(with permission)

Editorial

**Music Education and Globalization**

Lee Bartel

I attended the conference of the International Society for Music Education in Bergen this summer. This meeting of cultures and educators raised important questions for me, questions of multi-culturalism, inter-culturalism, and globalization. The way I understand and use the terms, multi-culturalism is about appreciating the uniquenesses of music, the maintenance of authenticity, the preservation of peculiarities, the placement of art above humanity. ISME showcased some multi-culturalism. Inter-culturalism is about recognizing differences and their legitimacy, appreciating these differences, but searching for commonalities. It is about recognizing that I only have my ears and mind to listen to others’ music but with every attempt they change, and therefore I can understand others. It is about the placement of humanity above art. There was some academic discussion about multi-culturalism vs inter-culturalism and some demonstration of inter-culturalism in practice. Globalization is about the elimination of differences, the homogenization of culture, or more accurately, world dominance of one culture, in music specifically, western music culture. And western music pedagogy.

Although there were a few examples of unique cultural music traditions, and a few academic discussions about multi-culturalism, the prevailing attitude among the educated musicians who attend ISME seemed to be the pre-eminence of western music and western ways of teaching music. For example, a report on music curriculum reform in Jordan extolled the achievements of finding Jordanian “folk” music, but then indicated that despite opposition on grounds of cultural tradition, notation oriented “basal music books” were being introduced and with bits of Orff and Kodaly in the pedagogy. A report from Mozambique on the need for an African music history, reported that the traditional holistic merging of music and dance had been separated and that the dissecting and examining approach to music, the cognitive approach to music of the western world, was being developed. A report from Korea used European repertoire with computer animated characters. In a plenary address Joan Armatrading praised the achievements of globalization through internet and other media, and of course, pop culture.

We may continue to harp on the preservation of a particular musical culture, or even multi-culturalism, but the practical reality is that the cultures of the world are under assault by global corporations, mainly based in the United States, that not only own the media delivery systems for entertainment but also the production of the entertainment itself. Just as corporations have intentionally and systematically created a world-wide market for cola drinks, baby formula, or cell phones, they have created a market for Madonna, Britney Spears, and Bono. And like global corporate exploitation of resources and labour with minimal dividend for those exploited, cultural globalization takes much and gives little back. Oh sure, we can “archive” musical practices in recordings or even
within the walls of university ethnomusicology departments, a bit like designating an opera house a UNESCO World Heritage site, but as at the opera house, we cannot keep the audience from leaving and not returning. A musical culture is not like a set of buildings that can be maintained by repairing boards and stones and paint to look like they did a 100 years ago. Musical culture exists in the mind – a mind that is instantly influenced by new sounds, new concepts. Musical naivete is hard to maintain today. And unless an elite selects a certain music for favoured attention and thereby maintains it by lavishing it with money and prestige, it vanishes quickly.

So should we in schools doggedly teach multi-cultural approaches to music as if nothing is changing? Or do we “throw in the towel,” letting ourselves be subjugated by corporate market strategies, and accept the new globalized commonality of pop music? Are we contributing to a globalization of music with the globalization of music pedagogy? Or can we recognize and honour uniquenesses while working for inter-cultural understanding? Can we put people ahead of art?