Ireland’s Music Education National Debate:
Rationalization, Reconciliation, Contextuality and
Applicability of Global Philosophies in Conflict

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To be sure, music is a miracle. ... What miracle wants of us is not that we, as thinking beings, shall capitulate to it, but rather that we shall do justice to it in our thinking. Precisely because music is a miracle, incomprehensible in the framework of the dominant mode of contemporary thinking, impossible to fit into the current conception of the world - a miracle not only in its greatest and most splendid, its most exceptional, manifestations, but in its plain fundamentals, precisely because of all this it is our duty to think about it. The purpose is not a rationalization, a setting aside of the miraculous. Thought that is true to its subject does not annul miracles. It penetrates the fog around them; it brings them out of darkness into the light.

Victor Zuckerkandl
Sound and Symbol p.6
Abstract

‘The young Irish person has the worst of all European musical “worlds”’. This seminal statement was discovered to be symptomatic of a general malaise. The Music Education National Debate (MEND 1994-1996) was a three-phase response to Deaf Ears?, the report from which the above statement was taken. The eventual aim was to set up a forum for music education which would systematically address the difficulties in Ireland. The scope of MEND was, thus, general, ab initio. Its progress was, however, inhibited by a specific concern, which was fundamental to the whole process of reform. It soon became apparent that consensus on a philosophy of music education to inform evolving strategies would be a sine qua non. Coincidentally, this was a time of debacle in the global field, instanced by the publication of a ‘new’ philosophy of music education (David Elliott’s Music Matters [1995]) which threw down the gauntlet to the undisputed classic - Reimer’s A Philosophy of Music Education [1970/1989]. This challenge amounted to a veritable counterposition and demanded a separate, albeit derivative, study before the MEND Report could be completed. This study was to become the substance of this thesis.

The aim of this work is to analyse these polar philosophies with a view to reconciling them. Beginning with some commonly held values about music education, the relevance of American music education practice to a wide range of global systems is suggested. The dominance of a western art (music) mentality is called into question by giving prominence to multiculturalism and popular music. Music Education as Aesthetic Education (Reimer) is compared with the praxial approach (Elliott). They yielded to rationalization, albeit posing residual questions of balance, relevance, and time constraints within the curriculum. The indispensability of performance and listening as a complementary pair is re-established. The ascendancy of artistic criteria in defining the music programme is affirmed. Finally the failure of the universal philosophy hypothesis is redeemed by sketching the compromises necessary to convert it to the adaptability of the contextual idea, leading the study to a conclusion of general, rather than specific, application.

Keywords

Music education; Music listening; Music performance; Music curriculum; Philosophy; Aesthetics; Contextualism; Multiculturalism; Ireland; USA.
Dedication

For a life in music together I gratefully dedicate my work to

My wife, Ann, and children, Aisling, Paul and Ann.
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the Music Department of the University of Pretoria for affording me the opportunity to submit this thesis on a topic of mutual interest.

Professor Ella Fourie should be mentioned significantly as the person who first introduced me to music education in South Africa.

I am grateful to Professor Chris Walton for facilitating me in the eventual choice of a supervisor who was already familiar with the groundwork.

I cannot adequately acknowledge the help and encouragement provided by my supervisor, Professor Caroline van Niekerk, who never allowed kindness to come in conflict with duty, firmness and standards.

I owe a debt to Dr Brendan Goldsmith, President of the Dublin Institute of Technology, who supported the idea of the Music Education National Debate in Ireland, and nominated me as its organizer with continuing status as a Director of the Institute.

My wife and family suffered the deprivation which an eighteen-year-long project entailed. I hope the outcomes will be evidence of my undying gratitude for their patience.

Thank you especially, Paul, for the wonders of technology and for your skills of formatting; you proved again that with Paul, as with Tigger, all things are possible.

I can never forget my countless students, whose needs constantly stimulated my thoughts and led to the joyful accumulation of my life’s expertise.

I am indebted to David Elliott, Bennett Reimer and Harry White for providing the stimulus to write this thesis.

To the participants of all nationalities at MEND, and to all who hold music and music education dear, be assured that this is your book too.
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# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>The (National) Academy for the Performing Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIT</td>
<td>Dublin Institute of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISME</td>
<td>International Society for Music Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITM</td>
<td>Irish Traditional Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC</td>
<td>Leaving Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Multiculturalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAE</td>
<td>Music Education as Aesthetic Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENC</td>
<td>The Music Educators’ National Conference (US)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEND</td>
<td>The Music Education National Debate (Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education (D Elliott)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCA</td>
<td>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (Ireland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIAM</td>
<td>Royal Irish Academy of Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCD</td>
<td>Trinity College Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAM</td>
<td>Western Art Music</td>
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