

# Why Do Humans Value Music?

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## **I. Introduction: Setting the Stage**

Whenever and wherever humans have existed music has existed also. Since music occurs only when people choose to create and share it, and since they always have done so and no doubt always will, music clearly must have important value for people. What is that value?

Throughout recorded history some people have spent enormous mental effort trying to answer that question. It is a fascinating question because attempts to answer it force one to grapple with the nature of humanity itself. If we can explain why humans need music we may learn something profound about what it means to be human. We know that humans need food, clothing, shelter, language, social interaction, belief systems, and so forth, and that these needs help define the human condition. But why do they also appear to require music, which seems, on the surface, to be only remotely related to human survival rather than central to it? As Howard Gardner frames the issue,

Precisely because [music] is not used for explicit communication, or for other evident survival purposes, its continuing centrality in human experience constitutes a challenging puzzle. The anthropologist Levi-Strauss is scarcely alone among scientists in claiming that if we can explain music, we may find the key for all human thought or in implying that failure to take music seriously weakens any account of the human condition.<sup>1</sup>

Why should music educators try to explain why music is valued by people? Why not just get on with our responsibility to teach it? After all, people will no doubt continue to need music whether we or they can explain why. Is it really necessary for music educators to have such an explanation? The answer is emphatically "yes," for several compelling reasons. First, professional music educators should have a convincing rationale for why the work they have chosen to do is important. Second, the profession as a whole needs a sense of shared aspiration to guide its collective endeavors. Third, the people to whom music educators are responsible—students and their communities—must understand that their need for music is being met by professionals aware of what that need is and competent to help fulfill it. Fourth, teaching can only be judged effective when it enhances cherished values: not being clear about what those values are insures ineffectiveness. Fifth, the ongoing attempt to define those values keeps music education on track toward maintaining its relevance to its culture. So, difficult as it may be, the attempt to continually clarify why humans value music is necessary if music education is to be successful.

### ***A Single Value or Many Values***

Can the value of music be identified as one particular contribution it makes to people's lives? Some have thought so. Music has been claimed to be, essentially, a force for morality, or a special way to experience the world, or a unique way to exercise creativity, or a way to "know" what cannot otherwise be known, or an

instrumentality for political/social change, and on and on with claims for a singular, distinctive benefit music bestows on people.

The rationale for seeking a single, essential value of music is that finding it will mean that the "essence" of music will have been discovered. If that is too much to hope for, at least the quest will get us closer to that essence, allowing us to identify, and focus our efforts on, values more fundamental to music than those which are peripheral.

Opposed to this orientation to musical value is one that claims that a singular, essential value for anything in human life, including music, does not exist, and asserting such a claim misrepresents the diversity and complexity of human reality. Further, trying to focus on a single musical value inevitably causes other important values to be unjustly neglected in favor of those a society privileges. Rather than search for some imagined essence of music we are better advised to abandon any hopes of locating what does not exist, and instead, include in our aspirations for music education any values we can possibly identify. We can then make a variety of contributions to human welfare.

A focus on diversity of values rather than on a single, defining value has arisen over the past several decades. Many thinkers now argue that human history demonstrates that our lives and our beliefs cannot be reduced to singular, ultimate solutions. For every human belief, assumption, or value, according to this view, opposing beliefs, assumptions, and values exist, each contending for truth. We can no longer expect definitive answers to our questions, but only an ongoing attempt to address old and new perplexing dilemmas, causing us to adopt an attitude of openness to all possibilities. The search for essences, in this view, has not only been unproductive, it has been harmful to human welfare, by excluding competing values rather than embracing them. What is lost in certainty, security, and faith by giving up the quest for essences is made up for by the higher values of inclusiveness, creative tension, and ongoing responsibility to invent useful solutions for particular problems.<sup>2</sup>

The conflict between beliefs in (1) reliable answers and secure values, and (2) ongoing contradictions among answers and the relativity of values is among the most characteristic factors in contemporary intellectual life.<sup>3</sup> Music education is not exempt from this conflict, and we cannot excuse ourselves from it because of our shared devotion to what the Tanglewood Declaration called music's "integrity as an art,"<sup>4</sup> as if there was no dispute about what that phrase actually means. We, as all others in the intellectual/artistic community, must reconcile ourselves to the difficulties of both holding significant values and being open to their uncertainty. Estelle Jorgensen summarizes our dilemma:

Rather than attempting to bring conflicting ideas or tendencies into reconciliation, unity, or harmony, music educators may sometimes need to be content with disturbance, disunity, and dissonance. Things in dialectic do not always mesh tidily, simply, or easily. Nor necessarily ought they. The resultant complexity, murkiness, and fuzziness of these dialectical relationships, however, greatly complicate the task of music educators.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Forming a "Community of Belief"***

The "task of music educators" referred to above is shared by all professions and by all humans: to forge a meaningful basis for cooperative endeavors based on shared values, while at the same time recognizing that values are subject to alteration or even abandonment if they lose their validity. The argument that there should be no commitment to beliefs is, after all, one particular argument: the need, even the necessity, for a consistent, foundational belief system is as forcefully and convincingly argued for by as many as those who deny its possibility. A healthy culture, nation, religion, profession, or person, according to this widely held view, requires strongly held beliefs, based on complementary values, providing a basis for effective action.<sup>6</sup>

Music educators in the United States, along with their colleagues around the world, share many convictions about the values of music, convictions that enable them to make consistent choices about why and how to teach music. These convictions need not be, indeed must not be, regarded as dogmas incapable of criticism, change, or replacement. As in a healthy democracy, differing viewpoints and diversity of opinions are inevitable, exhilarating, and rejuvenating, serving an essential role in the well-being of the larger organism. The viability of the music education profession, at any particular period in its history and in any particular cultural setting, may well depend on the existence of shared values upon which effective initiatives can be based, and acknowledgment that complete unanimity is neither likely nor desirable. The codependence of harmony and

dissonance, after all, is something music educators know a good deal about, and it is as relevant in the field of values as it is in music.

The following examination of dimensions of musical value demonstrates that it is possible to identify values widely held in common, which can provide a basis for professional aspirations, planning, and action, and also recognizes that tensions among and uncertainties about claimed values are inevitable, reminding us of our continual need for individual and professional critical self-examination.

## **II. Dimensions of Musical Value**

The dimensions of value explained in the following discussion are conceived with music in mind. But each claim for the value of music can be claimed also by other human endeavors. Is there anything unique to music, setting it apart as having a distinctive identity?

In her search for an answer to the question "What is art for?" (another way to ask the same question would be "Why do humans value art?"), Ellen Dissanayake concludes that an essential characteristic of the arts is that they provide a mechanism for creating objects or events that "place the activity or artifact in a 'realm' different from the everyday."<sup>7</sup> (Emphasis in original.) That is, the arts, in unique ways, "make special." Other ways of expressing this idea are that the arts exist to make the seemingly ordinary extraordinary, or to make the seemingly insignificant significant. Whatever other values the arts bestow, their distinctiveness as a valuable human endeavor is their powerful capacity to accomplish such transformations.

Adopting this idea as one useful way (among others) to regard the arts, we can express the distinctiveness, or uniqueness, of music as being its use of sounds to accomplish its task of "making special." In music, sounds, so constant and useful in human contact with the ordinary world, become "special," extraordinary, and significant, transforming the commonplace into what is remarkable. As philosopher of the arts Francis Sparshott puts it, "It is more nearly true of music than it is of anything else that it offers an alternative reality and an alternative way of being."<sup>8</sup> Sounds created to provide an alternative sense of meaning, or an alternative sense of significance, are an essential ingredient if the result is to be regarded as "music."

This constitutes both the power of music and its limitations. Music cannot do what, for example, poetry, or painting, or dance, or theatre, or film can do, although it can contribute to them. Similarly, none of the other arts can do what music can do, although the other arts can be allied with music in a variety of ways.<sup>9</sup> Whenever sounds, by themselves or as an integral component, are being used to "make special"—to achieve significance—music is doing what it does, offering its values in its unique way. This foundational idea will be assumed throughout this paper.

Five dimensions, or aspects, of music will be identified as a way to organize the numerous values claimed for music, and to emphasize that many (but not all) of them can be considered to be complementary. Each dimension calls attention to a wide range of musical values related by similarity of focus. No assumption is being made that these five exhaust all possibilities, although they do claim to be important aspects of music's value. They also serve as an example for how other dimensions can be identified and explained by those interested in doing so.

### ***1. Music is end and means.***

This dimension of musical value focuses on the question "where does one go to find whatever is of value about music?" One location of musical value recognized throughout history is within music itself—within the sounds of music as every culture creates and shares them. In this view, the experience of musical sounds, whether through composing them, performing them (in this paper the term performing will refer to the performance of composed music), improvising them (which requires a substantially different set of competencies from performing composed music), or listening to them, as well as associated involvements such as conducting, arranging, sound engineering, moving, and so forth as various cultures provide them, is taken to be, in and of itself, the end, or purpose, of music's existence.

The difficulty with the "music as an end in itself" view has always been to explain just why sounds, arranged in ways cultures deem appropriate, are valuable for people. That they are indeed valuable—often supremely valuable—is evident. Cultures have often, even routinely, regarded their music as a profoundly

important dimension of their identity, to be protected and treasured, in and of itself, as among their greatest achievements. But why are musical sounds, which are, after all, just sounds, so deeply valued?

As explained in the Introduction, it is unlikely that any single reason will adequately account for the high value humans have always held for musical experience itself. Yet several reasons have been taken very seriously over the centuries, and remain convincing, or at least credible, among those who pursue this matter professionally. As Wayne Bowman puts it in his detailed and exhaustive book on the subject,

Just what is music? And what is its significance or importance? Or, more concisely yet, What is the nature and value of music? These seemingly simple questions have generated, and indeed continue to generate, an astonishing array of responses. But amidst the striking diversity there do exist discernible patterns, convergences of perspective, recurrent disputes and problems.<sup>10</sup>

In the discussions of dimensions of musical value following this one on music as end and means, an attempt will be made to explain some of the influential convergences of beliefs about the values of musical experience. Enhancing the musical experience has been and remains a central justification for the need for both music education and for professional music educators. Creating musical sounds through composing, performing, and improvising them, and sharing their meanings through listening to them, are among the most challenging and satisfying endeavors in which humans choose to engage themselves. To assist with those challenges, and to heighten those satisfactions, requires high levels of expertise, both in music itself and in the teaching of it. Music educators are those professionals whose expertise has been, is, and no doubt will continue to be, primarily devoted to those values that musical experiences themselves characteristically satisfy.

A different view about musical value is that it exists as something separate and distinct from musical experience itself. Involvements with music serve as a means, or instrumentality, for achieving a variety of associated values. Here the focus is not on the experience of musical sounds themselves, but on the effects music may be said to have as an enhancement of or influence on some other activity.

The problem with the "music as means" view has always been to explain how it is that musical sounds can cause the enormous number of effects that have been claimed for them throughout history. Many of those effects are claimed entirely out of faith, with little or no evidence that the cause-effect relationship actually occurs. Some effects seem to be substantiated by reliable evidence. But how do sounds, which are, after all, just sounds, cause the claimed effects?

An important distinction must be made here, a distinction seldom given adequate attention. There is a crucial difference between the many positive consequences resulting from involvement with musical experience itself, and the use of music as a means to secure values not dependent on musical experience itself. Consequences of musical experience, in addition to the sheer pleasure and fulfillment brought about by creating and sharing musical sounds, include the sense of deepened individuality it yields, the societal beliefs it enables to be embodied and shared, the breadth and depth of feelings it adds to our inner lives, the awareness we gain of both the universality and cultural specificity of the human condition, the dimension of depth (or "specialness") it adds to our experience of life, the fulfillment of an inborn capacity to create and share the meanings expressive sounds afford, and on and on with the many values attained as a consequence of being involved with the sounds of music.

Using music as a means, to the contrary, focuses on producing outcomes unrelated to the quality and depth of musical experience itself. For example, the claim has been strongly made recently that certain involvements with music enhance spatial-temporal reasoning abilities. The enhancements are not a consequence of deeper musical experience as defined here. They are results of particular opportunities some music and some involvements with music provide to manipulate patterns similar in some ways to the patterns underlying spatial-temporal reasoning tasks. The high value our society holds for spatial-temporal reasoning can then become the reason music should be valued—for its utility as a means to achieve that particular result. The implications for music education practice of pursuing this value would be far-reaching, in transforming its focus on learnings related to musical experience, such as the National Standards for music education define,<sup>11</sup> to a focus on only those activities pertinent to improving spatial-temporal reasoning.<sup>12</sup>

The example above yields a criterion for distinguishing among values for music as an end or as a means. To the degree a claimed value is dependent upon and a consequence of involvement in the ways music is experienced and learned, such as the Standards represent, it can reasonably be identified as an end of musical involvement. To the degree the attainment of a value suggests or requires that musical learnings and involvements be altered in the direction of that value, weakening or eliminating musical learning and experience, it can justifiably be regarded as focused on music as a means.<sup>13</sup>

In many if not most cases, the values claimed for music as a means, no matter how farfetched they might seem to be, and as unrelated to musical experience they might seem to be, are assumed to occur naturally from musical learnings, musical involvements, and musical experiences. There is usually no intent that the musical focus or content of such learnings, involvements, and experiences be weakened in pursuit of the claimed value. In such cases the value(s) claimed may be considered to be complementary to those of music as an end, adding still other benefits to those resulting as consequences of musical experience.

Music educators are fortunate that the pursuit of musical learnings seems to enhance a variety of positive complementary values: this provides additional arguments for the value of music education. Judgments have to be made as to the ever-present risk that pursuing such values would require significant changes in the focus of the music program. In cases where no risk is evident, or where accommodation to these values can be made with little change to a musically focused program, it is likely to be to the advantage of music education to be gracious and positive in embracing them. When music is forced to serve ends incompatible with the values of musical learning, professional expertise to deal with the issue must be brought into play. Fortunately, such conflicts of values seldom occur.

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to an explanation of significant values of musical experiences and the positive consequences such experiences bring about.

## ***2. Music encompasses mind, body, and feeling.***

For much of Western history, and especially since the influential thinking of the philosopher-mathematician Rene Descartes (1596-1650), mind, body, and feeling have generally been considered to be separate components of human functioning. Descartes was driven to identify an absolutely reliable basis for knowledge, in which all doubt was dispelled. He found that basis in the idea of pure intellect, especially pure mathematics, in which the unreliable, confused, and imperfect senses and emotions have, as much as possible, been eliminated so they are unable to exert their negative influences.

The "highest" values, then, are the values of the disembodied intellect, and the "highest" subjects—those of most value—are the ones in which intellectual capacities are given full opportunities to develop. As a result, the subjects most valued in education, the "basics," are those that require the greatest exercise of the intellect, or intelligence, such as mathematics, languages, and the physical and social sciences. Subjects such as the arts, which are based on feelings, emotions, physical sensations and actions, and certainly not on "pure thought," are decidedly secondary in value, according to this conception. Their values are desirable, worthy of support after the basics have been attended to, pleasantly supplementary to the real work of education, but not, after all, central to or necessary for the solid foundation education is required to build.

The belief that the intellect, or intelligence, is separate from and of higher value than the body or the feelings has so pervaded Western culture for so long as to be, for most, a "given," no longer subject to examination. So long as this belief system endures, it is highly unlikely that music will be regarded as playing much more than a minor role among far more important intellectual endeavors. No amount of "advocacy," of impassioned pleading, of desperate attempts to somehow attach music to values higher on the scale as if that will rescue it from its lesser status, is likely to do much more than win occasional battles for sheer survival, necessary as it may be at present to fight such battles. Something else is needed if music is ever to be regarded as equal in value to the basic subjects required to be studied by all who are to be considered "educated." That

something is a sweeping shift in people's understanding of the nature of mind, body, and feeling. That shift is now well under way.

From a variety of scholarly disciplines, including psychology, physiology, philosophy, neuroscience, anthropology, sociology, and education, powerful, converging arguments are being made for a fundamental transformation in the ways we understand the nature of the human condition. Contrary to Descartes' conception of a disembodied, emotionless intellect, it is rapidly becoming clearer that human cognition, or intelligence, is (1) demonstrated in diverse forms, (2) intimately tied to the body and the ways it functions, and (3) pervaded throughout with feeling. Far more complex than Descartes and his followers could have imagined, the human capacity to know, think, feel, and act—what we call "mind"—requires the interaction of dimensions previously believed to have little to do with one another. The implications for our understanding of music, both as to its nature and its value, are profound.

### *1. Intelligence is demonstrated in diverse forms.*

There is no single, proper, correct form in which human thinking occurs. Instead, a variety of forms of intelligent functioning—of ways to create and share meanings—coexist. Different explanations of the diversity of modes of human thought have been offered, such as Philip H. Phenix's "Realms of Meaning" (Symbolics, Empirics, Esthetics, "Synnoetics" [personal meanings], Ethics, and Synoptics); Howard Gardner's "Frames of Mind" (Linguistic, Musical, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Naturalist, Spiritual or Existential); and the authors in Elliot Eisner (ed.), "Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing" (Aesthetic, Scientific, Interpersonal, Intuitive, Narrative/ Paradigmatic, Formal, Practical, Spiritual).<sup>14</sup> All point to the conviction that thinking, or intelligence, is not limited to the two forms previously conceived to be the only ones in which it could genuinely take place—the verbal and the mathematical.

Musical intelligences, manifested distinctively in each musical role such as composing, performing, improvising, and listening, require "thinking in sounds," the special form of human cognition fulfilled by music. Thinking musically—creating meanings through sounds formed in ways cultures have devised—is an act of intelligence, reason, thoughtfulness, rationality, intellect, and mindfulness. That these words may sound inappropriate when applied to music, as if they somehow render music "academic," or "abstract," or "theoretical," is testimony to how captive we have been to the idea that these words are limited to the linguistic or mathematical thinking modes. Music, as much as those and other modes, as precisely, as accurately, as powerfully, as logically, as broadly and deeply, as genuinely, is a demonstration of the human capacity to think—to be intelligent. Each musical role a culture provides requires a particular way to think in sounds, creating meanings only musically organized sounds are capable of bringing into being. All humans are capable of thinking in musical sounds. It is a fundamental capacity of the human mind.

### *2. Intelligence is intimately tied to the body and the ways it functions.*

Thinking in sounds requires the engagement of the body, as all thinking does. The bodily basis of human reality—the influence of our bodies on how and what we can know and imagine—is becoming clearer through a variety of scholarly enterprises, explained and summarized most usefully, perhaps, in Mark Johnson's *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*.<sup>15</sup> As Johnson explains, "*Any adequate account of meaning and rationality must give a central place to embodied and imaginative structures of understanding by which we grasp our world.*"<sup>16</sup> (Emphasis in original.) Imagination is the power all humans have to perceive things and events as being connected in some way, whether by similarity or difference. It is the power to achieve patterned, coherent experience. Without the imaginative capacity to make connections among what we experience, our lives would be chaotic, completely without form. Meaning would be impossible, as would purposeful action. Human imagination is at the core of human thinking and doing.

In a great variety of ways, human imagination is dependent on the realities of the human body. The body's structure and functions give us the bases for the various ways connections are made within and among our

experiences, including what many have regarded as "pure thought," as if human thinking of any sort could take place elsewhere than within the realities of our bodies. (Johnson gives detailed descriptions of the many ways human thought is "embodied.") Music is a prime example of thinking as being body-centered. Sounds themselves are experienced not by some sort of isolated brain but by the fullness of the brain's connection to the entire body. The "dynamic" qualities of sounds, their movement/energy/vitality characteristics as imagined by composers, performers, improvisers, and listeners, are qualities intimately connected to the movement/energy/vitality of life itself as experienced in and through the body.<sup>17</sup> No wonder music "makes special," touching us, moving us, energizing us, creating coherent, patterned sense of body-mind experience.

### *3. Intelligence is pervaded with feeling.*

The picture of music's value for creating meaning is still not complete. Human intelligence, in addition to taking many forms beyond the verbal and numerical, and in addition to being centered in the realities of the human body, is pervaded throughout with feeling. Although this is not a new idea, it is receiving important support from recent work in neurology, the most dramatic explanation coming from brain researcher Antonio R. Damasio's *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*.<sup>18</sup> Taking direct aim at Descartes' argument for the separation of thinking and feeling, and its negative influence on science over the centuries, Damasio argues that "contrary to traditional scientific opinion, feelings are just as cognitive as other percepts.... Feelings form the basis for what humans have described for millennia as the human soul or spirit."

I see feelings as having a truly privileged status. They are represented at many neural levels, including the neocortical, where they are the neuroanatomical and neurophysiological equals of whatever is appreciated by other sensory channels. But because of their inextricable ties to the body, they come first in development and retain a primacy that subtly pervades our mental life. Because the brain is the body's captive audience, feelings are winners among equals. And since what comes first constitutes a frame of reference for what comes after, feelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense.<sup>19</sup>

The growing recognition of the role of feeling in human cognitive functioning—in the human capacity to be intelligent—shifts the grounding of music's value from the "merely pleasant" to the profound. (See the discussion of Dimension 5 below.) The long-recognized special powers of music to explore, embody, and illuminate the depths and breadths of human feeling are now being recognized as central to human knowledge and understanding.

As a primary way in which mind, body, and feeling are unified in acts of meaning-making, musical endeavors represent a pinnacle of what the human condition exemplifies. The values of music stem from its contribution of special meanings to human life. These meanings are unavailable except through the unified experiences of mind, body, and feeling that music affords. Such involvements, in turn, inevitably have many positive affects on the quality of the interrelated mental, physical, and emotional dimensions of human life.

### ***3. Music is universal, cultural, and individual.***

Since music has existed everywhere that humans have existed it is natural to wonder what values it has bestowed on all humans universally. Are the values of music generic to humans despite the many differences among them (in time, place, race, gender, age, belief system, and so forth)? Conversely, are all musical values specific to particular times, places, races, genders, and so on? Or are musical values entirely individual, each human being uniquely creating and experiencing the values music confers?

Some thinkers, interested in the broadest, most widely shared values of music, have suggested that many universal values of music can be identified. Among these are the values of emotional expression; aesthetic enjoyment; the need to structure reality; the need to share musical experiences and meanings with others; entertainment; spiritual fulfillment; validation and stabilizing of social norms, beliefs and institutions; probing, challenging, and changing cultural norms; providing connection with the vast web of humankind over the ages;

expanding the meanings humans are capable of grasping; and on and on with values transcending particular times and settings.

Other thinkers prefer to focus on the cultural basis of human values. They explain the values of music as being tied to the particularities of beliefs and ways of living in each culture and each subculture. To understand why music is valued by humans, in this view, one must examine the belief system—the value system—each culture has devised, and how music contributes to the values particular to that culture. Music, in this view, is essentially and necessarily a product of singular communities of people, who have created their own norms of what counts as valuable. Without understanding the particular system of values, ideology, and politics in which music exists it is impossible to identify or cultivate musical values, which are always situated in the specific circumstances in which humans live out their lives.

Still another set of ideas about musical value focuses on individual experience. Human reality is, at bottom, unique to each person, a function of each person's ways of thinking, feeling, acting, making meaning, and constructing a sense of place or context. Only individuals, after all, compose, perform, improvise, and listen, even if they do so in cooperation with others. "Cultures," "groups," "families," "races," "nations," "genders," "religions," are all abstractions. What is real is the specificity of the experience an individual has when undergoing it. If music has value it must be explained in terms of each person's particular configuration of mind, body, and feelings comprising that person's selfhood. In acknowledging and honoring each individual's musical values we create a mutually respectful basis for exploring the values of other individuals and other cultures.

What can we make of these different positions about the value of music? Each seems to have validity: each calls attention to a persuasive set of claims. While it might seem that a choice must be made among them, it is possible to reconcile them with an inclusive conception—that all human beings are, at the same time, like all other human beings, like some other human beings, and like no other human beings.

This paradoxical condition is the basis for many of the dilemmas humans face, as when one dimension so dominates as to diminish or even threaten the others. If we concentrate too heavily on universal values we may compromise the validity of and necessity for group identification, with all that such identification adds to the value of our lives. We may also threaten the specialness—the uniqueness—of each human's experience, a quality much to be treasured and protected.

However, if we focus all efforts toward values situated within particular communities we can erect walls that separate, implying that cross-community sharing of values is impossible or undesirable. The bloodiest conflicts in human history have occurred because of over-zealous identification with particular cultural values, trampling on alternative cultures and on individuals with alternative values.

And if we so emphasize individual needs as to forget that every individual is also a member of the larger human community, and of particular communities within it, we can amplify qualities of selfishness and alienation, depriving people of the preciousness of communal membership.

Difficult—perhaps impossible—as it may be to perfectly balance the universality, cultural connectedness, and individuality of the human condition, music educators must continually recognize the validity of the values claimed within each level. The values of all three must be represented because music powerfully serves an essential need in each: (1) the need to experience meanings shared by all members of the species "homo sapiens," (2) the need to experience those meanings fashioned by various communities with similar value orientations, and (3) the need to experience them within the full individuality of selfhood. A person with a healthy musical identity understands music to be a common possession of humans, honors and delights in the distinctiveness of the musical communities of which he or she is a member as well as the musics of other communities that widen and enhance meaningful musical enjoyments, and treasures the personal responsibility to seek musical fulfillments as relevant to an internalized, self-determined value system.

That music so powerfully fulfills values at each level of the human condition is testament to its necessity as a factor in the living of a humane life. It explains why all people have had, now have, and no doubt will continue to have music so long as humans endure as a species.

#### ***4. Music is product and process.***

Many values are attached to products—the results of human endeavors and nature's manifestations. A good loaf of bread, automobile, pair of shoes, job, political system, tomato, sunshiny day, forest, are each, of its kind, prized because of its contributions to human welfare. In music, successful results of creation, whether compositions, performances, or improvisations, are similarly prized because they contribute to our musical welfare, with all the resulting positive consequences for the quality of our lives. We treasure a good song, or symphony, or solo by a favorite jazz musician, or performance by a country fiddler or gamelan or Beijing opera troupe or African drum ensemble, as a source of musical satisfaction and meaning. We honor those musicians, whether composers, performers, or improvisers, who provide us with their products—the outcomes of their musical efforts. In practically every culture some people are recognized to be capable of producing outstanding musical results, and win high esteem for doing so. Often, a musical product or body of work deemed extraordinarily successful is regarded as a cultural treasure, among the most precious achievements of that culture.

For most people the word "music" refers to all products of the sort having whatever characteristics they define as musical. Not surprisingly then, the dictionary defines music to be a noun rather than a verb. This focus on music as being a particular "kind of thing" reflects one major dimension of musical value—the achievement of musical significance as expressed in works of music.

Much of music education is devoted to sharing with students the treasures of successful musical products. The songs we teach in general music classes, or that are published in collections, are chosen partly for their appropriateness for the age and abilities of those who will sing them, but also, centrally, for their quality as successful pieces of music. Similarly for pieces chosen for performing groups; whatever other considerations must be taken into account, the consideration of their musical value is always paramount. This consideration also guides our choice of music to be listened to. Underlying all choices of music is the desire to share the bounties of musical experience available from musical products.

No product, musical or otherwise could exist without the processes that brought it into being. Engaging people in those processes allows them to experience the creation of the product, and therefore to understand and undergo another essential dimension of what the product exemplifies. Experiencing music from the process standpoint, as a creator of compositions, performances and improvisations, and as a creative participant in the meaning-making of listening, shifts the identity of "music" from noun to verb. Music becomes, in addition to being a bearer of realized musical values, a vehicle for realizing those values. Being musically creative, in all the ways this can be accomplished, not only fulfills the human capacity for bringing meanings into existence as only music can do, it also deepens the perspective on the nature of musical meanings. Seen as a particular realm in which creative imagination is brought into play, encompassing mind, body, and feeling, and embracing universal, cultural, and individual levels of experience, creating music exemplifies the human capacity to be generative—to bring meaning into existence.

Every generative musical act is aimed toward an end—to create musical meaning. Without that end in view the act becomes musically meaningless. Every musical end—every result of creating music embodies the sum of the acts of making it. Without those acts there would be no result. Music is result (product) and act (process) interdependently; music is both noun and verb simultaneously. The values of music education for students of any age, but especially for young people, lie primarily in learning how to be more skilled when they are engaged in musical processes. It is natural, then, for music educators to argue that what is important in music education is the process, not the product. There is a danger in forgetting that, in music, process cannot be

separated from product. The fact is, an awareness of process cannot occur without concurrent awareness of product; separating the two violates the nature of music. The widespread myth that process is what counts, not product, is examined by art educator Elliot Eisner as follows:

This myth, related to the one on creativity, argues that what is educationally significant for children is the process they undergo while making something, not what it is that they make. It is argued further that when attention is devoted to the product rather than to the process the child's growth is likely to be hampered; one would be, so to speak, keeping one's eye on the wrong target. It's not what a child makes but how he makes it that is important. I will not take the tack that just the opposite is true. I will not argue that the product is what's important, not the process. I won't do this because I believe that dichotomizing process and product is wrongheaded to begin with. In the first place, there can be no product without some type of process. The processes we use at whatever level of skill shape the qualities of the product that will be realized, whether that product is ideational or material. Similarly the product or end-in-view that we aspire to create shapes the means we employ and provides a criterion against which choices in the present are made. Further, unless some of us here are mind readers we will never be able to see the processes the child is undergoing. What we see are the manifestations of those processes: what they produce. It is from these products that we are able to make certain inferences about process. To disregard what the child produces puts us into an absolutely feckless position for making inferences about those processes. In addition, without attention to what is produced we have no basis for making any type of judgment regarding the educational value of the activity in which the child is engaged. Process and product therefore cannot be dichotomized. They are like two sides of a coin. Processes can be improved by attending to the product and products improved by making inferences about the processes. To neglect one in favor of the other is to be pedagogically naive.<sup>20</sup>

Heeding Eisner's admonition allows music educators a balanced perspective for action and a flexibility to emphasize process or product depending on the context. In a professional situation, such as, say, an orchestra, the musicians are expected to have achieved such high levels of expertise that the barest minimum of process, in this case rehearsal, is needed to produce what the orchestra exists to produce—the finest, most polished realization of its repertoire for its audience to experience. Product orientation drives the professional enterprise, unlike the developmental learning, or process orientation driving the educational enterprise. Of course the professional orchestral musicians, no matter how high their level of expertise, must still be concerned with process; hence their need to continually practice, rehearse, expand their repertoire, and so forth. What differs between children performing as part of their musical education, and professional performing, is the *balance* of process orientation and product orientation.

Keeping an appropriate balance is an ongoing challenge for those responsible for helping young people achieve the fullest possible value from music. For example, music educators involved with performing groups, must, as part of their responsibility, present to the public the outcomes—the products—of their learning. The drive to present a respectable product, especially when doing so brings a variety of coveted rewards, can so overwhelm the need for attention to learning processes as to seriously jeopardize the educational purposes of studying music.

An imbalance in the other direction is just as hazardous. For example, the widespread assumption that in music anything attempted must be, by virtue of attempting it, considered acceptable; that "anything goes" because there are no criteria for success or failure; that just "doing it"—having "hands on"—is desirable whether or not *minds* are on; all reduce process to the trivial. Connecting process to the quality of the product assures the veracity of the process, both musically and educatively.

The values of musical involvements, embracing the specialness of musical experience, the positive consequences of having it, the complementary values accruing to it, and its universal, cultural, and individual dimensions, stem from the interrelation of process and product on which the musical enterprise depends. Achieving an appropriate balance between them is an ongoing responsibility of music educators, no matter the age of their students or the particular musical engagement being pursued.

##### ***5. Music is pleasurable and profound.***

All humans have the capacity to enjoy their lives—to revel in the immediacy of the pleasures life affords. A great deal of time and effort go into, and have always gone into, the pursuit of pleasurable

experience—experience that diverts, amuses, and delights. The pursuit of happiness is, at least to some substantial degree, the pursuit of enjoyment.

Entertainment may be understood as the attempt to provide pleasurable experience. While not all entertainment requires music, much of it does. That is because music has a singular capacity to arouse or elicit experiences that are amusing, uplifting, and delightful. Musical sounds are remarkably effective in their ability to mirror, or embody, the inner qualities of enjoyment—its energy, vivaciousness, zest, and elation. When music, all by itself, is experienced as having such qualities, it entertains— it provides the value of pleasure. When music accompanies a variety of other entertaining activities it adds powerfully to their effectiveness. Music is treasured as a medium whereby humans gain joyful experience.

Along with the capacity and need for pleasure, all humans have the capacity and need to experience life at depths below the surface of the commonplace. All cultures have recognized and attempted to provide means for achieving experiences of deep meaning for their members, experiences variously termed "sacred," "holy," "soulful," "spiritual," or "profound."<sup>21</sup> The world's religions are, to a large extent, devoted to providing such experiences, and many aspects of secular life also strive to impart a sense of deep significance to our experiences. Such experiences, it is commonly believed, are among the most precious humans are capable of having.

Music, in its capacity to achieve a sense of deep significance by going beyond the meanings made available by words to meanings only sounds can bring into being, has always been a major source of, or an important accompaniment to, the quest for profound experience. That is why music's alliance with the sacred is so strong and widespread, and why it is so often regarded with reverence for having the power to deepen experience, the power to console, heal, and restore wholeness, or wellness. Music is an important medium whereby humans experience the spiritual.

Both the pleasurable and the profound are experienced as qualities of "feeling." As pointed out in Dimension 2 above, feeling is inclusive of the mind and the body. The term "feeling" is commonly used when discussing the quality of experience we undergo because that term comes closest to capturing the way we actually encounter experience—we "feel" it subjectively, that is, as something happening within ourselves. The human capacity to feel—to consciously experience one's self and one's world subjectively, including sensations, emotions for which descriptive words exist (love, fear, joy, etc.), and complex feelings for which no words exist—is at the heart and center of the human condition.<sup>22</sup> In a real sense, to feel consciously is to be human. (It is interesting, and telling, that in much of science fiction, nonhuman creatures, masquerading in the guise of being human, are found out as impostors by their incapacity to feel.)

The range of music's power to embody and display feeling is enormous, encompassing the lightest, most fleeting diversions, the most complex and weighty profundities, and everything in between. *No point along that vast continuum of feeling is exclusive of or entirely separate from, implications from other points.* That is, there is significance in the pleasurable and joy in the profound. We would not, and could not, exist at any one level of feeling to the exclusion of others: to do so would be to live a unidimensional life. Music serves human needs to feel by capturing and exhibiting feeling across the entire range of its possibilities. No single experience of musical feeling excludes or diminishes the importance of, and need for, any of the others.

Further, music does not simply imitate, or reproduce, those feelings available from all the other activities and engagements in human life. Music's ability to create feeling and make it available for experiencing inevitably transforms feeling into the materials and processes of which music is created—sounds organized in culturally provided configurations. That is, feeling, at whatever point in the continuum of its possibilities, is transformed by music into "feeling-as-musical," just as feeling in poetry is transformed into "feeling-as-poetic," feeling in painting into "feeling-as-visual," and so forth for all the arts. Musical experience, as all artistic/aesthetic experience, both dwells in the realm of human feeling and transforms that realm into its particular way of being.

In doing so, music is able to add a unique dimension to the capacities of humans to feel. Music goes beyond—makes special, or transforms—the feelings in nonmusical life, adding another dimension to the human capacity to feel, a dimension not available except through music. Music is an essential way to expand, deepen, and vivify the feelings humans are able to experience. It is among the most powerful means humans possess to fulfill their need for an abundantly feelingful life.

No single, particular music is more or less capable of providing significant experiences than others. While evidence is scant about which musics tend to cause deep experiences of feeling, indications are that such experiences take place "within a well-defined community of musical expectations,"<sup>23</sup> in which familiarity and self-identification play important roles. "Soul music"—music in which people find a sense of identity, of selfness, reaching to the core of their personal/communal experience of the world—is a precious, self-defining, and self-realizing possession. While some are likely to "find soul" in the music of the Western classical tradition, because of their societal context, experience, and training, many find their deepest musical satisfactions elsewhere. Fully recognizing this reality, and legitimizing it by respecting and including for study and experience the many musics treasured by people, including but going beyond those of traditional Western styles, remains a pressing agenda for the music education profession.

The need for rich and diverse feelingful experience, so powerfully fulfilled by music, exists throughout our lives. At every age, including infancy, a life being "well lived" is a life being lived with the fullest possible richness of feeling. Whatever the quality of feeling music affords, from the amusing to the soulful, from the fleeting to the indelible, from the frivolous to the passionate, all are precious contributions to a central value humans seem to share—the value of life being fully lived because it is being abundantly experienced. At bottom, this value, with all its ramifications for and support of the many values complementary to it and arising as consequences of it, is likely to provide a foundation on which music educators can build a community of belief, allowing them to act effectively and in solidarity toward helping people benefit from the significant values of music.

### **III. Summary and Conclusions**

The question of why humans value music has eluded all efforts to answer it conclusively despite many attempts throughout history. However, useful explanations have accumulated over time, serving well to provide enough agreement, or persuasiveness, to allow communities of people, such as music educators, to feel that they share a common belief system upon which they can build cooperative actions.

One significant orientation to the values of music has been toward its role in enhancing the depth, quality, scope, and intensity of inner human experience in ways particular to how music operates; ways that distinguish music from other human endeavors. This orientation has preoccupied philosophers of music, whose interests tend to be directed toward understanding the "nature" of music—its particularity as a human creation and the values it serves as such. Taking a philosophical stance, two characteristics of music may be suggested as bases for its values in human life.

1. Music makes human experience "special." It aims to achieve a level of experience different from the commonplace. Music makes ordinary experience extraordinary, or insignificant experience significant. Music creates an alternative to the reality of the everyday; an alternative to the ordinary way of being.

2. Music, unlike all the other arts, depends on the use of sounds, organized in ways various cultures sanction, to create the sense of specialness it adds to human experience. Music is unique in its use of ordered sounds as the basic material by which it accomplishes its "transformation" (passing over from one form to another) of experience.

Five dimensions of musical value may be identified as related to its distinctive nature.

## ***1. Music is end and means.***

1. All the various ways to be engaged in musical experiences—such as composing, performing, improvising and listening—enable both the creation of musical meanings and the sharing of musical meanings with others. The value of doing so is in making available an endless source of significant experiences uniquely gained through music. To seek the meaningful satisfactions of musical creating and sharing is to pursue musical value as an end. This end of musically meaningful experience has been sought by humans throughout history.

2. Many positive consequences grow out of the pursuit of musical meaning as an end. To be human is to make meaning and seek meaning. A life full of meaning, including musical meaning, is a life fulfilled in one of its primary needs. The consequences of such fulfillment are a sense of wholeness, wellness, and satisfaction. Effects on individuals' physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual health are profound. These effects radiate outward to the health of families, communities, nations, and cultures, all of which depend, ultimately, on the well-being of their members.

3. Many values not dependent on the uniqueness of musical experiencing are believed to be gained as a result of involvements with music. When the pursuit of these values requires that musical experiences and learnings be diluted in order to achieve them, music is being used as a means. In most cases the achievement of these values does not require any change from the pursuit of musical values as an end. Such values may then be considered complementary to musical ones, and can be regarded as welcome, positive contributions of programs devoted to musical learnings. Music educators may choose to promote such values to gain additional support for music study.

## ***2. Music encompasses mind, body, and feeling.***

1. The long-standing idea that "thinking" is the supreme capacity of the human mind, and that thinking is separate and distinct from the body and the feelings, is giving way to the recognition that thinking, knowing, and understanding—what is generally called "intelligence"—takes place in a variety of forms and necessarily includes involvements of the body and feelings.

2. Human intelligence occurs in multiple forms beyond its traditional association with verbal and mathematical thinking. Musical ways of thinking demonstrate intelligence in the fullest sense of that word—the mind functioning in a reasoned way to create meaning. The capacity to think musically is inborn in human beings.

3. Intelligence requires the involvement of the body, and the body-centered imaginative power to form connections among experiences. Musically intelligent functioning is grounded in the body's capacity to undergo the dynamic qualities of sound and their interconnections as imagined by composers, performers, improvisers, and listeners. Sound is a particularly powerful medium for engaging the body in acts of creating meaning.

4. Human intelligence, in addition to taking many forms beyond the verbal and numerical, and in addition to being centered within the realities of the human body, is saturated with feelings that vivify and color life. Musical meaning arises from the feelings music allows us to create and share. The unification of mind, body, and feeling in the creation of musical meaning adds an indispensable source of value to human life.

## ***3. Music is universal, cultural, and individual.***

1. At one level, musical meaning is universally sought by all humans and is cherished universally for the values it adds to life. Music can be conceived, at this level, as a generic possession of the human species.

2. At another level, music can be regarded as a phenomenon particular to the culture in which it exists, both reflecting and creating the values and ways of being in that culture.

3. At still another level the values of music can be understood as the possession of individuals. Only individuals create and respond to music, even if cooperatively. "Universals," or "cultures," are only abstractions from individual experience.

4. These three dimensions of musical value need not be conceived as contradictory. All humans are, at the same time, like all other humans, like some other humans, and like no other humans. All three levels of the human condition must be acknowledged as contributing to the values of musical experience: an awareness of all three adds immeasurably to the depth and quality of musical valuing. That music fulfills values at all three levels helps account for its indispensable contribution to the quality of human life.

#### ***4. Music is product and process.***

1. Successful musical products, whether compositions, performances of them, or improvisations, are precious for the benefits they offer to people as sources of significant meanings. Often a particularly excellent musical product or body of work is considered a cultural treasure, representing the highest achievement of which humans in that culture are capable. Much of music education is devoted to sharing with students the bounties of musical meaning embodied in successful musical products.

2. No product, musical or otherwise, can come into being without the processes that create it. Acts of creative musical imagination, involving mind, body, and feeling, and encompassing universal, cultural, and individual dimensions of experience, engage musical intelligence deeply and powerfully in generating meanings. The experience of musical creativity profoundly satisfies the human need to be generative.

3. Music as process and as product are interdependent: one cannot exist without the other and the values of each depend on the values of the other.

An overemphasis of either, at the expense of the other, weakens musical experience and diminishes its value. Effective education in music continually aims toward a balanced representation of both product and process.

#### ***5. Music is pleasurable and profound.***

1. At one level, music is an essential source of pleasurable experience, either by itself or as allied with a variety of other pursuits of enjoyment. The capacity of music to express the energy, zest, and elation of pleasure is endless, causing music to be treasured as a means for gaining the values of life experienced as joyful.

2. At another level, music serves the need for experience below the surface of the commonplace, in which deep meanings are uncovered—meanings often called sacred, or profound. Such experiences of soulfulness, of spiritual significance, are commonly believed to be among the most precious of which humans are capable. Music's alliance with this level of experience has been acknowledged throughout history as adding a profound realm of value to human life.

3. Music *creates* possibilities of feeling available only from music. It does not simply imitate or reproduce joyful or profound experiences available in other ways. No single kind or style of music has sole possession of this capacity; all musics can serve and have served the values of significant experience. The need for such experience exists for all humans, at every time of life from early childhood to old age.

Music education exists to make musical values more widely and deeply shared. While no single explanation can completely and ultimately define music's values, sufficient agreement to provide a basis for communal

action is possible and desirable. At this time in history, a viable belief system for music educators may be achieved if an attitude emphasizing inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness is taken. In this paper an attempt has been made to explain that musical values can be regarded as both end and complementary means; as encompassing the mind, body, and feelings; as being universal, culturally specific, and individual; as deriving from musical products and processes; and as embracing experiences across the entire spectrum of human feeling as made available by the entire array of the world's musics. Each music educator has the responsibility to forge a persuasive professional position from this and other attempts to solve the age-old puzzle of why humans value music.

## Notes

1. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York Basic Books, 1983), 123.
2. A penetrating explanation of recent views in opposition to the search for essences, as exemplified in music, is given in Wayne D. Bowman, *Philosophical Perspectives on Music* (New York Oxford University Press, 1990), chapter 8, "Contemporary Pluralist Perspectives," 356-409.
3. For discussions of the influences of the value dilemmas of contemporary philosophy on visual art education, see Suzi Gablik, *Conversations before the End of Time: Dialogues on Art, Life, and Spiritual Renewal* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), and Ronald W. Neperud, ed., *Context, Content, and Community in Art Education: Beyond Postmodernism* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995). An argument for foundational values of art in face of pluralist views is given in Ellen Dissanayake, *What Is Art For?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).
4. Allen Britton, Arnold Broido, and Charles Gary, "The Tanglewood Declaration," in *Documentary Report of the Tanglewood Symposium* (Washington, DC: Music Educators National Conference, 1968), 139.
5. Estelle R. Jorgensen, *In Search of Music Education* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 69.
6. Interestingly, an influential set of arguments for the necessity of a foundational value system, based on the existence of an underlying human nature, has arisen recently in the scientific community, exemplified by Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Harvard University Press, 1978), and *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).
7. Dissanayake, note 3 above, 92.
8. Francis Sparshott, "Aesthetics of Music: Limits and Grounds," in *What Is Music?* ed. Philip Alperson (New York: Haven, 1987), 89.
9. For a wide-ranging and insightful explanation of the similarities and differences among the arts, see the classic book by Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).
10. Bowman, note 2 above, 2.
11. *The School Music Program: A New Vision* (Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference, 1994), 9-26.
12. This particular situation is the topic in Bennett Reimer, "Facing the Risks of the 'Mozart Effect,'" *Music Educators Journal* 86, no. 1 (July 1999): 37 - 43.

13. For a detailed examination of the dangers of arts education being forced to pursue political agendas rather than artistic values, see Constance Bumgardner Gee, "For You Dear—Anything! Omnipotence, Omnipresence, and Servitude 'through the Arts,' Part 1," *Arts Education Policy Review* 100, no. 4 (March/April 1999): 3-17, and "For You Dear—Anything! Remembering and Returning to First Principles, Part 2," *Arts Education Policy Review* 100, no. 5 (May/June 1999): 3-22.

14. Philip H. Phenix, *Realms of Meaning* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964); Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, note 1 above; Elliot Eisner, ed., *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

15. Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). For an insightful analysis of the role of the body and the imagination in aesthetic experience see Mike Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), chapter 11, "Presence," 335-44, and chapter 12, "Representation and Imagination," 345-69.

16. *Ibid.*, xiii.

17. An explanation of the particular role of the body in performing is given in Bennett Reimer, "Is Musical Performance Worth Saving?" *Arts Education Policy Review* 95, no. 3 (January/February 1994): 2-13. For an exhaustive account of the involvement of the body in music listening, see Marian T. Dura, "The Kinesthetic Dimension of the Music Listening Experience" (Doctoral diss., Northwestern University, 1998).

18. Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: H. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994).

19. *Ibid.*, xv, xvi, 159-60. Also see Dufrenne, note 15 above, 370-425, on the role of feeling in aesthetic experience.

20. Elliot Eisner, "Examining Some Myths in Art Education," *Studies in Art Education* 15, no. 3 (1973-74): 11.

21. For a discussion of the widespread existence of beliefs in music's capacity to provide profound experiences, and a definition of the experience of profundity in music as "being moved deeply in response to music," see Bennett Reimer, "The Experience of Profundity in Music," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 29, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 1-21.

22. Definitions of "affect," "feeling," and "emotion," and an extended account of the role of feeling in intelligent functioning, are given in W. Ann Stokes, "Intelligence and Feeling: A Philosophical Examination of These Concepts as Interdependent Factors in Musical Experience and Music Education" (Doctoral Diss., Northwestern University, 1990).

23. Reimer, note 21 above, 5.