

## Lifelong Learning in Orff Schulwerk

Fall, 2009

My new e-mail signature reads, “Julie Scott, President, American Orff-Schulwerk Association.” Every time I see it in print, I am still honored, awed, and even a bit astounded. How did I get here? Well, a lot of it goes back to how I became a lifelong learner. And for that story, I have to tell you about my mother, Martha Scott.

My mother was a music teacher for over 30 years. In fact, she was the music teacher at the rural Texas elementary school I attended in the 1960s. Her music classes were fun, and my classmates and I loved it! We didn’t just sing songs; we dramatized them, moved to them, and played unpitched percussion instruments to accompany them. Mother never missed an opportunity to learn new approaches to teaching music. She attended the Texas MEA conference every year and completed a masters degree when I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. She started using the Mary Helen Richards solfège and rhythm syllable charts by the time I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, while the singing games, dramatizations, and playing of instruments continued. During my high school years, she began to talk about the Orff approach to teaching music. She attended all of the TMEA workshops she could find on the subject.

When I entered college, I began accompanying Mother on those trips to TMEA. We attended sessions together, but they were out of context for me. When I began teaching elementary music, I did the best I could with the resources I had, but by my third year of teaching, I was dreaming of a new career as a travel agent!

Sometime that spring, just after the death of my father in January, 1986, Mother said, “Let’s take the Orff Level I class together.” I wasn’t particularly fond of the idea of giving up two weeks of my summer, but my dad had just died, and my mother asked. We attended Level I

with Avon Gillespie and Rick Layton that summer and Level II the subsequent summer. In 1991, she said, “Let’s go to the AOSA conference in San Diego!” and that began our foray into national conferences. The last conference she attended with me was the first one where I presented a session—1998 in Tampa. By that time, I was hooked on learning and on Orff Schulwerk. My life was changed forever, and my students’ musical experiences were much the better for it.

Once you have experienced learning through Orff Schulwerk, you want more—no matter how much teaching experience you have, and no matter what your age. Orff Schulwerk teachers seek out professional development opportunities for at least three reasons:

**1. For our own musical, pedagogical, intellectual, and aesthetic nourishment.** Professional development keeps us fresh, interested and motivated to teach. After completing Level I of Orff Schulwerk teacher education, I noticed a distinct change, not only in my teaching, but also in the children’s attitudes toward music class. I was excited about the music I had to share with them, and my excitement was contagious!

**2. For the benefit of the students.** As I became more experienced at teaching, I learned that my students would rise to higher levels of musicianship if I led them there. This meant that my understanding of concepts or theories had to be at least a few steps beyond where I wanted theirs to be. It wasn’t until I finished Level III that I truly began to assimilate the Orff process and was able to devise a curriculum with an age-appropriate sequence for my students. Orff Schulwerk workshops and conferences were additional incentives, which provided perspectives of presenters from other traditions and countries, introducing me to different dimensions of Orff Schulwerk.

**3. To lend professional credibility to the field of music education.** As music educators, we

constantly struggle with convincing the general public that what we do is valid. If we want to be treated as professionals, we must present ourselves as professionals, who continue to learn. We can stay current with educational and musical trends by obtaining professional development in areas such as arts integration, children's literature, research, technology, urban education and world music—topics that are offered at the AOSA Professional Development Conference in Milwaukee.

My mother was a church musician, a leader in her teachers' sorority and an avid reader until the end of her life in 2004. She worked the *New York Times* Crossword Puzzle every day, had a computer, used the internet and e-mail, and would have followed the last presidential election with great interest and delight. Martha Scott, lifelong learner and Orff Schulwerk enthusiast, would have turned 80 years old this November 8. And I have no doubt that she would have celebrated, in part, with a trip to Milwaukee to the AOSA Professional Development Conference.

Thank you, Mother, for leading me, by example, to be a lifelong learner and for leading me to Orff Schulwerk. Love, your daughter Julie, President, American Orff-Schulwerk Association.