

## CLASS PRESENTATION

Riemer, Bennett. (2003). *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*.  
Third Edition. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall

### I. Modern vs. Postmodern Views

*Notes on Ornstein, Hunkins, p. 188ff*

Whereas Riemer's description of postmodernism is at times vitriolic, this description is more functional. It describes, e.g. the PM view of the world as "emergent, fluid, chaotic, open, and interactive."

*Postmodernism is an era of continual births, of new orders emerging out of the "soup" of chaos.* P. 189

Those involved in curricular reflection and activity might be better served to consider PM as a "movement to encourage and expand pluralism and to avoid the orthodoxy that some have defined as modernism."

The authors agree with Charles Jencks (p. 189) that PM is not in opposition to modernism; rather, it is a continuation of modernism and its transcendence.

Modern, dynamic, thinking human beings have always looked at knowledge as fluid, as evolving. He accuses postmodernists of creating "straw men" to advance their arguments and their political agendas.

PM is a refusal to accept any unified representation of the world.

Whereas Riemer argues for a "synergistic stance," Ornstein/Hunkin say balance is needed, and dialogue among theorists. They say we are not modernists or postmodernists, but both, and we are liberal and conservative, structuralists and poststructuralists, both static and emergent.

### II. The "Synergistic" Solution

This seems to be Riemer's "olive branch" to Elliott and his henchmen, but it does not read like a conciliatory stance. Rather, my take is that he wants the "other side" to repent and come to the fold.

### III. Riemer on Curriculum

#### Emphasis on Listening over Performing

While reading the book, I had this creepy sensation that Riemer was trying desperately to **seduce** us away from our instruments and our joy in performing, when performing is for us the portal to full appreciation of music. I know for myself that when I am separated from my instrument for too long (even while working on this presentation), I run the risk of drying out from lack of nourishment. My husband refers to my practice as "bitch prevention," for good reason. My husband is a good listener, a very good listener. But no one had to teach him to listen. He had a little piano, and some choir singing in school (he was always "choir 2, never choir 1, the *angels*) but he can identify every Beethoven Symphony no matter at what part he begins listening. He can identify the Mozart piano

concertos by number.

It is misleading, at best, or fraudulent, at worst, to suggest, even insist, that listening well to music can be learned separately from also learning to make music. We learn to listen from listening to ourselves first as we make judgements about our own performance. This is critical thinking, listening to music from the inside.

I could not figure out why any musician (Riemer) would move emphasis away from performing and onto listening, separately from all other roles, until I read his Riff No. 8 (p. 164-165). As I read about his collapsed lung and his being forced to give up wind instruments, without an accompanying story about any other musical performing skill, I began to understand. He is like the bereaved spouse whose response to the loss of his loved one, his *raison d'être*, is to deny the overwhelming importance to his life this loved one has played, and, instead, to point in another direction for life's meaning. Only, instead of seeing it as his personal response, he must convince the rest of the world of the importance of this new endeavor, in order to validate his own dilemma. I feel really sorry for him, because I see through this all, and I recognize someone still in mourning.

### **Emphasis on the Standards**

Riemer's major agenda, after writing the Standards, is to saturate the journals and the lecture circuits with their importance for having music accepted as one of the core subjects. It is just the kind of "top-down" approach to agenda and curriculum and all manner of other miscellany handed down from the states and federal government that make teaching so frustrating. Teachers were not consulted about the formulation of the standards, they were handed down by a small group from MENC which has presented them in lock-step. Every page of the MEJ attests to it. All of the articles back it up, and even the summer workshops have been co-opted to reflect this new stance.

His mandate for curriculum is that it must be comprehensive in assuring preparation for the three major roles: aficionado, amateur, and professional. He stresses the greater importance of the aficionado role,(which he says most of our students turn out to be anyway), because this role supports the other two.

He says unbelievably that he only lists singing and playing first, not because they are most important or even essential, but because they are most familiar. He does not even believe that notation should be taught, but bowed to pressure and included it. His emphasis on listening over performing has been addressed above.

### **Emphasis on General Music Restructuring**

Riemer wants General Music revitalized with the Standards and he wants it to be offered P-12. He says no one has envisioned this or written a curriculum for it. He believes an offering of several non-performing music courses on the high school level will reach far more students than just the performing courses we now offer.

### **Conclusion**

I believe that Riemer, in his zeal to combat creeping Postmodernism, and to undermine his rivals in the other camp, has revealed himself to be a warrior in an empty war. The point is, or should be, to discover new ways to introduce and engage students in the study of music, not to ward off the evil spirits of *change*.

This is also true of his stance on curriculum with respect to the standards. This kind of top-down approach has been shown not to work anyway, and the super-saturation of his writings with their importance sounds hollow, at best.

In view of these things, I think the title of his book should read, *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing MY Agenda*.