

The Repertoire *is* the Curriculum:
Getting Back to Basics in Music Education

Stephen Budiansky

My involvement in this subject was, and is, first and foremost as a parent.

Both of my children began playing instruments in middle school band, one the clarinet, the other French horn; both were quite enthusiastic at the start, and I was genuinely impressed by the speed with which they were taught not only the mechanics of music but how good a sound they were quickly producing.

But by the end of six years I was overwhelmed by three facts that still fill me with sadness — and it's not too much to say even occasional fury — about the net result of their entire experience with school music programs.

First was that although, as I said, they did learn quite competently the mechanics of playing their instruments, they emerged from five or so years

of these school band programs literally knowing nothing about *music*. They didn't know anything about musical forms or musical history; they had no knowledge at even the most rudimentary level of composers, or periods, or styles of classical music; they knew nothing about the great American musical traditions of folk songs and jazz and rock and blues and musical theater. They literally knew nothing about music as an art form.

Second, was that within about one nanosecond of their last band class in high school, they never touched their instruments again. Both were by that point quite advanced technically, but once band class ended there was simply no reason in their lives to play those instruments again.

Third, and clearly closely tied to numbers 1 and 2, was that for all of their years in band, all they did was play garbage. It was dull, gimmicky, pretentious, bombastic, simplistic, made-for-school music clearly written by fourth-rate commercial hacks. It all sounded alike, it was all formulaic, none of it was remotely art and some of it was scarcely music — *and* with the sole exception of the “Flintstone’s” theme (if that is indeed an exception) it had no connection to any real music or any living musical tradition outside of the closed world of music education.

And frankly, I was astonished by this. Because I remembered my own exposure to great music in the one year of chorus that I took in high school,

which helped to light a lifetime love for music in me. We did nothing but real music. We did traditional folk songs and Christmas carols; we did movements from Haydn's Creation and Lord Nelson Mass; we did parts of the Messiah; we did pieces from Broadway musicals like Brigadoon and Man of La Mancha.

And what I remembered so vividly was the power of that music to excite and inspire us, to make us feel that here we were kids in high school getting to actually create and be a part of this sublimest of art — and above all it was the music itself that left me with a burning hunger to learn more about music — it was the same feeling that I've since seen described by so many people who especially at that early teenage stage in life have their eyes opened to something great that they so desperately want to be a part of and make a part of their lives.

And so I saw, with anger and dismay, that my own kids had been robbed of this opportunity. It was all the more tragic since that they had become more than competent instrumentalists. They had the *means* to make music a rich part of their lives, and of course there's no better way to experience music than by making music yourself. They just had not been given any reason or motivation to do so.

I was also astonished because I didn't understand why this should be happening. With a thousand years of the greatest music available to choose from, they were fed a diet consisting almost exclusively of watered-down schlock.

But I had already caught a glimmer of the fact that the ed-music publishing business was something of a racket. There were obviously music publishers and writers making a bundle off of this stuff, and they obviously had succeeded to the point that a lot of band directors were so co-opted that they either chose not to question it or simply didn't know any better — and so one way or another the producers of this stuff had succeeded in establishing a captive market of school music programs which were buying and playing this stuff instead of real music.

And basically what I asked in the *Washington Post* article which I wrote in January 2005 was, *where* is this bizarre pseudo-music coming from?

I stressed that I'm not at all against popular music; I'm not at all against new and modern music; I'm not at all against music from other cultures — but this stuff that's filling the band programs is tedious, it's stunningly mediocre in terms of artistic merit, it's written by music educators who have zero reputations as composers in the real world of

music, it's almost all gimmickily programmatic and full of strained and unconvincing depictions of historical, multicultural, inspirational or patriotic themes, and above all it's unconnected to any musical life and tradition that these kids will ever encounter in the real world of music. It's music that no one—literally no one—would choose to listen to on their radios or CD players for pleasure, solace, entertainment, or inspiration were it offered to the public at large—which is why it so obviously is not.

And I concluded by saying the kids know in fact know this, and when they are occasionally given the choice of what to play themselves, they choose better things.

And I really tried to emphasize too that the music that band students play in band *is* their musical education. I said it would be incomprehensible for an English literature class to spend the entire year reading nothing but new works of original fiction written by English teachers who had aspirations to be published authors yet had never managed to get anything published outside of a school textbook. Yet this is *exactly* what we're doing in our music programs.

Now, in my three decades as a professional journalist I have written about gun control, animal rights, abortion, and countless other controversial

issues, and I can safely say that nothing I have written has ever generated such a reaction as this piece I wrote about bad school music.

I was almost instantly inundated with e-mails, phone calls, letters; I heard from band students, band directors, fellow parents, elementary school teachers, college professors, composers, music-store owners. I received about 140 responses, and they were about 7 to 1 in favor of what I'd said.

I was astonished at this outpouring of responses. A number of professional musicians took the time to write and said, You don't even know what a hugely important issue this is that you've put your finger on. But I was also struck by many messages from parents and amateur musicians like me and others who just wanted to say "amen." Here are a few examples:

Bravo! Delighted that someone else has noticed that great art can touch young people....if only we would expose them to it.

Dear Mr. Budiansky,

I, too, have railed at the terminally boring music put out by music educationists, who are unfortunately in a position to impose their dreadful tastes. The worst. Possibly you are not aware that exactly the same thing is happening to church music. There is reams and reams of the same vapid treacle turned out by choir directors for profit and marketed by them at choir music "festivals" in church basements. I suffered several years in a church choir directed by someone who favored this over Hassler or Schütz or Bach or Monteverdi — millions of good choices, but she made only the bad ones. It was nauseating.

We have systematically been creating a generation of students who are trained to perform and value mediocre music. Like you, I have been absolutely stumped when I try to figure out why this "school music" is written or performed. It has nothing to do with the art of music

Thank you for a Sunday morning inspiration. And please indulge me in some friendly advice. Write a book. Go on tour. Sell the movie rights. You have just spoken for suffering millions around the country. They need to hear this. And if you do, or simply write the sequel, remember the most tragic victims of material [written] by the teachers and for the teachers. The ones who suffer most are the kids . . .

Many factors having *nothing* to do with musical value or the education of children have come to take hold of school music programs. While the following points may be obvious to the point of the tautological, I think we have drifted so far from the purpose of music education that it's worth restating even the obvious:

1. The purpose of the educational system is not to subsidize the aspirations or gratify the egos of want-to-be composers who cannot get their pieces performed or published elsewhere

2. The purpose of the educational system is not to generate profits for the music publishing industry or other commercial ventures that make money by selling stuff to schools

3. The purpose of the educational system is not to provide bragging rights to band directors and school principals by garnering prizes, “honors,” and awards

4. The purpose of the educational system is not to serve as a vehicle for advancing the wind band movement or expanding the contemporary wind band literature

5. The purpose of the educational system is not to put on arts performances

The purpose of the educational system is to *educate*.

Looking at what I know now was the not-at-all-untypical experience of my own kids, the educational system is just failing miserably and tragically to educate kids about music.

It is failing to produce kids who have an understanding and appreciation of music at the most basic level as an art form and as a part of our cultural heritage— and as a lifelong source of inspiration and solace and beauty.

It is failing to introduce them to even a rudimentary acquaintance with the greatest works of music of different genres and eras so that they would have an entry point to explore further on their own.

It is failing to create a new generation of audiences knowledgeable about and appreciative of music, on which the future of serious music depends for its very survival in the real world.

And it is even failing in the one thing it arguably does well — in teaching kids to master the technical skills of playing an instrument. Because that skill is meaningless if we simultaneously fail to give kids any reason to make music on their own once they leave the school setting — and so their instruments sit in their cases, and those skills are quickly forgotten.

I should emphasize, too, that it is failing in spite of the fact that most school music teachers I have met, including most of those who taught my children, are hardworking, enthusiastic, decent, and dedicated men and women. It would in fact be so much easier to think about how to fix this problem if it were somehow simply the result of lazy or incompetent teachers. The problem in fact goes much, much deeper.

Now those who took issue with me, I confess, at times reminded me of the old joke about the lawyer whose defense of a client accused of borrowing a valuable watch and returning it broken was: 1. my client never

borrowed the watch 2. it was in perfect condition when he returned it 3. it was already broken when he borrowed it.

And I don't actually think I'm being terribly unfair when I say that in response to my assertion that recently written works of great mediocrity by minor or unknown composers are displacing great classic works in the band repertoire, I kept being told by defenders of the status quo something like this,

1. what you claim is happening is not happening;
2. it is happening, but it's a regrettable necessity given pedagogical and educational goals;
3. it's a wonderful thing that it's happening because we're creating original repertoire for the wind band out of which will come great works which will take their place alongside Beethoven and Mozart and Bach.

So I decided to do some actual research to answer the first claim, and collaborating with Tim Foley on a paper which we published earlier in the *WASBE Journal* ("The Quality of Repertoire in School Music Programs: Literature Review, Analysis, and Discussion," vol. 12, 2005), I looked through many extensive compilations of repertoire lists to see to what extent this made-for-school music is in fact dominating the repertoire.

You can see our paper for the specifics, but the basic quantitative evidence was just overwhelming: the repertoire of pieces being performed by school bands was skewed almost completely toward recent made-for-school pieces written by people who are essentially unheard of outside of the world of music education. Even the composers recognized by band directors themselves as the most significant composers *for wind band*, such as Holst, Vaughn Williams, and Grainger, were far less often performed than the works of educational music writers like James Swearingen, Elliot Del Borgo, and Robert W. Smith. The evidence from across the country is really again just overwhelming that the school band repertoire in particular (though it's also happening in chorus and orchestra) is being almost completely taken over by recent made-for-school works at the expense of music from every other period and every real genre. Please do go and look at our paper for the details: there's a lot of research we pulled together showing how a steady parade of ephemeral fluff has replaced works of lasting beauty and substance.

Now the second claim, about pedagogic necessity as the driving force for this phenomenon, is I think a more difficult one to address on purely objective grounds, but I think there's a lot of reasons to be extremely skeptical about it. Tim Foley and I were able to find a great many pieces of

substance by real composers suitable even for beginning and developing bands.

But there's a more important point and again I'd like to appeal to my own experience. I am now and always have been nothing more than a very amateur musician. I play for my own enjoyment. But I look back on the technical milestones I achieved in my development as a keyboard player and in every single case it was because I ran into a hard passage in a piece that was otherwise more or less on my level but which forced me to stretch myself when I got to that passage.

That hard passage was there because Bach or Scarlatti or whoever needed those notes at that particular place and was not going to compromise his artistic vision for the sake of homogenized, assembly-line uniformity in the grade level of his compositions. And the reason I mastered those hard passages was because I was dying to play that piece—precisely because it was the piece itself that so beautiful and so exciting. So I am extremely dubious about the whole idea of reducing difficulty levels to conform to educational bite-size pieces. The way you advance as a student, even in mastering technical lessons, I think, is when you get a fire lit in your heart about the music itself.

Several band directors who took issue with my complaint about bad music have rather airily maintained that even in these mediocre educational pieces they can find something of value to teach their students, even if it's just how to play a dotted eighth-note rhythm. My response is: but why *would* you choose to use an artistically mediocre teaching piece to introduce a technical skill when you can use a good or even great and inspiring piece of music instead? Again, I keep thinking of analogies to literature and writing: imagine if an English teacher said, we're going to read some dull, boring, piece of junk, but after all I can teach a grammar exercise from it just as well as I can from Shakespeare.

But there's another point that Tim Foley made to me and that we included in our paper: which is that it is notable how many simple works by great composers are technically easy but musically and emotionally engaging. They ask for a subtlety in interpretation, phrasing, dynamics, and ensemble playing—skills that lie at the very heart of an ability to understand and interpret and *appreciate* music. And that is what is so lacking in so much of this paint-by-numbers, massed-sound, emotionally simplistic, made-for-school, assembly-line music that's being played everywhere.

I should add here that it is in my view an entirely bogus argument that (as, on his website, Robert W. Smith quotes himself as saying), “To get to

Shakespeare you have to go through Dr. Seuss.” That principle may be true about reading and literature, but it is just flat wrong when it comes to music. For starters, I would note that the intrinsic artistry and genius of Dr. Seuss’s children’s stories are worlds ahead of the artistic mediocrity of the fare produced by the made-for-school-music industry. Parents themselves buy Dr. Seuss’s books for their children because they are great books first and foremost. By contrast, the only market for the Robert W. Smith’s made-for-school music is the classroom programs that use them. Second, as I just mentioned, it is not as if there is a shortage of real, authentic, good, worthwhile, artistically important music than even beginners can play. Third, those who throw around the Dr. Seuss analogy to music education conflate two very distinct points about the role that children’s literature plays in reading. Children’s literature exists not only because children’s vocabulary, ability to grasp complex sentences, and other such technical details are limited, but because the situations and themes of most great adult literature are beyond the emotional understanding and life experiences of children.

Some challenging music is of course similarly beyond the emotional grasp and sophistication of those who are beginning their musical education. It take a lot of listening and exposure to a lot of other complex music to

appreciate, say, Ives's Fourth Symphony. (I am speaking here even just as a listener.)

But there is an abstractness and universality to music—especially great music—that allows it to reach directly to the hearts and minds of even young children in a way that adult prose or poetry cannot. As Oliver Sacks fascinatingly shows in his recent book *Musicophilia*, the mind processes music through fundamentally different connections and pathways from those involved in speech and language. It is notable and significant that there are musical child prodigies but there has never been a literary child prodigy. For exactly the same reason, great music is accessible to the mass of us ordinary, non-prodigies even at an early age without the need for the musical equivalent of “children’s literature.” And surely the Dr. Seuss analogy breaks down entirely when it comes to middle school and high school students, who unfortunately are still playing vast quantities of this dubious musical “children’s literature.” (Some college bands are even still playing this stuff!) I think we’d say that a high school English class offering Dr. Seuss as its core curriculum had some serious issues.

So to be pedagogically effective, to capture the interests of children and be accessible to them, there is absolutely no need for juvenile-themed pieces the way there is a need for children’s stories.

Now, there is obviously a need obviously for technically simple pieces for beginners. But this is a separate issue from whether pieces have to be conceived of as “appealing” to children in their themes or titles or supposed fun-ness. And the wonderful fact is that there are a huge number of works by some of the greatest composers of all times that are technically easy while also being wonderful music. Some were written specifically with children (or, more accurately, beginners) in mind, but a lot were not. And there are wealths of folk music and other “non-classical” traditions that are also often technically easy while being beautiful and rich and authentic.

Now the third objection is in some ways the most interesting one and I think gets most to the heart of what is going on here. Many responders who were critical of my thesis offered up several interconnected arguments which basically said:

(a) what is great music is all just a matter of taste, and nobody can possibly define what it is

(b) it’s important as a matter of educational values to be inclusive and welcoming of diversity and you’re trying to censor the choices of teachers or trample the hopes and dreams of aspiring composers

(c) it's essential for wind ensembles to play only original works for wind band rather than transcriptions so of course that's going to be recent works and

(d) the great composers were all shunned in their day and only later was their genius recognized so the same thing is happening now.

Many of these arguments, even if they are true (which is dubious: see our earlier *WASBE Journal* article for details), are monumentally irrelevant when it comes to deciding the curriculum for the *classroom*. And what I keep coming back to is that the curriculum in music education *is* the repertoire that's played. Nobody said it better than the educator Allen Britton, who we quoted in our WASBE paper. He said:

Should not our music curriculum consist, first of all, of the world's most beautiful music? Should a child be able to sing in a high school choir or play in a high school band or orchestra for several years and still not have come to know at least a fair sample of the best there is in our musical heritage?...To construct curriculums with music of lasting beauty would by no means exclude the use of new music or even of the teaching pieces now so widely available. It would, however, ensure that music of the greatest worth would be presented

to our students in larger quantities than is now the case, and that they would know some of it when they get out of school.

To that I'd add three points: first, it's never "censorship" to set standards and educational goals; second, it's actually going to *increase* diversity and the breadth of students' understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of music to play the best and most beautiful that there is from *all* of our musical heritage — especially when compared to the narrowness and musical isolation that we inflict on our band students currently with a diet of recent made-for-school-band works; and third and most important, cultivating an ability to render aesthetic judgments is part of what gives us a sophisticated enjoyment of music, or any other art form, in the first place.

But I sensed there was something else weird behind a lot of this, and the more I looked into it the more I saw that the school band music ghetto was but a subset of a larger band ghetto that had inculcated some of the same mindset of placing uncritical encouragement and boosterism over critical and aesthetic judgment; that was making the support of original works for wind band a mission that was trumping other considerations; that viewed criticism of new works or composers as unseemly or rocking the boat or failing to support "the cause" (or "bashing" an important "industry sponsor")

or conference exhibitor); and that made it a crusade never to play transcriptions.

And in reading through publications like the *WASBE Journal* I've become very aware that this is indeed a larger problem in this community. It's not just that music educators commission works from other music educators; it's that there's an almost unnatural aversion to passing critical judgment or saying anything bad about anyone's efforts at producing new wind band literature.

Now I'm not an expert on music or the history of music or theories of aesthetics but I do know that great art is never made by uncritical boosterism, it's never made by committees trying to raise the reputation and standing of their field, or by corporate mindsets, or by prizes and commissions; nor is it produced by people living comfortable lives running their creative operation as a well-oiled business enterprise.

Great art is made by individuals who have placed a commitment to their art above everything else. It's made by people who understand that it's going to be extraordinarily hard, that they almost certainly will fail, that they will be mercilessly attacked, but who have chosen to run that gauntlet nonetheless. I was really struck by how there is article after article in journals like the *WASBE Journal* purporting to offer analyses and

descriptions of new or recent works and never uttering a single word of genuine aesthetic criticism or judgment — all just totally uncritical, value-neutral descriptions of what's happening in this measure or that measure or where this theme comes from or whatever.

You can contrast that with the searing criticism and furious debates that mark so much of any real artistic pursuit. In response to my *Washington Post* article I got several quite wounded comments from composers or friends of composers I had directly or indirectly criticized. I don't take any particular pleasure in criticizing people, but I must say I was amazed at how thin-skinned these guys are. And again I contrast this with the business I'm in: when you write something for publication, you know that criticism comes with the territory. Paul Fussell wrote a wonderful and hilarious essay about the mistake whiny authors make in complaining about unfavorable book reviews and as he said, "People with thin skins should stay out of show business." He said "nobody forced them to write a book." Amen.

Well, nobody forced any of these ed-music writers to write pieces for school band. They would get off the hook a bit more if they weren't so frequently pretentious about their compositions; but calling them things like "Symphony No. 2" is really asking for it. It's staking a claim that this is not just a fun little teaching piece but Great Art. And it's then the height of self-

servicing defensiveness to both claim that what you are doing is great art on a par with the greatest composers of all time and then turn around and basically try to claim immunity from critical comparison to those great composers.

This is my key response to the argument some people kept making, that you need to give these new pieces a chance and some of them will take their place alongside the great works of other ages. And my response is, fine: but let's have a fair competition. Let's not declare it taboo to utter a bad word about these works (and denounce those who do as "bashing" or "censoring" or being "rude"); let's not immunize these works from the *same* critical scrutiny that all real, grown-up artists face; let's make these pieces compete against the greatest and most beautiful pieces written in the last 1,000 years and not just against other recently composed works for wind band, many of them of equally dubious merit.

And I have to say this again: competition and criticism ought to come with the territory. Miles Hoffman, a great critic and writer on classical music, had a very apt observation on this precise point. He said:

No one would dispute that there have been many honorable, sincere, dedicated, and very nice men and women writing music over

the past 80 years. But if there are such things as “good music” or “good pieces” or “great pieces,” then there must also be such things as bad pieces.

And take a look at some of the criticism that was par for some of the greatest composers who ever lived. Here’s what one contemporary critic said of one of Liszt’s pieces:

The wildest infernal noise, a spectacle-piece with the greatest poverty of ideas, the most wanton orgy of dissonances— . . . Where only the palest glimmer of a melody appears, blundering about like a glow-worm in the pitch dark chaos of this “composition.” . . . Peals of bells, battalion charges, revolt in the bowels of the earth—all depicted and presented “d’apres la nature.”

It makes me wonder how many people in the wind band world read the arts criticism that appears in serious newspapers and journals. I suspect many don’t at all, which is precisely part of the problem: the music-ed business and the wind-band world tend to be cut off from the mainstream of serious artistic endeavor, and tends to operate on a value system that while

admirable in its collegiality and encouragement of diversity is painfully lacking at times in rigor, intellectual and artistic integrity, and just plain guts. The *best* contemporary composers — like the most serious poets, novelists, painters, playwrights, actors, dancers, choreographers — often receive just scathing reviews. It's part of the process of being a grown-up, real artist. It's part of being taken seriously. It's part of the process by which the good is sorted out from the bad. It's part of the discussion and thinking about art that serious art evokes. It's just childish to object that criticizing a composition is “hurtful” or “rude” or a “personal attack”—as a few of the people who took issue with my WASBE talk told me afterwards. Look for example at some of the criticism a first-rate contemporary composer like Jennifer Higdon has received. I mention her precisely because she is a very successful artist of the first caliber, who has received commissions from the world's leading symphony orchestras, and whose concerto for percussion was performed by the U.S. Marine Band at WASBE in Cincinnati. But you can't be a serious artist without facing the music, as it were. Here's what one critic for example said of one of her works, and he sure didn't pull any punches: “pure new-age fluff, undemanding, unadventurous tonality dressed up as a quasi-mystical experience by the addition of bells and chimes.” And the *Los Angeles Times* reviewer even suggested that her music “suggests a voluntary

embrace of the kinds of music that arose under dictatorial regimes that restricted artistic freedom, of the populist demands made on composers by Hitler and Stalin.” That’s pretty rough stuff by any standard. I don’t happen to agree with it. But I think the musical world is a far better place for the fact that there are critics like that who are taking new music *seriously* enough to offer real criticism, who are not afraid to say what they think, who are worrying more about their commitment to the integrity of their art than about hurting someone’s feelings.

So if a critic expresses a view you disagree with, the grown-up and energetic and useful response is to marshal your own critical arguments as to why his analysis is wrong. The not very grown-up response is to protest that he should not have expressed his views because it is being “rude” or “unsupportive” to do so.

My other point is this: of course criticism is often ill wrought just as the works of art they criticize are. Critical judgments often change over time. They are often hotly disputed by other critics then and later. Yet criticism is part of the essential conversation by which art is made. It is part of the process by which we begin to develop sophistication and judgment and appreciation of art at all. It is part of the refining fire that art goes through. The very discussion and debate is part of what makes art *art*. When you

isolate yourself from criticism, you are not producing art. You are producing . . . a product.

I was really struck — well, appalled is probably a better word — when I started looking through publishers’ catalogues and reading the descriptions and sales pitches accompanying the stuff they are peddling to high school and even college level wind ensembles. It was all the language of marketing with not a word about art. I couldn’t believe how many of these works were being peddled with such lines as “gives the illusion of being more difficult than it is!” or “your band will shine!” I looked in vain for “a great setting of one of the most beautiful pieces of western music ever written” or “a work by one of the most important composers” or anything like that — but it was all the language of interchangeable products and hucksterism.

I recently was sent a demo CD of Robert W. Smith’s “Symphony No. *Three*” and the description that accompanied it had literally nothing to do with music or art, and everything to do with marketing. It was all about how the solos are liberally cross-cued and how the final movement will “bring the audience to their feet.”

And it was interesting to contrast this with Gunther Schuller’s description of his own recent composition for high school band. His

description was all about his artistic goals and the challenge of maintaining his artistic objectives within the constraints of writing for middle-level players. He also stressed how he wanted to challenge students by making them responsible for their own parts—so no doubling and safety nets—and how he was breaking the supposed rules of school band music in doing so.

And I thought how remarkably ironic, that a real composer with a reputation outside of the school music racket is writing a piece not only with more artistic merit but more educational value than the stuff produced by the writers who specialize in the education market. And of course what that really underscores is that the writers for the ed market don't really care about education. They care about marketability, and that's come down to getting "superior" ratings at contests with pieces that sound harder than they are; it comes down to pieces that are quote "safely cross cued" to cover up mistakes; it comes down to not challenging students with something that might expose their flubs; it comes down to appealing to the lowest common denominators of ignorance and surface flash to produce pieces with built in applause lines at the end and lots of percussion activity in the middle.

So what to do—here's my attempt at summarizing what I think we need to do to start changing all this.

1. get rid of festivals, contests, grading of works — all of that apparatus that encourages us to look at music as assembly-line fodder rather than as art to be evaluated and embraced for its beauty and artistic significance

2. start teaching music teachers about *music* and how to make aesthetic judgments about music

3. play a lot of stuff in class that you never plan to perform but which it is important for students to be exposed to as part of their education. Worry more about teaching *music* and less about technical perfection

4. absolutely play new works and original works for wind band but evaluate them against the entire competition: only include them in your curriculum if you honestly believe they're as good as the best of the last 1,000 years

5. stop letting the for-profit merchants dictate curriculum, repertoire, what you can play at Midwest, what you're allowed to utter at a MENC conference. Put educational and artistic goals, not the profit motive, back in the driver's seat. Publishers are not evil people; they are not the ultimate root of the problem; but their interests are never going to place artistic and educational merit ahead of their bottom line. That's *your* job as educators

and directors. You really have to take a stand on returning educational and artistic decisions to the hands of the people who have no conflicts of interest

6. if you don't treat music as a serious, curricular, academic class, then there's no reason to expect the administrators, parents, and students to do so. If you treat it as an athletic event or a group activity rather than as something worthwhile in its own right, don't be surprised that it — and you — then get no respect

7. most of all: dare to criticize! it's a sign that your brain is functioning. And if somebody's feelings get hurt, they're in the wrong business anyway.

Stephen Budiansky is a historian, author, and journalist. This paper was adapted from the talk he presented to the WASBE 2009 conference in Cincinnati, Ohio.