Music for our Children—Challenges and Rewards

- by Keith Ward and Susan Marchant

It is generally agreed that music can and should play an important role in the lives of our children. We hope that the musical seeds planted during these young lives will, with proper nurturing, yield innumerable benefits as the children grow into adolescence and adulthood. As in many communities across the nation, our efforts toward this goal during the 1996-97 school year achieved mixed reviews.

Crisis in USD 250

This past year the music program in Pittsburg’s elementary schools faced a crisis whose importance goes well beyond the borders of a local school district or the struggles of local politics. Indeed, its ramifications are so profound that we have chosen to write about it in this issue of PSU Music Notes.

The Pittsburg Board of Education found itself in a dilemma in 1996-1997. Faced with declining enrollment and shrinking tax dollars, it had to take steps to maintain a balanced budget while preserving a quality education in the public schools. After much deliberation and some public hearings, the Board decided to close two of the five elementary schools and begin a process of laying off teachers, which was codified in the phrase “Reduction in Force,” whose acronym (“RIF”) became the jargon phrase of choice in public discourse.

On the surface, it would appear that well-meaning citizens on the school board took prudent, responsible, and painful steps to address a difficult situation: consolidating schools would reduce operating expenses and supportive operating staff positions, and releasing teachers on a last-hired-first-fired basis was not only equitable, it was the action the Board was legally required to take, due to the agreement it negotiated with the teachers’ union.

The results for elementary music education, however, would have been catastrophic. The RIF would have resulted in the complete elimination of certified music teachers in Pittsburg’s elementary schools. Music, according to the Board, would be taught by elementary teachers who held an “1800 Endorsement,” which is a type of endorsement (soon to be eliminated by the Kansas State Board of Education) that allows an instructor to teach any subject outside of special education. In other words, as good, committed and credibly as an elementary teacher with an 1800 Endorsement may be, she/he would be expected to design and teach a music curriculum with as little as one general music course in her/his own college education.

The PSU Music Department was profoundly disturbed by this development. Besides the obvious intrinsic value of providing children with a creative and productive outlet, extensive research by psychologists, music scholars, and other researchers has demonstrated the benefits of music in the development of a child’s spatial reasoning, the raising of SAT scores, and general improvement in academic performance. Such growth occurs through a systematic and progressive music curriculum, designed and maintained by a person who is trained in the profession. Music faculty — and music teachers in the district — were worried about the crippling effect the lack of qualified instruction would have on the music programs in the middle and high schools of Pittsburg. The faculty was concerned that this decision by Pittsburg’s school board made no distinction between music education and music exposure. Finally, we were distressed that these actions were framed in a way that avoided any focus on the preservation of a quality music program.

In response, the Music Department raised its voice publicly. The entire faculty signed a letter that was sent to the superintendent and the school board. Individual faculty wrote letters to the local newspaper. Chairperson Keith Ward began attending school board meetings and discussing options with individual school board members. Many private conversations were held. Eventually, the general public weighed in: the local newspaper ran feature articles, residents wrote to the newspaper and expressed their sentiments to the school board, and talk of private funding to preserve quality music education in our schools began to be explored behind closed doors.

Fortunately, in the end, all certified music teachers were retained. For now, the crisis has passed. The issues, however, have not, and it is they that we encourage readers of PSU Music Notes to keep in mind. Pittsburg is not unique in facing the challenges of declining tax dollars or resistance to tax increases and bond issues. If a music teacher can be replaced by a generalist, then the actions of our school board have disturbing employment ramifications. Even more important, however, is the value such a move places on music itself: what are we saying pedagogically if we accept a decision in which a person with one general music course is as qualified to teach music at the elementary level as a person who completes a five-year degree in music education? This values statement is one that goes well beyond a staffing issue; it is one that should concern all of us profoundly.

There are steps you can take to avoid a similar crisis in your community. First and foremost, be proactive. Consider ways of keeping music prominent in your school system. Learn more about the music programs in your public schools. Talk with principals and superintendents to learn how they value music as part of a quality education. If you run across an article that speaks about the value of music in a child’s education, whether through its intrinsic value or extra-musical benefits, help your school board make informed decisions by sending it to them. In these days of competing interests and shrinking public resources, consider ways you can be an advocate for something that has flourished in every world culture throughout human history, something that enriches and fulfills life. It cannot continue to do so without your help.

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Calendar of Events

<table>
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<tr>
<th>August</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>Faculty Recital: Brahms, Schubert, Mendelssohn Celebration</th>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Enrollment</td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>Classes begin</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>Solo &amp; Chamber Music Series: Jack the Dog, 7:30 pm</td>
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<td>KMTA Auditions, all day</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>Guest Recital, Carsten Svanberg, trombone, 7:30 pm</td>
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<td>September</td>
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<td>* Southeast Kansas Symphony, Memorial Auditorium, 3:00 pm</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Solo &amp; Chamber Music Series: Robert Weirich, piano, 7:30 pm</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Jazz Concert, University Club, 7:30 pm</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Suzuki String Concert, 7:00 pm</td>
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<td>Faculty Recital: Brahms, Schubert, Mendelssohn Celebration</td>
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<td>Solo &amp; Chamber Music Series: Baltimore Consort, 7:30 pm</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Faculty Recital, Susan Marchant, organ, 3:00 pm</td>
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<td>Student Composers Concert, 7:30 pm</td>
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<td>University Choirs, 7:30 pm</td>
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<td>December</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Solo &amp; Chamber Music Series: Robert Grayson, tenor, 7:30 pm</td>
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*Tickets required. For further information, contact the PSU Department of Music (316/235-4466).

Please consult local news media for changes and/or updates to the above information and for additional calendar events.

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Music for our Children, continued...

Pritchett Grant and Other Signs of Hope

Despite the close call for elementary music education, there were a number of positive developments as well, all reasons to believe that music has a bright future in this part of the world. Thanks to a grant from the Pritchett Trust which is administered by the First State Bank and Trust Company of Pittsburg, selected PSU music students made visits to classes in southeast Kansas schools, the purpose of which was to demonstrate their instruments and talk about their involvement with the Southeast Kansas Symphony. Under the title "Building Tomorrow's Audiences Today," the student ambassadors worked to establish good rapport with the young people and convey the impression that it's "cool" to enjoy great music of all types. They encouraged their new friends to attend the next orchestra concert and to come backstage to greet them following the performance. Dr. Paul Carlson served as grant writer for this project.

KRPS Road Show: "What is Classical Music?"

Another exciting initiative came through the efforts of PSU's public radio station KRPS. Staff members Paul Huybrechts and Flo Rogers travelled to a number of elementary schools in southeast Kansas and southwest Missouri, exploring the world of classical music and why it just might be more to their liking than they had realized. The presentation "What is Classical Music?" was viewed by some 1,000 students and their teachers, and it received rave reviews. Beyond the presentation, each of the students was given an attractive poster; teachers were given copies of National Public Radio's book on building a basic record library, along with a Naxos CD set and guide to classical music.

Continuing Efforts on Campus

There are many indications on the PSU campus that music is alive and well with our region's youngsters. Thousands of them come through the doors of McCray Hall each year for spring music festivals, including those sponsored by Pittsburg State (Mid-America Elementary Festival, PSU Jazz Festival, Four-State Band, etc.) as well as the ones sponsored by the High School Activities Association, for which Pittsburg State serves as host. Add to this the scores of kids who have visited us for demonstrations of the Fisk Opus 106 pipe organ, the school groups that have taken advantage of special group ticket discounts to the Solo and Chamber Music Series concerts, and the many students who enroll each year for lessons through the PSU Music Preparatory Division and the Suzuki String Program....and there is indeed reason to rejoice!
IN MEMORIAM
Gene DeGruson
This summer the university and community mourned the loss of Gene DeGruson, who died at St. John’s Regional Medical Center in Joplin on June 18 as a result of a ruptured brain aneurysm.

A popular figure both on and off campus who perhaps knew and understood the history of this region better than anyone else, he served in a number of capacities at Pittsburg State, most recently as Curator of Special Collections in Axe Library.

Many of us remember Gene not only as an avid music fan, but also as one of the central personalities in the annual Summer Master Class in Vocal Repertoire. His daily sessions on poetry analysis were a vital part of this highly successful offering which was directed for many years by Prof. Margaret Thuenemann. The site for these sessions was the stage of McCray Recital Hall. It was in this same space that family, friends, and colleagues gathered for Gene’s funeral on Sunday, June 22. Charles Cagle of the PSU English Department officiated at the service.

Faculty Briefs...

Todd Hastings, assistant professor, presented the Texas premiere of two pieces by Juilliard composer Eric Ewazen during his DMA trumpet recital at the University of Texas in April.

Carol Hoyt, lecturer, assisted as pianist for this concert. Among his other off-campus activities, Prof. Hastings joined the Kansas City Symphony for a performance of the Mahler Sixth Symphony.

John Hines, lecturer, following a one-year interim appointment to the PSU music faculty, has accepted a teaching assignment at Ball State University in Indiana, where he will teach applied voice.

Robert Kehoe, professor, attended the International Trombone Festival held at the University of Illinois, May 27-31.

Susan Marchant, professor, attended the dedicatory festivities of the new Fisk/Rosales organ at Rice University in Houston. The opening concerts were presented during April by university organist Clyde Holloway.

Lorraine Sims, assistant professor, has had a busy first year as a PSU faculty member. Included in her activities was an appearance as panelist at the national convention of the Music Teachers National Association, held in Dallas during April. The panel, one of the MTNA pedagogy seminars, was titled “Who Should Become an Ensemble Pianist and When Should Training Begin?”

Keith Ward, associate professor, made a presentation to the Southwest Missouri Music Teachers Association during their March meeting in Joplin. His topic was “Home Grown: Piano Teaching Pieces from Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century America.”

Paul Carlson announces retirement

Dr. Paul Carlson has retired from Pittsburg State University after 32 years of teaching. A cornerstone of the Department of Music, he has provided leadership in various university and community programs throughout his distinguished career. Beyond his contribution as a studio teacher of upper strings and his service as first violinist of the Faculty String Quartet and concertmaster of the Southeast Kansas Symphony, Paul has been vitally interested in international education and the continuing effort to put Pittsburg in touch with many corners of the world. In recent years, he has devoted much of his summer time to international travel, presenting concerts and masterclasses in South America and various parts of Asia, including China, Taiwan, South Korea, and North Vietnam. As an officer in the Kansas-Paraguay Partners, he has also helped to facilitate other musicians' travel between the two regions.

Closer to home, he has served as administrator of the Waddill String Fund and has been a principal liaison with the Music Advisory Council, the Friends of the Southeast Kansas Symphony, and the Friends of Timmons Chapel. Although his retirement plans include more travel opportunities and time for projects put "on hold" over the years, he hopes to remain actively involved in many of these important endeavors. This comes as great news to members of the McCray Hall family, as it means that Paul's warm smile and gentle, caring manner will be close at hand.

In recognition of his many years of dedicated service to the university, a new scholarship fund has been established at PSU in Paul's honor. Friends, colleagues, and former students who would like to support the Carlson String Scholarship are urged to contact the PSU Department of Music or the PSU Foundation for further information.

New Faculty Appointments

Three musicians will be joining the faculty of the Department of Music this fall. The next issue of PSU Music Notes will offer more information about our new colleagues.

Wei-Kan Zhou, violinist, comes to us from a teaching position at Arkansas State University. Dr. Zhou succeeds Dr. Paul Carlson as the upper string specialist in the department.

Lynne Garrett, pianist, leaves a post as director of accompanying at the University of Central Arkansas in Conway. She succeeds Prof. John MacKay as he enters the final stage of a phased retirement program.

Richard Davis, baritone, travels north to us from the University of Southwest Louisiana. He succeeds Dr. Paul Huybrechts as a studio voice teacher and director of the opera program.

ALUMNI NEWS

Have we heard from you lately? If not, please take a moment to complete the response form and return it to us! This is the best way to keep our files updated and to share news of your recent activities with other members of the PSU Music Alumni network. Thanks!

Lori Bolton (BME '96) has accepted a one-year position as an English/Debate teacher in the Fort Scott public schools. Prior to this, she had taught elementary music in the Leavenworth district.

Harlan Bryan (MM '96) has been appointed band director for the Coldwater, KS schools.

Beth England (BME '96) has accepted a one-year appointment as associate director for the Baptist Student Ministry at Lewis Clark State College in Lewiston, ID. In this position, she will provide leadership in the areas of music and Bible study.

Gary Green (BME '74) writes that he is continuing his portrayal of "Manny" in the show Master Class on its first national tour. The production, which stars Paye Dunaway, is playing in major cities across the United States...

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and Canada through November '97, and it's
affording Gary many opportunities to see
friends from his PSU days.

Carla (Allegre) Henson (BME '77) writes
that, after 18 years of teaching orchestra, her
assignment at Riverton High School has now
changed to include the middle school band.
She is also chair of the Fine Arts Department
at the school. This expansion of duties
accompanies her return to full-time teaching
following eight years of a half-time school
appointment which allowed her time to be with
her daughters, Ashley and Shelby. Carla
continues to play cello, most recently with the
Celtic Connection ensemble at festivals
throughout the region.

Janet Hubbard (BM '87) and her husband,
James Downes, are the proud parents of a new
daughter, Alicia Victoria Ceuffin Downes, born
January 16 in Moses Lake, WA. Janet
continues in her work at Big Bend Community
College, where she manages all Title III federal
grant activity and serves as Director of the
Center for Educational Resources and
Technology.

Susan Laushman (MM '94) has resigned
from her position as vocal director at Pittsburg
High School to accept a full-time appointment
as vocal director for the Carl Junction, MO public
schools, where she will succeed Sharon Owen.

Jerry Lovejoy (MM '97) has left his position
as music instructor at Messenger College,
Joplin, in order to move back to his native
California. He will pursue career opportunities
in the San Jose area.

David Lowe (att. '76-'77) has continued to
live in the New York City area since his
graduation from the Juilliard School with BM
and MM degrees in voice and opera. He has
been a soloist with several major orchestras and
has performed leading roles with the Texas
Opera Theatre, Spoleto Festival (both USA and
Italy), Wolf Trap Opera, Santa Fe Opera, and
others. Recently, he has served as an extra
chorister with the Metropolitan Opera and has
performed at Carnegie Hall in Verdi's Requiem
and Berlioz's Damnation of Faust. He toured
Japan with the company this June in these two
concerts. Luciano Pavarotti was tenor soloist
in the Verdi. David is a proud former student of
"Miss T" at Pittsburg State.

Jeannie (Habernehl) Norris (BM '68)
sends word of her appointment in July '96 as
the Ninth Head of School at Miss Hall's School,
a girls' boarding and day school in Pittsfield,
MA. She notes that this is the first time since
graduation from PSU that she has not been
professionally employed as either a school or
church musician. Jeannie earned a master's
degree in musicology from Temple University,
after which she headed a music department in
an independent day school in Philadelphia. She
then moved into the area of school
administration, serving as director of
admissions and then assistant head at the
Madeira School in McLean, VA. At that point
in her career, she still found it possible to hold
a concurrent position as church organist, but she
reports that her present responsibilities with 140
adolescent girls have made regular playing a
challenge.

Sharon Owen (MM '82) will leave her
position as director of vocal music for the Carl
Junction, MO High School in order to take up
similar responsibilities at Ruskin High School
in Kansas City.

Nancy Holman Richwine (BME '68) has
left her post at the Cassville, MO High School
and will begin serving the Humboldt school
district as director of their bands and high school
choir. Nancy reports that she married her high
school sweetheart on June 13. The couple will
reside in Stark, KS, where her husband runs a
grocery store that serves the surrounding
communities.

Jennifer Sager (BME '97) has been
appointed to the music staff of the Carthage,
MO public schools. She will serve as assistant
director for the high school band and will also
teach elementary music. Jennifer's excellence
as a young teacher was recognized through her
selection for the PSU Outstanding Student
Teacher Award in secondary education.

Ron Warford (BM '95) has been promoted to
the position of full-time music instructor at
Ozark Christian College in Joplin, MO. His duties
there cover a wide variety of activities, from
applied study to ensemble direction to electronic
music. Ron will also be associated with the well-
known summer youth program, Highest Praise.
Ron's wife, Joann (BM '95) is a part-time voice
instructor at OCC and is continuing her work on
the MM degree in vocal performance at Pittsburg
State.

Matt Whittier (BM '97) will begin work on an
MM degree in trombone at the University of
Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music this
fall.

Andrea (Baker) Wilkerson (MM '91)
presented a vocal Valentine Jazz Concert at the
new Sophia B. Clarke Performing Arts Center in
Walnut, CA. This performance, which yielded a
standing ovation from the capacity crowd, also
featured Andrea's husband Steve (MM '89) on
reeds and an ensemble of all-star jazz
colleagues. A CD of the concert will be available
soon. Check the Internet at http://
www.MtSAC.edu for information.

Obituary

Marguerite Theis (BME '33) died on
February 6, 1997 in Pittsburg. A violinist, she
also earned a master's degree from
Northwestern University in 1942 and performed
with the Tulsa Symphony Orchestra and several
ensembles at the UMKC Conservatory of Music.
Marguerite had a distinguished career as a music
educator, serving at various points in her life
schools in Cherokee, Paola, and Kansas City, KS.