

Making Music: Composing New Music *with* Young Musicians

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Abstract

The different ways that young musicians interpret sound and the varied levels of technical ability among them produce unique challenges for composers creating new music for students enrolled in elementary and secondary school music programs. These challenges cannot be resolved by conventional methods alone, that is through textbooks, score study and listening activities, but require problem-solving and contact with young performers. This study will explore the creative solutions that composers implement in generating educational music with the collaboration of teachers and their students.

Keywords: music composition; educational music; pedagogical music; collaborative composition

The Problem of Complexity

The music of many contemporary composers is inaccessible to young musicians, and consequently, it has virtually no impact on their musical education. The fundamental problem is that composers in conservatories and universities learn highly developed compositional techniques playable only by professional performers for specialized audiences. Music has become, as Sir Harrison Birtwistle of the UK comments, “a mysterious thing and slightly holy in a way, something you don’t tamper with” (from Ross, 1998, p. 255). Juraj Hatrik of Slovakia (2002) notes that many composers do not know how to write using musical language that is comprehensible to young people and need to learn how to do so. Michael Colgrass (2004), a Canadian composer, expresses the problem quite succinctly when he commented on his experience writing for a school band: “I could write complex, highly demanding pieces, but I simply didn’t know how to write interestingly for amateur musicians, let alone 12 year-olds.” (p. 19).

American (Adorno, 1980), European (Viera de Carvalho, 1999) and Australian (Walker, 1997) music researchers attribute the complexity of contemporary music to the dynamic changes in music during the twentieth century. The introduction of atonality and serialism represented a logical extension of the historical evolution of Western-European music beyond tonality. The rise of mass media fostered access to world musics and introduced the intricate nuances of alternate modalities, vocalizations and tuning systems on a much broader scale. As a consequence of these developments, music became more complicated, difficult to understand, and more challenging to perform. The German scholar Rudolf Frisius (1981) noted that an alternative method of composing emerged with the advent of the electronic field; that is, electro-acoustic music with its own theory and practice. Initially, this approach involved *musique concrète*, electronic sounds and taped music. With the rapid advances in technology, electro-acoustic composing now involves analog and digital synthesis, the use of multi-media computers and the development of alternate forms of representation, such as graphic notation. As the British composer Edward Williams (2001) noted, it also engenders innovative ways of manipulating and conceptualizing sound, and offers new possibilities for integrating music with other art forms through multi-media.

Contemporary composers have adapted to the changing musical landscape, and they use acoustic (e.g., traditional instruments), environmental (e.g., nature) and electronic (e.g., digital sampling) modes of composition. Many of them employ a broad range of compositional techniques (e.g., tonal, atonal, serial) and media (e.g., synthesizer, computer) in their works. Few twentieth-century composers, however, have successfully written major works for young musicians with the notable exceptions of the European composers Bela Bartok, Paul Hindemith, Zoltan Kodaly and Carl Orff.

Others have introduced alternative approaches to music composition in classrooms through the use of environmental sounds, peer assistance and group compositions, notably John Paynter (1982) in England and Murray Schafer (1977) in Canada. Paynter's work has impacted on the national music curriculum in the UK; however, Schafer's approach has not been integrated into mainstream music education programs in any systematic way (Andrews, 2004a; Carruthers, 2000). Researchers in Germany (Kim, 1995) and Australia (Gillies, 1990) have undertaken analyses of Hindemith's and Bartok's educational compositions, respectively, to obtain insights into their success. Their studies provide useful information on the nature of these musical works, such as the sequencing of rhythmic patterns. Unfortunately, we do not learn how the composers conceptualize, compose and refine music for young musicians.

The Challenge of Educational Music

The varied levels of technical ability among young musicians and the different ways they interpret sound and produce unique challenges for composers creating new music for students enrolled in elementary and secondary school music programs. These challenges cannot be resolved by conventional methods alone, that is through textbooks, score study and listening activities, but require problem-solving and contact with young performers. This study will explore the creative solutions that composers implement in generating new music with the collaboration of teachers and their students. It is based on the assertion that the development of high calibre music appropriate for young people is contingent on effective practice; that is, on successful engagement among composers, students and teachers in the creative process within classrooms, studios and rehearsal halls. By examining the relationship of music composition to music learning through the co-creation of new music by composers, teachers and students, this study will contribute to the Canadian repertoire for young people and improve the quality of educational music. Partnerships survive when students' educational needs are the central focus of the partnership, partners problem-solve, learn and change, and when there is strong leadership and consistent program development, advocacy, documentation and evaluation (Colley, 2008; Seidel & Eppel, 2001). Partnerships fail when communication among partners is inadequate, time and funding are constrained, leadership is ineffective, and when there are substantive complicating factors, such as timetable conflicts, which mitigate against artist/teacher collaboration (Arts Education Partnership, 2001). The most vibrant partnerships actively engage students in learning (Meiners, Schiller & Orchard, 2004; Smithrim & Uptis, 2005), involve schools, universities and community organizations (Arts Education Partnership, 2002), allocate sufficient time and space (Wilkinson, 2000), provide a high level of administrative support (Doherty & Harland, 2001), and understand the unique nature of arts education (Burton, Horowitz & Abeles, 1999). In the view of arts and educational leaders, arts partnerships can be sustained within the educational community when they improve students' overall academic performance, enhance teacher expertise, and extend the influence of schools in improving their surrounding communities (Arts Education Partnership, 2000).

Personal Experience

As a composer, I had undertaken the challenge of writing for young musicians (e.g., *The Well-Tempered Brass*, *Concertante for Strings*), and also experienced the frustration of obtaining adequate renditions of the works. Moreover, although I had 15 years of experience teaching and administering music programs in elementary and secondary settings, and 25 years in faculties of education, a pedagogical mind-set did not seem to improve matters much. As a researcher, I was aware of the literature on the generative processes of music from two perspectives: i) what children can achieve when improvising and writing simple melodies (Bolden, 2004; Burnard & Younker, 2008; Davidson & Scripp, 1988; Hall, 1998; Kratus, 1989; Robazza et al., 1994; Ward-Steinman, 2006); and ii) how little know we know about how composers actually compose (Bennet, 1976; Freund, 2011; Gardner, 1993; Hoover & Stanley, 2009; Krumhasl, 1991; Lerdahl, 1988; Phillips & Pierson, 1997; Reicher, 2000; Sloboda, 1988). As an educator, I was aware of the major initiatives of the Canadian Music Centre to promote Canadian music in classrooms. The John Adaskin Project is a multi-year initiative that involves cataloguing, grading and producing guidelists of Canadian music for young musicians (e.g., MacInnis, 1991; Shand, 1993; Stuble, 1990; Walter, 1994). The ComPoster music education kit is comprised of cassette recordings with an accompanying teacher's manual (Canadian Music Centre, 1992); *Creating Music in the Classroom* involves composers composing in schools; The Norman Burgess Memorial Fund commissions new string music for young musicians; and *Composers in Electronic Residence* involves composers critiquing student compositions via the internet (Barwin, 1998).

Despite these efforts, there is still a limited amount of new music performed and studied in schools (Bartel, Dolloff & Shand, 1999; Shand & Bartel, 1998) and in post-secondary institutions (Andrews & Carruthers, 2004). The Centre is well aware of the situation and of the need to promote its services to the education community, and it is supportive of research in this area (e.g., Andrews, 2005).

I was intrigued by the notion of developing an understanding of the parameters of pedagogical composition by working with professional composers. The Ontario Regional Director of the Canadian Music Centre was equally convinced that composers could write effectively for young musicians and, by reflecting on the process in collaboration with each other, we could develop useful guidelines for improving the quality of educational music. With the support of the Ontario Regional Council, we applied for a Canada Council Millennium Grant to commission 30 professional composers to write new music for young musicians in elementary and secondary schools. As a consequence, the Canada Council in collaboration with all the provincial arts councils commissioned 98 associate composers across Canada from each of the CMC regions (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, and British Columbia) to compose new works for young people in a project entitled *New Music for Young Musicians*.

Previous Research on Educational Music

The Ontario composers participated in an evaluation study in which they submitted a questionnaire on the conceptualization of their new works, responded to emerging questions and completed a reflective report on the refinements to their compositions in the field. The findings of the questionnaire indicated that they employed compositional techniques (e.g., short melodic phrases) to reinforce learning and to maintain attention, prior experiences with young people were invaluable to accurately gauge students' technical abilities and developmental levels, and adjustments to their compositions were technical rather than stylistic (Andrews, 2004b). Responses to emerging questions indicated that pedagogical composing does not differ substantively from professional writing, a fluid musical form is often employed to adapt to student needs, and blending traditional and atonal idioms represents a post-modern rather than a pedagogical approach (Andrews, 2007). The reflective report findings indicated that the composers' experiences in the classroom with students helped them to confirm appropriate technical requirements (i.e., feasible note values, intervals, ranges), skill proficiency (i.e., melodic and rhythmic complexity, tempo), and interpretation (i.e., appropriate phrasing, dynamics and articulations) (Andrews, 2006a).

The *New Music Project* served as the impetus for pursuing the SSHRC-funded study entitled *New Sounds of Learning: Composing for Young Musicians*. In this study, the Canadian Music Centre commissioned 8 composers with funds from the Ontario Arts Foundation to write new string works for young musicians in schools and studios. The Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB) also participated in the research by commissioning 8 composers to write new wind works. In implementing the study it was discovered that there was not a consensus among music publishers on the levels of difficulty for composing and promoting educational music. Consequently, a Music Complexity Chart (MC²) was developed and validated to address this problem (Andrews, 2011). Findings from the *New Sounds of Learning Project* indicate that compositional techniques can impact on music learning, such as short melodic units to obtain attention; pulsating rhythms to refine motor responses, and equality of parts to maintain interest (Andrews, 2009). The study also found that the key factors for composing educational music are students' level of ability, their technical proficiency, pedagogical development, challenge, musical quality and enjoyment (Andrews, 2013; Andrews & Giesbrecht, 2013). Above-all, there are specific conditions necessary to successfully write educational music: composers should 1) have direct contact with the students; 2) acquire a working knowledge of the instrument(s); 3) desire to compose good quality and pedagogically valid music; and 4) obtain knowledge of the students' capabilities (Duncan & Andrews, 2015).

Given the successful premieres of the new compositions in the local schools and communities of both the *New Music Project* and the *New Sounds of Learning Project* and the depth of the findings from these studies, it was apparent to the research team and to personnel from the participating organizations that further research was needed. There was a consensus that it would be helpful to understand how musical ideas can be initiated and organized to promote musical development. Such knowledge would improve the pedagogical quality of compositions composed for young musicians, thereby increasing their educative value to the school curriculum.

Further, there was a consensus that a research partnership should be developed to extend the research and focus on the relationship of music composition to music learning by involving students and teachers directly in the creative process. Subsequently, two new research projects were developed. *Sound Connections: Composing Educational Music* (Andrews, 2015) was initiated in partnership with the Canadian Music Centre; and *Making Music: Composing with Young Musicians* in partnership with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. The latter project is the focus of this article.

Methodology

The *Making Music Project* is a qualitative study employing a multi-perspectives methodology entitled Integrated Inquiry. This holistic approach to research involves combining multiple data sources to develop an in-depth understanding of a problem and to generate potential solutions (Andrews, 2008a). The multiple perspectives may be obtained by using qualitative and/or quantitative protocols, and they may be nested within the same instrument (Andrews, 2002), independent instruments within the same study (Andrews, 2010), inter-related instruments from the same individuals (Andrews, 2008b) or different groups (Andrews & Carruthers, 2004), or a series of inter-related studies examining an issue over time (Andrews, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2006b). The blending of multiple data sources is encouraged in the literature for field-based problems (Creswell, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study, entitled *Making Music: Composing with Young Musicians*, is to obtain an in-depth understanding of how composers can collaborate with young musicians and teachers to create educational music. The principal overriding question is "How can co-creation of new music by professional composers and young musicians promote musical development? Research focuses on four dimensions of creativity: examination of *environmental factors* that promote creativity; investigations of the *creative process*; evaluations of *creative products*; and assessments of *creative persons* (Woodman & Schoenfeldt, 1989; Amabile & Tighe, 1993). More specifically for music composition, these dimensions have been identified as the *pre-requisites* for composing (training, emotions, context), *person* (characteristics, pre-dispositions, motivation), *compositional process* (strategies, techniques, sequencing), and *musical piece* (features, style, impact) (Andrews, 2004c, d). This study employs a multi-dimensional approach by nesting the secondary questions within the four dimensions of musical composition and by adopting different research protocols to answer these questions: *pre-requisites*: How can musical ideas be conceptualized and developed in collaboration with students? (composer record); ii) *process*: What musical knowledge and skills are developed when students and teachers co-create music with composers in schools? (learning report); iii) *piece*: What aspects of the new compositions reflect the teachers' pedagogical input?(composition commentary); and *person*: What do students and teachers learn from collaboration with professional composers? (teacher questionnaire).

Analysis/Interpretation

This study is based on pragmatism; that is, knowledge claims arise out of actions, situations and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (as in post positivism). Concern is with applications, what works, and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). It is the problem that is most important in contrast to the method. Researchers use multiple data sources to understand the problem (Rossman & Wilson, 1985; Creswell, 2011). Pragmatism as a basis for knowledge claims is derived from the writings of Pierce, James, Mead and Dewey (Cherryhomes, 1992). In this study, the constant comparison method will be employed to analyze the data, identify patterns and integrate findings (after Stake, 1998). This approach is consistent with the pragmatic focus of the study; that is, to obtain an in-depth understanding of the relationship of music composition to music learning through the collaborative efforts of composers, students and teachers. Trustworthiness is achieved by employing multiple data sources (triangulation) contiguous with the four dimensions of creativity (internal validity). Participants/partners will be involved in reviewing the interpretation of data (member checks).

Participants

The participants will consist of 18 composers from across Ontario and 18 associate teachers with their students employed by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB). A *learning report* and *questionnaire* undertaken by associate teachers with their students will identify the musical knowledge and skills developed through co-creation of a new work and also the impact on student and teacher learning, respectively.

The participating composers will complete a *composition record* which will focus on the conceptualization and development of musical ideas in collaboration with the students. They will also complete a *composition commentary* which will identify the teachers' input into pedagogical aspects of the new composition. The Canadian Music Centre composers will be invited to participate in this study as they obtain membership as associates based on a juried process, thereby ensuring a similar level of expertise by all participants. Music teachers will be invited to participate by the Arts Instructional Coach, who is also the Contact Person for the partnership for the OCDSB, and they will be selected by board superintendents. The teachers all have similar backgrounds in music and education and require certification to teach in the schools. The 18 composers commissioned by the OCDSB will be selected by nominations from peers (snowball technique) based on their professional reputation. Number of participants (18 composers + 18 teachers) is appropriate for a complex in-depth qualitative study of a pragmatic nature where there are multiple measures submitted by participants (2 per composer/2 per associate teacher) (Denizen & Lincoln, 1998).

Research Team: The research group will consist of the principal investigator (PI), two partner contacts (PC's) representing the Canadian Music Centre (Ontario Regional Director) and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (Arts Instructional Coach), and two doctoral research assistants (RA's). The PI will liaise with the partners, organize the study, supervise the RA's, and document the project on-site (notes, photographs, etc.). The RA's will assist with the study's organization, data-gathering, analysis/interpretation and writing findings. The PC's will assist with administering the project in their organizations, liaise with the PI and RA's, and provide input into the analysis and interpretation of data.

Benefits: There are several research outcomes and social benefits for students, teachers, composers, administrators, and the research team acquired through their involvement in the proposed research partnership.

Research outcomes include: increased participation by administrators and field personnel in the organization, administration and implementation of the research process (i.e., enhanced research collaboration); development of an in-depth understanding of how co-creation by composers, students and teachers of new music can promote musical development (i.e., knowledge creation/intellectual outcomes); and a raised awareness by research assistants of the intellectual dimensions of music creativity and the skill to organize, collect data, analyze/interpret data, and write-up findings within an emerging arts partnership.

Scholarly benefits include: the development of a research literature on composing educational music for the academic sector/peers and scholarly associations; use of procedural knowledge to teach composition students in post-secondary institutions and undertake further research on music composition by artist-researchers; and the development of procedural knowledge to improve music composition instruction by teachers in schools, studios and post-secondary institutions (i.e., training and skill development).

Social benefits include: development of a formal research partnership emerging from previous participation in research projects by the Canadian Music Centre and school boards (i.e., an enhanced partnership); the addition of 18 new works to the repertoire for young musicians for use by students and teachers; and the development of language skills by learning bilingual choral pieces (i.e., cultural benefit).

Audiences: The proposed study will address several audiences including the international music community who are concerned about the lack of knowledge of how to create quality new music for young musicians; practitioners and professional associations who will have access to 18 new research-based compositions for teaching music in schools and studio; and young students who will learn how music is conceptualized, created and refined, and will access to 18 new Canadian works for performance and study.

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