

## Schools of Music and Adult Education

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When educators consider the inevitability of declining enrollments at colleges and universities, the non-vocational disciplines, such as music, appear to be particularly threatened. Music schools have felt the impact of declining enrollments for years and educators have become aware of the need for creative ways to deal with this situation.<sup>1</sup> At a recent national convention of the College Music Society, “music educators from all parts of the country related the same story, a decline in enrollment, less money, and faculty and staff reductions.”<sup>2</sup> Faced with budget cuts that have reduced faculty and staff size and that hamper recruiting and scholarship funds, music school administrators have been searching for way to increase enrollment, enhance community visibility, be educationally sound, and yet not place an additional financial burden on existing programs. One possibility that music school administrators should consider is encouraging adult learners to participate in existing programs.

The adult student is not a new phenomenon on college and university campuses. In their book American In Transition, Aslanian and Brickell report “half of all Americans 25 years and older (over 60 million adults) learned one of more topics in the past year.”<sup>3</sup> It is logical that many adult learners would turn to the local college or university to continue their education. Most institutions of higher education encourage these individuals to attend their schools and have adapted program to assist them. While many adult students will work on a graduate degree,<sup>4</sup> the majority will desire non-credit, non-degree courses.<sup>5</sup>

Adults are continuing their education for a variety of reasons. The most prevalent reason by far is based on career enhancement or changes. Family and leisure purposes are the next most common cause. Esthetic, health, religion, and citizenship are, in that order, other reasons

expressed by adults seeking to further their education.<sup>3</sup> Music schools will have a very limited appeal for individual expressing an interest in career changes; however, individuals interested in family, leisure or esthetic educational possibilities might welcome innovative music programs.

Music schools have been slow to take advantage of the returning student other than those individuals enrolled in graduate music programs. For many years, non-credit programs have existed for children and pre-college students as a service to the community but mainly for recruitment purposes. Music school administrators need to assess how adult students, interested in taking classes for their own enjoyment and benefit, could fit in the school's credit and non-credit programs.

Instrumental and vocal instruction for adults who are interested in beginning or continuing earlier studies, would be the logical foundation for any program. The administrator will need to keep in mind that adult students will need special consideration in registration, scheduling, instructors, and expectations. It will be necessary for instructors to adapt their teaching styles and choice of material. It is likely that many adults will be interested in traditional literature; however, jazz, contemporary, pop, country, and ethnic music may be the desired avenue of the individual studying for enjoyment.

Theory and music history classes aimed toward adult students could also attract many interested individuals especially if coordinated with private instruction. These courses would

need to be offered in the evening or on weekends and must take into consideration the variety of student interest. A history course, coordinated with a concert series that would be available in the community or at the school, might be a very interesting class for musicians and non-musicians. A course of this nature could attract a wide range of participants, both students and performing ensembles, and challenge the instructor and administrator to be creative and flexible. If handled well, it could establish a great deal of interaction between various segments in the community and be a positive endeavor for all participants. A series could also be developed for family audiences. This could create a positive image for the college or university and put the school in touch with future students as well as the interested adult.

Adult students could be encouraged to participate in established ensembles at the school on a credit or non-credit basis. It is a rare ensemble music program that would not benefit for an additional player, provided the individual meets the needs of the group. What orchestra conductor would not welcome a competent violinist or bassist? Schools could also help fill certain needs within their band or chorus programs.

An excellent example of how adults can affect a college ensemble can be witnessed at the University of Louisville. Five players in the various string section of the university orchestra are adult players who enjoy performing in their spare time. They participate in all of the rehearsals and perform within the sections at each concert. The organization would exist without their participation; however, their presence adds much to the ensemble and benefits the enrolled college students.<sup>6</sup>

The various jazz ensembles at the University of Louisville depend on adult students to a much greater degree. The large jazz ensemble has a total of twenty members, nine of which are non-enrolled students. Without these nine outside students, the educational experience for current and future students might not be possible. Their participation helps the school offer a very necessary ensemble at an extremely high performance level. In addition to the large jazz ensemble, adult students comprise 40% of the participants in the six combos, or small jazz ensembles. In short, the presence of adult students makes the jazz program possible at the University of Louisville.<sup>7</sup>

Schools of music should take advantage of the increased need for adult education courses. If developed and advertised in an attractive manner, a variety of classes could be offered at little or no cost and yet the school could reap many rewards. The school could better service to the community, foster a positive attitude for the university, increase enrollment, utilize faculty and space more efficiently, help with future recruitment, aid in filling ensembles, and offer a more varied educational experience to all involved. With thoughtful and innovative administrators, adult educational opportunities at a music school could be endless.

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