Editorial

The Canadian Music Educators' Association...So What!
Lee Bartel and Lee Willingham

(Warning: The content of this editorial contains material unsuitable for certain readers. We advise that you may not wish to read this, unless you have a stomach for the betterment of music education. If you do read, you will be asked to respond to some questions. Please do so by email to the editors, lwillingham@oise.utoronto.ca and lbartel@chass.utoronto.ca.)

My friend Clark (not his real name) won't join the Canadian Music Educators' Association. He is a great teacher. He presents brilliant workshops for music education conferences. He has even contributed to this journal. He has taught at the university level and lectures at faculties of education. He is a widely respected professional musician, and in the last ten years or so, has become recognized as an innovative and effective music teacher in a variety of secondary school situations. He is not a member of his provincial music educators' association, nor is he "one of us" in the C.M.E.A.

I have explained to him our mission...our cause...the reasons why he should join. I persuasively (I thought) outlined how the C.M.E.A.:

- is the national voice of Canadian music education and represents music education at the Federal level of government and for other organizations at the national and international level,
- is actively providing leadership in establishing high standards of Canadian school music for all grades,
- collaborates with provincial music educators and conferences
- produces publications on a national scale, thereby connecting music teachers across the country and providing a forum where a number of voices can be heard,
- has an updated website which links many national and international music organizations and resources
- provides leadership in such areas as advocacy
- connects Canadian music educators with each other through conferences, workshops, and meetings,
- encourages and reports on current research in music education
- ensures provincial/national interaction,
- recognizes outstanding leadership and life contributions to our profession through awards and honourary memberships, and…

then he interrupted me and said, “I don’t need the C.M.E.A. for any of those reasons. I have my own website. I go to conferences if I choose. I read what I choose. If I need help, I’ll call colleagues like you and we’ll work with each other, just like you’ve called me and I’ve worked with you on your projects. I know what’s going on in B.C., and Newfoundland, and I don’t have to wait for your journal to come out every two months. I just check it out with my friends by email, or
do a websearch. Why should I pay money for you guys to fly all over the country and go to meetings? I appreciate your commitment and the energy you’ve given to the organization, but frankly, I don’t need it, and I don’t really get it.” And then, he generously picked up the tab in the restaurant where we were debating these matters, and spent well over twice as much as a full C.M.E.A. membership would have cost him.

I had to admit to myself that I recognized how much of what he was saying was true of myself. There is great possibility for professional independence in today’s technologically connected world. I found myself starting to reflect on the points I had argued and their validity and importance:

_CMEA is the national voice of Canadian music education and represents music education at the Federal level of government and for other organizations at the national and international level._

What is “Canadian music education”? Is it only school music? Does it include private teaching? The educational work of arts organizations? What about community conservatories? Does CMEA really speak for all of Canadian music education? Probably not. And, even in school music, we are strongly segmented into separate associations of band teachers, choral teachers, Orff teachers etc. If CMEA spoke for “Canadian Music Education” would music teachers really want to listen? Or do they prefer to listen to voices from the United States where magazines are more numerous and more glossy and conferences larger and more frequent and leaders more outspoken and motivating and bands bigger and more polished and music companies more aggressive.

_CMEA is actively providing leadership in establishing high standards of Canadian school music for all grades?_

I wonder whether we see the involvement with the Coalition’s Standard’s project as being this sort of leadership? Or is it the performance awards for which almost no one applies? Or is it the occasionally commissioning a new piece of music like we did for ISME? Are we really “actively” doing this so that anyone notices?

_CMEA collaborates with provincial music educators and conferences?_

I know we intend to but what was the CMEA “collaboration” at the recent MEA conferences? In fact at several conferences in the past few years, the board met during a provincial conference but very few if any music teachers noticed the CMEA presence.

_CMEA produces publications on a national scale, thereby connecting music teachers across the country and providing a forum where a number of voices can be heard?_

Yes, we do that, but are they read nationally? The publications only go to members and many parts of the country have almost no members. And, what evidence is there that they are actually read. As for “connecting” and a “forum” that is probably more hoped for than real.

_CMEA has an updated website which links many national and international music organizations and resources?_
We do have that, but thanks to the Saskatchewan site, and is it really CMEA that links organizations? What does CMEA really contribute that is unique within the web-world? At this point nothing that I can see.

**CMEA provides leadership in such areas as advocacy?**

It is true that CMEA has a link to the Coalition for Music Education, but it seems to be the Coalition that provides leadership and the CMEA that offers some periodic support and encouragement (and at times maybe more criticism than encouragement).

**CMEA connects Canadian music educators with each other through conferences, workshops, and meeting?**

The annual board meeting connects a few people, but with no national CMEA conference, the connecting service for music teachers is rather limited.

**CMEA encourages and reports on current research in music education?**

The fact is that the research journal received few submissions and researchers openly admitted it was a publication of last resort. Consequently, its publication has been suspended. How does CMEA encourage research? Not with funds. Not with provision of membership lists. And not recently with opportunities to present papers at conferences. There is now the new Biennial Series “Research to Practice” and that might encourage some research, and definitely will report on some.

**CMEA ensures provincial/national interaction?**

Since there is no national conference, such “interaction” only happens with the board? Can there be “provincial” interaction, when the representatives from some provinces represent only a minute proportion of music teachers in the province? If the whole CMEA board is considered the “national” level, how does it interact with the provinces when it practically never has occasion to meet provincial educators?

**CMEA recognizes outstanding leadership and life contributions to our profession through awards and honourary memberships?**

Well, yes we do this and it does seem to be appreciated. But overall, I must agree with Clark that the CMEA may be more a wish than a reality, more good intentions than actions, more of a virtual construct than a dynamic organization.

So, I admit defeat, and I got Clark on a good day. I wonder what he would have said if he were not with me, a friend, and an openly committed member and dedicated volunteer. What does he really think? Why do I feel so badly about failing to convince one of my most valued friends and colleagues that for the cost of a modest meal, he could be part of the official community of his profession?
The C.M.E.A. as a Functioning Organization…Some Serious Navel Gazing

This past September, the Board of Directors of the Canadian Music Educators’ Association had its annual three-day meeting at the University of Toronto. Presidents of M.E.A’s were there, along with the executive, members-at-large, industry representatives, music coalitionists, and the editors of publications. We all put our minds to the ambitious agenda, well organized, and timed in order to keep us moving ahead. We dealt with the demographics of our membership and finances. We heard firsthand reports of challenges and successes from the provincial associations. We learned about the successes and activities of the Coalition for Music Education in Canada, the John Adaskin Project, some research plans to find out more about who is teaching music, and the upcoming series of bienniels called Research to Practice.

All of this is great news. Unless of course, it concerns you that out of all of the music teachers in our country, only about 1110 belong to C.M.E.A. as full members. Half of those members come from Ontario. Only a handful (24) are to be found in Alberta with more in British Columbia (87). Each province establishes its own relationship with C.M.E.A., and if affiliated, members are automatically enrolled as C.M.E.A. members when they attend a provincial conference or renew their local membership. British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and New Brunswick (currently undertaking to re-organize and re-establish affiliation) are not affiliated, and as a result, very few teachers in those provinces are members of the C.M.E.A. Does this mean that the “Canadian” Music Educators’ Association really is only the Inter-Provincial Music Educators’ Association of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and some Atlantic Provinces or the IPMEASMOSAP?

Education is a provincial jurisdiction in Canada, and as provincial governments have changed or fulfilled election mandates, education has undergone a tremendous and often burdensome reform. Music programs and associations have struggled to maintain their stability, if not their existence. Membership in provincial organizations has generally diminished, and especially in Ontario, where the O.M.E.A. once boasted over a thousand members, there is now a struggle to keep the membership at 500. The result? The C.M.E.A. becomes virtually dysfunctional due to a shortage of finances. The C.M.E.A. no longer presents its own conferences. It has no paid staff. It holds its meetings, when possible, as a joint affair with a provincial conference or symposium to save on travel and accommodation costs. As for outreach and innovative leadership, there just are no funds.

So, invariably, the C.M.E.A. enters into a navel gazing phase. Who are we? What do we purport to be? What services must we provide? What do our members need/want from us? How can the network be extended more widely, to reach those teachers in the un-affiliated provinces? How can the provinces and the C.M.E.A. work more beneficially together?

Questions that Demand Some Answers

We pose some questions to you, the readers, and ask you to think carefully, and respond freely. Your identity will be protected, and nothing you say will be published or disseminated without your permission.

(Are you still with us? Here are some questions for you to think about, and respond to. We urge the readership to be interactive with the journal and write us on these issues.)
1. If the C.M.E.A. disbanded today, how would it affect you and your work?

2. If you could change the C.M.E.A. for the better, what are some things you would do?

3. If your provincial M.E.A. has journals, conferences, and other forms of networking, is the existence of the C.M.E.A. redundant?

4. If your province is not affiliated with the C.M.E.A., what steps would you offer that would make the association truly a national one?

5. What would you say to my friend Clark, to help him reconsider his choice not to join?

The Canadian Music Educator Magazine

The magazine you are reading is in its second year of a “new look.” Feature articles, regular contributors, a variety of practical issues about teaching music, and resource reviews are all packaged in a popular, easy to read magazine format. We have tried to reach you and entice you to read.

Do you like it? What would you like to read about that you have not been able to? Can you “find yourself” in the articles, or do you sense that this journal is really about other people? Would you let us know your thoughts?

Come Together…. Right Now

The music education community is fragmented and specialized. Some of us have some expertise in one or more areas, but would be utterly lost should we be required to teach in others. As a result, individual teachers have been attracted to distinct associations that represent specific branches of music education. The band associations and choral associations serve a constituency of teachers, as do Kodaly societies and Orff chapters. The advantage is that you associate with like-minded people who share your interests and needs. The specialized associations can focus on conferences and publications with your specific interest and you do not have to be “confused” or bothered with ideas and suggestions that might require lateral thinking, broadening of your focus, or a larger view of education. The problem is that the specialized associations easily become “insular clubs” that lose sight of the large vision of music education, the fact that we learn much from each other, and that “music education” as a whole is already a narrow focus within arts education which in turn is a small focus within education as a whole. It is this narrowness which may well contribute to our marginalization and irrelevance within education, despite our advocacy, hand-wringing, and moaning.

What are we trying to do as a music profession? Produce another band member? Create another singer in a school choir? Or are we consciously contributing to the education of an artistic and musical society? If the education of a musical society is our mission, who contributes to this? Are all the contributors to the education of a musical society music educators? Are all levels of education relevant— the education of the life-long amateur as well as the education of the elite performer? What do we contribute to the education of a musical society in relation to the private music teacher, the community music conservatory, the national music conservatory, the church
children’s choir director, the City Symphony education efforts, the Opera company’s outreach program, the educational radio broadcast, the Arts Channel TV programming, or the children’s entertainers’ recordings? Are these all “music educators”?

Let’s restrict ourselves for now simply to “school music”—a rather narrow definition of music education. What would it be like, if there were one association in Canada to which we all belonged? What if this national organization could accommodate the elementary specialists and generalists, the guitar teachers, the string orchestra and band directors, not to mention choral, midi, keyboard, and so on? Would you join? What would you expect from your membership? What would be a reasonable fee to charge?

Consider the possibility of one outstanding music education journal published on behalf of all of the organizations? What if it contained sections from all of the specialty groups? (just like popular news magazines carry news, literature, sports, people, etc.) How about a journal that embraced the work of the Coalition for Music Education in Canada? What if you could receive lesson plans, practical teaching/learning strategies, and news from across the country once each month? Would you make time to read? Would you find time to contribute?

**We Cut to the Chase**

Since our September meetings, we have continued a conversation about the viability of the Canadian Music Educators’ Association, and what the future might hold for this historic body. We have also had discussions with provincial music education leaders, and some past presidents. Barbara Graham, the current president echoes much of our concern in her message in this issue.

Here is the dilemma. You, the reader, the teacher, the member, are the C.M.E.A. There is no other critical mass that forms who we are. This association is you.

You work hard. You volunteer for so much. You have so much at stake in your school programs, not to mention your professional growth and personal lives. Is there a place in your work and life for such an association?

We look forward to hearing from you.