
Editorial

Did we really *need* a National Curriculum? When it was introduced, was it necessary or merely inevitable: a token of the times? It's odd how each successive decade seems to acquire a particular character. The past sixty years, for example, have given us The Thoughtful 30s (T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, and all that), The Fortress 40s (rising to the occasion), and then, shrugging off the post-war austerity, The Forward-Looking 50s which, with The Stimulating 60s, paved the way for The Experimental 70s and the Oh-So-Optimistic 80s. And where are we now? The Niggling 90s? The Nervous 90s? The Not-So-Sure-After-All 90s? The prevailing philosophy seems to be, 'Don't take too much on trust; don't get carried away'. In education, that translates into breaking everything down to small, easily assessable units, testing, categorizing, appraising, OFSTEDing, and league-tabling – all overlaid with the 'objective' language of industry and marketing. (The writer of a recently published letter to *The Times* likens the preliminary assessment of five-year-olds to 'the goods-inwards inspection process that is conducted by any sensible organisation'!) All of which brings to mind Harry Partch's potent summary:

When things are hopping... definition: the BIG WORLD, complex in excitement, simple in rules, no analysis.

When things are not hopping... definition: the little world, simple in excitement, complex in rules, utter analysis.

To be fair, things can't always be hopping; we do need to take stock from time to time. The articles in this issue of *BjME* reflect the current stock-taking. The topics are varied but the authors are united in asking questions about the state of musical education and where it is heading. One way or another they all question the *status quo* – of the Secondary School music curriculum; of teacher-preparation; of professional musicians' involvement with education; of how we talk to children about music and of how we encourage children to communicate through music; of teachers as composers; and of the assessment of pupils' compositions – but all make suggestions for improving matters. Perhaps, out of diverse questioning a wholeness will emerge: a new vision for musical education in a new century.

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