A sound education: the gramophone and the classroom in the United Kingdom and the United States, 1920–1940

Colin Symes

Colin.Symes@mq.edu.au

The advent of the gramophone transformed the cultural conditions of contemporary music, including the way it was taught. For a considerable period of time, musicians and music educators disparaged the gramophone. The members of the musical appreciation movement were more sympathetic and helped transform the gramophone’s educational image during the 1920s and 1930s. They argued that the gramophone, contrary to its detractors, might stem the appeal of popular music. As is clear from the sentiments of those espousing the pedagogic uses of the gramophone – which are analysed in this paper – their advocacy went far beyond music and was part of a broader cultural agenda, which included arresting the moral dangers associated with popular music.

The new education should include music in the widest sense and tend to create listeners, – not necessarily merely executants; this can be best accomplished by means of the Gramophone. I should like to see one of these instruments, with a fine equipment of His Master’s Voice instrumental and vocal records, placed in every school. (Sir Edward Elgar, 1919)

If the gramophone becomes a universal toy, our concert halls will be filled one day, as never before, by intelligent and appreciative audiences. (Mackenzie, 1925)

The history of education has neglected the role that various media have played in the reformation of learning. Having the capacity to extend the core pedagogic processes of seeing, doing, feeling and hearing beyond the present and the particular (Popkewitz, Franklin & Pereyra, 2001), such media have exerted a strong allure. Furthermore, as many of the more educationally useful media have had wide appeal outside the classroom, much pedagogic intervention has also been directed at fostering their more discriminating use. The texts that codify the classroom use of media, certainly in the arts, are embedded in powerful discourses to do with shaping pupils’ minds and habits. The educational utility of such media thus extends beyond their ability to ‘mechanise’ the pedagogic process and has included systematic attempts to regulate and re-form popular taste, and immunise children against their threats. This was the case with the medium that is the subject of this article, the gramophone. Its advocates argued that it had the potential to revolutionise the teaching of music and the appreciation of music generally (Symes, in press). This potential took time to be realised, and the machine was initially disparaged and laughed at by the musical community at large. It was the members of the ‘musical appreciation’ movement who were in the frontline of gramophone advocacy, and who believed that it could act on the musical habits of school populations in powerful ways and thwart the influence of jazz and popular music.
The fears that the advocates of musical appreciation hoped the gramophone would help eradicate foreshadow those that have continued to beset music education, which in large measure stem from the continuing hegemony of classical music in the school curriculum relative to other forms of music (Blake, 1996: 225; Green, 1988: 102). In this article I chronicle the pedagogic espousal of the gramophone in the US and the UK during the 1920s and 1930s, and analyse the writings of those associated with its advocacy. This focused on listening as a generic musical capacity. Although many contended that this focus would diminish the academic cogency of music, when George Dyson produced his series of reflections on the future of music there was an increasing recognition that the phonograph had brought about an ‘industrial and mechanical revolution’ in music (Dyson, 1935: 115).

The early phonograph: from toy to musical instrument

Although the uptake of the phonograph as an educational technology was relatively slow, its inventor, Thomas Edison, had identified education as one of the range of applications to which his invention might be deployed. In an elocution lesson, for example, a recording could model a certain type of pronunciation (Edison, 1878: 533). In a second set of reflections about his invention, Edison suggested that the explanations of teachers could be preserved, and a child curious to listen to them again could do so at will (Edison, 1888: 646). Part of the versatility of Edison’s phonograph, as distinct from Émile Berliner’s more successful gramophone, was its capacity to both record and reproduce sounds. Hence, Edison emphasised the interchangeable nature of the phonograph – its capacity to stand in lieu of a voice – which led him to project that its main applications would be commercial, and that the phonograph would eventually supersede stenography.2

It was left to the musically more astute Berliner and the efforts of the Victor Talking Machine Company to develop the musical potential of the gramophone (Gaisberg, 1943: 261). Prior to the 1920s, when its attitudes began to soften, the musical establishment saw the gramophone as an abomination, as a mere toy, that had about as much capacity of producing real music as nursery soldiers (Swinnerton, 1923: 52). Although some listeners were able to live with the execrable sounds that emanated from records, any potential that recording had for elevating musical taste had been swept away by jazz, which, prior to the 1920s, constituted the bulk of the musical fare offered on record. For although the catalogue of recordings was not entirely devoid of classical music, many classical works still awaited their first recordings (Day, 2000; Symes, in press). At this time ‘jazz’ was still used as a catch-all term, mostly pejoratively, to refer to a range of music that stretched from vaudeville to dance tunes. Concerns were also expressed about the impact the phonograph would have on active music-making, which, by the latter parts of the nineteenth century, had reached an unprecedented height and was felt to be threatened by the increasingly popular phonograph. In this regard, Sousa’s dire predictions about the consequences of ‘canned music’, which included the shrinking of the national chest, no longer subjected to the pulmonary exertion of singing, and the demise of work for ‘live’ musicians (Sousa, 1906: 281), were typical.

An allied concern was the fact that the technology of recording, prior to its electrification in the mid-1920s, was not conducive to musical reproduction of the highest
quality and involved many auditory compromises. The worst of these involved the frequent abridgement of classical music, necessary because of the limited playing time of discs (this was a regular focus of editorial commentary in the gramophone journalism of the 1920s), and the transcription of some orchestral parts which were difficult to record acoustically to other instruments. If that was not enough, musicians often complained about studio conditions and their impact on musicianship, and the excessive lengths that were needed to achieve what, in the end, were relatively miserable results. Having once been subjected to these conditions, many musicians, including the likes of Toscanini and Stokowski (Badal, 1996), vowed (although they later relented) never to repeat the experience. Much of the dislike expressed towards recording was not mitigated until the coming of the long-playing record in the late 1940s, which offered sufficient recording time to accommodate most classical works (opera excepted), and a standard of auditory fidelity which, though far from absolute, was much better than had hitherto been attainable.

Of immediate concern to the teachers of the time, in both the US and the UK, was the fear that recorded music would discourage individuals from reading books, and this would undermine literacy (Kenney, 1999: 50). The US-based Victor Talking Machine Company battled long and hard to allay this fear and instituted a campaign designed to combat the belief that the phonograph was counter-educational. Much of this campaign was conducted in the popular press in the 1920s, and helped to create the impression, mainly through advertising, that the phonograph could be an educational instrument without peer that would be an asset in any home or classroom. This also involved a systematic social ‘reclassification’ of the phonograph and a symbolic assault on those facets of the phonograph that had lowered its social tone and dissuaded the ‘educated’ classes from investing in records. For example, the machine, which had previously had an unattractive horn and was seen as an ‘affront to people of refined taste’ (Johnson, 1975: 73), was redesigned and turned into a stylish piece of furniture, available in a range of period designs. Its appeal was also increased through the development of a catalogue of ‘distinguished’ recordings. The company’s roving impresario, Fred Gaisberg, was responsible for this. He persuaded Enrico Caruso – most classical musicians had previously resisted his overtures – to record for Victor. His recordings gave the phonograph a measure of ‘classical’ respectability that it had previously lacked. In fact, Frances Clarke, who helped to pioneer the classroom uses of the phonograph, suggested that prior to Caruso the recording industry had borne ‘no mentionable fruit’ (cited in Scholes, 1935: 15). Her words have a telling resonance in this connection.

Music appreciation: the record speaks for itself

The development of the gramophone as a pedagogic instrument coincided with the rise of ‘music appreciation’, which challenged traditional assumptions relating to music. Music had always faced manifold pedagogic difficulties. Many of these stemmed from its theoretical underpinnings, which can subvert its other attractions. The liberal underpinnings of Western education have valorised theory at the expense of practice, and the status of music has both benefited and suffered from this tendency. In general, the traditional belief was that music should be appreciated in the abstract and that pupils who found this difficult ought not to be learning music. Yet emerging from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau
was a contrary belief: that music is primarily something to be enjoyed and that this is undermined once music is subjected to theoretical analysis (Paynter, 1982: 7). At the turn of the twentieth century, much music education had centred on singing, particularly folk songs and hymns. Indeed, in the UK prior to 1927, music was known as the ‘Teaching of Singing’. It was held that singing produced a number of benefits including increased patriotism and improvements to the pulmonary circulation, said to come from exercising the lungs (hence Sousa’s fears about the condition of the national chest). It also fostered respect for authority because students learnt the importance of submitting to a conductor’s directions (Rainbow, 1989: 269).

Many at the time cast doubt on the efficacy of these benefits and considered that they overlooked an important factor in musical aptitude, that of listening. It was held that listening was a core musical competence whose fostering required close attention and special training. Out of this concern emerged the movement for musical appreciation whose initial advocates in the UK – there was a parallel movement in the US – were Stewart Macpherson and Walford Davies. The former had had a long association with the Aeolian Company, manufacturers of piano rolls. At the time, these were often preferred to gramophone recordings on the grounds of their superior sound and the range of their repertoire. Davies was to have a long association with the BBC developing lessons for schools, which were subsequently transferred to recordings (Colles, 1942; Cox, 1997). In the United States, the movement took its inspiration from Edward Birge (1928), who thought music teachers should take advantage of the many mechanical aids available to them and use them to cultivate intelligent listening habits. But it was the combative Percy Scholes and his gramophone aide-de-camp, W. R. Anderson, who did most to promote the cause of the gramophone as a vehicle for propagating musical appreciation.

Central to the idea of musical appreciation was the notion that encounters with music should not be restricted to what children could perform but should embrace other experiences, including listening (Moutrie, 1976). This was initially via examples on the piano or player piano but was extended, once their repertoire had improved, to the use of gramophone recordings. It was argued that music was essentially an auditory art to which all its other manifestations, including notation, ultimately deferred (Scholes, 1930: 12). Though many argued that the benefits of musical appreciation were chimerical and could not be proved, it was pointed out that appreciation was familiar in the other arts and had not caused the consternation it had in music. Indeed, Matthew Arnold, who had argued that the appreciation of literature should be part of the curriculum, had suggested that music might be easier to get in the mind than poetry (Paynter, 1982: 3). One of the gramophone’s undeniable benefits was that it was possible for many more people, including children, to hear an ‘abundance of music without stirring from their hearth’ (Scholes, 1935: 75). But it also meant that music could be closely inspected and scrutinised under a ‘microscope’ for analysis.

On the surface at least, the cultivation of musical appreciation was intended to entrench processes of aesthetic discrimination: but this was often a rhetorical overlay for other functions relating to the general administration of contemporary populations. Apologists for the gramophone were strong in their conviction that mechanised music could yield many social and moral dividends: that when combined with an appropriate pedagogy, of the type formulated by Scholes and his followers, it could extend the child’s musical
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sensibility in beneficial directions, and thereby offset the moral hazards posed by jazz. An adequate grounding in music education during their school years – the ‘most receptive and plastic years’ – would serve to protect children from the ‘degrading sounds’ (of jazz, presumably) that they would encounter in their lives (Hadow, 1928: 270). In effect, the gramophone was roped into the service of protecting children from its own supposed ill effects.

**HMV’s Department of Education**

Although the phonograph was invented in 1877, it was only in the early 1920s that its classical musical potential came to be fully appreciated. This tardiness had much to do with the technical shortcomings of recording, which were exposed by the more acoustically demanding orchestral repertoire. Thus it was not until 1913 that the first complete symphony, Beethoven’s Fifth, appeared on disc, and it took another 12 years before the first recording of a string quartet appeared. The absence of a ‘great library of good music’ on record (Mackenzie, 1923: 1) undoubtedly retarded the educational uptake of the gramophone. Another was its relative cost, which, by today’s standards, was expensive and was beyond the reach of many schools, certainly in the UK. Even so, outside the field of music records had been issued in the area of language instruction as early as 1897 (Welch & Burt, 1994: 118). Meanwhile, Columbia had developed a set of records employing what was called a ‘Phono-Vocal Method’, which was intended as a self-instructional kit in the art of singing (Klein, 1930).

Then, in 1911, the Victor Talking Machine Company established an Educational Department, which was charged with overseeing the use of gramophones in schools and colleges. Music was the main focus of its responsibility, though many, including Edison, insisted that the phonograph could be utilised across the curriculum and began to develop extensive educational catalogues, which included recordings of breathing for medical students (Johnson, 1954: 8). There was a general belief that mechanical devices such as the gramophone could revolutionise teaching and improve the efficiency of educational provision. H. G. Wells, for example, drew parallels with the mass production achieved in factories and suggested that similar techniques should be followed in schools. Gramophones could be used to standardise the methods of language teaching the world over (Wells, 1921: 163).

Victor appointed Frances Clarke, by then a noted US music educator famed for utilising the phonograph in the classroom, to head its new department, where she worked for several decades and produced many recordings specifically for children. These included abridged versions of operas, and songs written by Schubert and Schumann (Keene, 1982: 247). She also produced several booklets outlining ways of obtaining the best possible pedagogic results from the phonograph, which included encouraging children to express their responses to music pictorially (Rainbow, 1989: 291). But the main objective of her phonographic pedagogy was to thwart the development of delinquent musical attitudes and ‘counteract the spread of musical vulgarity and sensuality’ (Kenney, 1999: 92).

After the First World War, HMV also established an Education Department, whose inaugural head was Walter Yeomans and under whom the noted music and record critic Alec Robertson served for a time (Robertson, 1961). Robertson was, from the first, a
great believer in the gramophone as a classroom asset, and felt that the twin forces of musical appreciation and the gramophone would eventually produce an ‘educational millennium’ (Robertson, 1922: 267). Yeoman’s department also produced booklets (The Schubert Centenary, Golden Treasury of Recorded Music) that were designed to promote ‘the intelligent uses of the gramophone’. These included Clarke’s suggestion: that of encouraging children to respond pictorially to music (Robertson, n.d). HMV also produced a gramophone for schools, which was powerful enough to disperse music to all corners of a classroom and was frequently offered as a prize in competitions mounted by HMV (see Figure 1).

The record industry obviously stood to gain from investing in children and teachers, and, starting in the 1920s, it advertised its products in the US and UK music press. It also sought, at least on one occasion, the imprimatur of teachers to endorse its new products.4 This same music press also reprimanded teachers for not taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by the phonograph and suggested that they only had themselves to blame if the public were only interested in the ‘noise and St. Vitus’ of jazz. The fault was not that of the industry: it had developed a classical catalogue which teachers needed to use if an interest in ‘real music’ on the part of children was not to be ‘lost in the enormous flood of distributed ephemeral music’.5

The gospel according to the gramophone

Those who advocated the classroom uses of the gramophone stressed consistently the importance of intelligent listening – that listening to ‘real music’ required diligence and tenacity. This was unlike more ‘ephemeral music’ which was assumed to yield its secrets and pleasures instantly and was therefore judged to be of lesser aesthetic worth (Scholes, 1935: 227). Hence, one of the skills needed for musical appreciation was that of ‘attention’ – of being able to concentrate on a piece of music through its entire span and duration, without succumbing to the allure of other pleasures. With this went the view that listening to good music (as opposed to jazz, which it was intimated could lead pupils into acquiring profligate habits) represented a more profitable use of leisure time (Goble, 1999: 335–6). For although jazz had, in large measure, been brought to the public’s attention by the gramophone, there were many who feared its influence, particularly in the 1920s when the craze for jazz, especially among the young, had begun to burgeon. Many, including the widely educated, averred that such music, through its capacity to excite unhealthy vices and unwelcome erotic impulses, could induce moral degeneracy (Fielden, 1932).6 The evidence for this was in large measure circumstantial, and contained racist elements that were manifested in the view that the musical expressions of black culture were inferior and uncivilised. This view was also extended to the ‘disgusting caterwaulings of Tziganes’, whose attractions could be countervailed if an appetite for good music was acquired (Smith, 1947: 91).

Thus, the philosophy behind music appreciation was commensurate with the broad objectives of universal education in the nineteenth century. These were related to improving the ethical and aesthetic capacities of populations as articulated by, for example, Matthew Arnold. Initially, these capacities were aligned to the Protestant work ethic, and linked with being industrious and compliant, punctual and productive, with ennobling the value of
Fig. 1 This advertisement, published in the *Music Teacher and Student* in October 1929, shows the type of promotional stratagems used by the record industry to get its products into schools. Many schools would have entered pupils in the competition advertised because gramophones would still have been beyond their means...
labour as a precondition of a meaningful life (Bauman, 1998). But with the introduction of a more comprehensive curriculum, incorporating other domains of knowing, including music, these objectives were extended to the more constructive use of leisure. It was held that the arts might help counter the licentiousness of popular culture and produce better disciplined populations. The power of music to soothe the savage breast was not a new notion, but it was given ‘scientific’ respectability in the 1920s when Cyril Burt, among others, attributed to music the ‘essence of synthesis, of order’. It had the capacity to ‘socialise the instincts’ of even recalcitrant children, and to encourage ‘courtesy and co-operation’ (Burt, 1925: 522). A picture that appeared in the music press of the time provides a striking illustration of these redeeming powers: that music could curb crime and dissolve habits, and give cohesion to the family unit (see Figure 2).

But primarily the work of the Education Departments involved ‘propagating the gospel of the gramophone’ (Robertson, 1961: 112) and convincing teachers that the gramophone was a natural adjunct of the music lesson. This meant countering the judgements of many teachers who remained insistent that the gramophone’s technical inadequacies reduced its suitability as an instructional aid and could not be a ‘purveyor, albeit second hand, of serious music’ (Robertson, 1969: 382). For in spite of the advocacy of the gramophone by the musical appreciation movement, many teachers continued to belittle the contribution that records could make to the development of musical intelligence. Notwithstanding this scepticism, it made sense to cultivate the pedagogic potential of the gramophone, namely its capacity for repetition, held to be a key element of musical acquaintance. It also seemed quite natural to use the gramophone as an instrument of musical illustration, much in the way that the ‘magic lantern’ had been used to show paintings in classrooms (Scholes, 1945). And although many recognised that mechanised music was no substitute for the real thing and that listening to recorded music was somewhat ‘akin to looking down the wrong end of the telescope’ (Johnson, 1936: 3), it was the next best thing, for attendance at concerts was a privilege only a ‘fortunate minority’ could enjoy (Johnson, 1935: v). Thus, an important theme of gramophone discourse was an egalitarian one: that it could bring music into the ‘life of the masses’ (Macpherson, 1923: 203). This ran counter to the exclusionary trends of the time, which held that the vast majority of the population was musically indifferent and that this indifference was innate and could not be overcome. It had nothing to do with its lack of exposure to serious music. For concerts, by the end of the nineteenth century, had become integral parts of the social and class features of metropolitan life (DiMaggio, 1987; Gay, 1995; Levine, 1988). The gramophone had the capacity to transcend these social relations, and to mobilise interest in music beyond that of an aesthetic oligarchy.

In this respect, the gramophone was seen as a socially progressive machine that had the power to democratise music and contest its hegemonic functions in conferring class distinction. It had the potential to enable music to be redistributed and transferred ‘from the aristocracy into the “hands” of the whole civilised community’ (Johnson, 1935: xi). And this was particularly true for children in regions remote from the metropolitan centres of music. In fact, time and time again teachers reported the degree to which musical enthusiasm was galvanised by the gramophone, and that children who had rarely been exposed to classical music were soon entranced by its sounds (Katz, 1998: 10). This was true even of what were claimed to be recalcitrant communities, where the opportunities for exposure to music
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Fig. 2 These two pictures, which first appeared together in *The Etude* in October 1926, form a homiletic diptych. There is a dialogue between the top picture, which laments the demise of the moralising home, and the bottom picture, which attributes to the arts in general and music in particular the ability to administer populations and produce honest, law-abiding citizens (Reproduced by permission of Theodore Presser Company)
had been limited to ‘second rate cinemas’ (Lewis, 1924: 467). Indeed, the introduction of the ‘talking machine’ into the classroom was held responsible for extending musical knowledge in communities where the opportunities to hear music ‘written to the laws of harmony’ would have been rare (Johnson, 1922: 164). And many teachers reported considerable increases in general musical knowledge which was attributed, in the main, to listening to records (Birge, 1922: 190; Dyson, 1935: 117). Another symptom of the growing penetration of the gramophone into education was the ‘Music Memory Contests’. These started in the US after the First World War and reached their peak in the 1920s. In 1922, for example, there were over 1,000 such contests (Keene, 1982: 263). They involved schools and students competing against one another in quizzes that tested basic musical knowledge and understanding.

**Schooling the gramophone**

By the 1930s a broad community of interest had developed across the record industry and education that recognised the pedagogic soundness of the gramophone in a variety of environments, not just schools. For example, in an address to librarians, Walford Davies had urged that gramophones warranted a place in the progressive library (Sharp, 1922/3: 291). This community also extended, once it started, to radio broadcasters, and many of the advocates of musical appreciation extended their sphere of interest to the wireless (Cox, 1997). One early feature of BBC broadcasts, for example, were the ‘lecturettes’ of Walford Davies. These were subsequently transferred onto a set of HMV records, and promoted as ‘an excellent way of instilling musical enthusiasm’ (Whittaker, 1922: 80). Thus, it began to be recognised that if children were subjected to musical experiences – now more possible because of records and the wireless – from a very early age, they would soon acquire the foundations of a lifelong interest in ‘real music’. Indeed, it was suggested that there were parallels between learning language and learning music. Both worked, so it was argued, by immersion and osmosis, such that by an early age any child reared on music would have a smattering of its language and music would not be ‘unintelligent [sic] to him’ (Johnson, 1922: 164).

A series of articles that W. R. Anderson wrote for *Gramophone* and *Music Teacher* over the period 1926–38 reveals much about the way the educational potential of the gramophone was enlisted. One of their dominant themes is the vitiating effects of popular music and the poverty of taste flowing from its wanton commercialism (Anderson, 1927a: 70). In an earlier article, Anderson observed that children are more likely to hear poor music than read poor books, and that the objective of the teacher must always be to improve the aural aptitudes of the child and to cure musical laziness (Anderson, 1926: 143). The picture emerges of the gramophone as a machine that could train taste and produce a more discriminating musical outlook (Anderson, 1938b: 219). The ghost of Arnold haunts these sentiments: that the child has the ‘right to nothing but the best’ (Anderson, 1926: 143). Thus, a sound education was precisely that: one underpinned with solid moral and aesthetic foundations that were robust enough to withstand the seductions of jazz. Through apt selections of gramophone music, children might be safeguarded from the ‘weakening influence of unworthy art’ (Anderson, 1927b: 387) and be immunised against the effects of popular music. Moreover, there was the hope that this immunisation would be taken
home and children would demand that their parents listen to better quality music on the wireless and the gramophone (Borland, 1927: 67). All this was framed as part of a larger agenda relating to the function of music in adult life: that the appreciation of music would give people the wherewithal to be lifted out of the ‘commonplace ruts of everyday life’ (Johnson, 1936: 96).

At the same time, it was recognised that the educational uses of the gramophone were not restricted to the realm of music. The gramophone could stand in lieu of the school orchestra at assemblies or the organ during religious observances, and provide the musical accompaniment for gymnastics and marches. Columbia had already issued records for the latter purpose. It was even suggested that recordings of fine music could be used as pedagogic muzak, to increase the powers of concentration among pupils. This was claimed to have another advantage: that such music would insinuate itself into the sensibility of the child and help the process of familiarisation with more ‘elaborate types of music’ (Tayler, n.d.: 18).

In fact, as early as 1918, the Victor Company had been promulgating the virtues of the phonograph as a universal pedagogic machine. A two-page advertisement, appearing in the Talking Machine Monthly in July of that year, showed the machine being utilised in a range of teaching contexts from callisthenics to roller-skating, wireless telegraphy to typewriting. It was suggested that the phonograph could revitalise the teaching of history, literature and geography (Kenney, 1999: 58). Moreover, some musicians were already using records as a medium of self-instruction, to gain insights into music. This was the case with the percussionist James Blades, who transcribed recordings of jazz and learnt much about its performance and musical architecture (Blades, 1977: 95). Indeed, by the late 1930s, such was the gramophone’s perceived pedagogic versatility that the school without a gramophone and an accompanying library of records was regarded as a deprived one. To this end, policy makers had begun to deem the gramophone a desirable item of educational equipment, even in primary schools (Board of Education, 1931). And school certificate regulations of the time often specified that a gramophone should be used if certain aspects of the syllabus were to be covered (Scholes, 1935: 301).

There was also a general recognition that if education via the gramophone was to succeed, teachers needed appropriate training. One of the alleged failings of the gramophone was that it was used merely to babysit pupils. This was because trainee teachers of the time were not taught how to use it appropriately (Anderson, 1938a: 163) – yet there was no shortage of guidance in the form of articles and books on the matter. These generally promoted the idea that the gramophone was modern teachers’ tool of the trade, and told them how to care for and store records, and how to enhance their acoustic presentation through the right choice of stylus, for this could determine how animated a record sounded (Scholes, 1933: 11). There was also recognition that classrooms, because they lacked sound-absorbing materials, were poor listening environments for music. School architects were enjoined to redress this, and were urged to design classrooms that flattered the phonograph’s sound – even more necessary with the advent of stereo and tape-recording in the late 1950s (Webb, 1976).

There was also advice on how listening rooms should be furbished – preferably with paintings that provided an appropriate backdrop for listening to music (Johnson, 1936: 30). Teachers were also provided with guidance about purchasing records and what sources
they should consult to assist them. The BBC’s ‘New Gramophone Records’ was named as one source, as were Imhof’s ‘Intimate Record Recitals’, which provided regular auditions of new recordings (Johnson, 1936: 38). This was another symptom of the growing accord between the record industry and education, which was also evident in the fact that the industry continued to seek the endorsements of well-known music educators for its products and services.9

Percy Scholes and the ‘Columbia History of Music’

Another example of this growing accord was a pioneering example of mixed media, Scholes’s ‘Columbia History of Music’, which utilised a combination of recordings and booklets, illustrations and musical examples. This consisted of five illustrated record albums chronicling Western music from 1600 through to 1930, in which the ‘letterpress’ was considered ‘a mere subsidiary’ to the accompanying gramophone records (Scholes, 1930: 12). Scholes had already produced a body of writings – some in association with the Gramophone Company – which form a broad apologetics for the pedagogic gramophone. One section of his definitive text on the subject (Scholes, 1935) was devoted to ‘experiments and experiences’ occurring in a number of UK schools which demonstrated the pitfalls and potential of phonographic education. These reiterated many of the ideological clichés associated with music appreciation. For example, jazz and cheap, raucous gramophones were the ‘greatest enemies’ (Scholes, 1935: 57) of the music teacher, yet it was also recognised that it was no good telling children that jazz is trash: only bouts of intensive listening to real music could make them aware of its musical inadequacies.

Scholes held that if children could be armed with a few musical ‘touchstones of excellence’ (Scholes, 1935: 166), they would soon tire of musical populism. He argued that through recordings children could become as familiar with the life of Beethoven as they were, through history, with that of Napoleon. In fact, such suggestions were part of the broad reform of music education to which Scholes had committed himself. ‘Humanising’ music through telling the lives of the composers and stories behind their compositions was an important part of this reform (Scholes, 1945). He argued that children were lukewarm towards musical appreciation in the abstract and needed to see music in its broader cultural context. He thought that the ‘concert’ or ‘radio’ lesson would generate much more enthusiasm than the conventional music lesson, since it would suggest that ‘work at school’ was preparing ‘oneself the better to enjoy the delights of the home broadcasting set’ (Scholes, 1933: 11). He was adamant that music teaching should be animated and lively, and that the music played in the classroom should be approachable and leave an indelible impression. This also meant presenting music in excerpts, and using music that told stories, evoked pictures or was ‘figurative’ in the onomatopoeic sense (Scholes, 1945: 12). He also reminded teachers of the dangers of overestimating the auditory stamina of children, who should not be expected to sit through entire symphonies.

Scholes also wanted to draw ‘correlations’ (the term used at the time) between music and the other arts. This entailed teaching the music of Elizabethan England alongside the plays of Shakespeare, or demonstrating that architectural styles echoed that of the music with which they were contemporary. Plainsong is the musical equivalent of the unadorned Saxon arch (Scholes, 1933: 45). Likewise dress: the simplification of
contemporary fashion echoed that in contemporary music (Scholes, 1929: 131). The pedagogy of music appreciation was a multidisciplinary one, and underpinned with the belief that musical developments could not be insulated from those occurring in other cultural fields. Indeed, others who espoused correlation suggested that music could be taught across the curriculum. In geography, for example, the folk music of other nations, because it crystallises the ‘soul of other peoples’, could be presented in geography lessons (Tayler, n.d.: 79).

Conclusion

This paper has chronicled the ways in which the music appreciation movement sought to take advantage of the gramophone and demonstrate that it was a genuine musical instrument whose educational claims could not be eschewed. In this respect, the interests of the movement were shared by the developing record industry, which at the time was keen to improve its cultural credentials and, to this end, set about establishing educational departments that would further the pedagogic potential of the gramophone. The advocates of music appreciation determined that recording would have an assured place in the classroom and play its role in combating the damaging effects of inferior music. In this respect, music teachers enlisted the services of the gramophone to broaden the musical tastes of the population and establish the foundations of more discriminating musical taste. To some extent, this end was realised, certainly by the 1930s, when it was claimed by one industry representative that as a result of the pedagogic uptake of the gramophone ‘music is no longer remaining a closed book to the majority’ (Neck, 1932: 254). Yet the broader goals of the project, which had to do with the reform of musical taste, were not achieved. This was because they failed to take into account the fact that the distinctions classical music confers are, in large measure, social rather than universal, and that the ‘raucous gramophone’ allowed access to a diversity of music that many listeners, contrary to the advocates of music appreciation, thought equally worthwhile and pleasurable. In the end, it was the fact that the gramophone provided an open book to music that had remained closed to Western ears that ultimately posed a challenge to music educators in the second half of the twentieth century.

Notes

1 This is a quotation from a letter to Fred Gaisberg, 26 February 1919 (Moore, 1974: 27).
2 Edison’s own foray into phonographic pedagogy reflected these utilitarian goals. The classroom discs his company released related to ‘dictation and spelling, maths drills and various practices for secretaries’ (Klinger, 1993: 240). It is also pertinent that the word ‘phonograph’ was the one Pitman applied to the system of shorthand he developed. See Gitelman (1999).
3 This idea is encapsulated in St Augustine’s view of music: that it could only qualify as a liberal art insomuch as its appeal remained intellectual (Howie, 1969: 268–9).
4 According to an advertisement in The Etude (April 1920), 6,000 teachers, who were described as the ‘fine intelligent kind of men and women to whom you have entrusted the education of your children’ – code for persons of impeccable judgement – attended one of Edison’s famous ‘Tone Tests’. These were designed to reinforce the audio credentials of the new phonograph.
In ‘A great force needs your guidance’, which appeared in the US magazine *The Musician* (May 1920). Its English equivalent, *The Music Student*, when it was still under the editorship of Scholes, had carried a number of supplements from HMV, beginning in 1919, supporting the use of the gramophone in the classroom.

Typical were the views of ‘Terpander’, the columnist of *Gramophone*, who reviled jazz as undemanding, licentious, and no more than an aphrodisiac. Ironically, many contemporary composers, Darius Milhaud and Igor Stravinsky included, did not share Terpander's view, and used jazz in their compositions, though even they recognised its musical shortcomings, and argued that it was not an art in itself. In Stravinsky's words, it was not created for eternity (cited in Scholes, 1930: 66).

Even promiscuity, often attributed to attending too much cinema, was thought to be curable by attending concerts (Burt, 1925: 431).

One Sydney high school, Canterbury Boys’, reports in its school magazine, *Canterbury Tales*, for 1927 that the boys who belonged to its Gramophone Club had elected to listen to *Faust* and *Rigoletto* rather than jazz.

An HMV advertisement which appeared in *Music Teacher* (May 1926) cites Walford Davies to the effect that ‘The Gramophone is the handmaid of modern musical education’.

Pupils delighted in recognising the sound of horses splashing in Schubert's song ‘Der Erlkönig’.

### References


A sound education: the gramophone and the classroom in the UK and the USA, 1920–1940

LEWIS, E. R. (1924) ‘Appreciation in an elementary school: how a scheme was planned and how it worked’. Music Teacher, 3, 467.
MACKENZIE, O. (1925) ‘Children who hate music lessons: the gramophone to the rescue’. Gramophone, 2, 5, 290.


Magazines

The Etude (US)
The Musician: Music Teachers’ Magazine (US)
The Music Student (UK), reprinted Music Teacher
Gramophone (UK)