

Justifying Music in General Education: Belief in Search of Reason

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In his essay, "Music and Liberal Education," Peter Kivy rehearses several arguments why music in the Western classical tradition should be included as an essential element of education in the academy.¹ Among these, he notes the claim that musical masterpieces not only constitute monuments of Western culture that are of intrinsic worth, but music provides knowledge of self and the world beyond that is of a different order than scientific, among other ways, of knowing. Through musical experiences, people are initiated into a sense of their social and cultural identity, and they are "humanized" through the emotional, cognitive, and physical impact of music.

After criticizing these arguments, Kivy comes to the "distressing conclusion that there is no real rational justification for requiring students of the humanities to be familiar with such masterworks of the Western musical tradition as Beethoven's Third Symphony." His distress arises from his "very strong inclination to believe that something is the case; and not for lack of trying, no acceptable argument to *show* that it is the case."² As an amateur musician, he is convinced of the importance of music in the Western classical tradition as an essential aspect of a liberal or general education, and yet he is dissatisfied with the defensibility of the philosophical arguments traditionally mounted. He leaves his readers with a solitary strand of hope; music might be justified as an essential aspect of general education insofar as it offers the prospect of engaging in one's "tribal rituals," those social activities that are part of corporate lived experience. What these tribal rituals and the music associated with them are, remains an open question.

Kivy is not alone in his dilemma as to the place of music in general education. Aristotle had earlier concluded that the arts, including what we now think of as music, were difficult to justify. True, he followed Plato in recognizing that they may have certain salutary effects on emotional well-being, and therefore constitute civilizing influences on the young. However, he parted company with Plato in suggesting that when compared to other subjects, the arts seemed largely bereft of compelling instrumental value; unlike those subjects that have seemingly direct benefits as means to other desired ends, the arts seem primarily to exist for themselves as ends. For Aristotle, subjects seen as having instrumental value were easier to justify, especially in an age of dawning empiricism.

This difference between Aristotle and Plato regarding the justification of the arts in general education hinged on their divergent views of the nature of cognition, especially the relative centrality of the arts in cognition. For Plato, artistic or imaginative knowledge (*eikasia*) constituted the lowly, but fundamental means of cognitive access to higher abstract thought and moral judgment. As Plato illustrates, the artist's portrayal of the bed points, by way of the carpenter's bed, to the god's

ideal bed. Although twice removed from the ideal, the artist's creation is the first and most readily accessible means of grasping truth.³ This being the case, the arts, as a part of Plato's *quadrivium*, were assured an essential role in his vision of republican general education. For Aristotle, on the other hand, notwithstanding their inherent value, the arts did not have such a central place in cognition; rather, they constituted only one of a variety of ways of knowing, of which science, among other subjects, offered an important, if not the preeminent, alternative.⁴

Martin Luther, Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schiller, and Herbert Read, among other philosophers to follow Plato, believed that the arts symbolized the good and were essential in developing a moral person. Consequently, they championed the arts in general education.⁵ True, they disagreed about the relative merits of music as opposed to the other arts and about the actual mechanics of designing educational systems, yet they were united in their conviction that the arts enrich cognition; offer emotional, physical, and social benefits; constitute civilizing and humanizing influences on the young; and should therefore be integral to any plan for mass education. Read wanted to go so far as to turn the traditional school curriculum on its head and organize all the school subjects within various art departments.

By contrast, other philosophers, such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Dewey, followed Aristotle in according science and other subjects with obvious instrumental value, pride of place in the curriculum.⁶ Even Dewey — whose work, *Art as Experience*, is one of the classics in twentieth-century aesthetics due to the power of his argument for a link between the arts and common, everyday life — bypassed them in favor of the primacy of scientific understanding in the general curriculum.⁷

Historically, then, it is not surprising that musicians and others interested in their work appealed to the philosophical arguments offered by Plato and others in his train as justification for the place of music in general education.⁸ For example, William Woodbridge, in a groundbreaking lecture that became the *raison d'être* for the Boston School Music Movement in the 1830s, and has largely remained unchallenged since, drew directly from the ideas of Plato and Luther, among others.⁹ His justification for vocal music, defended philosophically and theologically, suggested an array of religious, social, political, psychological, and physical benefits that would presumably follow from the study of vocal music. In his view, not only does music offer a means of praising God, defensible on theological grounds, but it enriches religious worship, enhances social order, promotes moral development, and enhances intellectual, emotional, and physical well-being. Given these instrumental benefits, and its status as a good in itself, vocal music should be included in the general education curriculum.¹⁰

Aristotelian ideas, on the other hand, were somewhat disturbing to artists, seeing that they left the arts in a less central and more vulnerable position within the general school curriculum, as one, rather than the principal, means of knowing. As compelling religious values of the mid-nineteenth century gradually gave way to secular political and economic instrumental imperatives, this vulnerability seemed to be exacerbated.

More recently, music supervisors, then music teachers, began to disappear from elementary and secondary schools.¹¹ It is not surprising that musicians, along with their colleagues in the other arts, responded to a growing sense of embattlement with such manifestos as: *Growing Up Complete: The Imperative for Music Education*. Similarly, they responded to calls for accountability in the school curriculum with such documents as: *National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts*.¹² In seeking to forge justifications for music education in more powerfully economic and political terms, they argued that musical study could save a culture from dying “from the inside” by giving children a knowledge of their culture and benefiting them socially and psychologically. Besides, if they could also define standards for arts education, they could establish accountability to the politically and economically powerful elite and the public-at-large.

My difficulty with most of the justifications for the arts in general education, especially those in the Platonic vein, is that while they seek to show the benefits of artistic study, and demonstrate that artistic study constitutes a good, they take insufficient account of the difficulties created by grounding justifications only in the claim that the arts constitute a good. For example, proponents of the arts have offered the following advantages of artistic study: it develops the imagination; strengthens the physical constitution; benefits society and enhances the quality of life by developing a sense of community, culture, caring and carefulness; provides personal understanding of the monuments of human civilization; promotes a grasp of, and sensitivity toward, cultures different from one’s own; and constitutes an opportunity to study works of inherent value. I am concerned that such justifications not only overblow claims for the arts, but also raise a nest of philosophical problems.

The study of other subjects besides the arts can potentially accomplish the self-same ends as those claimed by the proponents of the arts. For example, scientific study can develop and enliven the imagination; physical education can strengthen the physique; geography, history, and literature can provide social benefits, enrich personal and corporate understanding, and give students the opportunity to study works of inherent value. Showing that the study of the arts promotes these benefits does not demonstrate why it should be the arts rather than these other subjects that should be studied. Also, some of the more recent educational talk carving up cognition into discernible “intelligences” or “ways of knowing” — each with its respective subject matter — while highlighting the distinctive contributions of each subject, has the disadvantage of suggesting to teachers that subjects are more distinctive and discrete than they really are. It seems a short step to associating particular ways of knowing with individual school subjects — a step that some educational thinkers, such as Dwayne Huebner, have resisted.¹³ So, while each of the arts may contribute something to our aesthetic and artistic understanding, in a variety of ways, they by no means constitute the only means by which such understanding is gained. Other subjects besides the arts can be approached in ways that foster aesthetic and artistic sensibilities.

Also, that these arguments have been more-or-less offered in defense of various arts, notably music and art, suggests that these arts may be interchangeable; if one

art can accomplish these benefits, then it may presumably suffice in place of another. There is, however, a widespread conviction among aestheticians and educators that musical knowledge is of a different sort than drama, dance, and art, among others. Indeed, Susanne Langer showed quite convincingly that one art doesn't equate with another in all respects. Each has its own materials, syntax, and meaning.¹⁴ So, presumably, claims regarding each art will have to be evaluated separately.

These problems are further complicated by the fact that arguments offered by Phillip Phenix, Elliot Eisner, Howard Gardner, and Jerome Bruner, among others, suggesting that all the various ways of knowing should be included in general education, are not entirely persuasive.¹⁵ All such arguments show is that the arts have a potential contribution to make to general education. Aside from the taxonomic problems inherent in classifying these ways of knowing, not the least of which is the tendency to think in terms of a global aesthetic or artistic way of knowing or intelligence, there are other problematical issues — among them, matters of practicality. Throughout history, societies have always had to make decisions about those things that should and would be encompassed in a general education curriculum conducted in the public interest, and those things that must perforce be excluded.¹⁶ While the lists of school subjects often included music among the other arts, the arts were not always included. Inevitably, some subjects were relegated to other societal institutions, be they family, church, or whatever. Ultimately, the decision as to which particular subjects will be studied in the context of general education is made by the social group or institution under whose aegis general education is conducted. In the case of state-supported education, this is inevitably a political decision. For example, at the time that arguments were being mounted in defense of the introduction of vocal music into the City of Boston schools in the 1830s, others were making the case on behalf of human physiology.¹⁷ Notwithstanding that the philosophical arguments in favor of physiology as a required subject in the school curriculum might be as compelling, if not more so, than those in favor of music, it was music, not physiology, that won the day, because of the political pressure mounted by the musicians and the visibility of musical performance. Quite apart from the potential good each subject offered, school committees had to make choices between them. It was not enough, then, to show that each subject of study constituted a good; rather, one must show why it should be included in a limited range of subjects in general education, and mount political pressure on those responsible to include it in the curriculum. And in so doing, one must move from justification to advocacy.

Aside from the political importance of advocacy, the fact that arguments on behalf of the arts can be refuted — either by contrary evidence to the supposed benefits of artistic study, or by showing that other subjects can accomplish some of the self-same ends — need not necessarily negate efforts at justifying the arts. Here, it is important to distinguish justification and refutation. Within science, refutation, or the effort to destroy the basis on which a claim is made, is regarded as the more relevant and possible test of a claim's efficacy. Hence, an hypothesis is tested in an attempt, if possible, to disprove the null hypothesis, that is, to test if such-and-such

is *not* the case. Scientific refutation must therefore be distinguished from philosophical refutation, which is the effort to logically test whether such-and-such *can be* the case. Justification, on the other hand, has another purpose. It is directed towards providing a defensible argument for a claim that — notwithstanding the possibility of detraction, and if possible, philosophical refutation — suffices to ensure a sufficient weight of evidence on its behalf.

Weighing in on the side of the philosophical justification of curriculum, Israel Scheffler proposes certain logical and moral tests that cannot be disproved or refuted scientifically, notwithstanding that scientific evidence may be utilized in philosophical deliberation about these tests.¹⁸ Scheffler is not so concerned to show that a particular subject has intrinsic qualities that set it apart from another subject, as to identify philosophical principles that can be applied to justifying curricula in general education. Among these principles, he suggests that “Holding exemplars of value before the growing mind is justification enough for various elements of education.”¹⁹ If logical, moral, and aesthetic/artistic values, among others, constitute the basis for justifying curricula, as Scheffler insists, then things that have these values ought to be included in general education. Showing that the arts, like other subjects, are things of value, suffices. Moreover, the ground of curricular justification shifts from defending particular subject areas to defending particular qualities within those subjects, potentially shared by them all, including specific things of value. The philosopher’s task in such a situation is to construct sufficiently compelling arguments for those qualities that will withstand the inevitable attempts to refute them.

My search for more inclusive justifications for the arts in general education that respect the sorts of general qualities Scheffler is after and highlight shared attributes between subject areas, without negating their distinctive characteristics, leads me to suggest two principles that might provide a starting point. In so doing, I shall rescue one argument that Kivy is somewhat inclined to dismiss, and build on another that he suggests might constitute a more defensible basis for music as an essential aspect of liberal education in the academy.

First, assuming Scheffler is right that establishing value constitutes sufficient justification for studying subject matter, then musical pieces should be studied that are deemed to be valuable. For example, if musicians see value in Beethoven’s Third Symphony, this constitutes sufficient reason for its study. However, the matter is not as simple as may first appear. Given the plethora of world musics, each with its own set of values, some conflicting with others, musicians and music educators disagree about who the arbiters of value should be, and whose music should be studied. Some, such as Francis Sparshott, Wayne Bowman, and David Elliott have suggested that the interplay between musical context and substance is so important as to negate musical universals, thereby making evaluative comparisons of music possible only within the context of a particular musical practice.²⁰ Besides emphasizing musics outside the Western classical tradition, their ideas imply an extremely relativistic approach to world musics, with values determined within a particular musical practice. Others, such as Bruno Nettl, Bennett Reimer, and Forest Hansen have suggested that — notwithstanding the diversity of world musics — there may be

musical universals, and value judgments may be possible across, as well as within, particular musics.²¹ For them, the study of Western classical music within its wider social and cultural milieu constitutes an appropriate starting point, and musics may be studied systematically with reference to certain universal values.

In finding a way through some of the questions these writers have raised, it is clear that, at least practically speaking, musicians do make judgments about the value of musical pieces within and without their particular traditions. They regularly select examples of music for study and performance on their own, or with their colleagues and students, that they deem to have musical or other value. Within the classical musics of the West and East, for example, composers and performers manipulate musical sounds in sophisticated ways. Whether it be in the Indian or European classical traditions, the intricacy and elegance of formal design is paramount, and the manner in which sounds are utilized is a monument to human ingenuity. These musics provide case studies of imagination at work. They demonstrate the intellectual feats possible within a limited set of tonal constraints, express the richness of human feeling, and communicate something meaningful to listeners who understand them.

Beethoven's Third Symphony is one such monument. Its inherent musical value can readily be defended in terms of such aspects as its formal design, its sensuous appeal to the initiated listener, and the light it may shed on European musical and aesthetic values at the turn of the nineteenth century, and on Western culture generally. The more one studies and listens to this work, the more layers of meaning emerge, and the more one realizes some of the musical reasons why it has endured well beyond the time of its composition. There are, of course, many such musical examples of value to study. While I am hard pressed to propose that every student should know this particular musical piece, I would like every student to know musical pieces of comparable value in the Western classical tradition.

The same might be said of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Claude Monet's *Wild Poppies*, Michelangelo's *David*, or any other work of art. There are so many artistic creations of value to study that identifying the particular examples to be widely studied becomes a difficult task. Kivy's presupposition that Beethoven's Third Symphony is an essential example for all liberal arts students fails for the same reason as his example of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* fails — because of the practical impossibility of studying all of the artistic monuments in Western civilization, let alone those in the world beyond. Artists and teachers are forced to select from among many possibilities, and practically speaking, their choices differ because their particular purposes and situations differ. Such is the embarrassment of riches in the arts that, even if one wanted to, it would be practically impossible to be specific about what every American should know and be able to do in the arts.

Second, to the extent that the arts are seen to be relevant to the public's experience, and a part of political, familial, religious, business, athletic, social and cultural life, they are more readily justified in general education. For example, in music, whether it be the patriotic songs sung on festive or memorial occasions, the popular and folk melodies that are a constant part of ordinary life, the music

associated with religious events, film music, the songs and chants sung in ball parks, stadiums, and racetracks, the music played in concert halls and opera houses, the young need to know this music and participate in it if they are to be effectively socialized and enculturated. If these times and places constitute the tribal rituals of which Kivy wrote, then there is a practical case to be made that the music of which these rituals are constituted should be included in elementary general education.

Notwithstanding the relationship between music and social events, Kivy's reference to tribal rituals is problematic, and the connection between music and social events is less clear than upon first glance. For one thing, music educators have historically taken their objective to be one of broadening musical understanding beyond the confines of a particular family, clan, or tribe, to include musical and social events beyond, even to other parts of the world. Notwithstanding the importance of a student's particular place as a curricular starting point, and Kivy's emphasis on the relationship between music and the social events of everyday life, the concept of musical tribalism seems antithetical to education construed as broadening and deepening understanding. Embracing a form of musical tribalism suggests that teachers may pander to students' present musical interests and desires rather than introduce new musical pieces to their students and enrich their understanding of their own and other's musics. Including only those musics associated with the particular social events with which one's students are acquainted also leaves much besides that students may not regard as "their" tribal rituals. Questions relating to whose musics and social rituals are to be taught and how, so as to emphasize the relationship between music and its social context, are very problematical.²²

Nor will it be easy to forge a reciprocity between these two justifications I have suggested: the search for artistic values, and the interrelationship between the arts and society. In fact, they may well be in dialectic. Searching for musical value, for example, may emphasize the sophisticated classical musics; interrelating music with common, everyday life may emphasize the more accessible folk and popular musics. Judgments of musical value, for example, may emphasize acquiring musical knowledge; learning the musics of everyday life may emphasize music as a pleasurable experience. However, seeing that these dialectics between the classical and vernacular musics — between musical knowledge and pleasure — are a fact of musical life, it is reasonable to expect that justifications for musical study should likewise reflect these tensions. And the same might be argued for the other arts.

In sum, if the arts are to survive and flourish in general education, they will need to be justified in ways that meet contemporary challenges. Where they are seen to be vulnerable, belief in search of reason becomes a more urgent enterprise. To this end, the justifications I have suggested may constitute starting points that emphasize both their commonality with, and divergence from, other aspects of general education.

1. See Peter Kivy, "Music and the Liberal Education," in *Philosopher, Teacher, Musician: Perspectives on Music Education*, ed. Estelle R. Jorgensen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 78-93.

2. *Ibid.*, 88.

3. See Plato *Republic*, Book 10, 595a-602b.
4. See, for example, Plato *Republic*, Books 3, 6, and 7; Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 8. For Plato, the arts were so important in intellectual and moral development that they should be strictly censored (*Laws*, Bks. 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8) and only certain modes should be employed in general education (*Republic*, Bk. 3). Compare this reading of Plato as a qualified supporter rather than enemy of the arts with that in Whitney J. Oates, *Plato's View of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972). On the differences between Plato and Aristotle regarding music in general education see Estelle R. Jorgensen, "On Music Education as a Political Enterprise," *College Music Society Newsletter* (May 1992): 2+.
5. See F. V. N. Painter, *Luther on Education* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889); "Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae incundae," in *Source Readings in Music Education History*, comp. Michael L. Mark (New York: Schirmer Books, 1982), 73-75; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans., James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952); Immanuel Kant, *Education*, trans., Annette Churton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960); Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, trans., Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby ([1967]; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Herbert Read, *Education Through Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958).
6. See, for example, John Locke, *Some Thoughts on Education...* Boston, 1830, in *Three Thousand Years of Educational Wisdom: Selections from Great Documents*, ed., Robert Ulich, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans., Barbara Foxley (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1911); John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).
7. See John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934; reprint, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980) and John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (1938; reprint, New York: Collier Books, 1963).
8. See, for example, Bernarr Rainbow, *Music in Educational Thought and Practice: A Survey from 800 BC* (Aberystwyth, Wales: Boethius Press, 1989); Michael L. Mark and Charles L. Gary, *A History of American Music Education* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992).
9. See William C. Woodbridge, *A Lecture on Vocal Music as a Branch of Common Education, Delivered in the Representatives' Hall, Boston, August 24, 1830, Before the American Institute of Instruction* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little and Wilkins, 1831); Estelle R. Jorgensen, "William Channing Woodbridge's Lecture, 'On Vocal Music as a Branch of Common Education,' Revisited," *Studies in Music* (University of Western Australia) 18 (1984): 1-32.
10. A century later, a revival of these ideas from a humanistic perspective is found, for example, in James L. Mursell, *Human Values in Music Education* (New York: Silver Burdett, 1934).
11. See Estelle R. Jorgensen, "Justifying Music Instruction in American Public Schools: An Historical Perspective," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* no. 120 (Spring 1994): 17-31.
12. *Growing Up Complete: The Imperative for Music Education* (Reston VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1990); *National Standards for Arts Education: What Every Young American Should Know and Be Able to Do in the Arts* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994).
13. See Dwayne E. Huebner, "Spirituality and Knowing," in *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing*, ed., Elliot Eisner, Eighty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Pt. 2 (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1985), 159-73.
14. See Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), especially chap. 6.
15. Philip Phenix, *Realms of Meaning: A Philosophy of the Curriculum for General Education* ([1964]; repr., Ventura CA: Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Office, 1986); Eisner, ed., *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing*; Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Jerome S. Bruner, *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Jerome S. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).
16. See Edward D. Myers, *Education in the Perspective of History* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).
17. See William A. Alcott, "On the Study of Physiology as a Branch of Common Education," *American Annals of Education and Instruction* 3rd ser. 3 (1833): 385-403. The dilemma between subjects that were arguably desirable and those that could be included in the school curriculum is noted in an article entitled "What Branches Should be Taught in Common Schools?" *American Annals of Education and Instruction* 3rd ser. 8 (1838): 145-53.

18. See Israel Scheffler, *Reason and Teaching* (1973; reprint, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973).
19. Israel Scheffler, *In Praise of the Cognitive Emotions and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 134.
20. Francis Sparshott, "Aesthetics of Music: Limits and Grounds," in *What is Music? Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed., Philip Alpers ([1987]; repr., University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 35-98; Wayne D. Bowman, "Music without Universals: Relativism Reconsidered," Paper presented to the Philosophy of Music Education; International Symposium II, University of Toronto, June 14, 1994, "Sound, Society, and Music 'Proper,'" *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 14-24; David J. Elliott, "Musical Values Revisited: A Reply to Forest Hansen's 'Values in Music Education,'" *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 52-55.
21. See Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), chap. 3; Bennett Reimer, "Can We Understand Music of Foreign Cultures?" in *Musical Connections: Tradition and Change*, ed. Heath Lees (International Society for Music Education, 1994) 227-45, and "Selfness and Otherness in Experiencing Music of Foreign Cultures," *The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning* 2, no. 3 (1991): 4-13; Forest Hansen, "Values in Music Education," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 3-13.
22. Austin Caswell, "Canonicity in Academia: A Music Historian's View," in Jorgensen, ed., *Philosopher, Teacher, Musician*, 129-45, proposes an ethnological approach to musical study by way of highlighting the relationship between music and its social context.