

## *Cultural Currents and the Music Studio*

by Ardyth J. Lohuis

Many will concur with the observation that today's sonic media moguls seem bent on removing most of what many refer to as "art music" from our everyday environments. Joseph Polisi, President of Juilliard, made the following remarks about the role of the arts (including music) in today's society: "We live in a society today which evidences little effort to make a distinction between art and entertainment, achievement and fame, liberal and vocational education, quality and quantity. The arts help us to better understand ourselves and to more clearly focus the experiences and ideas that give value to human life. It should be understood that all entertainment is not art and not all art can be expected to function as entertainment. As individuals who bring the art of music to our society, we must clearly understand the primary place which art has in preserving our culture and quality of life."

Because the term "art music" tends to push emotional buttons, I would like to suggest that we use different terminology and speak of "higher order" music to describe that which evidences originality, inspiration, and a high level of craftsmanship. Higher order of music is not necessarily "classical," nor is lower order music of any particular origin. At present, so pervasive and persuasive is the promotion of lower order music that many classroom teachers in our schools have found it necessary to accede to these pressures. School music teachers express frustration regarding the imposition of repertoire limitations and constraints that prevent a well-rounded education in music. A teacher of my acquaintance reported that his school principal said music classes are solely for entertainment and that time should not be wasted on the academic aspects of music such as theory and history. How can one reckon with such a view when we are, at the same time, mandated to raise the "standards of learning?" Such an attitude regarding the values of education in music exhibits gross ignorance. As a consequence, it is more than ever the private music studio where the understanding and love of many musics is carefully nurtured.

Who can clearly describe the features of "higher order" music or even that which is in "good taste?" We might list melodic development, inventive harmonies, textural variety (including counterpoint), rhythmic vitality and variety, stylistic diversity, and formal integrity among the desirable characteristics of higher order music. These attributes are not guarantors of quality and any or all of them could be employed in works deemed lacking. Words elude us, yet most music teachers are able to make such distinctions.

As we nurture new organists we must teach so much more than technique and a body of utilitarian music. In addition to cultivating a love of music, developing a sound technique, and learning repertoire, the organist's education should include experience with varied musical styles, awareness of common musical forms and genres, attainment of stylish performances, concepts of registration and organ design, familiarity with traditional, modern and multicultural tunes, highlights of music history, and cultivation of the ability to evaluate the worth of a composition. You'll surely add to this list. What a challenge to incorporate all these elements in weekly organ lessons! We are always in search of repertoire that is enjoyable to perform and that fosters understanding of and delight in fine music. As a user of the *Discover the Organ*<sup>®</sup> series (and one who is involved in its development) I know that Wayne Leupold and his co-editors have given extraordinary thought to the total content of every volume. At every skill level, the whole realm of the organ and its music are integrated, and cultural challenges are successfully met without musical compromise.

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