

**Emotional connections in music: A deeper dive into expression
and emotions in music**

by

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B.M.E., Kansas State University, 2012

A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MUSIC

School of Music, Theatre, and Dance
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2022

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Abstract

The lessons that I have devised in this report cover the effects of emotional connections with choral music. From a historical and personal viewpoint, connecting one's emotions to a piece of music is a way to get the most out of what the music is trying to portray. Making an emotional connection with a piece of music can help an individual dig deeper and help them see past the basics of the piece. While pitches, rhythms, dynamics, and other markings are important to how the music is designed and followed, expression and emotion are what allows the essence of the piece to be experienced. These thoughts and lessons have come forth from the vast knowledge gained in both my early undergraduate study in vocal performance, as well as in my master's program when learning about how to program or introduce pieces. With these lessons that I produced for my students, I not only attained many different thoughts and connections from the individual responses, but also learned more about some of my students in the process.

Throughout my master's program, I have increased my knowledge base from the teachings of my professors with emotional and expressional thoughts in the forefront of my mind. A few of the main points that have helped me in my progress are understanding how and where our music education comes from, as well as a deeper understanding behind vocal pedagogy and learning how to introduce pieces to young adults. As I began creating the framework for this report, I really tried to focus on letting the students use descriptive writing, as this is something that I do not see much in ensemble classes. Through this, I found that not only did students have a decent understanding of how to research a piece, which I asked them to do, but they were also able to share deeply emotional and mature thoughts that I, as their teacher, might not have ever known about without doing this research.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Phillip Payne, Dr. Ruth Gurgel, Dr. Patricia Thompson, Dr. Amy Rosine-Underwood, Dr. Reginald Pittman, Dr. Frank Tracz, Dr. Julie Yu-Oppenheim, and Dr. Joshua Oppenheim for their guidance and support throughout the entirety of my music education journey. Without them and their knowledge I would not be the educator I am today.

Also, my family, particularly my father and mother, Clinton and Vickie, in their support of my pursuance of post-secondary education. As the first male in my family to attain a bachelor's and master's degree, I could not have done it without them.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wife Melissa and our boys Beau and Caulder. Without them I would not have been able to accomplish any part of this degree and for them I am truly thankful.

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

What is music? Music is defined as “vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion” (Oxford, n.d.). Music has been around farther back than history has written it down. We communicate through music. We share our cultures through music. Humans can share their beliefs through music. Music is a part of history. Because of all this, music eventually became something of its own language. Humans began to write it down. We began to study it. We wanted to know how it worked. As time went on, we began writing it, performing it, listening to it. So why should it not be a part of our education if it has been with us since as far back as we can remember? Music and the education of music has been important to me for many years. I began formally learning music when I was five years old. I tell you this because I have been doing some form of music since I can remember. Thankfully, I had people around me that cultivated music in me. Everyone can be a musician; I truly believe that. Everyone has music in them somewhere. Just because it was not as cultivated for one early on, does not mean it is not there. But to understand how music and the education of music came to be, we must first take a glimpse into formal education and how music education ties into it.

Formal education is something that has been a staple in our society for well over one hundred years. A reason for this was to provide education to the masses and prepare them for the workforce as adults. It was a way to teach children all the way through young adults the basic concepts to turn them into well rounded individuals. Formal education works by progressing students by a certain age and grade level, from pre-kindergarten to high school, through the educational system.

As a society, we do the aforementioned things to keep society advancing. Today, things are constantly changing in how our society works. We, as humans, are constantly pushing into the unknown to further advance ourselves and the world around us. Because of this, there needs to be places of learning where students can obtain knowledge dealing with a wide variety of subjects. Formal education is a way to help teach our young minds what they need to know so that they are better prepared for the road that is ahead of them.

Formal education also provides structure to the ways in which we learn things. Each grade level is structured in a fashion that students will attain a certain amount of knowledge through means of instruction and testing before they can move through to the next grade level. There are four main institutions where students are educated: pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, elementary school, middle school or junior high school, and high school. Each school is broken down into a certain number of grade levels based upon age unless there is a rare exception. Once a certain level of knowledge is attained, students are allowed to progress to the next level, thereby to gain the next level of knowledge per the structure.

Formal education helps us to understand our culture and how we may function within it. We are a society of workers. We need education of some manner in order to understand what we want to do with our lives and how we will affect the lives around us. One cannot simply walk into NASA claiming to be an astronaut without some form of formal education. You cannot become a great writer without having gone to school and studied the written language and writing. Along those same lines, formal education is what shapes our culture. When we go out into the world with the knowledge we have gained, we have the power to add to the culture that is already around us.

As humans, we should all be given an equal opportunity to learn and be educated. Throughout history, this was not always so. Education was, at times, only for the rich or well connected. It is easier to control the masses when only a select few in a society are educated. Formal education gives everyone the opportunity to be educated. It gives us the chance to learn new things. In learning these new thoughts and ideas, we can expand our horizons and push ourselves to become more educated. Through this education, we learn problem solving skills and how to work together. It allows us to have the knowledge to see reason and to be educated enough to know when we are on the right path or if we are being led astray. With these progressions through formal education, we can see and understand the past and hopefully learn from it, instead of being a slave to it.

Music education is a facet of formal education. I believe that anyone can be a musician. One of the great things about being a musician is you can learn the basic concepts of almost any subject. Whether it be reading, history, mathematics etc., music is able to give you a basic introduction to many of the other facets of formal education. Music can teach you the basics of the written language and even enlighten you to some foreign language as well. If you are discussing a choral selection, you are tracking words and sentences across a page, exactly like you do when reading a book. In a piece of music, note duration deals with mathematical concepts such as counting, adding and subtracting beats, and basic fractions. For science, there is a formula for creating music. As far as history is concerned, we can tie music to almost any part of history even farther then written history itself.

Using music in this fashion allows students to become more well-rounded. It allows us to make ties through music to other disciplines of formal education. To interconnect these ties gives us better access to our memory banks with the information that we have learned. “Even when

performing with sheet music, student musicians are constantly using their memory to perform. The skill of memorization can serve students well in education and beyond” (NAfME, 2014, para. 2).

These days, keeping kids engaged during school can be a challenge. Music education is something students can utilize to keep them engaged throughout the school day and beyond. Although music learning can and is meant to be challenging, music can be a great way to either refocus on a subject, or to simply take a break from other subjects. When students do get that break, it is sometimes easier for students to refocus on their other subjects later on. “Students can fight stress by learning to play music. Soothing music is especially helpful in helping kids relax” (NAfME, 2014, para. 13).

Discipline is also something that can be enhanced through music education. “Kids who learn to play an instrument can learn a valuable lesson in discipline. They will have to set time aside to practice and rise to the challenge of learning with discipline to master playing their instrument” (NAfME, 2014, para. 14). In today’s world, there is an abundance of things for students to be distracted by. If a student wants to learn an instrument and play it well, whether orchestral, band, or vocal, they have to maintain focus, perform consistent practice, and push themselves past failure.

Emotional development is a large part of a child’s upbringing. Through music, students can find ways to emotionally connect with the pieces that they are playing or singing. In doing so, they can find deeper meaning within the pieces. Students can then transfer the emotional content they learn through music to other subjects, such as reading, writing, and history. This will also help them transfer that knowledge as they grow up to their society and culture.

Elliot Eisner said, “The primary aim of music education is to enrich human experience. Human experience is enriched musically when individuals are able to undergo the experience that music provides” (Eisner, 2001, p. 23). While music education is one facet of formal education, music education in itself is also multi-faceted. Music education teaches children about composition, listening skills, creativity, movement, and performance. Students can be engaged when there is a performance of music. Music requires the listener (student) to think critically about the piece. What is the performance about? Does the piece sound different from other things listed too before? Is the piece creative? How does the piece affect you emotionally? Emotional expression is one of Alan Merriam’s ten functions of music (Merriam, 1987, p. 219). Students can connect and share their emotions through music. Through these emotions, we begin the “...development of self-esteem and self-identity” (Elliott, 1995, p. 10). In a way, it forces us to discipline ourselves to figure out who we are and how are we effected by the culture around us.

Between being a student of music, a performer of music, and a teacher of music, music education is vital to helping an individual become a well-rounded member of society. Music helps us see the cultures around us. It gives us ways to connect with cultures that cannot always be done with what we call the “core” subjects. Elliot Eisner discussed in his personal essays that the arts enlarge our knowledge of the world (Eisner & Bird, 1998, p. 63). Through the different mediums of the music, we can begin to understand or get a glimpse of how different cultures portray music and what it means to them. Music gives us ways to emotional connect with fellow students and peers around us in ways that many other subjects cannot. Christopher Small says that ... “music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do” (Small, 1998, p. 2). I would politely disagree. Music is in us. It is a part of who we are. I cannot say for certain, but I would find it hard to believe that music is not part of every culture that walks this earth. I believe

that David Elliott said it best when he said “All humans are born with the “hardwiring”... to learn how to make and listen to music at a competent level” (Elliott, 1995, p. 11). Through this, we can use music to not only learn about the basics of formal education, but we can use music education to enhance our learning of other subjects to help better prepare us for what awaits us.

In conclusion, I feel it is important to have everyone have some experience with music and music education. There are so many things that music provides for us. If we want to continue to enhance our understanding of the world, music education should be at the forefront of education, not at the back. All students should have access to it, and we need quality teachers to educate them. Through this education, students will open up many avenues to find out who they truly are, and how the world works around them.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

The core of my lessons is derived from the portion of my philosophy that deals with emotional connections in music. I chose to get away from technology to help students connect more with themselves as well as the music they were singing. In a way, we have begun to lose the connections with our emotions, because we are unsure as to how to fully express them either to ourselves, or to other people. Through these lessons, I chose to try and bring those emotions out not only for the individual person, but also for the other students that could tie their emotions to another through other students experiences.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)

Lesson Plan 1

Lesson Plan Format for an Ensemble Rehearsal

2014 Music National Standards: MU: Pr6.1.E.5b Demonstrate an understanding of the context of the music through prepared and improvised performances. (NAfME, 2014).

Teacher/Conductor's Name: Tomas C. Lambotte

Rehearsal 1 ☒ 2 ☐ 3 ☐

Review piece and Paper Introduction

Prior Knowledge/Skills (*What do already know and can do?*):

Reading and understanding pitches and rhythms.

Rehearsal Objective (What will your student's be able to do as a result of this rehearsal *with you?*)

Sing through the piece Kyrie Eleison by Audrey Snyder with reasonable accuracy to develop a baseline recording for the project

Assessment of the Rehearsal (How will *you* know if your *students can do* what they need to?)

Active listening of the piece, reviewing recording that will be made

Relevant Contextual Factors:

Modifications/Accommodations needed:

Limited background knowledge because of COVID

Instructional materials, resources, &

Technology:

Personal Improvement Objective:

<i>Kyrie Eleison, iPad</i>	<i>Clean conducting to maximize efficient singing</i>
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Table 1 Rehearsal Plan (A step by step plan for the rehearsal - with timing - that leads to your objective.)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Purpose of Activity</u>	<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Assessment</u>
9:30-9:40 a.m.	Board work	Getting their minds engaged for music	Students are given a set of 4 measures of music that they write out the counts and solfege for. Students then count and clap the rhythm, speak through the solfege in rhythm, then sing through the solfege in rhythm.	Visual and audio while students count and clap through examples
9:40-9:45 a.m.	Warmups	Warming up and preparing voices for rehearsal	Do-sol-do lip trills Bee-ay-bay diction warm-up Breathing sequence warm-up	Auditory assessment through listening for tuning and rhythm accuracy of warm-ups
9:45-10:00 a.m.	Rehearsal and recording of <i>Kyrie Elison</i>	Developing a baseline that the students can review and compare to their final recording	Students already have a major baseline in the understanding of rhythms and pitches of the piece. We will be hitting key entrances and cutoff, as well as blending and dynamics	Recording of students singing <i>Kyrie Eleison</i>

10:00-10:15	Introduction of writing assignment	Create a more in-depth look into their piece and how they could personally connect with it.	Students will write a minimum one-page paper over <i>Kyrie Eleison</i> . They will be asked to supply background research of the piece, the reason they chose the piece, a personal connection they may have with this piece, and how the impact of what they have learned might change the way they sing it.	Written report by students
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The goals of this lesson were to provide a baseline framework for students on what to write their papers about in connection with the piece of music that we were practicing. Students had already learned the basics of the piece that they were performing but were not at the moment connecting emotions and phrasing to the piece. As such, students were given an assignment to reflect on the piece emotionally, how it made them feel, what ties in their life did they feel connected with the piece, etc. I used a formative assessment, which was writing a paper, describing the piece and what connections could be made to it. Upon reading their papers, I would give more detailed instruction into what they should be describing in the main part of the paper, with more detail on the flow of the things they are trying to describe. This is something I plan to implement more in the future, so students can connect more with the pieces that they are singing, as well as giving me more understanding of who my students are and what backgrounds they come from.

Figure 1: Student Essay

"Kyrie Eleison" Composed by Audrey Snyder and arranged by Audrey Snyder. She is a professional composer and arranger; she has several hundred choral titles. That is currently in print and has millions of copies sold worldwide. She has received many ASCAP rewards. She has appeared internationally as a clinician and choral director.

The song means "Lord, have mercy". I have chosen this song because after understanding what it is about and the meaning behind it I was able to connect with the song. When my dad passed we had just come home from church when I saw police cars in front of my house. As a little girl, I didn't understand at first. But then I connected the two and realized something was wrong. My dad was there but now he's not. My grandma picked me up after telling me what happened. It felt like my heart was ripped out of my chest. Eventually, I had shed so many tears I just went dumb. I was sitting there staring at my house just waiting to wake up from this nightmare. But I didn't. I didn't want anything but my father back. I started praying and hoping that he would be the one to wake me up from this nightmare. But he didn't. No one did. He was gone and I couldn't do anything about it. For all of my birthdays and night prayers, all I would wish for would be to have my father back. But as a little girl, I didn't realize that that couldn't happen. I gave up. I pushed all of those emotions down so far that I can barely see them and know that they are still there. Those emotions hardly come out and I try my best not to let them.

When i first sang it I just thought that it was going to be a cool-sounding Latin song. And that I wasn't going to be able to understand it well. But when Mr. Lambotte explained to me what it meant to him and how to move the song to make us feel the same thing and the movement of it

and how great of a song it really is that's when I really enjoyed singing it. It became my favorite song that we sang because I made a connection with it when I sang and it really started to move me. It made me strive to sing it better than I had before because I was singing it for that memory. For that person. For the people in the crowd. Not just myself to get the song over with for the concert to get the grade. It is my favorite song and I really enjoy the movements and harmonizing of it.

Figure 2: Student Essay

The song I chose to write about was Kyrie eleison. This song meant alot to me while singing this song because of many reasons. Most people use god in a way that just doesn't work. No matter how bad of a person you are, God will always be there for you. In order for God to truly feel you in that moment you need him you need to pray at least once a day and don't call him only when needed such as asking (lord have mercy). Singing this song made me go back to the moments I remember asking for mercy and to help my family and I.

I have 2 main reasons on how I really felt about the song. My first one was when I went through a fase where I was really broken and depressed that lasted for a good month and my mom even told me she's never seen me like this. I was in my room for days and I just didn't feel me. I had gone through my first breakup and I know really why? I really needed a sign from god because I didn't know if I could let go sompletly or hold on to them. I thought my whole life was over in those days. You can only really feel how much a person means to you when you lose them, some people just have a spark they can give you that no one else can. My other reason was my brother. My brother went through a car crash that was mainly his fault and he got in trouble and gained my parents trust again as he went out on new years day. He came back home and got in more trouble because of the way he was when he came home. The car was completely damaged, there was no fixing and I was already having a bad day and knowing the fact that the cop even said they were expecting a dead body when they found him, that was

a sentence that broke my heart. I've never seen my dad cry and he was just not stable. I can tell on my dad's face at the Chiefs game after that day he was in pain still. I was very disappointed in my brother and I was just asking for god to pray for him and tell him what he did was not wrong and he needs to fix himself if he wants to have fun again. I asked for a break because it felt like so much was happening these days like why is this all happening to me so quickly.

At first I couldn't really understand the feeling of the song until I sang it with quiet and peace when everyone sang it beautifully. I really hope one day people can see how strong music can help and what they deeply do. Having mercy is something everyone asks for and needs everyday even for the smallest things. God is the strongest person we know and when the time is right he will be there. I hope reading this shows how much a song can connect to many people. Not everyone is perfect and no matter how good of a person you are there's always going to be a time you mess up badly and just because you mess up once doesn't mean your going to be a bad person forever you just need to have some time to yourself to think "really I do need to get my act together".

Lesson Plan 2

Lesson Plan Format for an Ensemble Rehearsal

2014 Music National Standards: MU: Pr4.3.E. 1a Demonstrate an understanding of context in a varied repertoire of music through prepared and improvised performances. (NAfME, 2014).

Teacher/Conductor's Name: Tomas C. Lambotte

Rehearsal 1 ☐ 2 ☒ 3 ☐

Paper Discussion and Rehearsal

Prior Knowledge/Skills (*What do already know and can do?*):

Reading and understanding pitches and rhythms. Listened to first recording that was made

Rehearsal Objective (What will your student's be able to do as a result of this rehearsal *with you?*)

Discuss emotional connections with students and how they can impact the way you sing

Assessment of the Rehearsal (How will *you* know if your *students can do* what they need to?)

Review of some students work to the class, active listening of first recording.

Relevant Contextual Factors:

Modifications/Accommodations needed:

Limited background knowledge because of COVID

Instructional materials, resources, & Technology:

Personal Improvement Objective:

Kyrie Eleison, iPad, Chromebook

Clear, concise, and meaning discussion on emotions

Table 2 Rehearsal Plan (A step by step plan for the rehearsal - with timing - that leads to your objective.)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Purpose of Activity</u>	<u>Sequence</u>	<u>Assessment</u>
9:30-9:50 a.m.	Review and discussion of recordings and papers	To discuss what they learned from writing the essay and how they could apply it to future singing	Open discussion on how they connected more with the piece after writing the essay. Will use some discrete examples from students writing as well as recording to tie into the emotional content of the song.	Informal- make sure students are participating in the discussion.
9:50-9:55a.m.	Warmups	Warming up and preparing voices for rehearsal	Do-sol-do lip trills-3 sequence runs Breath Support pg.6 Vocalize book warm-up Lips, Tongue, Tip of the Teeth pg.9 Vocalize book warm-up	Auditory assessment through listening for tuning and rhythm accuracy of warm-ups
9:55-10:15 a.m.	Rehearsal of <i>Kyrie Eleison</i>	Rehearsing piece while keeping in mind discussion.	Focus of rehearsal will be connecting emotions to the phrasing of <i>Kyrie Eleison</i> . With only three different words,	Informal- Participation and auditory listening for phrase shaping.

			phrasing will be crucial for the piece.	
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The goal of this rehearsal was for students to take our overall discussion on emotions, through reading of certain essays to understanding that emotions are a great tool to use in music and apply it to what they were singing. Through our discussion, students learned that there can be many different interpretations of what the music is trying to portray, not just based on students thoughts on what the piece is about, but also how they personally connected to it. We had an informal discussion of how our emotions can be used in different pieces of music, and how much emotions can change or enhance what we are singing. Moving forward, I would employ some sort of rubric for students to assess the differences that they heard between the two recordings and how things have changed emotionally between the first and second recordings. The discussion really opened me up to things that my students have experienced emotionally that I personally have never experienced before which in turn helped me to make more connections to my students at large.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

As I look back on the last three years of being in a master's program, there have been many changes I have seen and experienced in both a positive and a negative way. There have been multitudes of growth for myself, my students, my colleagues, and even between my wife and me.

When I reflect on myself, I have grown in multiple ways. The knowledge I have gained throughout my master's program has benefited me to be a better teacher. Through my conducting courses, I have learned to look deeper into the music through score study and bring more to the table for my students. From my survey of vocal solos course, I have a better understanding of how to pick appropriate solos for the age groups in which I teach. Through a multitude of other courses, I have become better at putting words down on paper in a more fluid and concise manner.

For my students, I believe they have been able to positively benefit from the knowledge I have gained. I have been able to advance my teaching practices so as to enhance their experiences in my classroom. However, I think for some of them it may have been a bit of change from having me from seventh to eighth grade and seeing a difference in me. In reference to my score study, I tried to implement that with my eighth graders and many of them seemed to be slightly confused with the terminology I was using. But we were able to get on the same page with patience and communication.

As far my colleagues go, it has been a learning experience to bring my knowledge from my masters into PLC meetings, district PD, and different performance opportunities we have been in together. In my current district we are fortunate to have diversity amongst our staff. We are all of different ages, genders, socioeconomic statuses, cultures, and backgrounds. At one

point we had a first-year teacher and a veteran teacher of forty years on the same staff. My undergraduate education was excellent but with my master's degree I have tried to dig deeper into assessments so as to benefit the music program for years to come. A few of my colleagues are much more focused on performances, which I am as well, but if we do not know what the students do not know, I do not think we are doing our jobs to the fullest. With my experiences getting this degree, I have been better able to communicate why certain aspects of education are so important.

I am fortunate in that I am married to a music teacher as well as a colleague. While my content area is vocal music, hers is instrumental, primarily band, and we are employed at the same middle school. She also has a master's degree in general education, and we also overlapped a few years of going to school. All of this has positively impacted my teaching. We are constantly having conversations about how our classes went, what we could have done better, common assessments, etc.

As far my thought processes go, taking classes over the past three years, especially during COVID, has absolutely affected the way I think through things. Since many things were online over the last couple of years, I have needed to slow down and think through how my lessons and teaching would translate to a fully online platform. I have had to be clearer and cleaner with my instructions for digital content, so that my students understand what is going on, even when I cannot be in front of them. I had to dive in more thoroughly when speaking in music theory terms, as well as my teaching of music theory in general.

For my students, I have begun to help students process a deeper understanding of the music that we are singing. Since COVID, many things at our school have gone to a more digital format, which keeps students on computers and technology more frequently. For choir, I have

worked on keeping my in-class content focused on not using as much technology. Not to just give them a break from it, but also to be able to have in class discussions about the music and what it portrays and how it can affect their lives in general. I have guided them to look past the rhythm and pitches and to explore the poetry in which the music is and how it is created. My goal has always been to help kids emotionally connect more with the music, and my time in the master's program as given me the tools to promote this.

With my colleagues, both music and general, I have a better understanding of how to approach them when discussing things of a musical nature. Music, sadly, is not the main focus of most school programs these days. We focus more on the core subjects, with most general colleagues not understanding how music can not only tie them together but enhance them as well. Through the teachings in my master's program, I can better approach colleagues who have limited information on how our music programs function and how they can function better when we really include them in our core subjects.

As I mentioned before, I am fortunate to be able to be in the same profession as my wife. We are also fortunate in that while we think similarly on many subjects, the subjects we think differently on absolutely outweigh the similar ones. Throughout getting my master's degree I have been able to develop the skills that it takes to listen better and think through where she is coming from when it comes to her educational philosophy. We were raised quite differently and while both of us have a passion for teaching music to children, we go about it differently from time to time.

In conclusion, over all I think my time in my master's program has made me a better teacher, husband, and father. Especially with the COVID elements involved, I have learned how

to slow down my thought process, think about others, adapt what I am going to say, and truly reflect on how I make others feel while teaching music.

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