

## SPECIALIZED MUSIC TRAINING

Harold Higa

Several years ago, members of a status study committee of the Hawaii Music Educators Association were surprised but pleased when, in response to a questionnaire on specialized music training, a school on the island of Hawaii listed "string program" as part of its music electives. Upon further inquiry, that "string program" turned out to be a ukulele class, rather than a class in violin or other bowed strings. In this article ukulele and guitar are considered part of a specialized music course called "folk instruments." All courses, other than general music, which focus on the development of instrumental, vocal or theoretical skills come under the heading of "specialized training." In addition to folk instruments, other specialized-training courses include band, chorus, orchestra, wind ensemble, stage band, and music theory. Since a one-semester general music class at the intermediate level is the only *required* music course in secondary education in Hawaii, specialized training courses are elective offerings, occurring most frequently at the intermediate and secondary education levels.

In 1964, the U.S. Office of Education sponsored a twelve-day Seminar on Music Education which was held at Yale University. Thirty-one musicians, scholars and teachers met to discuss problems in music education in our schools. The tangible product of the seminar is a pamphlet titled *Music in Our Schools*.<sup>1</sup> Some conclusions reached by the seminar which are pertinent to this article might be summarized as follows:

1. The primary aim of music education is the development of musicality—"the capacity to express a musical idea accurately . . . and the capacity to grasp in its completeness and detail a musical statement heard."<sup>2</sup>
2. A basic musicality should be developed in the primary grades before the teaching of reading, notating, composing and analyzing is attempted.
3. The main purpose of public performance should be musical experience of the participants, not entertainment for the spectators.

4. The latter can only be realized through the use of the best musical literature available.

Points one and two are obviously related. Since the Hawaii Department of Education has placed a minimal number of music specialists in our elementary schools, it cannot be generally stated that a basic musicality is being developed at that level. Some basic musicianship is being developed by private teachers at parent's expense; but on the whole, students who elect specialized training at the intermediate and secondary level are embarking on a crash course simply because they have not experienced adequate preparation in the elementary school.

In spite of a shaky foundation, many intermediate bands and some intermediate orchestras have been able to produce impressive performing groups. A pattern which has emerged is that brighter students seem to seek membership in the most successful musical group on campus. In most schools in Hawaii, band has the distinction of being the top priority elective. Chorus and general music teachers, perhaps justifiably, complain that their classes are comprised of kids who are not talented enough to qualify for band or orchestra.

Points three and four, which concern public performance and the selection of appropriate musical literature, are perplexing problems which have not been solved since the Yale report. Perhaps not surprisingly, activities which might be considered questionable from the standpoint of music education tend to be obtrusive and make themselves abundantly evident. For example, a vastly greater number of people are spectators at a band's half-time football show than listeners of its spring concert. More publicity is generated when a performing organization is raising funds for a proposed trip than when it is preparing a formal concert. Similarly, the dazzling precision of a marching band led by trim, agile majorettes represents music education in Hawaii to the thousands of tourists and residents who attend our Aloha Day Parade.

Unfortunately, the glitter of colorful performing groups is blinding. When snapped into focus, this showmanship tends to obscure the fine work that takes place in other areas of music education. For example, in addition to the concert band, many schools have a semi-compact group called the wind ensemble, which is usually an extra-curricula honor group created by paring down the concert band personnel. This group is a serious organization which attempts the best wind literature, and often performs with a high degree of polish. Also, many teachers of choral and instrumental music are providing individualized training through ensembles such as trios, quartets, and madrigal groups. In many schools, ensemble activity is possible only during breaks in the regular schedule. In spite of its low visibility, the ensemble experience is without question the most valuable of all performance activities, and probably makes the most lasting impression on the young musician. In ensemble playing each participant learns a bit about conducting, evaluating and composing while performing.

Groups with mass appeal are not limited to marching bands. In Hawaii's schools, large choruses which once attempted works of serious proportions seem to be less active these days than smaller groups composed of multi-talented youngsters who sing, dance, and play instruments. Because of television's influence, it seems that sound alone is no longer adequate. Some teachers assume that the public will be bored unless singing is accompanied by gyrations, complex choreographic maneuvers, and other visual flourishes. Television has been successful in producing spectators of music. In producing elaborate musical extravaganzas, many school groups help to further condition the future spectators of music.

Flamboyant groups that are active and visible tend also to conceal Hawaii's neglected areas in music education. For example, since the majority of our music students will one day become consumers of music, a built-in goal ought to be the development of musical understanding. However, only a few teachers are willing to attempt to teach basic musical concepts and processes through choral or instrumental classes. The materials produced by the Hawaii Music Project were designed specifically for the development of comprehensive musicianship through performance, but to date, these books have been in greater demand on the Mainland than in Hawaii.

Also unseen is the sad state of neglected areas such as the string program. Some of the loss of

appeal of strings is due probably to this generation's demand for loud sounds. The soft and soothing background music in restaurants, hotel lobbies, elevators, and department stores seems to have created a counter-demand for shock-inducing noises. Strings cannot be expected to meet these extremes in sonic demands. Nevertheless, some of our greatest musical literature from Vivaldi to Bartok have been composed for the string orchestra, and any youngster who is interested in exploring these masterworks should be given a chance to do so.

At present, there are 61 band teachers, 31 chorus teachers and only 6 string teachers in Hawaii's public schools. By sheer numbers, school bands will be self-perpetuating. Of the hundreds of band students, at least a few each year decide to pursue band teaching as a career. The diminishing number of string programs, on the other hand, means that there will be fewer potential string teachers.

Is anything being done to achieve a balanced music curriculum in our schools? One significant effort is being accomplished by the Hawaii Music Advisory Council, which includes members of the Department of Education, the Hawaii Music Educators Association and its affiliated groups, the Hawaii Music Teachers Association and the University of Hawaii Music Department Faculty. This council has recently made an in-depth study of course offerings and staffing in music in Hawaii's public schools. Based on the data collected, the Council has made the following recommendations:

1. The Music Advisory Council recommends that the staff of each elementary school include one or more teachers who specialize in classroom music teaching.
2. The Music Advisory Council recommends that each Department of Education educational district make available within a school complex a minimum of one course in each of the following areas:

**ELEMENTARY—**

Wind Instruments (grades 5-6)  
String Instruments (grades 5-6)  
Chorus (grades 4-6)

**SECONDARY—**

Band (grades 7-12, sequence of six years)  
Orchestra (grades 7-12, sequence of six years)  
Chorus (grades 7-12, sequence of six years)  
Stage Band (grades 9-12, sequence of four years)  
Folk Instruments: Guitar, Ukulele, Recorder, etc. (grades 8-12, one-year course open to all students)

Figure 1

School Organization	School Enrollment	Band	Orch.	Chorus	Stg. Band	Folk Inst.	Mus. Theo.	Mus. Lit.	Mus. Wrld.	Gen. Mus.	Staffing Recommendation
7-8	300-600	x		x						x	2
	601-1000	x	x	x		x				x	2-3
7-9	600-1200	x		x		x				x	2
	1201-1900	x	x	x		x				x	3
7-12	600-900	x		x						x	2
	901-1400	x	x	x		x	x			x	3
9-12	600-1900	x	x	x	x	x				x	3
	1901-3000	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	4-5
10-12	500-1500	x	x	x		x				x	2-3
	1501-3000	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	4-5

General Music, including Keyboard (one-year course for grades 7-9; one-year course for grades 10-12)

Music Theory (grades 10-12, sequence of two years)

Music Literature (grades 10-12, one-year course open to all students)

Music in World Cultures, including specific ethnic musics such as Polynesian (grades 10-12, one-year course open to all students)

3. The Music Advisory Council recommends that minimum course offerings in music based on school organization and school enrollment be provided for students in all DOE educational districts. (Recommended minimum offerings, see Figure 1.)

4. The Music Advisory Council recommends that special courses in music—other than those listed under Recommendation 2 as minimum offerings—be provided for students where there is sufficient student-teacher interest and anticipated enrollment.<sup>3</sup>

Among other important positive steps in specialized music training in Hawaii, one should note the following:

1. The University of Hawaii's music education faculty in the Music Department, in conjunction with the College of Education, has established an effective system of monitoring the progress of students engaged in student teaching in our schools.

2. The Hawaii Youth Symphony Association is supporting a pilot project in string classes at Manoa and Noelani Elementary Schools.

3. The Hawaii Music Project, now listed under the College of Education's Curriculum Research and Development Group, is an important innovative movement which will improve music education in Hawaii and the rest of the nation as well.

4. When implemented, the recommendations of the Hawaii Music Advisory Council will make specialized courses available not only to talented students but also to those of less than average ability in music; in a word, to those who need these courses the most.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Claude V. Palisca, *Music In Our Schools—A Search for Improvement* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>For further information on this proposal contact Dr. Malcolm Tait, Music Department, University of Hawaii, and chairman of the Music Advisory Council.

*Since graduating from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music with a Master's Degree in 1950, Harold Higa has served in Hawaii's schools as a teacher of general music, chorus, band, and orchestra. He has served three terms as president of the Hawaii Music Educators Association and one term as president of the Hawaii String Teachers Association. He was a member of the Royal Hawaiian Band for two years and a member of the Honolulu Symphony for three seasons. In 1966, he started the Hawaii Junior Orchestra and served as its conductor for six years. He has been a member of the Hawaii Music Project team since its inception. At present, he is orchestra director, theory teacher, Music Department Chairman of the University Laboratory School, and Associate Professor of Education, University of Hawaii.*