

# Letters On Music Learning

By Mary Ellen Pinzino

From the Come Children Sing Institute

Issue 14

Winter, 1995

## Ode to Movement

Dear Movement:

We have been friends for a long time, but I don't understand you. You have such power in my classroom. You compel my students, both children and adults. You draw out the sensitive musician in both the beginner and the advanced student. You propel music making into artistry. What is your magic?

Through the years you served my classroom well through creative, rhythmic, stylistic, and choreographed movement. More recently, however, you have shown me your greater wonder, and you have transformed my teaching. I am in awe of your power, but I don't understand it. You are a bundle of paradoxes. You are the most basic musical response, yet the most developed musical response. You are the manifestation of music, yet the manifestation of musicianship. You are fundamental to rhythm, yet fundamental to tonal. You make music tangible, yet I can't put my finger on you.

Like the Pied Piper, you draw all to your charm. You engage those who are afraid of you by touching the artist in the individual. You bring each beyond his own inhibitions by empowering him with his own artistry. Only you could strip away consciousness of peers. Only you could lead fifth graders to become a community of artists. Only you could transform an inhibited adult choir into a moving expression of song.

You speak the language of music. Unlike words, that can only speak *about* music, you speak *to*, *for*, and *through* music. It is through you that students can interact with all dimensions of music. It is through you that music can directly communicate. It is through you that music can be addressed without the intrusion of words.

You, Movement, are the *embodiment* of music. You are the life and breath of music. You make music come alive. You are what happens between the beats. Without you, music is but a clinical model. It is you that propels fine tone and fine intonation into fine art.

You are also the *embodiment* of musicianship; the embodiment of music learning; the embodiment of audiation—musical thinking. From the toddler enthusiastically bouncing to music to the polished performer, it is you, movement, that expresses the

comprehension of music. You propel performance—overtly or covertly—at all levels of development. You are both the most basic and the most developed musical response.

You provide access to music, while accessing musicianship. Through you, beginners interact with music of Mozart and Stravinsky and sensitively reflect the differences. Tuneful and rhythmic five and six year olds move artistically with a new song, reflecting nuances in movement long before they can begin to reproduce the melody, rhythm, or text. More accomplished students move artfully while performing melody, rhythm, and text just as skillfully. You activate both tonal and rhythm audiation, enhancing their development and bringing them together into one expressive whole.

You compel artistry. You move the individual to lose consciousness of self and to become lost in his own artistry. Through you, he becomes one with the art. Such intimacy with art can be threatening to the reluctant adult. He will avoid you rather than risk being so vulnerable—so utterly musical.

You insist that musical movement is a natural, ongoing expression of what the music being heard looks like, and that the individual find his own unique expression in movement. You demonstrate that the most musical movement is nondefined, continuous, flowing movement. It moves as music moves, with the grace and beauty that is art. It transcends the turbulence of rhythm, while being shaped by it. It is like a cloud, moving and changing in the wind.

Continuous, free-flowing movement that fully engages the upper torso, with outstretched arms shaping yet being shaped by nuance, complemented by expression of the lower body—this is the movement that makes music come alive; that makes the musician come alive; that makes musicianship come alive. This fluid, ongoing, "sustained" movement grants beginners easy access, while leading developed musicians to greater depth in music, greater depth in movement, and greater depth in their own musicianship.

Sustained movement is the foundation for the more obvious relation of movement to beat. It provides a blank canvas of time and space upon which to accommodate rhythm. When weight, heaviness in movement, is integrated with sustained movement, meter begins to take shape. The use of weight amidst sustained movement determines meter in the music domain and demonstrates a sense of meter in the music learning domain.

Your fundamental relation to rhythm both supports and masks your fundamental relation to tonal. You are the momentum that propels tonal, the phenomenon that gives rise to breath, and the source that animates tone quality. Your *motion* reflects *emotion* expressed in the shape of a line. It is you that provides ample breath and inspires the musician to literally carry the line, shaping it in all its nuance. While relating to rhythm, you transcend rhythm, moving through and beyond the tonal spectrum into sheer artistic expression—both in the music domain and in the music learning domain.

Your many paradoxes continue to baffle me, Movement, but your wisdom is not in the realm of the thinking mind; it is in that of the body in motion. Although there have been times I wished that you would just write a book explaining yourself and telling me

what to do rather than make me struggle with constant experimentation and observation in the classroom, words cannot reveal your mystery or teach what you have taught in action.

Seeing and hearing the transformation of the accomplished adult choir when movement was introduced; discovering the depth of musicianship of my developed five and six year olds engaged in sustained movement; being moved by the sheer musicality of the singing and movement of my children's chorus and sensing their artistic satisfaction in movement; observing self conscious, peer conscious fifth grade beginners not only find musical expression in movement, but resemble a group of gifted conductors; watching three and four year olds reflect different styles of music so precisely in movement; hearing parents sing to their toddlers most musically while moving in a sustained manner; witnessing a graduate student who had difficulty with rhythmic movement after much exposure and experience with various meters demonstrate competence in sustained movement; watching a graduate student who was uncomfortable with movement and with unusual meters become intimate with the art in movement and be moved by the beauty of the experience in a choral work in unusual meter; these, along with experiencing my own growth as a musician under your tutelage, have unveiled your power.

You are a master teacher. You have not only developed my musicianship and that of my students, but you have led me beyond my own inhibitions in movement, and guided me in facilitating students' movement. You have shown me that sitting rather than standing, using the full expression of the upper torso in movement, provides for gradual immersion in full-body movement. You have taught me that the music teacher need not be a movement specialist, but simply a musician willing to be musical—willing to move. Movement invites movement. The students follow the teacher's lead, and their natural response in movement becomes the model for the teacher. Students and teacher become a community of artists, moved by their own artistry, with the teacher serving as coach as needed.

You make each classroom experience more meaningful, more musical. You transform activities one would least expect you to influence. You make listening experiences more meaningful. Fifth grade beginners as well as developed three year olds artistically reflect the nuance of what they are hearing while they are moving. Graduate students report greater comprehension in listening to music while moving. You provide for *active involvement* in the listening process.

You cast a spell on my chorus. You command phrasing, style, articulation, and vocal technique. Students engaged in sustained movement while singing do not have to be reminded to take a breath, or to not take a breath. They do not have to be reminded to keep the momentum going on long notes or to shape the line, as they *move through* those long notes and phrases, carrying the line with their arms, as if a treasure, not to be dropped. They do not have to be reminded to breathe properly or to open the throat, as breath and tone are generated naturally and appropriately through movement. You inspire singers to *move in style*. They *become* the style of what they are singing—in movement, tone, and articulation.

Since I have been associating with you, Movement, I have found many performances to be sterile rather than exciting. Accepted performance standards seem to strive for perfection in tone and intonation and for precision in pitch and rhythm without regard for you that gives flight to music. These performances are a reflection of standard rehearsal practices, which are often an insult to the musicianship of ensemble members. Too many well-meaning vocal and instrumental conductors do not engage in rehearsal in the language of music that communicates directly with the art and with the artist. Rather, they talk endlessly, giving verbal instructions for musical execution. They find comfort in their pulpits, afraid to risk intimacy with the art, while trying to "talk" *students* into being more musical.

Movement releases students into the depths of art and the depths of their own artistry. It removes the restraints of *thinking about* the musical attributes of performance and activates *musical thinking*, allowing those attributes to emerge as an organic whole in performance. The more that overt movement is done in rehearsal, the more that covert movement will propel performance. Artistry is the realization of movement in performance.

Movement, you are the essence of music. You are consummate musicianship. Of all the paradoxes that define you, perhaps the most perplexing is that you are so intimately entwined with both music and musicianship, yet your magnitude is virtually ignored by the field of music education. It is time for a new *movement* in music education—one that takes *action* in every classroom to uncover the power of movement; one that is not afraid to be intimate with the art; one that develops musicianship that moves both the listener and the performer.

Yours truly,



*Note: See “[Awakening Artistry in the Choral Rehearsal](#),” by Mary Ellen Pinzino for more about movement.*

© 2007, Mary Ellen Pinzino

Contact  
Mary Ellen Pinzino

More by  
Mary Ellen Pinzino