

Fall, 2010 President's Column

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Finding Common Ground through the Volumes

One of the greatest challenges facing music educators in the 21st century is what music to teach. When I began teaching music to children almost 30 years ago, the answer was fairly clear-cut. We taught “American” folk songs and dances, including African-American spirituals and some Hispanic folk songs. Occasionally, we sang a song in another language, such as Spanish, French, German, or even Korean. We listened to and moved with Western art music. Those music choices were representative of most of the ethnic populations present in my classroom.

Things have really changed. The population of the U.S. is much more diverse. Now, I might walk into a classroom of students who speak 10 or more different languages. According to the Dallas ISD website, their 160,000 students collectively speak almost 70 different languages in their homes. The days of Appalachian folk songs being relevant to at least half of the students are past. So, what music can we teach to 21st century students that has meaning to them all? In my opinion, Appalachian folk songs, African-American spirituals, gospel, jazz, Hispanic music, and Western art music are still a good place to start. However, we also need to draw upon every resource we can find to teach music that is representative of all of the students in our classrooms. One of the best ways to overcome the challenges of not knowing the language, repertoire, or cultural tradition is to have a musician, teacher, or parent from that culture come to share music and dance of the country. Other good sources for teaching music of other cultures, which include sample lessons, are past issues of *Reverberations* and *The Orff Echo*. (Go to <http://www.aosa.org/echoindex.html> to see the index of article titles.)

Since is it difficult to find music that is relevant for everyone in our 21st-century classrooms, I'd like to suggest an idea that may sound a little unconventional. What if the music we use in class is really “nobody’s” music in particular? What if the music is novel to everyone, and, therefore, a source of music that is relevant to students of all cultures? Enter the Orff Schulwerk *Music for Children* volumes. While the music of the volumes is European (some of it very Bavarian!¹), much of it, such as the modal pieces in Volume IV, sounds unfamiliar, even to many Westerners. Dorian and Phrygian modes sound new and “hip” to today’s students. Add to those the Mixolydian and Lydian recorder pieces by Miriam “Mimi” Samuelson from Orff Schulwerk *Music for Children*, Volume 3 (American Edition), and all students will find music that moves them—literally and figuratively.

The rhythmic intensity of the body percussion pieces in *Rhythmische Übung* is completely relevant to today’s multicultural students of all ages. When we transfer those pieces to drums and other unpitched percussion, we get motivation with a capital “M.” Let’s face it—Keetman was cool. It is widely accepted that Carl Orff was a great composer, but Gunild Keetman deserves a place in the annals of music history as well.

The Orff Schulwerk *Music for Children* volumes are our primary source materials. These materials, like most great works of art, are timeless, able to cross cultural barriers, and adaptable to almost any setting or environment that a music educator might encounter.

¹ I am thinking of *Music for Children*, Volume I, p. 111, #31, which Carol Erion has aptly named “This Is a Great Rondo.”