



## EDITORIAL

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# SEX, DRUGS, ROCK & ROLL... AND SCHOOL MUSIC

"STUDENTS REJECT BAND PROGRAM" declared a headline in the October 16, 1968, edition of *The New York Times*, announcing a story about how a lack of student interest at Rutherford High School, in Rutherford, New Jersey, prompted administrators to shut down the long-running band program. The school district had routinely fielded a 100-piece marching band, but only 16 students signed up in the fall of 1968. "The band is so regimented it borders on neo-fascist," explained the president of the high school's student organization. "This is a generation that's into individual self-expression," added one of his friends. The *Times* also suggested that student interest in marching bands was waning throughout the Northeast.

A major talking point at the 1969 meeting of the National Association of School Music Dealers in Fort Lauderdale was fading student interest in band. "With this anti-war hippie thing, kids are sneering at the band, and it's bad for our business," declared a concerned Reuben Caplan at a round-table meeting at the gathering. "Recruitment drives are getting harder because kids worry that if they join the band they'll be looked down on by their friends," chimed in Buddy Rogers from Buddy Rogers Music in Cincinnati. Vito Pascucci of Leblanc chaired a session ominously titled, "Is the Band Marching Towards Extinction?"

At the height of Viet Nam War protests and on the eve of the Woodstock festival, it should hardly come as a surprise that the "do your own thing" generation was lukewarm in its support of an institution as traditional as a marching band. What is surprising is just how much things have changed in less than 20 years. In that short time span, Baby-boomers not only grew up and took control of society, they suffered convenient memory loss and embraced the old saying, "Do As I Say, Not As I Do" as a guiding principle. The generation that once extolled free love, drugs, and total freedom of self-expression is now busily enforcing campus speech codes, raising drinking and driving ages,

and campaigning against most of life's others pleasures with a vengeance that would do the Puritans proud. Along the way they have discovered that music makes you smarter and that maybe, putting fears of fascism to rest, school music programs, with all their personally inhibiting restrictions, are not such a bad thing after all.

Then again, maybe things haven't changed so much. Churchill once observed that a young man with conservative ideas has no heart and that an older one with liberal ideas has no head. In that vein, perhaps some of the more off-the-wall pronouncements of the baby-boomers can be forgiven as the folly of youth. (From a purely personal standpoint, I hope so.)

School music programs survived the social tumult of the '60s, the budget and economic woes of the '80s, and the financial crunch of the '90s because they appeal to that deep-seated parental desire to broaden their child's experience. Rhetoric, taste, and opinions may change from year to year, but deep-seated human instincts are far more predictable. As school music manufacturers and retailers gear up to promote their products, they should be mindful of this. Band and orchestra programs are not about budgets, teachers, or instrument sales. They are about making better children. A Leblanc ad from the early '70s put it best with the tag line, "The Investment Is In The Child, Not The Instrument."

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