

Music Education

Source Readings from Ancient Greece to Today

Edited By Michael L. Mark, Published by Routledge



Reviewed by
Doug Goodkin

This is a book that will help music teachers feel that they are not alone. It appears that people have been eloquently defending the need for music education in the West for at least a few thousand years. Plato, St. Augustine, John Ruskin, Friedrich Froebel, and John Dewey are just a few of the luminaries included in this book who suggest that humanity needs music and that music needs education.

This book offers a wealth of answers about why music is essential to our physical, mental, moral and spiritual health, spread out in almost 100 short articles (most are one or two pages long.) The range of the prose – from sublime poetry to metaphysical discourse to scientific diction – is both refreshing and enlightening. The book is organized into three parts: "European Views from Plato to A.S. Neil," "American Views between 1700 and 1950" and "American Views Since 1950." To go to the next school board meeting armed with a few choice quotes from Aristotle, Martin Luther, John Locke, Horace Mann and Howard Gardner may help remind us all that many of the founders of both classical and modern education fully intended music to be included in the plan.

But to read this book solely for the practical purpose of defending music education is to miss part of its power. This work invites us to reflect on why we have chosen this path and to remember what an important service we are offering to children.

These articles give language to our experience and such testimony is always welcome.

It is a thankless task to edit such a book: important people are invariably left out. In this case, I missed the words of Carl Orff and Zoltan Kodaly (Jaques-Dalcroze is included). I sent Mark a sample of Orff's words, and he assured me they would be included should a second edition be issued. It is worth noting as well that the book confines itself to Western European and American thought and practice. I can imagine a companion volume surveying how Bulgarian, Burmese, Brazilian and Botswanian thinkers discuss the role of music in education being a valuable resource.

An additional bonus of such a collection is its long-range historical perspective. It is illuminating to compare how the authors speak of music's importance and what tone they take to convince. These days, we are inclined to simplified sound bytes ("music makes you smarter") and scientific justification ("research shows"). But in 1837, the Boston School Committee sought to convince the public school system to include

music in the curriculum with an eloquent and poetic piece – and they succeeded. Could the same speech work today? Try it!

"If Music enlivens prosperity or soothes sorrow, if it quickens the pulses of social happiness, if it can fill the vacancy of an hour that would otherwise be listlessly or unprofitably spent, if it gild with a mild light the chequered senses of daily existence, why then limit its benign and blessed influence? Let it, with healing on its wings, enter through ten thousand avenues of the paternal dwelling."

