

A Gift of Music by Abbie Gregg

Twenty Kindergartners sit on a bright triangular rug, facing their teacher. The rug is divided into 20 spaces by twenty shapes, and the children wait quietly, one child on each shape. They turn towards me as I come into the room. These children do not know me, though I have taught some of their brothers and sisters. They are wide-eyed and wondering, "who is she, what does she carry, what is she going to do?" The teacher says, "Here is Mrs. Gregg, and she is going to teach us music every Thursday." "Oh," they sigh. The teacher goes to the back of the room as I sit in her warm chair in front of the class. Twenty pairs of eyes find mine and I smile at these darling children, each one different and so fresh and new, not blank slates or empty vessels, instead, relationships waiting to happen, wanting to happen. I will teach these children until they are in fourth grade, some of them until they are in sixth grade. This will be my first impression, they of me and me of them.

"Hello", I say. "I am Mrs. Gregg. I am your music teacher." As I tell them this, I take my autoharp out of its soft case. Their eyes grow wider. I strum it, then turn it on its edge so they can see. "This is my autoharp. I use it when I am singing. It has buttons." I show them the buttons. "It has strings." I show them the strings. "I push a button and strum the strings and it sounds like this." I strum a few times. "What do you think will happen if I push a different button." Hands thrust up, energy glancing off the fingertips. I look at a child, eye to eye.

"What's your name?"

"Aubrielle."

"What do you think will happen?"

"It will make a different sound."

"That's right! Good thinking." I demonstrate. I push several different buttons, strum.

"Oh", they sigh, loving the sound

"When I come to your class for music, I always sing my 'Hello' song", I say. I put my hands on my head. "Can you put your hands on your head? They put their hands on their heads. I put my hands up in the air. "Can you put your hands up in the air?" They put their hands up in the air. I put my hands back on my head and sing, with my hands on my head, "Hel" and then, as I put my hands up in the air, "lo". They stare at me. I do it again. "Can you sing with me?" Their hands on their heads, they watch me, and, as I open my mouth, they open their mouths. As I take a breath, they take a breath. "Hel-lo" I sing, with them and this, this is the moment that means so much. They sing, and the angels they are inside pour out through their innocent mouths. "Hel-lo" we sing together again, twenty beautiful high light ringing voices. I could do this forever. "Hel-lo", again, the hands on the head, the back straightening on the "lo", the most beautiful sound, so new, so glad, so open, so real. I finish the brief song: "Hello, Everybody, yes indeed, yes indeed, yes indeed", on the 'yes, indeed', hands on head leaning to one side and then the other, once again the hands up in the air, they are mimicking me, singing along to a song they don't know the words to but that they think

they might. Hands moving slowly down the scale in the air as we sing "Let's make music, " hands resting on my head again, leaning my head to the side as I sing,"Yes, indeed", to the other side as I finish with "yes, indeed, my darling." They do all this with me and we are like one singer. As I sing, I move my gaze from face to face, letting them know that a connection has been made, that I am their music teacher.

"That's my 'hello' song, and I will sing it every time I come to teach you music." In this magical moment they sit wrapped in the warmth of singing, the affective curriculum reaching them on these early days of Kindergarten. By the end of the month, and in the years ahead, they will smile, as I smile, and put their hands on their heads, as soon as they see me, telling me,"we are ready for music."

In the morning, I park behind the school, at Sunset Park. An elderly Chinese gentleman is doing Tai Chi. A black labrador is sitting under an ancient and spreading oak, staring at a squirrel. Two squirrels dash from pine to eucalyptus to ginkgo. Across the park, and separated from the park by a low fence, is Arroyo Mocho, my children's elementary school, where I have the perfect job. I teach early primary music, K-3, twelve hours a week, in the town of Livermore, California.

As I walk across the school yard, the students say "Hi, Mrs. Gregg", "Hi, Mrs. Gregg", "Hi, Mrs. Gregg". At the beginning of each school year I learn the names of the 100 new Kindergartners quickly so I can reply, "Hi, Emily", "Hi, Duncan", "Hi, Katy". When their Mothers are with them and look at them quizzically, they say to their Mothers: "That's my music teacher." I am filled with pride. They are right; I am their music teacher. Every week from Kindergarten through third grade, I will give them a music lesson. I am a credentialed music teacher with 23 years of experience and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, working as a volunteer to provide an education in music to students who otherwise would have none.

I have an argument with the Livermore Joint Unified School District. I believe music education should start as early as possible. A Kindergartner who has an education in music does not learn to love music, as he or she already loves music. These are individuals who are full of music and rhyme and the energy to love anything that lets out in a joyful way what is already inside them. They sing along to songs they have never heard before. "I love this!" a student shouts spontaneously as she comes to the rug for music. When asked to jump to the steady beat, these precious beings jump up, then jump erratically until the beat is reinforced and then, jump as one, through a song, ask to do it again, and again, and again. After two lessons on the steady beat, they raise their hands to answer "the steady beat!" before the question is asked.

Marisa, in Special Day Class first grade, whom I also taught when she was in SDC Kindergarten, sits right next to me. When I compliment her singing, she says "I have a pretty voice, just like you." She wants to sing a train song. She wants to sing a song about the cat and the mice. Next to her, Joseph, who reacts in horror to loud noises, bounces to the not quiet music, his attention somewhere between the classroom and outer space, a look of pleasure on his face. When the song finishes he moves closer. When I

hand out a pair of rhythm sticks to each student, Zachary looks at me with tears forming in his eyes. "I love rhythm sticks." he whispers. When the twenty minute lesson is over, and I sing my closing song, "Goodbye, Everybody," Gabriel looks at me quizzically and says, "You're going?" I tell him that I will be back next week.

Most primary students in this school district do not receive an education in music, even though the state curriculum guide states that every elementary student should receive a music lesson, taught by a credentialed specialist, every week. On each of the many times that I have mentioned this to the members of the school board, I am told, with patient indulgence, that, yes, that would be nice, but there just isn't the money. Every year there is even less money. The answer I would prefer, but that I have never received, is that, while there doesn't appear to be enough money for a comprehensive music program right now, that spending priorities will be examined as regards the entire music program as it currently exists, and that, if money is found, it will be used for primary music education.

When elementary school students in Livermore reach fourth grade, they are given a recorded test involving pitch and rhythm and, on the basis of this test, a very few are offered a place in a string instrument class. If these chosen students accept a place in the class, they must come up with their own instruments. Most students attend instead a general music class, where the musical concepts they should have learned during the previous four years of school are taught. The students who are playing strings are not taught this general music curriculum. In fifth grade, students are again tested and again, a few are offered a place in a wind instrument or percussion class and, if chosen, must provide an instrument at their expense. Again, most students are not chosen and take general music instead.

What sense does it make to teach a child to play Hot Cross Buns on a trumpet, when that student has never sung the song, has never tapped out the rhythm on a drum, has never played it on a recorder? Instead of teaching a few students a few notes on orchestral instruments, outside the context of a background in music fundamentals, why not teach everyone, and at an age when a bad attitude is unheard of? Kindergartners soak up the concepts of beat and rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, tone. They love the repetition through which they learn the words and melodies of songs. They absorb, through folk songs, the culture of their country and other countries. They are participants in the affective curriculum of expression and feeling, an interlude in the droning of paper and pencil tasks ruling the school day and of homework after it has ended.

The first grade class is singing and acting out a ballad, "Three Drummer Boys." In this ballad, three drummer boys disembark, returning from battle. One wears a rose, to brighten up the journey. Princess Marie is watching from her tower. She asks the drummer boy for his flower. He asks for her heart in return. She says he will have to ask her father. The drummer boy asks the father. He says no, the drummer boy has "no gold to court her". The drummer boy says he has three ships, one filled with gold, one filled with treasure, the third for pleasure. The king decides the drummer boy may wed his daughter. The drummer boy thanks him kindly, but says, in his land, they do not wed so

blindly.

The previous week, the students have practiced, on twenty different drums, which they have passed from student to student so that every student has a chance to play every drum, the rhythm _____, which they have read from the board, saying ta ti ta ti ti ti ta, with the ta's for quarter notes and the ti's for eighth notes. The drums are played at the same place in every verse, as the students sing, "Rat ta tat ta rat tat ta pum".

Three students have volunteered to be the three drummers. One has a flower rose taped to his shirt. They walk around the room, to the steady beat, with their drums, playing Rat ta tat ta rat tat ta pum when it comes up in the verses. They stop at Princess Marie's castle, where one student stands on her chair, a construction paper crown on her head. She sings "Sweet drummer boy, will you give me your flower?" The drummer boy responds "Give me your heart, and give it to no other." When he says "heart," two students hold up paper hearts. He approaches the king, a student with a crown on his head, standing near Princess Marie. The king shakes his head, no. Three students with paper boats hold them up during the verses about the ships. The whole song is acted out and then a different group of students choose parts. They are learning about beat, rhythm, pacing and story telling in song, what a ballad is.

Rachel raises her hand.

"Yes, Rachel."

"My middle name is Marie."

"Do you think you'd like to be the Princess?"

"Yes!"

The second graders have had their recorders for a month. They have learned the left hand notes, B,A,and G and can read them on the musical staff. They have practiced quarter notes and eighth notes and played them in different combinations, saying "ta" for the quarter notes and "ti" for the eighth notes. They have played B,A,and G to different patterns and learned them as the musical syllables me, re and do. Today they are going to learn E. It is the week of Halloween and they are going to play on the recorder the refrain from a Halloween song they learned in first grade, "Skin and Bones." "There was an old woman all skin and bones" is sung, then they play, "Oooooo--ooo-oo-ooooo," a descending B,A,G and then their new note E. "She lived down by the old graveyard" then, again on the recorders "Oooooo-ooo-oo-ooooo." "One night she thought she'd take a walk," "Oooo-ooo-ooo-ooooo," on through the short ballad, until the surprise "BOO!" at the end. I teach the new note E. We sing the song, with the BOO! at the end surprising the students who have been lulled by the repetition of the descending "Oooooo-ooo-oo-ooooo." The teacher jumps in her chair. We sing the song again, with the students playing the refrain on the recorders. When they go out for recess an hour later, a few students take their recorders and play the refrain again, over and over.

From the Livermore Schools Web Site: "Elementary Music Program"

"The District offers one of the premier music programs in the entire Bay Area. It begins in grade 4 and continues through high school. All 4th and 5th grade students receive music instruction during their regular classroom teacher's 40 minute prep

period. Students involved in a strings or band class are pulled out of their regular classroom for one additional 30-40 minute lesson per week."

This is, on the face of it, a ridiculous claim. How can "one of the premier music programs in the entire Bay Area" offer no music education to students in grades K,1,2, and 3?

For the music program I provide at Arroyo Mocho, lessons are presented in units, starting with beat and rhythm. In Kindergarten and first grade, students learn that music has a steady beat, that music has rhythm, that the steady beat is grouped in two's and three's, that music has tempo. They learn what the different note values are and what the steady beat looks like, what a rhythm pattern looks like, in notes. They clap, they pat, they snap. They practice the steady beat and rhythms on drums, rhythm sticks, finger cymbals, triangles, shakers, claves, sand blocks, popsicle sticks, oatmeal boxes, rain sticks, guiros, maracas. They jump, and dance, and skip, and stretch and hop and walk to the beat, and in imitation of rhythms.

They learn that music has melody, that melody can rise or fall, or stay in one place. They learn the shape of melodies from listening and from seeing them written and by playing them on xylophones and glockenspiels. Students learn that music has harmony, when two or more notes are played at the same time. They create harmony on hand bells, on xylophones, glockenspiels, by singing rounds and by singing and playing ostinati. They dance and sing rounds, their bodies echoing their voices. They make up instrumental accompaniments to songs. They act out songs with stuffed animals, they wear construction paper crowns on their heads and are kings and queens, princes and princesses. They ride imaginary trains and trains made of chairs. They rush around the room pretending to be in a subway. They ride canoes and sing and create rowing ostinati. In the two years of Kindergarten and first grade, they learn over 100 songs.

I start instruction on the recorder when the students are in second grade. As they learn the recorder, the previous lessons on the elements of music are reviewed and reinforced, this time from the standpoint of learning an instrument. By the end of the second grade, most students can read in musical notation and play the notes D', C', B, A, G, F, E, and D, as well as F# and Bb. They have learned several songs using these notes. By the end of second grade, most students can play "Go Tell Aunt Rhody", "Jingle Bells", "Lightly Row", "Aura Lee." Students who excel at the recorder are put in an advanced class and play songs using these notes and more; and they learn rounds and songs in parts, playing harmony to melody. Students sing throughout the lessons.

In third grade the recorder lessons continue. Students learn to play more difficult songs, such as "Oh, Susana," "Yankee Doodle," and "America," as well as songs they have sung in Kindergarten and first grade, such as "Fiddle-dee-dee" and "Skip to my Lou." Students who easily learn the material presented during classroom music are given more difficult music during a separate weekly class just for them.

My music program at Arroyo Mocho is based on the conceptual approach to

teaching music, as detailed in the MENC (Music Educators National Conference) text *The Study of Music in the Elementary School – a Conceptual Approach*, copyright 1967. This approach rose out of the perceived need of a balance between the 19th and early 20th century approach to teaching music that was strictly skills based, with sight reading the goal, and one later in the 20th century that was based on having fun with music, without an emphasis on acquiring skills. The conceptual approach emphasizes understanding the art of music, with intellectual comprehension matched with emotional response and technical proficiency.

At each lesson, I present the students with a musical concept, such as "music always involves rhythm" and then engage them in activities with music that illustrate the concept. As more and more concepts are introduced and practiced, interrelationships among them develop and the students can understand music on several levels. Rhythm is related to melody and melody has beat. The beat of the music can be emphasized with harmonic changes. Expressive elements, such as dynamics and tone color, affect the perception of the melody.

Children respond to music intuitively, physically, emotionally and intellectually, all at their individual levels of development. Music is uniquely suited to providing something for everyone. One child may be mulling over the relative note values while another is lighthearted from hearing the lilting melody of Skip to my Lou, unconcerned with whether he is skipping to quarter notes or eighth notes. Music can reach children in corners of their brains that are not even approached by standard school fare. The exposure to music in the primary years opens a window which, if it is not opened, may never be opened, or opened with great difficulty and not ever as widely. Music makes all the difference in the world for some children.

Of the hundreds of children I have taught at Arroyo Mocho in the past five years of volunteering there, there are a handful, who, because of what I have done at the school, have found in music a sustaining passion. Muriel Burns, a first and second grade teacher at Arroyo Mocho, wrote about her son Tyler: "As someone who has absolutely no talent for music myself, I had no idea my son Tyler had talent. It was through Mrs. Gregg that I discovered, and Tyler too, that he had a gift for hearing, reading and playing music. He is able to pick up an instrument, and figure out melodies, and notes himself. He now plays the recorder, tin whistle, guitar and trumpet and would love to learn piano too. As a child of ADD, Tyler has self-esteem issues. Music has given him a way to feel successful, talented and good about himself and for that we are forever grateful to Mrs. Gregg."

Tammy Fitz-Randolph, the mother of Austin, now in 4th grade, wrote to me, in part: "I thought you might like to know some specific ways your gift has benefited my son, Austin. Because he was able to receive instruction in music beginning in Kindergarten, the principles of rhythm and the 'language' of music are very much a part of who he is becoming. You might not realize, but Austin was a late (very) walker and as a result, lags behind his peers in his ability to run and compete in physical activities. It is one thing to tell a child that everyone has a special talent, but it is almost as painful for a parent as it is for the child to struggle to find that 'special something.' You gave Austin

his special something when you encouraged him to explore music. I believe that this contributes to his academic excellence and his maturity. Thank-you most for this gift. I also believe that being exposed to and understanding musical theory has contributed to Austin's success in reading and mathematics. He currently reads at a ninth grade level. As a 9-year old he can already grasp the nature of algebraic equations. I remember listening to him tap incessantly two years ago not just to musical rhythms, but also while doing addition, subtraction and multiplication, everything. When he reads aloud there is music in his use of language. He can hear music and translate it into scores or play it on the recorder. He is learning to translate it on the piano and to other instruments. I believe the ability to hear and translate music is also helping him to develop fluency in his study of Spanish as a second language."

The parents at Arroyo Mocho thank me again and again for bringing music into their children's lives. And I thank the parents for the chance to reach into the future through their children. I walk across the school yard between classes. An articulate and engaging second grader, whose mother is an alcoholic, whose mother's mother is also an alcoholic, who is cared for by her father's mother, stands outside at recess with her recorder, leaning against a post. Around her students in happy commotion snack at the picnic tables under the shade structure, play games of chase, play with balls, stand around and talk. She plays a descending melody, like the one in *Skin and Bones*, but rising back to the B before descending to E. It is a plaintive melody, over and over. I ask her if she made it up. She says she did. I tell her it's beautiful. I tell her I'm glad I gave her a recorder. She jumps up in the air and snaps her heels together. This student is using the notes she has learned to express herself, to put melody in a world that has not always looked out for her. Over and over, this sad little melody, making her happier inside. At the end of recess, the bell rings. The students freeze, waiting for a whistle from the teachers on yard duty that tells them it's time to line up. The recorder notes rise above the sudden silence.

School subjects can be divided into those that are primarily cognitive, where what is learned is the result of thinking, and subjects such as music, which are primarily affective, where the learning results from an emotional or felt response to the subject. Most subjects in the school day are cognitive. The subjects which are the first to be cut and the last to be reinstated are the affective ones. These are, however, the subjects that make school enjoyable and give students compelling reasons to attend school, that provide a break during the school day from reading, writing and arithmetic. They are also subjects in which all students can feel successful, especially those for whom the primarily cognitive subjects present difficulties and disappointment. If a student has classroom music starting in Kindergarten, he will enter an orchestra or band program already familiar with the concepts of rhythm, melody, harmony, form and expressive elements and have an extensive repertoire of folk songs, patriotic songs, historical songs, composed songs, silly songs, songs from other countries, and children's songs.

There must be time in the school day for the fine arts, for beauty and

emotion. The affective subjects need to be taught by credentialed teachers equal in status to the other credentialed teachers in a school. Music is crucial to the intellectual, emotional, physical and social development of every child.

I stand outside my daughter's classroom, waiting to see her when she comes out for lunch. Carly's Mother waits there too.

"How's Carly?" I ask. Carly is in 4th grade now so I don't see her for music anymore.

"She was so disappointed she didn't pass the music test."

"She didn't pass?" I ask incredulously.

"No."

Carly was one of the best recorder players in third grade. She learned everything I put in front of her and taught herself many songs on the recorder that I passed out for singing, such as The Star Spangled Banner and God Bless America, and was in the advanced recorder class. If I gave her a piece of music that was difficult, she would practice until she could play it perfectly. She also took an after-school tin whistle class that I taught for GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) students and was at the top of the class there as well. She is a dedicated student, a hard worker, and loves music. Yet she was not chosen for the string program.

The instrumental music program that the district provides in 4th grade is an exclusive program. Less than one-third of the 4th graders are chosen to participate. The students who are now in 4th grade at Arroyo Mocho have spent four years learning music in an inclusive program, that reaches out to every child, regardless of aptitude. After four years of learning that they can accomplish whatever they want in music, through hard work and paying attention, they are told that they didn't make the cut. The students who are chosen for the instrumental program do not sing in their lessons, nor do they learn any of the general music curriculum. They learn a minimum amount on the instrument they have blindly selected. The music they play is presented as letters on a page, not as notes in a staff. The students who are not chosen are forced to see themselves as failing, as not having what it takes to play an instrument. If a student is not chosen in 4th or 5th grade, he or she has little chance of entering the music program in middle school. The elementary program is intended as an early entry into the middle school program. A student starting middle school, who has not played an instrument in elementary school, under the auspices of the district teachers, is unlikely to be accepted into the instrumental classes in middle school. There is not any general music at the middle school level.

Even more ridiculous, having been selected, the students must produce an instrument, without having any idea if they have an aptitude for that instrument. The students who are interested in playing an instrument should have a chance to hold the instrument, compare it to others, and decide if that is really what they want to do for the whole school year. A kinesthetic learner may take to a violin immediately even if he or she cannot attend well to a listening test. A student who can tell pitches apart may be all thumbs.

Chandler, a precocious first grader, raises his hand as soon as I start talking about note values. I have divided a circle, which they will learn in subsequent lessons is a

whole note, into quarters and another circle into eighths, darkening the parts that are left after a quarter is taken out, and an eighth.

"Yes, Chandler?"

"Mrs. Gregg, are eighth notes the fastest notes?"

"Do you remember when we learned about tempo?"

"Yes."

"Notes are fast or long depending on the tempo. An eighth note in one song might be faster than a sixteenth note in a song with a slower tempo."

"Are sixteenth notes the fastest notes?"

"There are sixteenth notes, thirty second notes, sixty fourth notes" I tell him, drawing them on the board. Chandler looks thoughtful, stares at the notes I have drawn.

"Each one is twice the number of the one before it" Chandler announces.

"That's right!"

Mrs. Ouellette has a substitute today. I walk into the classroom and the students are at their desks, with their recorders out, sitting quietly. The sub sits at the desk, watching. The students, at my request, play G, then C', then G, then C', over and over. Then we sing the "Hello" song they have sung at the beginning of every music lesson since Kindergarten, only instead of singing the rising fourth from G to C' to the word "Hel-lo", they play it on their recorders. By the end of the year they will be able to play the whole song on their recorders. After the "Hello" song, we sing "Old Joe Clarke". When we get to the refrain, while I sing "round and round, Old Joe Clarke, round and round I say," they play a sustained F, then change to Bb on the word "say," back to F, then change to Bb again on the word "long," back to F until the end of the refrain. Their recorders and my voice are making harmony. They understand this. They understand that they change to Bb because the harmony changes. I do not need to tell most of them when to change but those that need help can look at me. I raise my eyebrows when the harmony changes.

After "Old Joe Clarke," we review the song from last week, "Ho Ho Watanay," an Iroquois lullaby. I pull down the screen and put the music on the overhead projector and we sing the song. Then we review the notes D and E, then practice going from E to A. Then, pointing to the notes on the screen with my recorder, on which my fingers are fingering whichever note I'm pointing to, I lead the whole class through the song. Most students play along without error, a few lag behind. We try it again. We sing the song. We clap the rhythm. We sing the note names. The class plays the song on their recorders again, this time I am pointing to the notes with a pointer. These notes should be very familiar to them by now.

I introduce a new song, a Japanese game song, "Kagome," about a bird in a cage who is freed by a crane and a turtle. We sing it with the Japanese words spelled out phonetically, clap the rhythm, say the notes, note that it is mostly A's, that the note above A is B, the note below A is G, around the bottom line of the staff is E. I play the song for them on the recorder, then they try. The principal walks in the door. He smiles and goes to the back of the room where he stands, observing the lesson. We play it again and

again. The students like the song. Then we play "Ho Ho Watanay" again. The principal is impressed. He says to me, as he is leaving, "Thank you so much for doing this." He thanks me whenever our paths cross.

Third grade is my reward for the previous three years I have had with most of these students, my last year to reap the benefits of all my sowing. Next year the district will provide music teachers for these students. Week by week, I have filled these students with music. They are good, they love me. I love them. Teaching them is mostly effortless. They want music. I want to teach them. A group of third graders in another school would not be so easy to teach. They would not know what these students know. They would not love music as much as these students do. This is my reward for showing up, week after week, year after year. It is a generous reward.

In the last three years, the Arroyo Mocho Parents and Teachers Association has given me \$3,000 to buy classroom instruments and materials for my lessons. Thanks to them I have a classroom set of xylophones, one per student. I have an alto glockenspiel, classroom sets of triangles, wood blocks, castanets, sand blocks, finger cymbals, shakers, bells, hand bells. On Back-to-School night, I was standing outside my daughter's classroom and the AMPT co-treasurer ran up to me and asked: "Would you like a shed?" I was taken aback. No one has ever asked me before whether I would like a shed! In the yearbook, on the dedication page, in large type, is written: "A special thank you to Abbie Gregg for sharing the joy of music with our children." A whole page in the following yearbook is covered with pictures of me teaching, with "Thank you, Mrs. Gregg for the music" written alongside. The school is a better school than it would be without a music teacher. I am appreciated.

In most school districts in California, two generations or more have passed without general classroom music, music for everyone, being treated as an important, if not essential, subject. Parents who had no classroom music when they were in school have no expectation that their children will have music, unless they read the curriculum guides from the State Department of Education. In The Visual and Performing Arts Framework for California Public Schools, issued by the California Department of Education in 1996, it is stated: "All students need access to instruction in classroom or general music as well as to participation in choral and instrumental ensembles, and the instruction needs to be provided by credentialed music specialists." Students who have instruction in music do better in all subjects.

The beautiful voices of these children transform an ordinary day into a delightful one. These pure voices, effortlessly high and compellingly melodic, fill my heart with joy. To hear these precious small voices is a gift.

My gift to the students at Arroyo Mocho has allowed me to keep up my skills as a music educator and to find, outside myself, what Bob Walker, the late landscape photographer of the hills around Livermore and the East Bay, called for, when he said: "Find something outside yourself that is yourself. Then devote yourself to it with all your heart." By teaching at Arroyo Mocho, I can set an example of what a school with a comprehensive music program is like, and enrich my life immeasurably.

The school where I have been teaching music as a volunteer, the one I wrote about, has shut down, school district trying to save money, shutting two top-performing schools and increasing class sizes 50%. The world is in a sorry state.

from an Abbie Gregg e-mail July 5th, 2004

Pat Campbell:

Abbie Gregg's gift of music to her children there at Arroyo Mocho is told in a tale that is likewise a gift to we who read it, and we cannot help but find the resonances within our own teaching experiences. My teacherly self found frustration and anger in learning of young Carly who, loving music, needing music, pumping her energy into learning music, is shot down and blocked from further training in school. It makes my heart burn, particularly because she is not a solitary case. It happens all too frequently that children are *tested out of* music. That was not ever the intent of aptitude tests, which were devised to measure a student's potential to achieve in music. But when schools are confronted by budgetary dilemmas, children's scores on standardized music tests and teacher-constructed tests may be used against them. Teachers are told by administrators to make choices, that staffing cannot be increased to accommodate all children in the ensembles, that ensembles that get too large cannot be easily managed. So "push comes to shove" and the Carlys are regretfully ushered out of their dreams, out of what is all so very good for them. This practice must be over and done with, forevermore. Despite the administrative edicts, the budgetary constraints, there must always be a place in the choir, the band, the recorder consort, the drumming ensemble, for those children who desire it. It is what teachers must advocate, what they must uphold and support: "music for every child", despite the odds. The common school is no place for elitist practices.

Music aptitude is the potential to learn music, a product not only of nature but also of nurture. Edwin Gordon, designer of the Music Aptitude Profile, the Primary Measures of Music Audiation, and the Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation, maintains that while music potential may appear to be inherited (only), it is only through positive early childhood experiences in music that children rise to the level of musical skill and understanding that is their innate capacity to achieve. So important is this early childhood musical stimulation that, Gordon notes, the period "from birth to age nine is of greater consequence than formal instruction in music after age nine". His assessment of musical capacity suggests that some are more greatly "born to groove" than others, which we would argue against. Yet we do agree with his sense of urgency for the musical education of the very young.

* Out of curiosity and interest in the content and premises of music aptitude tests, see Edwin E. Gordon's The Nature, Description, Measurement, and Evaluation of Music Aptitudes (Chicago: GIA, 1987).

Charlie Keil:

For me, "personally," as they say, this is the most important chapter in our book because it documents very clearly a 5 year slice of the utter, continuing and devolving

failure of the public schools in a reasonably prosperous state like California over a three generation period of time.

"In most school districts in California, two generations or more have passed without general classroom music, music for everyone, being treated as an important, if not essential, subject. Parents who had no classroom music when they were in school have no expectation that their children will have music . . . "

When a beautiful butterfly or orchid goes extinct in the tropical rain forest, and this happens now daily, it is a sad, sad day for all of humanity. When the musical potentials of children are crushed and parents don't know what their children are missing because they never had "the gift" given to them either, it is almost as sad. There are at least another half dozen single sentences in Abbie Gregg's description that are carefully prepared for but nevertheless hit this reader like a surprising beam of sunlight, or like a sudden punch in the gut.

A great beam of sunlight: "These are individuals who are full of music and rhyme and the energy to love anything that lets out in a joyful way what is already inside them."

A punch in the gut: that July 5th, 2004 e-mail saying that one of the rare schools full of musically attuned kids has been terminated.

I have to be careful not to go ballistic, berserko, over the top with a rant, whenever I hear the words "progress" or "progressive" these days. It has been decades, generations, perhaps a century or so since this noun and this adjective have made any sense whatsoever in relation to the joy and expressive power of children in schools.