



## Editorial

# Sustain Balance and Harmony

By Benjamin Bolden

I am frequently reminded how much I don't know about music education. Lately, I find I am often asked how we plan to musically educate our son, who is almost 10 months old. Predictably, after many years of music and education learning and experience...I have no idea! Private lessons? Group lessons? Music Together? Kindermusik? School music? Choir? Suzuki? Kodaly? Orff? Piano? Electric guitar? Tuba? Drumming?

So, with the goal of feeling a little less overwhelmed, I've been thinking about what I really value. How do I hope my child will benefit from music education? What do I want him to be able to take away?

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Ron is 47 years old. He is always excited about something, and every now and again he drops by my office or stops me in the hall to tell me about the latest focus of his boundless energy and ferocious intellect. Although designated an art educator, Ron's passion is music. Last Friday, he hefted a huge hard-body instrument case into my office, carefully laid it on the floor, and asked if I wanted to see. Of course I did! Ron gently opened up the converted bass case to reveal a cross between an electric guitar, bass guitar, slide guitar, and dulcimer. "It's a *megatar*" he proudly explained. "Similar to a Chapman Stick. It's a combination guitar and electric bass that plays like a piano. You can play a bass line, chords, and melody all at the same time! I'm figuring out how to play it. There are some great resources online. It's what I do with my time. I can't wait to get home!"

Ron has sustained his enjoyment of music learning; he has taken his music education with him. He has picked up the tools to do it on his own – to continue to develop as a musician. This is something I want my son Max to learn: how to *sustain* pleasure in making music and developing as a musician. And, like Ron, I want him to reach a point where he can do it without professional assistance. I want Max to learn how to be his *own* music teacher.

Michael is 23. We got along well when he was a student in my class: *Teaching Music in the Elementary Classroom*. Although the course finished some time ago, he still stops by now and again to chat. "I don't

want you to think I'm weird or anything," he told me recently, "but I still play the recorder. Quite a lot. I pull it out if I'm feeling stressed or just if I need a break from my schoolwork. I found this website that teaches you how to play a whole bunch of songs. Even Abba!"

Michael uses music making to take him away from whatever it is he needs to be taken away from – it helps him keep his life balanced. I hope Max will learn to find the same solace in music; I want him to be able to turn to music to help him keep his balance.

A few weeks ago I attended the opening celebrations of a small local business (specializing in the sale of baby paraphernalia – as you've probably noticed, babies are central to most things in my life these days). Jake and Sherri are twelve, while Rory is thirteen. Playing upright bass, electric guitar, and tenor sax respectively, these young musicians performed jazz standards while customers nibbled appetizers and browsed the merchandise. I was blown away by their professionalism. The music was low-key, tasteful, and perfect for the atmosphere. The three players accessed their knowledge of their instruments, of ensemble music making, of jazz theory, and of the standards they'd chosen to play to create gorgeous, playful harmony.

These middle-school aged youngsters, with no teacher in sight, had all the skills and knowledge they needed to build a mini community of musicians and make music together. To the enjoyment of an impressed and appreciative audience, Jake, Sherri, and Rory combined their voices and played together in beautiful harmony. I hope Max can learn how to do this, too.

So although I still don't know exactly what Max's music learning experiences should look like (will he be setting off with a kazoo? didgeridoo? double bass?), I think I'm a little closer to knowing what I should look *for*.

What I want from music education is for students to come away with the ability and desire to sustain their music making throughout their lives. I want them to know how to access music as a tool to help find balance. And I want them to have the ability and confidence to make music with others, in harmony. *CME*

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