight into the commercial arena.” Comprised of a wide variety of psalm tunes, anthems, and hymns, this book was intended for use in the church, choir, and home. William Billings, a leading composer, tunebook compiler, and singing school master of the Revolutionary War era, also sought to appeal to a wide audience. After the revolution, psalms and hymns by several composers became popular.

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10 Crawford, *A History*, 37. The tunebook was *Urania, or A Choice Collection of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems, and Hymns*, compiled by James Lyon, a Presbyterian and recent Princeton graduate. Designed for broad appeal, *Urania* was much larger and more diverse in content than earlier tunebooks.
with the public. These works, like those of Billings and even earlier composers, bore sacred texts but functioned “more like popular music.”

Later, Lowell Mason employed both sacred and secular music in his tunebooks and other instructional manuals, and the Boston Academy of Music, founded in 1832 by Mason and George J. Webb, featured instruction in and performances of both types of music. Moreover, Crawford believes that Mason may “have been the first American musician who realized capital—profit in excess of expenditures and wages—for musical work.” Isaac Baker Woodbury, George Fredrick Root, and others continued the practice of combining sacred and secular works, and the latter began to write overtly popular songs during the 1850s.12

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, classical music, especially opera, was extremely popular in the United States. However, before the turn of the twentieth century, a rigid hierarchy of musical and other cultural forms had begun to take shape. This hierarchy manifested itself in many ways, including the founding of elite symphony orchestras in Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York. Lawrence Levine notes that “[i]nevitably, . . . the ideology of culture assumed ethnic and racial dimensions.”13

This division of culture into a hierarchy of ostensibly aesthetically determined spheres included the advent of Tin Pan Alley in the 1890s, a commercial venture centered in New York that sold popular songs in the form of sheet music. Ragtime, a precursor of jazz, also began in the 1890s and quickly became a “popular mania.”14

By the 1920s, widespread use of the phonograph, followed closely by radio, was creating an unprecedented market for popular music. The technology-driven distribution of popular music coincided with what British sociologist and rock music critic Simon Frith sees as the roots of an American mass youth market, and for more than just music: “[i]t is from the 1920s that we can date a consumer culture [in the United States] in which continuous purchase is encouraged with the suggestion that you are buying something that makes and keeps you young.”15 Thus, the music industry as we know it today began in the 1920s, due in large part to the presence of new recording technologies followed by a mass youth culture and market.

This period also saw the advent of the blues, country music, many types of popular songs, and jazz in various forms, swing band music among them. Along the way, country music, a white folk tradition, became a popular commercial force. Paralleling the development of country music was the emergence of rhythm and blues, a form of black popular commercial music with roots in the blues (not jazz, as is commonly thought).

11Ibid., 37-38, 45-46 (quotation from p. 46).

12Ibid., 140, 149-55 (quotation from p. 149).


These two forms of music, country and rhythm and blues, merged to form rock and roll. A few bands, some black and some white, produced what they later claimed were rock music recordings in the 1940s, and a deejay in Cleveland named Alan Freed began to play recordings of black tunes for his white teenage audience in 1952. However, when Elvis Presley, a nineteen-year-old white singer born in Tupelo, Mississippi, made his first professional record in Memphis on July 6, 1954, the two genres fused to create the rock and roll sensation. This first recording took place just six weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that outlawed racial segregation in schools. Presley’s initial recordings and the music that followed changed people’s attitudes toward the mixing of the races and their musics. They may have been “a more accurate reflection of the current sweeping across America” than the High Court’s ruling.16

The fusion of black rhythm and blues and white country music into rock and roll was facilitated by the historic romantic myth of black people as “Noble Savages,” and by white people’s perceptions of themselves as “overeducated and undersexed, unnatural and inauthentic. . . In a word, . . . boring.”17 Rock and roll began in the American South, a region with strong, but romantic, democratic ideals and certain attitudes that emerged from its slave-holding past. The American South, along with its soon-to-be British counterpart region in the rock and roll revolution, the North of England, was a “cultural backwater” outside the mainstream of high culture.18

Rock became the most popular musical genre of the second half of the twentieth century, not only in the United States and Great Britain, but in much of the rest of the world as well. It was propelled beyond its working-class youth roots and into other strata of society (especially in the United States) by the Beatles, who made their debut in 1960, and was popularized even more widely by another famous British rock group, the Rolling Stones, who debuted in 1962.19 However, despite its appeal to people of different social classes and ages, rock retained its ideological image as a representation of a single, albeit lower, social class.20

Rock was a product not only of the mixing of the races, but of the primacy of feelings over the intellect and of commercial power made possible by increasingly sophisticated recording technology and mass production and distribution systems. Much like jazz, rock traveled north from the Mississippi Delta to the Midwest. It was also a music through which relatively economically and socially disenfranchised adolescents could express themselves, and with which they could identify. Some began to see rock as the music of, by, and for the American capitalist system.21 Its wide range of messages and

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17 Ibid., 74.

18 Ibid., 82.


20 Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity*, 154. Popular music was only one aspect of the Americanization of European popular culture that began in the 1920s and 1930s with motion pictures, clothing fashions, and many other things.

broad appeal led Pattison to call rock “the dazzling progeny of American’s democratic premises.”

**Popular Music in Schools**

The most influential founders of the modern American society, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay (Boston), founded a public high school only five years after their arrival in the New World. The purpose of their Boston Latin School (1635) was to prepare students for Harvard College, which was founded the following year primarily to train future clergymen. These early colonial leaders eschewed music as a school subject, preferring instead to leave the business of music instruction to the church.

The elitism practiced by the early colonial Puritan educational institutions paved the way for a more egalitarian form of education in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—private evening schools. One type of evening school evolved to meet societal needs for better singing in churches because the quality of congregational singing had deteriorated as settlers became further removed from the music instruction enjoyed by British and other European citizens. These singing schools also provided participants opportunities for social encounters.

Singing masters taught hymn tunes, anthems, and other musical forms used in colonial churches, as well as some water-down versions of European art music that Allen Britton dubbed “polite,” “genteel,” “parlor” music that was “bland” and “unexciting.” To the extent that singing schools promoted the reading of notation, the traditional, more popular improvisatory styles of singing psalms “continued . . . under a social stigma which made its wholehearted enjoyment difficult . . .” This resulted in “popular and learned styles” influencing each other less than in some European countries. During the Revolutionary War period, singing masters taught some American folk and composed music by William Billings and other indigenous composers. Hitchcock wrote that “[i]f there was ever a popular music, the singing-school music of the New Englanders was popular; it was accessible to all and enjoyed by all; it was a plain-spoken music for plain people. Here lay its downfall, at least in the cities that had created it.”

A more democratic form of government evolved during the first few decades of the young nation’s history, a shift that culminated during the Andrew Jackson presidential administration (1828-1836). These egalitarian societal and political currents

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included calls for the implementation of universal education—to be delivered through a widespread system of “common schools.”

The common school movement that began in the 1820s was accompanied by efforts to add music as a new curricular “branch.” School music promoters like William Woodbridge and Lowell Mason used European school music education systems as models for their ideals and teaching methods. Because Mason and most other early school music teachers were singing school masters, they tended to teach music similar to that featured in the singing schools. In other words, much of the music they taught came from the repertoire of watered-down European “parlor” music and British folk music, in addition to some church music.27

Much like nineteenth-century general music, the large music ensembles still found in American schools today entered the schools during a period of change, only this time the changes were more social, economic, and educational than political. By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had become an industrial power, which resulted in major population shifts from rural areas to cities and significant lifestyle changes for millions of Americans. The Industrial Revolution and certain new trends in educational and psychological thinking led to the progressive education movement in Western Europe and North America. Educational progressives built on the work of the child-study movement, whose advocates had begun to examine, “scientifically,” the nature of children’s lives, their interests, and the extent of their knowledge of various subjects, among other things.28

Progressive education leaders sought to enlarge the role of schools in society by making them more responsive to individual interests and needs, including preparing people for the increasing amounts of leisure time they were expected to gain as a result of the industrialized economy. Perhaps most importantly, progressives wanted to make schools “levers of social reform.” Over the next few decades American education changed a great deal from the days of the “three r’s,” one-room schools, lightly qualified teachers, short school days and years, and precious little in the way of funding or even the respect of society. The changing philosophy of schools, manifested robustly in an expanding curriculum, provided opportunities for the widespread adoption of three types of musical ensembles that were already well established in American society: the band,


choir, and orchestra. Later, jazz ensembles made their way into the schools in much the same fashion.\textsuperscript{29}

Much like school music ensembles, general music in the twentieth century also had its roots in progressivism, with changes propelled forward by the invention and use of the player piano, and then the phonograph. During the first decade of the twentieth century, general music began to shift from its historic practice of focusing mainly on sight-singing to the more eclectic approaches used today. Again, common musical practices already in society were adopted, in this case music listening (appreciation) and the learning of instruments.\textsuperscript{30}

The training of music teachers began informally with the earliest group of music educators, the singing masters of colonial and post-colonial America. It is likely that most of these individuals were self taught or received their training in other singing schools. Later, school music teachers received some training in church choirs and singing conventions, and later still in summer institutes sponsored by music textbook publishing companies, which played an important role in the training of late nineteenth-century American music teachers and supervisors. Paralleling the singing conventions and institutes were normal schools. Due to their relatively high level of responsiveness to societal needs (as opposed to the more elite, insular universities), most public and many private normal schools provided music instruction from the beginning.\textsuperscript{31} It appears that the early music conventions, publishing company institutes, and normal schools provided training in various types of music, some of them popular forms.

Music in universities got off to a very slow start due to the Boston Puritans' exclusion of music from the university curriculum. When large numbers of collegiate music departments and schools began more than three centuries later, in the second half of the nineteenth century, many of the leading ones developed through an amalgamation of three European institutions: the classical medieval university, the conservatory, and the normal school. American universities began to train general teachers about the time they developed music departments, assuming the responsibility previously held by normal schools in Europe and various institutions in the United States.

The conservatory model tended to dominate the new university departments and schools of music, at least in terms of numbers of faculty members. Because the performance and music theory (and eventually music history) faculties, and thus the curriculum, focused almost entirely on classical art music, students training to become music teachers became steeped in that musical tradition and no other. Thus, when the role


\textsuperscript{30}Humphreys, “Instrumental Music,” 44, 46, 48-49. The shift in general music approaches was in large part complete by the beginning of World War II.

of the conventions, institutes, and normal schools was assumed by the nation’s teachers colleges and universities in the early twentieth century, the types of musics taught decreased and, in most cases, geared more toward the perceived needs of the departments themselves than the needs of the schools for which these institutions ostensibly were training teachers.

**Why Not Pop?**

It is time to attempt to answer the question of why popular music, especially rock and its various offshoots and derivatives, does not occupy a more formal place in the American school curriculum. Below I set forth eight reasons why this is so, not as absolutes and certainly not as the last words on the subject, but hopefully as points to consider that will generate future thinking and discussion.

**Desire to Reform Tastes.** One reason popular music has not taken a more formal place in the school curriculum has to do with American music teachers’ collective desire to reform the nation’s musical tastes. Devotion to this ideal can be traced to the reformist practices of some Calvinist church leaders in colonial America, and even today it continues to lay like a shroud over the school music teaching profession:

The atmosphere of reform has permeated American music education as it has all other aspects of American culture. From the musical standpoint, because of the essentially popular nature of the singing school and the system of music education derived from it, the reforms sought have always been comparatively simple in nature—an improvement in such things as voice quality, sight-reading ability, and more importantly, but in ways more difficult to understand, in the quality of music used.\(^\text{32}\)

Later, after the nation’s university music departments and schools assumed responsibility for music teacher education, teachers in training developed similar attitudes due to the music philosophies and practices they encountered in those institutions. Specifically, these institutions fostered a belief in the superiority of Western European and North American art music over all other musics. Like their predecessors, the early singing masters, future music educators became indoctrinated into the belief that they must assume the mantle of carrying the message about “something better” to American society. Tens of thousands of music students became convinced that their most important task was to improve their students’ musical tastes, which in turn would improve the tastes of the general public.\(^\text{33}\)

Sadly, the abject failure of music teachers to lead the American public to develop a deep appreciation for art music has been paralleled by an equally dismal failure to satisfy students in the realm of popular music instruction. The profession’s ambivalence over goals and expectations, both popular and artistic, has led to all manner of problems

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\(^\text{33}\) North American universities have added a plethora of popular music courses during recent decades, but most of these are aimed toward non-music majors. See Paul Théberge, “The Project Ahead: Some Thoughts on Developing a Popular Music Curriculum,” *Canadian University Music Review* 21 (2000): 28-39.
for music teachers, including burnout due to constant striving to achieve unachievable goals and paranoia over their work not being valued by society.  

Cultural Bias. Another reason for popular music's relative lack of standing in the curriculum is the continuing bias against American culture that also began with the Pilgrims. This attitude includes a prejudice against American popular music in almost every form. Briton wrote:

Throughout the 19th century and too well into the 20th, compilers of school singing books have found better music to be almost anything song-like so long as it possessed no indigenous flavor, excepting only a few patriotic airs and the most popular tunes of Stephen Foster.  

The content of school music series improved considerably during the twentieth century, but the same attitudes are still manifested in the music education profession's lack of full acceptance of indigenous popular music.

Association with Youth Culture. The youth culture that began to develop as an economic and social force during the 1950s evolved into a powerful political force in the 1960s. As one of the central elements that represented and even cemented the youth culture, rock music became a driving force in the pro-youth, pro-freedom (in sex, drugs, and other realms), anti-establishment, and anti-war cultures of the 1960s. These associations did not endear popular music to the art music, education, and other professional and cultural establishments.

Bias toward Cognitive Training. There remains a bias in the Western educational world in favor of cognitive training in schools and against subjects more related to the affective and psychomotor domains. This attitude dates back at least to the writings of Plato, when schools were supposed to train future leaders only.

Local Control. The United States government exercises relatively little control over the nation's schools, education being the constitutional responsibility of the individual states. The federal government has increased its authority through certain financial and judicial means, but its degree of control over education remains small compared to that exercised by most other national governments. Moreover, states delegate much authority over schools to local school boards, which tend to be populated by lay members of the communities. This system of state and local control generally results in highly conservative school systems in the United States. It appears that this country's relatively large middle class can more easily control education through local

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36Even in the 1990s, one musicologist characterized rock as "a major supplier of messages that helped to fuel a national crisis": Richard Crawford, The American Musical Landscape (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 105. A less biased argument would be that the Vietnam War was the crisis, not the protests against it and certainly not rock music, although unquestionably rock helped galvanize the anti-war protest movement.

schools than the middle class of other countries with federal ministries of education that exercise near complete authority over education.\footnote{Jere T. Humphreys, “Music Education in the U.S.A.: An Overview,” \textit{Music Education} 1 (1998): 63 (English abstract). Australia, Canada, and Germany also have relatively decentralized systems of education.}

The purveyance of middle class values through local school boards partially explains the entry of ensembles into schools a century ago, especially the ubiquitous American school band, which sprang from the middle class upheavals of the French Revolution and continued in military and town band traditions. Today, bands retain their “squeaky clean” and “motherhood and apple pie” image, and as such, unlike rock, they represent conservative middle class values.\footnote{Humphreys, “Instrumental Music,” 39, 45; and Jere T. Humphreys, “Strike Up the Band: The Legacy of Patrick S. Gilmore,” \textit{Music Educators Journal} 74 (October 1987): 26.}

\textit{Lack of Demand.} The conservative nature of the schools results in subjects generally not being offered until there is “an unequivocal social demand for instruction in such subjects.” Music did not enter the schools for more than a century after the beginning of singing schools and the publication of the first two American tunebooks in 1721. Bands, choirs, and orchestras were pervasive in American society for many decades before they entered the schools. Similarly, jazz made its way into a number of schools in the 1950s, but it was not until the 1960s and beyond that formal jazz programs became commonplace in schools and colleges. Thus, “[i]n the history of American education as a whole, subjects other than the traditional humanities have been introduced in the public (tax-supported) schools only after having been taught for extended periods in private classes.”\footnote{Britton, “The Singing School Movement,” 90.} Despite rock’s spectacular popularity, amateur participation in rock music performance has never reached the proportional levels achieved by singing schools, town and municipal bands, church choirs, or choral societies.

\textit{Social Class Associations.} There is a tendency for Americans to de-emphasize, and sometimes even deny, social stratification in this country. It is fashionable for virtually every citizen to claim membership in the middle class. I suspect that the emergence and phenomenal success of rock and roll is one manifestation of this idealized classless society because the image of rock is also that of a single class. However, herein lies a discrepancy in values and image: schools are seen as a product and tool of the middle class, while rock consciously associates itself with the lower or working classes.\footnote{Pattison, \textit{The Triumph of Vulgarity}, 154. For two of many examples of writing on rock and its links to social structure and class, see John Shepherd, “Toward a Sociology of Musical Styles,” \textit{Canadian University Music Review} 2 (1981): 114-37; and Graham Vulliamy and John Shepherd, “The Application of a Critical Sociology to Music Education,” \textit{British Journal of Music Education} 1 (1984): 247-66. For an opposing view, see Keith Swanwick, “Problems of a Sociological Approach to Pop Music in Schools,” \textit{British Journal of Sociology of Education} 5 (1984): 49-56.} Just as many in “polite” society opposed jazz and jazz education due to its lower class African-American and poor white Southern cultural roots, opposition to rock as a potential official school subject and otherwise socially acceptable art form may stem
partly from the fact that it shares with jazz nearly identical social class and regional roots, as well as the black half of its racial ancestry.

**Structure of School Music.** Still another reason has to do with the structure and values of the schools as they relate to music instruction. Historical trends seem to suggest that rock and perhaps country music "ensembles should enter the schools...", just as vocal classes followed singing schools, and school bands, orchestras, and jazz ensembles followed their nonschool counterparts." However, these three types of music ensembles that made their way into schools do not employ instruments and voices together, "generally do not deal with controversial material," and they involve large numbers of students simultaneously. Not all popular music genres have become part of school music, including various types of popular songs and minstrel shows. Among other things, instruction in rock would have to demonstrate some social utility.\(^{42}\)

**Pop in the Future Curriculum**

It is paradoxical that American music teachers, so steeped in a reformist tradition, have not sought to radically reform their own profession in terms of the types of musics taught, but have been driven instead by a missionary-like zeal to reform society's musical tastes. In so doing, the profession has lost countless opportunities to participate in the culture of American music as it was and is, as opposed to how the profession wants it to be. "One result has been that music education, although created and nurtured by a popular love of music, has nevertheless always operated at a certain distance from the well-springs of American musical life, both popular and artistic."\(^{43}\)

Given all the traditions and in the absence of a national curriculum in the United States, the best hope for significant inclusion of popular music in the formal music curriculum may lie in reforming music teacher training programs. Today, even if conditions in the schools were ripe for inclusion of popular music, the vast majority of music teachers are inadequately trained for the task.\(^{44}\) However, revamping the music teacher education curriculum to train music educators to teach popular music in the schools would require programs to go against historical trends because universities usually do not offer specific training until a need for public school teachers arises, not the other way around.\(^{45}\)

Music teacher education in popular music could be informed by models found in other countries. For example, "a new university department of musicology with a clear sociological profile" was founded at the University of Göteborg in Sweden in 1968, followed by the founding of a music teacher education program there that "included various forms of popular music as an important part of the curriculum." Moreover, between 1979 and 1989 the musicology department at Göteborg granted twelve doctoral degrees that were "chiefly devoted to the scholarly study of popular music." It is thought that "Sweden's lack of high-cultural historical ballast in relation to other nations," and its

\(^{42}\) Humphreys, "Instrumental Music," 62-63 (quotations from p. 62).


\(^{44}\) Herbert and Campbell, "Rock Music in American Schools," 14. The national arts standards are not a curriculum, but curriculum guidelines: Humphreys, "Some Notions, Stories, and Tales," 149.

\(^{45}\) Britton, "The Singing School Movement," 90.
lack of “big historical names of high culture on which to focus bourgeois national identity” mean that “the institutionalisation of high culture was therefore less substantial and less powerful than elsewhere.”

Similarly, Sibelius Academy, a high-profile conservatory in Helsinki, Finland, requires a two-semester music education course in which students learn composition and arranging in rock styles, and students present a public performance of their own music in which they rotate as performers on the guitar, keyboard, bass, and trap set. Also in Finland, at the University of Oulu, students study acoustic and electric guitar for two years, perform for three years in small combos similar to those at the Sibelius Academy, and develop keyboard skills for three years. Popular Afro-American and Afro-Cuban music is approached through work in “sound production and reproduction technology,” improvisation, and songwriting.

Interestingly, Göteborg, Oulu, and the English city of Liverpool, not to mention the American South, were all far from the musical and cultural mainstreams in their respective countries. This suggests that teacher education programs that truly emphasize popular music may first emerge in areas and institutions not considered in the forefront of “high” culture, much like North Texas State College in Denton, Texas became the first American institution to offer a degree in jazz.

On the other hand, the best hope for bringing popular music into schools may not lie with teacher education, because to date all watersheds in American school-based music education have occurred in conjunction with major changes in society and the educational system itself, with universities then following suit, usually belatedly. Singing schools arose largely to fulfill a perceived need for improved congregational singing in Calvinist churches, and when music entered the Boston schools on a permanent basis in 1838 it did so as part of the common school movement then sweeping the country. When ensembles entered the schools in the early twentieth century, the schools were beginning the next major change in their history: the powerful progressive education movement. Similarly, general music as a multi-modal form of teaching with multiple purposes (as opposed to single-purpose sight-singing instruction) emerged in schools in the early twentieth century, also fueled by the new goals of progressivism and new technology that made feasible the teaching of music appreciation.

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47 Thomas Regelski, “Regelski responds to Meyers,” electronic mail correspondence to MayDay Group (via J. Terry Gates), 17 November 2002; and Vakeva. “Vakeva responds to Jones and Johnson.” During a trip to Finland in April 2002, I witnessed snippets of popular music instruction and saw facilities and equipment for the same in three Finnish universities, including Sibelius (with Regelski) and Oulu (with Vakeva).

48 Humphreys, “Instrumental Music,” 53. This degree was in “dance band.” The Berklee College of Music, founded in Boston in 1945 as the Schilling House of Music, granted its first bachelor’s degrees in popular music performance in 1966. The institution does not offer a teacher preparation program.

We are currently experiencing a period in which the American economy has already shifted from its manufacturing base to its new knowledge base. Just as the schools were slow to change from one-room structures to factory-like models when the economy became industrialized and the population urban, we are still trying to make the old Industrial Revolution-era schools function well in the new economy. I believe that schools of the future will provide flexibility to students beyond anything we can imagine at the present time. Students will be able to choose which types of schools to attend (including much on-line instruction) and, for the most part, what to study. They will be able to choose between many alternatives geared not only toward different student goals, but toward different learning styles and abilities.\(^\text{50}\) Surely significant, meaningful participation in learning popular music will become an option in the new order of schooling.

Some problems will have to be addressed with regard to popular music education in the schools. One is whether popular music instruction should be delivered through the medium of general music (i.e., for general students), elective performance ensembles, or a combination of the two. Another has to do with rock music’s associations with youth and its sometimes anti-establishment images. Still another problem is that current popular music, the rock culture in particular, is characterized by male chauvinism that manifests itself in countless pervasive ways, including the scarcity of female rock stars and frequent images of women as sex objects.\(^\text{51}\)

Other than changing teacher education to facilitate the teaching of popular music, the biggest problem facing the profession may be the issue of authenticity, a problem made particularly acute by the transitory nature of modern popular music. It is true that “[m]usic always is of a time and of a place,”\(^\text{52}\) but in the case of rock and other currently popular genres the issue of currency is especially problematic:

Top Forty radio rests on one of the central paradoxes of the record industry: radio programming policy is determined by record popularity as measured by sales, . . . so that . . . the greatest number of listeners can be attracted by playing the currently best-selling records as often as possible.\(^\text{53}\)

A Finnish academic popular music specialist, Lauri Vakeva, recently described problems associated with “keeping up with the rapidly changing contemporary Popular/Afro-American music scene, . . . while at the same time trying to keep up the quality of the work,” so that “you find yourself as a pop historian before you know it!”\(^\text{54}\) Realistically, it is unlikely that popular music will ever be taught authentically in the schools because, more so than most, it is music intended to be experienced in the “here

\(^{50}\) Ibid.; and Humphreys, “Some Notions, Stories, and Tales,” 149-57.

\(^{51}\) Frith, The Sociology of Rock, 74-75.

\(^{52}\) Britton, “Music in Early American Public Education,” 199.


\(^{54}\) Vakeva, “Vakeva responds to Jones and Johnson.”
and now.” On the other hand, authenticity in rock music education is a problem only of
degree, as the issue continues to surface in discussions on schooling of all types.

Problems aside, popular music should be taught in schools because it is the music
of our time. Rock, in particular, is about needs and wants, not the intellect. It coexists
with the capitalist commercial system because it is part of the system. Despite what some
may think, rock does not try to change the system because it is the system. It is “the
ubiquitous ingredient of American popular culture,” and it is “[f]irst, last, and always a
musical return to the primitive.” In the final analysis, for better or worse, rock is the
music of the American democracy, and its appeal has spread far beyond this nation’s
borders, undoubtedly for that very reason.\textsuperscript{55}

To change the current situation, the music education profession, and perhaps
society and its schools as well, would have to reconsider the traditional musical canon
and admit that it too is a social construction, and then acknowledge that “we have
indulged in the process of inventing tradition and have become the prisoners of our own
constructs.”\textsuperscript{56} To justify the inclusion of popular music in the schools, Frith recommends
that we “reverse the usual academic argument: the question is not how a piece of music, a
text, ‘reflects’ popular values, but how—in performance—it produces them.”\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55}Pattison, \textit{The Triumph of Vulgarity}, 9, 36, 95, 154, 174.

\textsuperscript{56}Levine, \textit{HighBrow/LowBrow}, 241.

University Press, 1996), 270.
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