

EDITORIAL

Music Education Beyond Performance Metrics

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A concert offers a powerful account of collective achievement. Examinations can provide structure, progression, and external recognition. Technical goals matter because musical intention depends partly on control. Problems arise when visible performance becomes the dominant measure of learning.

Students enter music classrooms with unequal access to instruments, lessons, rehearsal space, family support, and repertoires recognized by formal assessment. A narrow metric can convert these differences into judgments about talent or commitment. It may also encourage teachers to select students and music that will produce reliable public results, leaving experimentation, composition, listening, and culturally unfamiliar practices with less time.

Music education philosophy has long argued that musical knowing is practical, embodied, interpretive, and social. Assessment should reflect this plurality rather than forcing all learning into a single performance scale.

Calls for broader assessment are sometimes interpreted as calls to lower standards. The opposite is possible. A student who performs accurately may still be unable to explain interpretive decisions, adapt to collaborators, identify structural relationships by ear, or create a coherent musical response. Multiple evidence can make standards more demanding because students must demonstrate understanding across contexts.

A balanced portfolio might include a performance, a recording that documents revision, an original or arranged piece, a listening analysis, a collaborative reflection, and a short explanation of cultural context. Not every task needs equal

weight, and criteria should be clear. The point is to assess music as a field of action rather than a final display.

Process evidence is especially valuable. Early drafts or rehearsals allow teachers to see how students diagnose problems, seek feedback, and change strategies. Improvement should not be confused with a fixed hierarchy of ability. Students can demonstrate sophisticated learning even when their final technical level differs.

Curriculum diversity is not achieved by adding isolated pieces while preserving one model of musical excellence. Different traditions organize expertise differently. Notation, improvisation, oral transmission, timbre, movement, community function, and relationships between performer and audience may carry different weight. Applying one performance rubric to every practice can misrecognize what participants are trying to do.

Context-sensitive assessment requires teachers to learn with communities and practitioners rather than simply extracting repertoire. Students should understand how music functions, who has authority to teach or adapt it, and what ethical limits apply. This approach avoids presenting culture as a collection of interchangeable styles.

Allsup's argument for open, democratic forms of music education supports classrooms in which students participate in defining musical problems. Choice should not mean abandoning guidance. Teachers can structure inquiry, introduce unfamiliar resources, and make criteria explicit while allowing multiple paths to musically defensible work.

School music is often organized around ensembles and examinations that many students will not encounter later. A

broader aim is lifelong musical agency: the ability to listen critically, join community music, create with available tools, support local artists, understand rights and attribution, and make informed choices about platforms and technologies.

This aim changes what counts as foundational. Ear training and technique remain important, but so do collaborative planning, basic recording literacy, audience awareness, inclusive rehearsal practice, and knowledge of how musical work circulates. Students should leave school knowing that musical life includes more than professional performance.

Schools and examination bodies should: publish a broad statement of musical learning that includes creating, listening, performing, understanding, and participating; use several forms of evidence while keeping criteria manageable and transparent; review whether access to instruments, tuition, and technology biases outcomes; involve culturally relevant practitioners when designing repertoire-specific assessment; and evaluate programs by sustained participation and student agency as well as public results.

Teachers need planning time and professional development to implement these changes. Reform cannot consist of adding more assessment to already crowded workloads.

Performance metrics can clarify progress, but they should serve musical learning rather than define it. Music education becomes more rigorous when it asks students not only to reproduce prepared work but also to listen, decide, create, collaborate, contextualize, and revise. The objective is not to produce identical performers. It is to develop people who can participate thoughtfully in varied musical worlds.