



**FREEING MUSIC EDUCATION FROM SCHOOLING:
TOWARD A LIFESPAN PERSPECTIVE ON
MUSIC LEARNING AND TEACHING**

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In 1931, John Finley Williamson, founder of the famed Westminster Choir, issued this challenge to his colleagues in the North Central Music Supervisors' Conference: "If music is going to stop when our children get their diplomas, what hope is there?" (MSNC, 1931)

This past January, some 74 years after Williamson's challenge, Stephen Budiansky wrote an op-ed piece in *The Washington Post* entitled "The Kids Play Great. But that Music " A music lover and parent of kids who participated in school music programs, Budiansky is tired of performances of mediocre repertoire written specifically for school ensembles. He captured his frequent feelings at school concerts by relating a scene from a Marx brothers' movie. Chico is playing the piano. A man sitting next to Groucho says, "I love good music," whereupon Groucho replies, "So do I. Let's get out of here." Within days of Budiansky's piece, he had received over a hundred messages and phone

calls, many from professional music educators. The messages ran 15 to 1 in support of his views.

I was one of those who wrote to Budiansky. In a return e-mail, he elaborated: “We’ve turned music education . . . into an assembly line that is pretty good at whipping together a group of students who can push the right buttons on their instruments and read music and produce something that sounds polished fairly quickly. And then those kids leave high school and never touch their instruments again, never go to classical or jazz concerts, never know how to make music on their own, never have the curiosity to discover music that means something to them. It really makes me want to weep” (e-mail correspondence, April 6, 2005).

Is school music as irrelevant to fostering lifelong musical interest and involvement as Budiansky seems to think? Apparently Williamson shared a similar concern decades ago. And so does Bennett Reimer. Last April Reimer challenged participants at the International Music Education Policy Symposium in Minneapolis by stating that music education, both in the United States and worldwide, is facing a “potential crisis of irrelevancy.” Personally, I would omit the word “potential.” Moreover, this situation is perhaps less a crisis than it is a natural consequence of an historic professional myopia of near-epic proportions. In my view, we are at least a half-century late in coming to this realization. Going back as far as the 1963 Yale Seminar (in which composers, historians, and performers proposed more ethnic and popular music, as well as composition and varied performance opportunities in school programs), and perhaps beyond, music educators have largely dismissed the views of those who have questioned our priorities,

our practice, and our relevance -- especially if they happen to be performers, composers, or other arts professionals who are concerned about music learning and teaching. Like most crises, this one's been a long time in the making. Our response to cutbacks and eliminated programs has been to drum up political and commercial support for the status quo, thus largely circumventing issues of relevance between school music and music in the larger society.

Though Budiansky and Reimer contextualize their comments differently, their assertions are essentially the same: producing successful ensemble performances in schools, while a worthy effort in some respects, does not necessarily instill skills and understandings that empower people to fulfill their musical drives and potential over a lifetime. It's not hard to get people to say enthusiastic and positive things about school music programs, or about the value of music study. According to an *Americans for the Arts* survey, some 90 percent of parents believe the arts are important in preparing students for the future and that they should be part of a well-rounded education. However, what is not clear is whether people perceive tangible links between school arts experiences and the lasting intrinsic values of arts education. As John Goodlad (1984) noted two decades ago, there is a frequent dichotomy between the transcendent values ascribed to arts learning and the practice of arts education as it occurs in schools.

There is danger, of course, in over-generalizing this issue. Examples abound of adults who cite their school music programs as the impetus for their continuing professional or amateur music pursuits. But what about the proportion of these individuals relative to the numbers of individuals who never participated in school music programs? Or the

proportion of school-music participants who carry on no apparent musical life in adulthood? Or even those adults who have an active musical life that originated outside the confines of school music programs?

Apparently the concern that school music was an entity unto itself existed well before the mid-twentieth century. Edward Bailey Birge wrote optimistically in 1928 that “School-music is no longer cloistered. Its spirit is that of co-operation and helpfulness. School and community are rapidly coming together” (p. 226). Burge goes on to mention Lowell Mason, which suggests he was reaching back toward some ineffable dimensions of the legacy of community music education that had given way to formal music education in schools, as well as to a time when music played a role in the closer ties between schools and community life.

It might be convenient to pass topics of school-community relevance off as a function of changing generational emphases and shifting philosophical winds, were they not so thematically evident across time. Edgar Gordon, who taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, observed in the 1936 yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education that “It too frequently happens that boys and girls who are valuable members of high-school musical organizations make little or no use of their music outside of school” (p. 189). (Coincidentally, Gordon also suggested that there was “little justification for women of musical training devoting themselves to their own self-improvement. Rather should they be interested in employing their musical resources to the spread of musical culture throughout the community” (p. 192)).

In 1941, Dykema and Gehrkins wrote: “We are concerned with the question as to whether high school music cannot be so conducted that it will be practiced after graduation much more than it is at present What effect upon high school music teaching would the establishing of greater community relationships have?” (p. 347)

Allen Britton argued in 1961 that music education operated at a distance from the well-springs of American musical life, both popular and artistic. Here are some of the predominant issues over which he said music educators had become exercised: gaining sufficient instructional time; developing a comprehensive curriculum; training classroom teachers; maintaining students’ musical interest into secondary schools; marching bands and their “bare-legged majorettes;” festivals and contests; and the promotion of materials for music instruction (pp. 215-219). Budiansky and Reimer might concur with Britton that school music is too often characterized by a “paucity of musical vitality.”

By the time of the 1967 Tanglewood Symposium, the term “continuing education” had entered the lexicon of American music education. These recommendations appeared in the Symposium’s final report:

1. . . . continuing education should offer an opportunity to move as far in depth or breadth as each [person] can, through a comprehensive program of music that will equip him [or her] to live in the modern world.
2. Music should be offered to adults both for instrumental purposes, to satisfy psychological, religious, and vocational needs, and for expressive purposes, to help each individual find means for self-realization, either as creator or as participant audience. (Choate, 1968, p. 115)

It's ironic that despite the dual legacies of school-community connections and the continuum of music learning from childhood into adulthood, these considerations have not been central to our research and practice. Though the literature is replete with references to the lifelong benefits of school music programs, Marie McCarthy (2002) thinks school-community integration was overshadowed by an emphasis on aesthetic and psychological inquiry: "The profession needed to respond to social and cultural upheavals in American society of the 1950s and 60s, but neither its philosophy nor its community of scholars were focused on making such connections central to their inquiry" (p. 5).

Thinking of the recommendations of the Yale Seminar and Tanglewood, as well as the promises of the Great Society, the era McCarthy references could have been a watershed time, when music educators might have confronted the essential questions of how music education could reinvent itself as a dynamic field relevant to a dynamic society. But even by the 1970s, when American music educators began to be pink-slipped and longstanding school music programs began to disappear, the profession demonstrated little willingness to alter its image toward more holistic, diverse, lifelong considerations. Instead, this period stands as the portal for significant curricular and research advances that, while important in their own right, nevertheless often have exacerbated the divide between school music and community and lifelong relevance.

The sacred model of elementary general music leading to large performing ensembles supplemented by occasional chamber music and jazz bands formed the non-negotiable structure within which research and curricular change were undertaken. How often have

we heard ensemble conductors chafe against a culture of contests and festivals that compromises learning and teaching? Yet, they feel the profession expects such activity as a standard of peer-affirmed success. Despite frequent calls for the expansion of general music through middle and high school, models were scattered and fleeting, largely subject to individual teacher initiative or limited funding, and had no large-scale impact on programs.

A few years after Tanglewood, in 1974, MENC produced a position paper on adult and continuing music education. This paper listed self-realization, human relations, enrichment of family life, sustaining and improving health, and improvement of occupational competence as objectives. In the early 1980s, Mary Hoffman and Charles Leonhard raised the scepter of lifelong music learning, particularly as it pertained to adults, for the profession. Leonhard even proposed that music educators should begin to re-conceive themselves as community music leaders in view of the entrepreneurial potential associated with growing numbers of adults, including the aging. This theme prevailed through special sessions at the 1981 national MENC convention under Hoffman's presidency, and there was to be a follow-up in San Antonio in 1982. However, a review of the San Antonio conference program reveals almost no mention of lifelong learning.

Were it not for the lifelong human need for music, there would be little reason for the school-based professional enterprise known today as music education. The vital, frequently passionate engagement between humans and music -- in community and in communities; indelibly situated at the core of life's most poignant passages; firmly

ensconced within our patriotic, spiritual, religious, entertainment, and recreational lives; expressing the otherwise inexpressible; challenging us into continual judgments about the interplay between social-cultural context and new, sometimes even offensive, auditory experiences; ubiquitously present in our mass media; and even blessedly alleviating the urge to kill that arises amidst the maddening cacophony of ringing cell phones and useless conversations with which we are all assaulted— all of these give rise to the imperative of thinking deliberately about music and music education across the lifespan.

In January 1966, according to *Time*, self-made music was second only to reading as America's most popular leisure-time activity. Since 1982, the National Endowment for the Arts has conducted five surveys of adults' participation in the arts in the United States. In this period, levels of attendance at arts events have remained essentially static. The most recent data, from 2002, indicate that about 11-12 percent of American adults (23.8 million individuals) attend at least one classical music (symphony, chamber, choral) event in a 12-month period. About 10-11 percent attend a jazz event, and about three percent attend an opera.

When multiple-event attendance is figured in, there were about 79.3 million attendances at musical plays in 2002, 72.8 million attendances at classical music events, 68.8 million at jazz, and 13.3 million at opera. When asked what they'd like to do more of, nearly 25 percent of adults said they'd like to attend more classical music or jazz, and 11.5 percent said they'd like to attend more opera. The preferred musics are country-western and classic rock/oldies. Classical music does not make it into the top five.

When it comes to personally performing or creating art, the highest levels are in choral music, where 4.8 percent of the population (9.8 million) reports performing or creating at least once in a 12-month period. For classical music, the percentage was 1.8 percent. For jazz, it was 1.3 percent, and for opera, about .7%. Interestingly, 2.8 percent of adults said they participated in composing music.

Since 1982, classes in performing music have topped the types of arts classes American adults have taken at least once in their lives -- some 40-47 percent of adults report having taken such a class. An additional 16 to 20 percent have taken a music appreciation class. In 2002, about 1.4 percent of American adults (over 2.8 million) took a performance class within the previous year, and .6 percent an appreciation class. Level of education is the factor that best predicts attending arts events, and participation rates are typically higher among those with more disposable income. However, these correlations are less evident among “doers” as opposed to “attenders” of art.

Though these participation percentages may sound low, the real numbers suggest that a lot of adults want to be engaged with music and music learning. The 2005 tour program of the Radcliffe Choral Society documents that 2000 Harvard University students participate in 475 music, drama, and dance performances annually – this number amidst a student population of 6600. There are over 500 students in ten choruses, with hundreds of others in six orchestras, five bands, and 35 chamber ensembles. Over the past twenty years, there has been a 300 percent increase in the number of student arts organizations at Harvard. These students, of course, tend to represent the correlations among higher levels of education, higher socioeconomic brackets, and participation in the arts. What

about those who deserve such opportunities but whose families themselves have not had the advantage of discovering the values of arts learning? How many more adults might harbor a closeted desire for music that they would act on if we took seriously the obligation to provide ready access to music learning across a lifetime?

Nevertheless, rather than emphasizing multiple and continuous entry points for music learning, we suggest that unless one begins music before the age of nine, the attempt is largely useless. I would note, additionally, that those of us in higher education are increasingly challenged to figure out what to do with musically adept applicants whose musical growth has occurred in the community – outside the normative pre-collegiate experiences in large performing ensembles – and who find the notion of majoring in music education as it currently exists wholly inconsistent with their own formative experiences and the musical work they expect to pursue as professionals.

One of my doctoral students is tackling the question of whether high school choral programs make any difference in people's lives after their school years. In compiling her literature review, she encountered the Turton and Durrant (2002) study which investigated the reasons for declining participation in school choral ensembles in England. The researchers elicited stories from adults, including a karaoke finalist who had not participated in school music. His reasons: “[we] didn’t sing my style of music” and “[I was] insecure about my voice” (p. 38). The authors found that their adult subjects actually felt singing should be given a higher profile in schools and that students should be taught vocal technique. In other words, these adults wished they had learned how to sing – to make music.

Even when music educators have embraced the importance of school-community integration, the profession has often managed, in its own inimitable way, to bifurcate the topics of adult and community music from school music. This philosophical and practical division segments the preparation and professional development of music teachers for in-school work from questions of relevance beyond the school. As a consequence, we lose sight of things such as the crucial role of music in intergenerational cultural transmission, or how providing high-quality music education at any age benefits from knowledge of lifelong developmental contexts. We lose sight of the ways in which people spontaneously engage in music throughout their lives and the skills that underlie personal music making, both of which could form a basis for more relevant school programs. We also lose sight of the fact that building support for in-school programs may be a matter of providing direct educational experiences for adults. Within our world of sub-specializations in the already narrow field of school music, intergenerational learning, issues of rigorous practice for adult learners, community collaboration, needs of an aging population, and applications of research across generations rarely penetrate the conversation in substantive ways.¹

This division might be of lesser concern if our professional emphases had stabilized the place of music in schools or evidenced more progress toward the goal of a musically literate society. But according to the NEA, the share of adults who has taken arts classes at any time in their lives has been declining since 1982. Stories such as this one from San Diego may or may not be related, but they do at least make us think about the long-term

¹ *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning* (Oxford, 2002) makes important contributions in this regard with its inclusion of topics in adult education, community music, and music connections.

implications of our typical priorities. On the Friday prior to the opening of the 2004 convention of the National Association of Schools of Music in San Diego, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* ran an article entitled “Low Note Sounds for Music Education” (Moran, 2004). This was the lead: “Music instruction is in a free fall.” The article reported 30-to-50-percent drops in school music enrollment since 1999, attributing them largely to budget cuts and testing priorities, which is certainly safer for music educators than asking why such programs are deemed dispensable from a values perspective. While the chief executive officers of college and university music departments were listening to music education researchers cite data on national teacher shortages in other disciplines and review state teacher certification policies, certified music teachers in San Diego were wondering whether their jobs were at risk.

The discomfiting fact is that large numbers of school-age students do not believe that music education as typically practiced in schools is relevant to their needs and interests – even before the age of eleven, which is about the time performance programs take center stage. I would suggest that this is not so much because our programs fail to incorporate enough popular music or culturally diverse music or technological innovation, or because children don’t enjoy music classes, but because of a failure to energize the fundamental drives for musical expression and musical understanding that lead children and adults to seek a host of musical opportunities – many of them highly sophisticated – in their communities.

A recent article by Patrick Jones (2005) proposes an intelligent curriculum emphasizing small ensembles, ethnic music, awareness of local community music, and musical

creativity and expression. Jones's thesis is that this approach resonates with Richard Florida's assertions (2002) that a vibrant musical life attracts creative workers to a community. However, Jones chooses to cast his recommendations in an implicit traditional context of school as preparatory to lifelong musical participation, rather than viewing the school years as an integral component of lifespan education that is complementary to, and interactive with, lifelong musical growth.

To free music education from schooling, we must transform school models that are based exclusively on self-perpetuating structures and that are inconsistent with the musical worlds most people participate in outside of school. To be fair, it is not so much the issue that ensembles are part of music education as it is how we position them within a lifespan perspective on learning and teaching. Ensembles are part of many adults' musical worlds, and they obviously can be a forum for developing both individual and group musicianship. In many cases, general music also suffers its own lack of relevance. As we well know, "learning how to do" without "learning how to learn" is a recipe for obsolescence.

In this sense, issues of school-community relevance reside within a context that asks boldly how systematic music education – across the complete gamut of learner characteristics and settings – embraces the organic musical proclivities of humans, empowers musical choices of value, provides for independent and social engagement across the lifespan, and enhances the quality of the human condition and the societies in which we live. The habits of mind and other values we ascribe to arts education are not guaranteed as lifelong traits simply because children experience some sort of school

music program. Rather than arguing for idiosyncratic school music by overlaying goals of adult music literacy or creativity or any others of a number of worthy outcomes, the focus must be on engaging children in independent and authentic music-making that is consistent with their developmental capacities, and that will grow with them into and through adulthood. As adults, they are then empowered to choose those musical experiences most consonant with their own desires and capacities. If, in addition, we provide opportunities for adults to begin and/or continue this same process, we move toward a firm foundation for lifelong music learning and participation.

A lifespan perspective not only informs and extends existing practice, but it may, and should, challenge the status quo of how we do music education. It should take us, at once, back to our roots as an intergenerational community enterprise while posing structures and models that move music education beyond its current identity. In 1980, Texanna Ollenberger started an intergenerational choir program between her school and a local retirement center in Olathe, Kansas. The choir has received many performing invitations and has been the subject of research projects, yet such an innovative model is generally viewed by the profession as a local aberration that, while interesting and heart-warming, bears little relevance to our primary function as music educators. Such attitudes have ensured that the essential structure of school music programs has not changed in over 75 years. Nor has the focus of the teacher education enterprise that supports it. Paraphrasing John Finley Williamson, I am tempted to ask: “If we fail to prepare a new generation of music teachers with enlarged visions of music education, what hope is there?” How I wish I had been present and influential when that motto, “music for every

child, every child for music,” was coined. Would the simple substitution of “person” for “child” have had any effect on our professional dispositions?

Almost ten years ago, Chelcy Bowles and I decided to interview some adult music learners about their perspectives on music learning and teaching. A person I interviewed was discussing the large dropout rate in her guitar class. Pondering the issue, she proposed two perspectives: (1) that some people, unlike herself, didn’t realize how much concentration, practice, and effort are required to learn a musical instrument; and (2) that maybe more emphasis on playing songs and less technical drill might have been more appealing to the students in the class. Like the adults in the Turton and Durrant study, this adult was telling us that musical self-efficacy, *i.e.*, the self-awareness that one could make satisfying music independently and share it with others, should be the driving force behind music education programs.

In the 1990s, our fledgling Adult and Community Music Special Research Interest Group brought Stephen Brookfield, one of my heroes in the field of adult learning, to an MENC national convention in Washington D.C. Not surprisingly, only a handful of people attended. Brookfield (1992) has cited several simplistic myths associated with adult learning, among them the notion that adult learning is always joyful and that adults are innately self-directed. Adults, as we know, have much more latitude than children to vote with their feet. If they cannot connect their motivations – both immediate and long-term – with instruction, they’ll disappear. If they don’t sense progress, they’ll become frustrated. If they don’t feel affirmed in their efforts, they’ll give up. If they don’t learn musical independence, they’ll worry about whether they’re musically capable. But, most

importantly, if they're not touched at the level of intrinsic musical satisfaction, they'll lose heart.

On the other hand, adults often persevere because they know from their life experience that success is not instantaneous, that persistence may lead to satisfaction, and that incremental growth feeds upon itself. These people – especially those who have found avenues of meaningful musical pursuits in adulthood -- may offer us the best clues as to how we can achieve coherence in music education across the lifespan, ensuring that the goal of lifelong musical growth is supported by a continuum of strategies that enables connections between music education and the welfare of the larger society.

I once followed the sequence of two adult beginning piano classes – one in the United States and one in Australia. Both were populated with adults ranging from middle age to younger old age. And both followed a similar pattern. While the instructors were well versed in the pedagogy of building piano skills, neither spent time learning the stated goals of the students, and neither seemed to recognize growing frustrations in the class until participants began not to come back. Numerous lessons were spent on technical skills that provided neither musical satisfaction nor a sense of progress. As I interviewed the students, they expressed goals such as wanting to share simple songs with family members, knowing how to read music, and being able to play for their own satisfaction. Roughly half-way through the series of classes, about half the students had dropped out. In the Australian class, we had decided to take one evening simply to talk about how things were going. One man, who had a Ph.D. in mathematics, expressed his exasperation this way: “I know I can learn to play. I want to do it. But I get frustrated

because it seems to me that the people who teach music too often are natural musicians. They haven't figured out the steps necessary to help those of us who don't have that same kind of native talent.”

Some of you work with Roy Ernst's New Horizons band movement. When Roy undertook this effort, he brought a series of consultants to the Eastman School to build understanding among the teachers in that program about adult cognition, development, and learning. Tying these areas of knowledge with content-based processes in music teaching and learning, Roy launched a now-international phenomenon that invites older adults to begin and continue music learning from whatever their starting points may be. While there is broad acknowledgement of the extra-musical benefits of these programs, Roy centered his efforts on the fundamental principle of successful music learning and doing that obviously connect with the musical interests and goals of participants.

In a much different context, I serve as the chief national evaluator for the Orchestra Leadership Academy, a professional development program of the American Symphony Orchestra League. Continuing education has not historically been a part of the orchestra world, but the League has taken a proactive stance regarding ways in which musicians, board members, and administrators can grapple creatively with both the artistic and economic challenges facing the field. What impressed me particularly was the early effort to consider the research base in adult learning and to think about how this professional development could integrate with and extend college-level training and existing work experience. This initiative is consistent with the recommendations of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1999). Entitled

Returning to our Roots: A Learning Society, the commission recommends collaborative efforts among schools, universities, and a cross-section of community institutions to provide lifelong access to high-quality learning. If the field of music education has similarly sought to implement such principles into its professional development agenda, I am not aware of it.

In the United Kingdom, David Price is currently leading a project called “Musical Futures” (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2005). Though focused on adolescents, this project takes as its starting point an important lifespan concern: “Music education in schools often fails to excite young people. Many of them turn away from learning to play music in a formal setting to seeking out informal opportunities where, for example, they may have more choice in the music they play. . . .By general consent, the organizations and music leaders involved in both formal and informal sectors don’t work together often enough.” The objectives of the Musical Futures project include understanding the factors that affect young people’s sustained engagement in music and facilitating support for collaborative working practices among students in higher education, policy makers, teachers, performers, and composers.

Another promising British development is the Connect program of London’s Guildhall School, (2005) which interlocks the training of Guildhall students with that of younger musicians through collaborations with schools, local communities, and arts organizations. According to Guildhall’s website, “Connect is developing an artistic and educational identity that resonates with people from a wide range of backgrounds, ages, and experience It aims to break down the boundaries between musical genres, arts

disciplines, specialists and non-specialists, and open up an exploration of new musical languages and alternative mechanisms for instrumental teaching and learning.” I might add that there are similar initiatives under way at Georgia State University through our Center for Educational Partnerships in Music, where we are working to build seamless music-learning cultures through collaborative university, school, and arts organization efforts.¹

The point is that adopting a lifespan perspective does not compromise educational or musical standards, diminish the importance of sequential curricula in schools, or position music education as recreational community endeavor. To the contrary, a lifespan perspective enlarges and extends the vision of a musically aware society to provide a context for high-quality learning and teaching from nursery school through eldercare.

In January 2004, an *Infobrief* from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development focused on the collaborative responsibilities of educators and the community for student learning. This brief offered information on the development of community schools – deliberate school-community partnerships that support and strengthen learning opportunities for students, families, and the community. These kinds of schools use the community as a curricular resource to help students become problem solvers and to help young people acquire real-life skills in association with local community professionals. Research indicates that community schools improve student learning, promote family engagement with students and schools, improve community

¹ It is also important to note the efforts of symphonies, opera companies, community schools of the arts, and others who are working along similar lines. Unfortunately, rather than asserting its expertise proactively in these efforts, the music education community has often been resistant to such initiatives. Currently, the Music in Education National Consortium – a network of universities, schools, and arts agencies – is also working to establish broadened visions for music and arts education.

investment and support for education, and add vitality to communities. Given our history, it seems that this ought to be an area ripe with potential for leadership from music educators. Imagine the opportunities for putting lifespan perspectives to work and demonstrating the role of music in life and learning.

The authors of the RAND Corporation's most recent arts report, *Gifts of the Muse* (2004), concluded that current policy in the arts, which involves arts education, has three major flaws: 1) it relies too heavily on instrumental arguments; 2) it ignores the intrinsic benefits of the arts; and 3) it is primarily tailored to serve the financial needs of the nonprofit sector. Their proposal for sustained arts involvement builds on the intrinsic benefits of the arts as realized in three ways: through gateway experiences; through the quality of arts experience; and through the internalization of a desire for more arts experiences via the vital role of individual engagement. According to the report, "The key policy implication of this analysis is that greater attention should be directed to introducing more Americans to engaging arts experiences" (p. 71). While I believe the authors make some interpretational and strategic missteps in this report, I also find their reinforcement of intrinsic arguments refreshing. It is unfortunate that they did not choose to balance their recommendation of early exposure to arts education with one advocating the importance of multiple entry points across the lifespan.

A key element of the RAND report – the emphasis on worthy individual experiences – brings me to a close. If you've never read Noah Adams's *Piano Lessons*, I recommend it highly. At 51, Noah decided to learn to play the piano, and this book is his account, which lends tremendous insight into the perspective of the adult music learner and

teacher. The final chapter concludes with a description of Adams's Christmas gift to his wife, Neenah. Having set a personal goal of playing Schumann's "Traumerei," he has now arrived at Christmas Eve:

I get into a hot bath. Neenah's in the next room, wrapping presents, listening to *All Things Considered*. In the tub I play through the music in my mind and think over the strategy. This should be a quick *shock*, I decide. I dry off, run into the bedroom, put on the white dress shirt and find the cuff links and studs and bow tie and dance into the pants and don't worry about which way the cummerbund goes and squeeze into the black shoes and put on the tuxedo jacket and – smile at the mirror! This might work. At least she didn't catch me halfway dressed.

I find a candle, the brass candlestick, matches, and walk into the room where Neenah's sitting on the floor with the ribbons and wrapping paper and watch her eyes grow wide. "What?" she asks, grinning.

I say, "I'll just turn off this radio for you. And light this candle for us." She stands up, blinking. I place a chair just to the right of the piano bench. I place Neenah on the chair. I sit on the bench. The Steinway 1098 is black, the white keys shiny. I'm in black and white. The candle flame dances with light . . . the world becomes small. And I play.

It gets hard to breathe and pay attention to the notes coming up. There's my lovely B-flat and then the five notes with the right hand leading up to the F – and I play it with some confidence. Then the second melody phrase, and the repeat

comes. My hands seem okay, but my right foot is shaking on the sustain pedal, and I can't figure out how to stop it. The difficult part comes up, and I play very slowly, holding the pedal down so that the next note, when I find it, will sound connected. The music begins to sound hushed, eloquent; even the wrong notes seem to have a special quality. I can barely see Neenah, off to my right; I would dare not turn to look. And I move from the messed-up middle section to the final measures, the melody returning, the B-flat, the F, then a grand and difficult chord, just before the end. I play the chord, and I know Neenah is crying. What surprises me is that I'm crying too. (pp. 242-243)

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