

World music for schools

by Anne Norman

For the past one and a half years I have been conducting workshops in Japanese Music in primary and secondary schools in Victoria. This service has been primarily accessed by language teachers and Japanese departments rather than music teachers. Partly this has been because of the way I have marketed the service, but I also suspect that the music teachers are reluctant to teach 'ethnic musics'. Is this due to an ignorance of music traditions other than their own (whether that be 'High Art European Music' or 'Western Rock 'n' Roll') and thus a fear of the unknown, or is it based on a belief that the study of 'ethnic musics' or ethnomusicology will not help educate their students to better appreciate the fundamentals of music?

While I do not believe in the concept that 'music is the universal language' (it is almost as ludicrous to state that English is the universal language), I do feel that lessons in the art of listening and a fundamental analysis of the nature of sound through time is possible no matter what one listens to. Tuvan throat singing, Koorie songs of the dreamtime and Italian bel canto are universes away from each other, however, the act of singing performs a similar set of functions within disparate societies (while the concept of 'singing' may often be quite differently explained). Many cultures have developed high art music traditions with sometimes quite complex theoretical systems of analysis and music education. Musicians through the generations have developed methods of passing on their music tradition which in some cultures have lead to the development of notation systems and mnemonic codes.

As a musician trained in European art music through the Melbourne Conservatorium, I naturally approach any new music which I encounter with a certain set of learnt analytical and aesthetic responses. These tools and responses have been continually modified as I have been exposed to more and more musics which come from traditions foreign to my initial training. The first time I heard a recording of Balinese

gamelan music it all sounded delicious yet indistinguishingly similar. It wasn't until I spent some months in Bali sitting in on rehearsals taking notes and recordings and taking music lessons with the practitioners that I began to be familiar with certain compositions, arrangements and styles. Likewise my years in Japan opened up whole universes of musical styles and aesthetics which had previously been unknown to me.

It seems to me that today's children are much more exposed to all types of music than I was in my childhood. The soundtracks to movies, TV shows and even TV commercials use either live or sampled grabs of a gamut of instruments and compositional styles from around the globe (sometimes all at once). We are all continually exposed to sounds which we would have problems naming. Some of these are electronically generated, and those of us unfamiliar with electronic music processes would not be able to identify the probable method of generation. Likewise the culture of origin of a particular compositional process or a specific instrument is usually something which most people do not know or question.

Exposing our students to the music cultures of the world which are all contributing to today's world music culture would be an excellent element in our school curriculums. Likewise, the physics of music, or an acoustical understanding of sound is an important step in the education of any listener let alone any musician. These principals can be grasped through any form of music, taking the right approach.

I would therefore encourage music teachers to regularly expose themselves and their students to new musical experiences, whether that be exploring a different style of music, a different era of music, a different sound source or a different music culture.

In Australia we have the best climate in the world for

accessing expert practitioners of an enormous range of music traditions. In Melbourne I am in regular contact with outstanding practitioners of Vietnamese, Chinese, Indonesian, Indian, Japanese, Greek, Cuban, African, Irish, Brazilian music traditions. Why not invite one of these sources of knowledge and music making into your classroom and give your students a chance to hear and make music which opens up their listening world. Having said that, I would recommend that schools do not simply use these people as a form of mindless mass entertainment, but rather approach the experience from a sound pedagogical base. Small workshops with demonstrations and discussion usually achieve the best results. Physically touching an instrument or singing a song or asking direct questions are all experiences which last in a student's memory far longer than sitting in a large hall having difficulty seeing, hearing and concentrating.

Budgeting for at least one guest artist per year in your departmental budget is a good idea. Many schools take a small levy from the students to contribute towards a guest artist's visit. Feel free to negotiate the fee with the artist, but please put yourself in their shoes when settling on a fee. Many schools only consider their own budgetary constraints

and expect outside individuals to be sympathetic to the school's needs rather than sticking to good business practice of a set fee for a set service.

Be adventurous in your outside listening life and in your classroom listening and music making activities. If you need help, there are experts out there to call on. Some are better communicators than others, but if you do a bit of research yourself, a visit by a guest artist could start you on a track of a whole new music educational method. Good luck!

Anne Norman has a Bachelor of Music (Melbourne University) and a Masters in Ethnomusicology (Monash University). She has also had postgraduate training in Japanese music at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music. Anne is a professional shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute) performer regularly performing in Melbourne. She has released four CDs, and in addition to teaching shakuhachi, runs the Japanese Music in Schools program (JMIS). Anne visits schools in the capacity of consultant, performer, teacher and facilitator for music and language events based on the Japanese culture. Anne has written a bilingual play for Primary schools with musical accompaniment by a student band comprising a combination of classroom instruments and hired Japanese instruments. Anne may be contacted through AMN Productions, suite 350, 45 Glenferrie Rd, Malvern 3144. Phone/Fax: (03) 9387 2126. E-mail: amncrow@vicnet.net.au



Anne Norman demonstrates the koto to onlooking students.