

Mary Goetzeon Music Teacher Education and How the Use of World Music Can Reach Students

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Abstract

Dr. Mary Goetze, Indiana University retired, is an author, composer, clinician, conductor, guest speaker, runs her own choral series published by Boosey & Hawkes, and is an active advocate for many educational issues affecting children. She has centered her life on choral music, multiculturalism, teacher education and children's singing. She has received the Distinguished Alum awards from both the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the University of Colorado College of Music, being named as Outstanding Hoosier Musician by the Indiana Music Educators Association and Outstanding Educator of the Year by the Organization of American Kodaly Educators. She also received the Distinguished Teaching Award from Indiana University. In this interview she discusses her lifelong joy of teaching, of finding new ways to reach school-aged children, as well as lays out some best-practices all school music teachers should follow in order to provide an effective and meaningful educational experience for children.

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These are tough times for teachers. The news has been full of bad reports. Not only have states, for years, not been funding their own states' employee teacher retirement plans as they are legally required to do (*Underfunded Teacher Retirement Plans: It's Worse Than You Think*, Manhattan Institute For Policy Research, Civic Paper No. 61, Josh Barro and Stuart Buck, April 2010) but now teachers are being fired because of massive government budget shortfalls. The Providence, Rhode Island school board fired all their teachers in order to make budget cuts (Feb. 23, 2011, *CBS News*), and the Idaho (Feb. 22, 2011, *Reuters*) and Wisconsin (Feb. 17, 2011, *Huffington Post*) teachers unions held large scale protests when their governors proposed cutting hundreds of teaching jobs and limiting collective bargaining agreements. To those of us in the arts, massive budget cuts have been the norm for the past three decades. Thankfully excellence in arts teaching continues on. In music, Dr. Mary Goetze is one of many shining examples of the best of us working diligently, guided on by the belief in the goal of passing on their knowledge for the betterment of future generations. Her interest in helping others extends past her classroom. Not just a teacher and mentor, she is an author, a frequently commissioned composer, clinician, conductor, guest speaker, runs her own choral series published by Boosey & Hawkes, and is an active advocate for many educational issues affecting children.

Centering her life on choral music, multiculturalism, teacher education and children's singing, Goetze's work, through her synthesis of research, composition and choral work, for spreading children's choirs across the country is stunning in both its excellence and scope. She is co-author of *Educating Young Singers: A Choral Resource for Teacher-Conductors*, and an on-going series of DVDs entitled *Global Voices* that explores the songs of the global village including volumes on the songs of Hungary, Japan, the Sotho and Zulu, the Maori and Azerbaijan, to list just a few of the volumes. Her two series of books, *Share the Music* and *Spotlight on Music* are used by school children in grades K-6 throughout the United States and English speaking countries around the globe. Goetze, who recently retired as from her position as Professor of Music at Indiana University, is certified in both Orff-Schulwerk and Kodaly Concept, and founder both the Indiana University International Vocal Ensemble and Indiana University Children's Choir in the School of Music Pre-College Music. The excellence of her work has been confirmed by an arm-long length of awards and honors.

A few include winning the Distinguished Alum awards from both the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the University of Colorado College of Music, being named as Outstanding Hoosier Musician by the Indiana Music Educators Association and Outstanding Educator of the Year by the Organization of American Kodaly Educators. She also received the Distinguished Teaching Award from Indiana University, and assumed the R.L. Jones Distinguished Professorship at East Carolina University School of Music during the Fall semester of 2005. She has been given grants to further her work from organizations like the Center for the Study of Global Change, the Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center, and the East Asian Studies Center, to list just three. She's given presentations, and led clinics and workshops, throughout the United States and worldwide in locations like Brazil, Newfoundland and Labrador, throughout Australia and Canada.

You've devoted a significant chunk of your life to giving and making available, to children of various ages, quality musical experiences in the materials you've written and composed yourself. From where does your desire to work in this area stem?

Since my first teaching experience in elementary school, I have been passionate about bringing music to children. My involvement with vocal music came about because I had been in wonderful choirs all of my life, and I wanted to share that with youngsters. Singing was at the core of my public school general music classes. In the school choir, I saw an opportunity to develop children's artistry and nurture their love of music. That love led me to found the Indiana University Children's Choir to provide Bloomington children an opportunity to perform in major works that were being done by the School of Music. At the same time the choir provided the School of Music with a skilled children's choir that could keep pace with the operas and orchestral works they were doing. I directed the program with undergraduate and graduate students assisting for the first 15 years, and now, in its 31st year, it continues to serve both of those purposes. My passion for teaching and my fascination with children's singing also led me to study their vocal development and apply my observations in the arrangements and compositions I've done.

In looking through your compositions for vocal choirs, as part of your imprint via Boosey & Hawkes, I am struck by how you don't play down to the ensembles. They may be composed for children's groups of various ages, but you don't have the performers singing just simple lines, melodies and rhythms. What was it that led you to start composing your own works for children's choirs?

I started arranging and later composing because as a public school teacher, there was no local music store that carried music that suited my needs, neither for choir or my elementary classroom. A lot of my early pieces are arrangements because I was exploring how kids learned to sing in parts and what devices helped them succeed. I had done both Orff and Kodaly training and was integrating ideas from both of them into little arrangements for fourth and fifth graders. Then when I started the children's choir at Indiana University I had a need for pieces that were longer and more developed, often with accompaniment. When I looked at what was published there was very little for children, and those specifically for kids were often in unison and, as you say, "played down" to kids. When I found that octavos with vocal parts, the writing wasn't consistent with what I was learning about beginning part-singing. As a result, I just fell into writing my own arrangements and in sharing them in workshops. I found they worked for other teachers too. After Boosey and Hawkes started my choral series, and those by Doreen Rao and Betty Bertaux, excellent music has been springing up from a variety of publishers. Now there is an overwhelming number of excellent pieces available.

Something I would say about my own compositions, in comparison to some of those being composed today, is that most of mine are truly for children's choirs. There are a lot of works that I view as material for youth or even women's chorus, rather than children. Some compositions are really challenging and require hard work for the kids to sing well, sometimes adding stress to rehearsing, and taking away the joy of singing. I hope conductors resist the temptation to prove how great they are by the level of sophistication and complexity of the music their choir can perform. Since I believe musical expressivity is not dependent on complexity, I try to write things that have an overall effect of sophistication but are relatively easy for the kids to learn and satisfying to sing. I want the kids to understand the music and the text, and to relate to it. In other words, I want to involve the kids' emotions as much or more than their intellect. I want them to love the melodies and to understand the words.

*What would you say was one of the major issues you were aiming at in your book, *Educating Young Singers, A Resource for Teacher-Conductors*?*

There are many for my co-authors and I packed in our very best choral and pedagogical ideas. But one topic that is not always included in choral resources is creativity within the choral rehearsal. Choral procedures reflect European autocratic rule, where the conductor is on the podium, like a king, telling everyone how they're supposed to play or sing. In contrast, we talk about democratic procedures in the book—ones that can be incorporated into rehearsals. We describe ways to involve the singers in artistic decision-making, so they are invested in the music and ensemble, and grow to understand how musicians think. As one of many examples, we pose problems like “We have to decide here if we're going to sing this section louder or softer. Let's try both ways, then see which best expresses the words and intent of the music.” You can work collaboratively with choristers rather making all the decisions for them, and it is really fun to have 30 or 40 minds focusing on solutions rather than just your own.

With regard to your work as a collegiate teacher of aspiring public and grade school teachers, what is the number one fault you've seen teachers make with regard to teaching children music?

I see three related issues: 1) Teachers need to maintain high expectations for their students. 2) To help their students achieve, the teachers need to know how to teach musical skills efficiently, and 3) to develop skills, teachers need time with the kids. (This is a major problem music teachers face in schools as a result of economics and No Child Left Behind.) Music classes can be entertaining, but to really develop students' musical ability and a love of music, teachers need to enable students to make music in a manner that is satisfying for them and serves as a vehicle for expressing their feelings. With regard to singing, if children don't know how to control their voice and if they haven't learned to match pitch, then they aren't going to find singing a gratifying experience, and neither are the people who are listening to them. In the music education resources from early in the 20th century, teachers were advised to isolate the out-of-tune singers--sometimes calling them “crows.” Those children were told to just mouth the words while a group of “bluebirds” did the singing. I was convinced that I do better than that. So early in my teaching career, I devoted my attention to helping kids from the beginning of their vocal development through part-singing.

My dissertation reported some interesting observations that had not been addressed in the literature and led me to develop remedial activities that I presented in numerous workshops in the 1980s and 1990s. I found a significant difference in the pitch of kids' singing alone and the pitch they sang when joined by others. While most adults sing better when supported by an external pitch, I found that at a certain stage of development, some kids were notable focus on their own voice when singing with other voices. This is one possible explanation for out-of-tune singing. So my advice to those teaching music to Kindergarten, First and Second Grade is to provide kids with opportunities to hear themselves alone when they echo patterns or phrases. Then the teacher can ask an individual questions about his or her singing, and give them some qualitative feedback and, if they are not tuneful, pointers on how to improve.

I believe that with appropriate instruction, there are very few children who truly can't develop pitch-matching skills and sing tunefully. Not everyone is going to become a solo singer, but nearly all children can be taught to use their voice expressively and tunefully if they are given fundamentals, encouragement and time to develop.

What factors led you to create the Indiana University International Vocal Ensemble?

One factor arose from traveling and seeing what colonization had done in countries like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. I witnessed how the native cultures had been nearly trampled out by the Europeans who settled those countries. Except for the Maori in New Zealand, it seemed the natives were deferent to western culture, and did not value their own. Then I came home to realize that my own country had the same sad history. I realized that both the materials and the way I had been teaching perpetuated the notion that western culture is superior. Something in me absolutely balked at continuing to be an instrument of colonization in my teaching and I began to search for a new direction.

Another factor was rooted in watching the violence that results from racial and ethnic strife every night on the news. I felt I couldn't go on as a music educator without doing something about the problems in the world. I wondered how music education could help bring people together. I decided the best way was to demonstrate to my music education students effective ways to teach music from outside the western art tradition. I knew from the beginning that I wanted the students to experience learning and making this music, not just learn about it or write a lesson plan on how they might teach it.

One of the things you pioneered when teaching the music of other countries and cultures to vocal ensembles was to bring in an expert from the culture in the music being taught and have that expert teach the music to the ensemble in the manner they would teach the music to natives of their own culture, and not in the way we would teach music to ensembles here in the United States which is to use sheet music. This is such a logical concept, but of course logical after you hear someone else has pioneered it. What led you to develop this idea?

The first thought I had when I founded the Indiana University International Vocal Ensemble (IVE) was to perform music of diverse cultures with as much integrity as western art music is performed in the school. Musicologists conduct research into the performance practices of previous centuries, and we have libraries full of original scores to insure that we perform western art music in an appropriate style. I asked, “What would be analogous to that in teaching other musical traditions?” It was obvious—there are living sources of music all around, so why not turn to them rather than a library?

I recall clearly a moment when this idea was brought to my attention. I was in South Africa attending an annual concert in which a Welsh choir and a Jewish choir perform a joint concert. Each year they invited a different African choir to sing with them. That year one of the white choirs sang a Zulu song as part of their set. What did they do? They sang an arrangement of it by Paul Simon’s pieces. I thought, “Oh my God. The choir was willing to have the African choir on the stage but not take materials directly from them.” Then I began to see similar practices, everywhere I looked. White people were resisting accepting things directly from colored hands, especially in the western art music culture. So that led me to look for people across my university who could teach music to the ensemble, and when I got grants, to bring artists to campus to teach and perform with IVE.

The Global Voices DVDs clearly reflect your philosophy and the approach you took in IVE. How did that series evolve?

It was coincidental that at the same time I was starting IVE, I met Jay Fern who was in music technology at IUPUI (Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis). He got excited about what I was planning to do with IVE. We talked about what to do when I couldn’t get an informant for IVE rehearsals. The next best thing, at that point in time, was video. I had been invited to teach in Australia at a conference, so I got my first grant to buy a video camera. There was a South African choir at the conference, and I recorded their performances and gathered as much information about their music as I could. Then on my way home, I stopped in New Zealand to study Maori culture. Again I recorded some performances of their singing. I taught from these video recordings in my first year with IVE. Later Jay taught me how to digitize video and incorporate movies into PowerPoint. We then worked together to develop CDROMs and, when there seemed a demand for it, we created the Global Voices DVDs. I collected the songs, did the research and dealt with all of the content, and he managed the technology.

My romp with technology didn’t stop there. Jay helped me set up satellite link-ups with informants in remote places to teach IVE in real time. Then came SKYPE and other internet video phones. These made possible video contact with artists around the globe over the internet using the webcam on my laptop. You have to wonder if we will be beaming our informants in next.

Was there any resistance to your teaching, from either the students or the administration at Indiana, because you weren’t teaching from the printed page via the Western mode?

There was no resistance from the students—they found it novel and sometimes challenging. I think it provided a pleasant change from their other ensembles.

The administrators paid IVE no mind. The Jacobs School of Music is very big, with over 1000 concerts each year. Once IVE was approved, the administrators never attended its concerts nor visited rehearsals. With operas and orchestras performing “real music” each week, there was minimal interest in, nor support for this kind of ensemble within the school. However I enjoyed a wonderful response and support from across the IU campus

How important is it for the choirs singing this music to truly embrace the feet and hand movements that accompany the music being taught?

My decision to “re-create” all aspects of a culture’s music springs from my purpose and philosophy in founding IVE. For me, the guiding principle was to contribute to respect and understanding between cultures. Given this goal,

I wanted the singers to get inside the culture through their music, and that goal led me to what I call *re-creating* music—to sing *their* songs *their* way. Needless to say, that includes the movement. So if a conductor shares my goals, matching the movement is important. If their priorities are different, then it might not be essential. Let me add that to reach my ultimate goal, re-creation needs to be coupled with learning a little about their history and geography in order to understand how the people came to be who they are. In my view, through experiencing the music the way it is experienced in the culture, singers can gain insights into how people in that unfamiliar culture think, feel and live, and thus have a better chance of grasping the essence of the emotional expression embodied in their music. I believe re-creation sets the stage for the empathy and appreciation of people from diverse cultures that is so needed in the world today.

Your One World, Many Voices CD series is collection of songs from various cultures of the world expertly performed by you Indiana University IVE. Each disc has an incredible diversity of different music from various world cultures. With such a wide repertoire, was there ever a point in rehearsals where students would sometimes confuse one culture with another and slip, accidentally, into the wrong cultural pronunciations or rhythmic units?

I think that would more likely happen if you were reading from sheet music. My theory is that, with this approach, the singers learned holistically—that is, through their senses and not only with their intellect. I tried to reintroduce the aural processing of music they had as young children, which I believe is more right brained. The way trained musicians learn music, almost entirely from scores, is predominantly left brained. In short, the words, pitches and timbres were fused and at one with the song, so the students didn't experience this kind of confusion. Also, it was always amazing to me how a song from a previous year would come back to the students. They would remember every movement, every pitch, and every word. I thought it was very interesting how musical the mind is when left to its own natural devices. Western-trained musicians sometimes forget that most music on our planet exists only in human minds, senses and hearts rather than on a piece of paper.

How would you say the ensemble participants were affected by those kinds of experiences?

I haven't done a formal study to see where their participation led and what they did with the ideas. IVE was required for the music education majors preparing to teach vocal music. I was really pleased when upon graduating, those students wanted materials like we had used in IVE. So I went back to various countries to record music, this time with permission to share them beyond the ensemble. That's how the Global Voices DVD series came about.

I know a number of former IVE members who have completed graduate degrees in ethnomusicology, and others who have traveled widely. They came back to tell me about their experiences, or write me from around the globe telling me how meaningful the IVE experience was, sometimes saying that it was an important part of their educational experience in that it opened up the world to them. When you are retired, it is a lovely thing to hear that a seed you planted is still blooming.

In a general way, what are the lessons today's teachers can carry with them today from those experiences into their subsequent teaching within the educational style that is utilized here in the United States?

In teaching diverse styles of music, I hope they look to technology to bring music to life in a more vibrant way rather than having students read it out of a book. And in the way I drew upon international students on our campus, I hope they explore their own communities to find people around them, such as parents and grandparents of the students they teach, who can serve as informants. Even if those people aren't comfortable teaching the song, the parent or grandparent can still share insights into a song the teacher has taught. They might say, "Yes, I learned that song as a kid and my mother sang it to me when...." I hope teachers also might use YouTube or video recordings (www.mjpublishing.com) to heighten the experience their students have with music from unfamiliar cultures, and ultimately prepare them to live peacefully in this diverse country we have become.

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