

*Biophily: Five musical episodes for the Revolutionary Educator Appendix*

**Question:** How should teachers as transformative intellectuals navigate through the current educational system in the age of accountability to pursue equity among in and through education?

**Thesis:** Educators in today's social climate must tirelessly and continually challenge and question not only any and all past models of education, but even more importantly, their own. By undergoing what Paulo Freire calls a "rebirth" into the position of the oppressed, in this case the student, the educator can identify what the student knows, what the student wants to know, and how to help them achieve the knowledge they hope to gain.

**Overture:** The overture of the piece aims mainly to introduce the theme, and the central characters of the piece, which are the four solo SATB voices. In the style as the remainder of the piece, the voices are not given syllables to sing on, in order to create their own musical dialogue in the way the performer deems fit.

**I. Germinal:**

"The intellectual challenge of teaching involves becoming a student of your students, unlocking the wisdom in the room, and joining together on a journey of discovery and surprise. The ethical demand is to see each student as a 3-dimensional creature, much like yourself, and an unshakable faith in the irreducible and incalculable value of every human being." (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010, p. 113.)

Named after the seventh month on the French Republican (or revolutionary) Calendar, the title of the first movement seeks to describe the book it corresponds to, "To Teach: the Journey in Comics" and how the book demonstrates ways to plant the seed of advocacy and questioning in students, teachers, and community members alike. The first episode, or 16 bars after the overture, begins with a rhythmically simple tune in a minor key, repeated once to drive the theme home. The role of the educator, which changes instrument several times throughout the piece, is in this episode a trombone, reminiscent of the adult figures in the Charlie Brown franchise. As the students attempt to deviate from the melody, the trombone promptly enters to correct their "mistake," and the corrections get particularly aggressive at measure 30.

In the second episode, the F sharp minor key moves to its parallel major, and we see a diminution of earlier theme rewritten in major. Getting the curriculum explained and over with in two bars, the new flute sets the students creating without a repeat. Immediately students try to find their own personal tastes, with voices like the soprano taking a liking to triplets while the bass prefers to keep the rhythm on a single note. Once all students have found the way in which they best create, the teacher presents a revised curriculum with all of the students' personal touches.

## II. Prarial:

"Teachers are working to bridge the cultural gaps between themselves and their students, and they are seeking to understand and integrate the prior knowledge and cultural and linguistic heritage of their students into the content and delivery of their classes and ensembles. They know that nothing short of an educational paradigm shift to a culturally inclusive pedagogy will ensure the success of their students in music, the arts, the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences." (Campbell, 2008, p. 219.)

In E flat major, we find a character very similar to the trombone in the trumpet, equally strict in adhering to the prescribed lesson, but more easily overwhelmed by their class. The bass voice quickly steps in on a blues scale, switching up the rhythms to something more interesting and encouraging their classmates to join them, which they promptly do. As the students really begin to enjoy working with these new harmonies brought to the table by the bass, the trumpet can be heard in the background desperately trying to outline correct arpeggios and eliminate things like flat sevenths from the performance. Recapitulating the lesson at the end to try and make the students feel bad, they respond quickly with their new creation in summary.

In the second episode, the alto voice takes off with a similar idea to what the bass had previous. With a new instructor, the students take the reins in a similar way to the opening. Rather than jumping around making corrections and fixing mistakes, the baritone saxophone steps in only to give students what they need: an outlined blues scale, twice, and a tonic pedal tone. From there, the students take off, singing in harmony and alone with the help and understanding of the instructor. In this way, as mentioned in *Musician and Teacher*, the teacher readily embraces the cultural disconnect and seeks to connect the alto and their prior knowledge to the other students along with the teacher.

The movement title, "Prial" translates to "pasture" in French, something I believe to be appropriately reflective of the breadth and depth of topics, styles of teaching, and cultural examples that are expansive throughout *Musician and Teacher*.

## III. Messidor:

"The task of teaching a subject to a child is to make the child perceive objects and relationships the way authorities perceive them.' This sounds more like the old education than a new one, especially because it directs the child to see *only* what some previous perceivers have seen." (Postman & Weingartner, 1969, p. 79.)

Much of *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* was written with the aim of presenting an outdated and faltering paradigm, so I sought to base the third movement on a passage that explained what the educator should not do. With the piano playing the chorale voicing of the work, the students are given hardly any space to create or think on their own, minimizing any sort of improvisation or deviation from what the teacher expects of the students. In this way, students simply perceive music in the way that the instructor does.

In the second movement, we run into a problem with the same lesson. The soprano voice sings one constant whole step up, and is converting the 3/4 meter to a 4/4. Whether this be the same teacher as the first episode, or another, they immediately accommodate the student by shifting the mode of the piece and the meter, so the soprano may sing with the group comfortably. From measure 101 on, the students and teacher alternate in guiding the melody rhythmically. In the end, the soprano is able to sing in A major, and transposes the student created portion beyond measure 101 into a conclusion in the original key, although still in the soprano's 4/4.

Naming the movement "Messidor" or "harvest" was my intention at reflecting the deeply critical tone and outlook of *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, and the way in which the authors seem to hack away at the current system of education to see what can withstand the critique.

#### **IV. Thermidor:**

"The convert who approaches the people but feels alarm at each step they take, each doubt they express, and each suggestion they offer, and attempts to impose his 'status,' remains nostalgic towards his origins. Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were. Only through comradeship with the oppressed can the converts understand their characteristic way of living and behaving, which in diverse moments reflect the structure of domination." (Freire, 1970, p. 61.)

Obviously the most well-known of the revolutionary calendar months, Thermidor was the point at which the French people reacted against the revolutionary government that had taken the place of the monarchy at the end of the eighteenth century. It is no coincidence, then, that the name lines up with the most forward-thinking and action-provoking book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

The cello that opens the movement pays no attention to the notated 6/8 meter, and carries on in a 3/4 reminiscent of the early French overture, associated with the higher class. Superimposed upon that is a 6/8 dance performed by the voices in F major, while the cello grips onto d minor beneath the bright tune. Slowly shifting to the bright and loud F major, the cello makes no noticeable shift in meter, denoting the aforementioned "nostalgia" for its d minor, 3/4 origins. Taking the false bait, the students follow the teacher and quickly find themselves in d minor, a sort of harmonic enthrallment, that ends with the voices even adhering to the French rhythm to end the episode, falling to the monologue of the oppressor.

The second episode begins with a loud entrance by the voices, a chordal boom that will not be overpowered by the cello. For the remainder of the episode, the voices trample the cello as it staggers into F major, but give a rhythmic reprieve at measure 138 to allow the cello to

showcase its new agreement with the meter and the key, denoting the victory of the culture of the newly liberated. In this way, the cello has undergone the “rebirth” Freire speaks of.

#### **V. Vendémiaire:**

“Vendémiaire” or “grape harvest,” marks the cycle anew. Standing as the finale, the title aims to state that diligence can and will create a new and more appropriate order if we simply have patience and exemplify advocacy.

The movement has one elongated episode as to balance out the overture and make 10 total episodes, reflective of the 10 day French revolutionary week. The orchestration of the work may seem strange to someone not enrolled in Social Foundations of Music Education, but those who are should immediately recognize the designations of each part. That being said, the piece aims to add a cheerful and hopeful finale to the work, allowing for even more interpretation than the previous works in terms of dynamics, phrasing, and performance. More of a large exclamation mark than a thesis, the final movement aims to explain that if one small class can take such bounding progress, who is to say it cannot happen throughout the world.

#### **Works Cited:**

- Ayers, W., & Alexander-Tanner, R. (2010). *To teach: The journey in comics*. New York, NY: Teachers College.
- Campbell, P. S. (2008). *Musician and teacher: An orientation to music education*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Postman, N., & Weingartner, C. (1969). *Teaching as a subversive activity*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

Eddie Holmes