



**ROBERT H.
WOODY**



**BECOMING
A REAL
MUSICIAN**

**INSPIRATION AND
GUIDANCE FOR
TEACHERS AND
PARENTS OF
MUSICAL KIDS**



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and Parents of Musical Kids***

Robert H. Woody

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To those who have musically and humanly inspired me most in my life, my wife, my parents, and my children.

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PREFACE

Contrary to my friends' quips about my "cushy job" as a music professor, I seem to keep pretty busy. Busy enough that I sometimes feel like I am just operating class to class, project to project, deadline to deadline. At such times, I have found it helpful to zoom out to look at the forest when I'm feeling trapped among the trees. Usually then I quickly remember how fortunate I am in my professional life to be in the company of some incredible musicians (my music faculty colleagues) and be inspired by the youthful enthusiasm of college kids studying music. Although I would deny that my job as a music professor is always "cushy," I cannot deny that it is a real blessing to be able to make a good living doing what I do.

The perspective afforded me by my professional position is but one source of the insights that have led to this book. I have also been fortunate enough to be the father of two children and stepfather to three more, all wonderfully musical in unique ways. With them I have played the role of music parent and attempted to apply my knowledge of music psychology and educational research. With mixed results! My experience with them has led to greater appreciation for adapting learning strategies to the individuality of learners. Another discovery has been the critical importance of a "teacher" being a "facilitator" and "encourager." And pursuant to this, I have learned that sometimes the best thing an adult can do is to stay out of the way and let a student's child-like love for music prevail.

I have been surprised by how much my perspective on music education has been informed by my experiences as a parent. Surprised and perhaps a little troubled, because the vast majority of people who enter the music teaching profession (usually as new college graduates) of course do so with no experience as parents. For this reason I am pleased to offer this book to both the teachers and parents of musical kids and I heartily encourage their collaboration so that their students' music learning will bring lifelong benefit.

In the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, I must also mention the time I have spent in K–12 American public schools, including a short but extremely enlightening stint as a full-time middle-school music teacher. There is nothing more “real world” or “on the front lines in the battle for the souls of our youth” than spending six to eight hours a day with hundreds of preteens! I have also gained insight into “keeping it real” musically by being a part of a small-town karaoke community. Special appreciation has come from watching my wife Angie shift from being a committed nonsinger (due to a “near death karaoke experience”) to becoming an avid and accomplished karaoke performer. Karaoke singing has demonstrated how music can powerfully impact the lives of real people.

My everyday practical experiences as a parent, middle-school teacher, and karaoke enthusiast have helped to offset idealized dispositions I might adopt from spending most of my professional life in the ivory tower of higher education. For this reason I define a *real musician* not only as someone who is a music professional but also someone who makes music in a variety of real-life settings, including common social settings, from weddings and funerals to birthday parties and gatherings around a campfire.

I really started thinking about the term *real music* years ago when I came across some music education research in which school music students were contrasting the term “real music” against “school music.”¹ Among kids, school music has been associated with difficult, analytical and passive lessons done with teacher-chosen style of music (usually classical, jazz, or similar), whereas “real music” brings to mind kid-preferred styles of music (popular styles), social interaction with friends, emotionally enjoyable experiences, and personal expression. It would of course be silly to try to exactly duplicate in formal education settings the informal social music experiences that kids prefer. Yet,

learning would surely benefit (if only motivationally) from trying to make it more *real* for kids.

Just to be clear, I always have been and will remain a committed supporter of formal music education, such as through school music and private lessons. Every chance I get, I encourage parents to get their children involved in these time-tested institutions. I do, however, think music teachers can do more for students than they traditionally have, and parents should get more involved in the process too. As formal music learning has departed from the ways that human beings naturally make music, the harder it is for people to become musical. Over a half century ago, anthropologist Alan Merriam offered up a list of ten functions that music plays within human cultures around the world.² They are:

1. Emotional expression
2. Aesthetic enjoyment
3. Entertainment
4. Communication
5. Symbolic representation
6. Physical response
7. Enforcement of conformity to social norms
8. Validation of social institutions and religious rituals
9. Contribution to the continuity and stability of culture
10. Contribution to the integration of society

Merriam didn't offer these as a rank order, but I am heartened by seeing emotional expression at #1. In fact, it is likely that music is so effective with the other nine functions because it enhances them with its emotionally expressive capacity. For example, consider our American culture's passion for professional sports, NFL football in particular. This would likely be a "social institution" according to Merriam (college football is closer to a religious one!). Think about the many ways that music enhances our experience of NFL football: the stadium music, the enduring theme of Monday Night Football, and of course the Super Bowl halftime spectacles (U2 in 2002 was easily my all-time favorite).

Moving into the future, I expect that music education will evolve in ways that I seek to illuminate in this book. Each chapter offers a central

theme or an avenue by which music learning for young people can be enhanced: Realness, Nature (of Music), Motivation, Creativity, Improvisation, Expressivity, Performance, and Humanness. In general, my perspective advocates for music teaching to become more inclusive and considerate of the learners themselves. As this evolution happens, parents will also have a critical role to play as facilitators.

NOTES

1. Graça M. Boal-Palheiros and David J. Hargreaves, "Listening to Music at Home and at School," *British Journal of Music Education* 18, no. 2 (2001): 103–18.
2. Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

REALNESS IN MUSIC

By and large, people love music. As an art form and as entertainment, music enhances life and gives people some of their most emotionally powerful and rewarding moments as human beings.

Also, by and large, people love children. Kids—from infancy to adolescence—have certain needs that must be met in order for them to develop well as human beings. They depend on adults to guide their developmental process. This is true from infancy, when they rely on adults for literally everything, to adolescence, when many youths refuse to acknowledge that they need adults for anything (but they do!). The key people in the lives of children, including in their musical lives, are their *parents*, their *teachers*, their *role models*. Kids' lives and their development into young adulthood is necessarily improved as they become more involved with music. Believing this is probably a precursor to reading this book.

Parents of children who are into music want them to get all they can out of their music activities, to be successful as music learners, have positive performance experiences, grow as people, and enjoy the rewards of the process for themselves. Most “music parents” don't *just hope* for these things for their kids, they are committed to them. They spend their money on the materials and experiences that a music education requires. They spend their time transporting their kids to lessons, rehearsal, and concerts. And they expend mental energy keeping track of what they're learning, convincing them to practice, and giving them emotional support along the way.