

the prelude



Editorial

Where does music take you?

By Benjamin Bolden

I was running, one moist and misty evening, to the video store (having pragmatically decided to combine DVD return with daily exercise). I was listening to the radio, cocooned by earphones with CBC's *As It Happens*, doing my best to keep up with the world by tuning in to the program's string of current events stories and interviews. The producers of this radio show are masters at bringing in brief music excerpts that separate, punctuate, and often illuminate stories—allow for and shape reflection and contemplation, sometimes obviously connected to the news story item and sometimes not. I do not remember the news that day, but I do remember the 30-second music sting that separated one story from the next. Or—to be more precise—I remember how it affected me. I was transported.

I don't mean to suggest this was anything monumental or epiphanic—it was just a regular old run-of-the-mill instance of music taking me from where I was actually and physically to somewhere else entirely. In this case, I was taken somewhere quite geographically and temporally specific: Paris, France, in the 1920s. Something about the music (I think it was a piano piece in 3/4 time) whisked me off to checkered tablecloths, buzzing conversation, clinking glasses of red wine, Champagne, absinthe...and the crunch that comes when you squeeze then tear off a chunk of fresh baguette. I think the music took me there by evoking Erik Satie and Les Six. Or maybe by lighting

up a string of neural connections that led to the grey matter where I'd stored my impressions of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). "*This wine is too good for toast-drinking, my dear. You don't want to mix emotions up with a wine like that. You lose the taste...*"

But of course I only unearthed these possibilities after some serious after-the-fact reflective analysis. At the time, I was simply transported, no explanation provided. And that was fine with me.

This is one of the things I love most about music. On occasion—certainly not always, and it is in large part the elusiveness of this phenomenon that makes it so delightful—music 'moves' me, in the sense of picking me up, taking me on a journey through time and space, and allowing me to experience somewhere different. This is not magic, but it is magical.

The phenomenon has many variations. Sometimes music takes me to a geographical place, or an imaginary place, sometimes to an emotional place, or a different state of consciousness, and occasionally to a place of new (or familiar) perspective, vision, or understanding. Sometimes, inexplicably, music will take me to a space where I am overwhelmed with what I can only describe as a sensation of...possibility. Usually the musical journey touches a combination of these metaphorical and actual 'places'. On occasion I am drawn *inside* the music itself—seduced into following a certain

instrument, or motive, or element of counterpoint, or of compositional technique (usually only vaguely aware, admittedly, of the devices employed—a sense). I remember specifically, for example, being captured by an electronic piece of music with two voices moving in parallel. Gradually, with each new phrase, the rhythm and pitch structure of each line of counterpoint became increasingly dissimilar, gaining independence, the voices shifting and slipping further and further away from parallel motion. Simply but effectively the music drew me in and enveloped me in a new world.

It occurs to me that any one piece of music is a vehicle that can transport in many directions and to many destinations, depending on the listener, her culture, mood, education, breakfast... How fascinating to attempt to understand someone *else's* associations—to gain a sense of where she is taken by music, and how she is taken there.

Often music is composed and/or presented with a very specific journey for the listener in mind; film music, for example, is the fine art of shaping (some might say manipulating) the viewer's perceptions of the visual narrative. Effective movie music is often so brilliantly engineered that it whisks us where the composer wishes us to go, while we do not even register awareness of the music's existence. There are many examples of music deliberately designed to take listeners to specific places. I was reading recently how

Canadian composer Stephan Moccio scored his 2010 Olympic theme music over a hundred different ways: with hip hop beat to enhance the excitement of a snowboarding run; with lush, earnest strings to bring a tear to the eye as we watch the tragedy of a falling figure skater. And how can we forget the music that retailers use to whip us into a shopaholic frenzy?

The journeys I enjoy best, however, tend to be those that allow me to choose my own path. When the music suggests rather than dictates. And although many people now turn to YouTube for music, to me it seems somehow richer and more exciting when the musical journey happens without visual instigation—when there is more freedom of direction. I appreciate the sentiment expressed by the slogan of CBC Radio 2, acknowledging the desire for personal liberty of destination as it generously offers to help listeners travel: ‘Wherever music takes you.’

So what are the implications lurking in here for music educators?

Perhaps when we introduce music to students—or when we invite them to introduce it to us—we might ask: ‘Where does this music take you?’ And perhaps we might wait a little before the inevitable follow-up: ‘...and *how* does it take you there?’

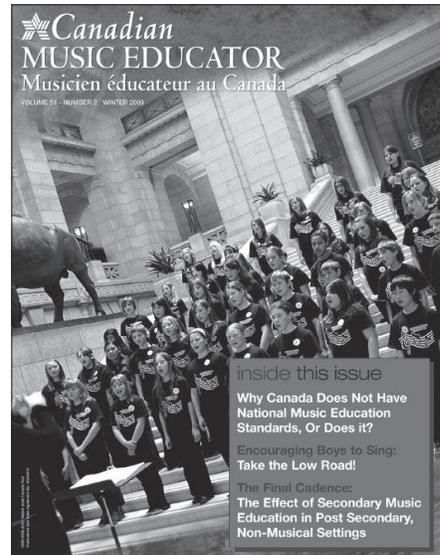
Some of my most exciting music listen-

ing journeys have been teacher inspired, and I am by no means suggesting we avoid analysis—but rather that we allow some space for non-analytical listening and exploration. And when we do get to the analysis, can we help our students approach it in a way that flows from what they find in the music, rather than from what we think they ought to find in the music? I wonder if the knowledge we bring our students to (sometimes kicking and screaming) might risk ruining the journey. Does the ‘richer’ understanding we offer compromise the magic? A professor told me once that he attended an orchestral concert with a colleague who turned to him a few minutes into the Beethoven to quip: “Oh no—we’d better leave—he’s starting to develop.”

Where do you want music to take you? Where do you want it to take your students? Or those whom you love?

So many people walking, running, and commuting with earbuds and mp3 players taking them somewhere differently entirely than where they’re going. Should we, as music educators, strive to enhance those journeys? Or should we leave well enough alone? CME

Please respond through the ether to: bbolden@uvic.ca



The Canadian Music Educator is grateful to the Coalition for Music Education in Canada for providing the image we used for the cover of issue 51-2 of the River East Transcona Divisional Choir, Maureen Ferley, Conductor, Manitoba Legislature, Music Monday, May 2008.

UPDATE ON DENNIS TUPMAN

Many folks in the music education community may have noticed that Dennis' regular column "ADVOCACY CORNER" has been missing from the last couple of issues of our Journal. Back in July 2009, Dennis had some serious health issues requiring some down time in hospitals, followed by rehab sessions. I am pleased to say that he is making steady, positive progress. Recently, his wife Ruth was hospitalized, too.

We would be remiss if we didn't send our best wishes and prayers for a speedy recovery to both Dennis and Ruth. If you would like to send them greetings, I know it would be most appreciated. Send to: Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Tupman, #399, South Green Lake Rd., R.R.1, 70 Mile House, B.C. V0K 2K0.

-Peter Stigings