

Critical Perspectives in Canadian Music Education. Carol A. Beynon and Kari K. Veblen, editors. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012. 216 pp. ISBN 978-1-55458-386-7.

One of the earliest and most valuable pieces of advice given to me as a young teacher came from my first department head: “Always have a healthy sense of impatience about what you’re doing and why you’re doing it!” I guess it took. This has been the “lens” through which I’ve looked at education for the past thirty-five years; it has held me in good stead. So, naturally, I was attracted by the first words of the book’s title: *Critical Perspectives*.

I shall begin with the overarching theme of the collection. Editors Carol Beynon and Kari Veblen, in the book’s final chapter, which was jointly written with Anne Kinsella, conclude that “the findings in these chapters illustrate more concerns and problems than good news about the current context [of music education in Canada]” (200).

The book’s foreword also “afflicts the comfortable.” R. Murray Schafer sensed a revolution in the 1970s with the Manhattanville Music Project and its emphasis on creativity. “Instead,” he writes, “music education programs in Canada and the United States pioneered backward” (ix).

Within the framework of this motif, the papers critically examine current aspects of music education in Canada: curriculum, music teacher certification and professional development, the dwindling place of choral music, the persistent dominance of band (in particular, as Elizabeth Gould describes it, the “hyper-masculine space” within band cultures), the place of popular music in the repertoire and the impact of globalization on music education. While it is not possible within the constraints of this review to comment on every chapter in this collection, I feel it appropriate to comment on some as being not only engaging, but provocative.

Wayne Bowman’s comprehensive look at “Manitoba’s Success Story” is certainly a highlight—albeit a disturbing one—given that his analysis and premises clearly extrapolate to the state of music education across the country. While Manitoba may boast enviable access to music education at the elementary level and the apparent healthy state of the band movement at the secondary level, Bowman submits that “the successes we celebrate are quite fragile and our programs quite vulnerable” (50). He points out that music students today live in a musical culture far different than the one with which most current music teachers are familiar. In this light, Bowman challenges music educators to critically examine the criteria against which musical and educational success can be measured and questions the very sustainability of music education. Bowman’s examination of teacher certification and professional development is particularly salient. He notes that faculties of music education tend to regard their students more as musicians rather than music educators. He maintains that advocacy in music education rationalizes the status quo rather than challenging it. Bowman’s concluding image captures the

essence of Schafer's "pioneering backward" observation in the foreword: "We are in danger of becoming a well-maintained Commodore 64 in an iPad world" (66).

In her look at community music making, Veblen comments on significant changes to the context in which music education currently exists, emphasizing findings of new research and the pluralistic nature of our society. The limited music education she currently sees in public education needs "massive transformation" to adapt to these changes. Along with David Elliott, the editors continue this theme in their consideration of the impact of globalization on music education.

June Countryman's study of popular music in the school curriculum points out that, while many teachers seek to engage students by incorporating "their music" into the repertoire, there remains a focus on "musical grammar, technique, and analysis at the expense of the essence of music – its expressiveness" (137). The challenge is a pedagogical one: not popular music's inclusion in the repertoire, but rather, how best to teach it.

While there is some mention of music education in the context of private tuition, most of the critical perspectives are on music education in the context of public schooling. Beyond this, Betty Anne Younker examines the music teacher education curriculum. Echoing Schafer, she points out that "the focus, then, is the content, the materials, and the subject – as opposed to the student, the student's fund of understanding, musical problems, and the processes of inquiry" (172). Her chapter is also one of the few places in the book where revisions are suggested.

Several chapters seem to digress from the critical tone. They are largely historical or informational, reporting results of surveys that give a picture of the current state of affairs— curriculum, teachers, teacher training, resource support, and Canadian content. Of note in this group is a chapter on e-teaching and learning in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Anyone committed to music education would profit greatly from this book. But clearly it is a call for change and therefore must be a topic of discussion among policy makers. The book's penultimate sentence admonishes: "We need the courage of our convictions." Through critical perspectives on the status quo, the book asks what those convictions should be in the rapidly changing world of the twenty-first century. This reviewer enthusiastically applauds both the editors and the contributors for their healthy sense of impatience.

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