

# No National Answer, But Plenty Of Local Solutions

The rallying cry of "support music in our schools" invariably draws a sincere and affirmative reaction from everyone associated with music: instrument manufacturers and retailers, performers, composers, and educators. Yet while the larger musical community agrees that music is beneficial, they seem to agree on little else. The fractious nature of the world of music was on display at a recent public forum in Nashville.

Sponsored by NAMM, the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences, and the Music Educators National Conference, the forum provided concerned individuals with the opportunity to "testify" to the benefits of music and music education. (A complete report on the meeting appears on page 118 of this issue.) Testimony ran the gamut from inspired to mundane, but the most striking aspect of the comments delivered was the near-absence of any common ground. Aside from endorsing the notion that exposure to music and learning to play an instrument are rewarding experiences for a child, there was little consensus in the testimony.

Some traditional educators treated the words "music education" and "band" as synonymous and argued that the solution to all problems was more money to fund instrumental "feeder" programs at the elementary school levels. Others implied that music education could be saved by de-emphasizing bands and focusing on music programs that deal with popular music. Still others argued that by ignoring America's indigenous folk music, school music programs were depriving children of their birthright. Trying to distill this three hours of testimony into a set of recommendations that would be relevant to any elected official would challenge the most gifted wordsmith.

The majority of those testifying were decidedly pessimistic, lacing their comments words like "grave concern," "crisis," and "pending disaster." However, one of the minority optimists,

Paul Heid of Heid Music, Appleton, Wisconsin, tendered a cogent observation that could be immediately useful to anyone in the business of selling musical instruments. "More important than grand theories and arguments is the persistent advocacy that each of us performs in our home communities," he said. "I am convinced that people respond not so much to eloquent cases about the value of music as they do to the direct experience of music."

Our nation's public school system has become an ossified bureaucracy that is resistant to all but the most superficial changes. Despite substantial increases in educational outlays on a per-student basis over the past decade, results continue to deteriorate. Thus, the likelihood of a small, fractious group like the music industry altering the national educational agenda is slim; however, the failings of our educational institutions are not necessarily cause for despair. As Paul Heid says, by bringing a community into contact with live music, a retailer can make a compelling case.

It is a simple but indisputable idea. Those who see children expand their horizons by performing music are more likely to support music programs in the schools, enroll their children in music lessons, and encourage music generally. In other words, what our industry apparently needs is less in the way of learned papers on the academic benefits of music, and more in the way of promotional events designed to showcase musical talent.

Waiting for a Federal Music Education Mandate calls to mind the old proverb, "He who lives on hope dies fasting." But in the meantime, what have you done to expose your community to the "experience of music making"? If you don't do it, nobody will.

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