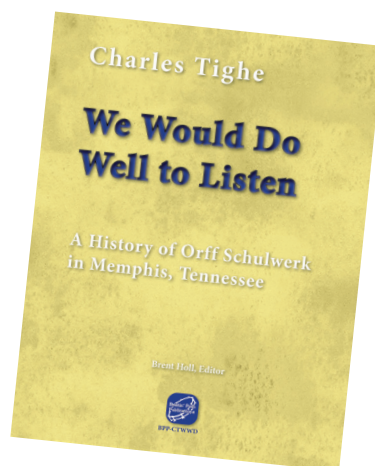


Reviewed by **Martha M. O’Hehir**

## We Would Do Well to Listen

Written by Charles Tighe/Edited by Brent Holl  
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**C**harles Tighe’s *We Would Do Well to Listen*, published as the first research-based book in Beatin’ Path Publications’ practical catalog, is a cutting-edge resource recounting the history of the Memphis Orff Institute. The title of this book is a quote from Shirley McRae, who was an Orff levels teacher educator and children’s teacher in Memphis, Tennessee. In April 1970, after race riots and the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy, McRae said, “There are no easy teaching positions, but surely those persons working in our strife-ridden urban schools are making an extraordinary contribution to the lives of youngsters. **What they are saying is relevant, and we would do well to listen**” [emphasis added by author].

The book is divided into two large sections. The first section profiles the innovative history and individuals of the Memphis City (now Shelby County) School District who developed their own relevant, child-based, American approach to music education through Orff Schulwerk. The second section showcases a large sampling of compositions created by the Institute’s faculty, for and with their students.

Tighe contextualizes the Memphis program by first connecting the reader to the rich soil that nurtured American music in the city of Memphis. By the 1960s, Memphis was well known for its

assemblage of highly talented African American musicians contributing to the growth of American music in all its glory—multiple genres of jazz and soul, blues, rockabilly, rock and roll, folk, gospel, and even opera. “On Beale street, you could hear Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, or Louis Armstrong, Marion Anderson, and J. Robert Bradley,” wrote the author. Local idols also included Isaac Hayes, Wilson Pickett, and Booker T. & the M.G.’s.

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Tighe then tells the stories of how Nancy Ferguson, Konnie Saliba, Shirley McRae, and Carol King—four visionary American teachers trained in Toronto at the first Orff Institute in North America—implemented the Orff approach in the Memphis City School District. They quickly learned that good Schulwerk process did not lie in imposing a European classical music genre, with German and English folksong repertoire, onto children who had their own rich heritage of play parties, counting out games, and incredible music being played and recorded in Memphis. Instead, they embraced Orff’s mandate to “teach the children to make their own music,” by creating along with the children and bringing more well-known folk music into the classroom. When Jos Wuytack, a Belgian priest, organist, composer, and pedagogue joined the faculty at Memphis in 1971, he had already completed the

Flemish and the French versions of the *Music for Children* volumes under the direct guidance of Carl Orff, who approved many of Wuytack's own compositions for those volumes. Wuytack's first gift to American teachers was the confidence that the Schulwerk begins with local musical materials.

Accordingly, in Memphis, the repertoire was local and child-friendly. Shirley McRae, a church musician, brought spirituals and folk songs; Nancy Ferguson, a professional jazz performer, brought jazz and blues; Konnie Saliba brought Appalachian folk music. Wuytack brought international folk music, pedagogical "activation techniques," and some tried and true, thinner-textured arranging formulas that served to set the voices of children to advantage, to provide easy-to-implement arranging patterns for classroom composing, and to highlight the identifying characteristics of various genres. Carol King transformed recorder instruction for levels programs by choosing a sequenced progression of folk materials and skills acquisition. She applied Wuytack's activation techniques and added visual aids, providing a model not just for levels classes, but also for recorder instruction that teachers could implement in their classrooms. Each of their stories is developed independently, from their unique perspectives.

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The second part of Tighe's book features samples of the repertoire from that era, arranged, scored, and ready for study as models for your own composition and teaching. The musical examples were crafted by the founders and faculty of the Memphis program and demonstrate a pedagogically sound departure from the thick-textured arrangements in the German *Music for Children* volumes towards the

more transparent orchestration techniques Tighe outlined. Readers will find more supplemental historical materials available online through Beatin' Path Publications.

Just as we do now, the founders of the Memphis Orff program worked within the framework of their understanding and context to use the music of children and honor their African American and Southern folk music heritage. By today's standards for classroom song selection, a few of the tunes in this collection may need to be delicately contextualized for use in the classroom, if used at all. Tighe received these songs, however, from the primary sources and culture bearers who emphasized, "These are our songs, the songs we sang in childhood." After much reflection, Tighe asked himself, "Who am I, as a historian, to delete these pieces from the repertoire?" As with these early teachers, our choices and repertoire will continue to evolve as we grow our historical and cultural knowledge and understanding. We can still glean compositional and arranging techniques from these early orchestrations.

It would be wonderful if more of us could emulate Charles Tighe's excellent sleuthing and scholarship and one day publish the histories of our mentors and Orff Levels programs. Throughout the book, readers are inspired by the dialogic spirit of the Schulwerk, the needs of the time, the philosophies of the day, and the call of the heart, all conjoined with the talents of many colleagues—politicians, administrators, community activists, and music teachers—to create a genuinely American wildflowering of the Schulwerk. What a story it is ... and we all would do well to listen! ■

**MARTHA M. O'HEHIR** holds master's degrees in music education from Shenandoah Conservatory and in educational leadership from Johns Hopkins University. She has completed three levels of Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education and Master Classes and has served on the editorial boards of *The Orff Echo* and *Reverberations*. Martha helped create the first PLN on *Elementaria* and adapted Schulwerk pedagogy for teaching adults to improvise in modes on their various instruments at the bedside. She currently serves on *The Orff Echo* editorial board.