

A PROPOSED PROGRAM OF
STRING INSTRUMENT INSTRUCTION
FOR THE ANCHORAGE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Submitted by
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Throughout the ages man has found music to be essential in voicing his own innate sense of beauty. Music is not a thing apart from man; it is the spiritualized expression of his finest and best inner self. There is no one wholly unresponsive to the elevating appeal of music. If only the right contacts and experiences are provided, every individual can find in music some answer to his fundamental need for aesthetic and emotional outlet. Education fails its cultural objective unless it brings to every child the consciousness that his own spirit may find satisfying expression through music.

From the discovery of the full possibilities of the string instrument family stems a considerable portion of the great musical development of the world. The opera, the symphony, the oratorio--all depend on the orchestra for full realization, and it is the string section, comprising seventy percent of the personnel (violins, violas, cellos and basses) which gives the orchestra its unique character.

The present nationwide revival of interest in string instrument playing has great musical significance and has led to the development of fine school and civic orchestras. Far greater values than community pride will accrue to the individual child who studies a string instrument and participates in these orchestras. The values are very real, and the following exposition is an effort to explain some of them.

Performance. The first and most important effect of string instrument study is that, through it, one ultimately learns to play the instrument. Here, one has the satisfaction of being able to produce sounds which are pleasant to the ear, and here lies the reward for time and effort spent. But by no means is it the only reward.

Musical. The greatest musical organization yet to be developed by man is the symphony orchestra. In it we find all of the instruments of the wind band plus the great body of strings with their almost limitless varieties of color, expression and range. Because of this all-inclusiveness of the orchestra and its consequent ability to express, it is only logical that the greatest composers have chosen it as the medium for the performance of their works. Thus, persons who play the strings are naturally drawn into contact with great music.

Social. Perhaps the next important value of string instrument study is the social. String players usually seek a place in an orchestra of some kind. Here new friendships are made and old ones renewed. Prestige, due to wealth or so-called social standing, fades before skill in performance. Another social reason for stringed instrument study is that the "language" is universal, the same the world over. Wherever one goes, string players will be found. There is always room for the newcomer. He may be an utter stranger of a foreign tongue, yet be accepted and admired for his musical achievement.

Cultural. For the student who wishes to follow some vocation other than music, the cultural value is one of the greatest of all. One may study an instrument, and for any one of several reasons never play upon it again, yet there is left an understanding and an appreciation that varies directly with how far that person has proceeded in his study. If one has played a great deal of orchestra literature or chamber music, this value will be very great. The better radio programs are filled with fine music by composers of all periods, played by fine orchestras and chamber music groups. For the person who has gone far enough to understand these works, even though he might not play them well, there is a joy and an appreciation that can never be gained by hearing music or by reading about it.

Personality. Careful study, analysis and drill are required for mastery of a string instrument. Through a daily practice routine the student will find himself gradually growing in his sensitivity to pitch, rhythms, timbre, form, dynamics, orchestral color and general artistic appreciation. Personality traits far removed from music are developed by the student through continuous association with people in groups, at rehearsals, concerts, banquets, etc. His manner and taste in dress, evaluation of friendships, and his ability to meet and converse with people will all be influenced sharply.

In many schools of the United States string instrument instruction flourishes as a vital part of the musical activities of the community. In practically all of these places a good band as well as orchestra is maintained, and the administrators in charge are convinced that they are supporting a broad and well-balanced program of real educational value, wherein every child is given the chance to participate in the musical experience best suited to his talents. In the schools where a large orchestra of fine quality has existed year after year in uninterrupted force, both school and community take a genuine pride in this accomplishment and make sure each year that the program remains under capable, experienced supervision and that nothing interferes with its continued support.

The present program of string instruction in the Anchorage Independent School District is most inadequate. Some work is being done at the secondary school level.* Students are not being reached at an early enough age, however, to develop their musical potentialities to the fullest. Although beginning instruction can be well received by many children of junior high school age and older, it has been proved that younger students are better qualified physically to accept the correct position and all-important bowing techniques for the mastery of the instrument.

String students now in the Anchorage schools are being developed mainly through the efforts of the PTA and private teachers. These students, although some are quite proficient, are too few in number to ever make possible balanced orchestras in the secondary schools. A school-

*The present high school orchestras have dwindled from ninety in 1956 to ten at East High School and six at West High School for the 1963-64 school year.

sponsored program available to all qualified students at the elementary school level is necessary to develop youth orchestras to the aesthetic and cultural level they deserve.

The following material suggests a plan whereby an adequate string instruction program could be offered in the Anchorage schools.

Scope: This program should be available to all interested elementary school children in the fourth through sixth grades. Junior high schools should provide orchestras and classes for beginning, intermediate, and advanced players. String and symphonic orchestras in addition to intermediate classes should be available at the high school level. An intensive program in chamber music should be initiated at the secondary school level. Chamber music would be handled for the most part on an after school basis.

Staff: 1963-64. Use of present staff to start beginning classes on a limited basis in the elementary schools. The PTA sponsored string program should be continued on its present basis for this year and expanded if additional qualified teachers can be found.

Schools which have expressed a keen interest in the instrumental program at this time are Airport Heights, Inlet View, Lake Otis, North Star and Turnagain. Therefore, these would be the logical schools in which to begin the program. If desired, the program could be available to other elementary students with parents providing transportation to these schools.

It has been suggested that all students participating be charged one dollar per lesson, with this fee being paid to the PTA Council. These monies would then be used for payment to the teacher(s) not employed by AISD, as well as for mileage expenses of AISD employees.

AISD personnel trained in string instruments and able to participate in the program this year are Frank Pinkerton, East; Ruth Settles and Marlow Thomas, Wendler Jr. High; and possibly some others. Mrs. Leah Telford, private violin teacher and concertmistress of the Civic-University Orchestra, is giving PTA sponsored group lessons at one school and could conceivably cover one other school.

1964-65. The addition of two full-time teachers would be required to implement this program.

1965-66. Intermediate classes in the elementary schools would require at least one additional string instructor.

1966-67. One additional orchestra instructor will be needed because of the large number of string students entering junior high school. This will then allow one orchestra instructor per junior high school and its feeder elementary schools. The above personnel figures represent a minimum staff to carry out this program. With the large anticipated enrollment for the Anchorage schools it is possible that additional staff will be necessary.

Note: Extreme care should be used in selecting qualified string teachers. The success of this program will depend upon their instructional background and personality!

Schedule: Classes should be met a minimum of twice per week during the school day in the elementary schools. Loss of academic class time for the student can be minimized by overlapping string classes with recess and lunch. Each class should be allowed forty minutes.

Facilities: Physical. Adequate rehearsal space, music stands, chairs, piano, blackboard, staff, and bulletin board.

Instruments. School-owned violins should be issued for a maximum of one year with the understanding that those students who continue will purchase their own after the trial period on a school instrument. The other string instruments could be loaned for a longer period of time. String basses, for instance, would be provided by the schools through high school.

20	1/2	size violins	per year for 5 years	@	80.00	\$1600.00
20	3/4	"	"	"	"	1600.00
20	4/4	"	"	"	"	1600.00
15	3/4	"	Violas	"	"	1200.00
6	15"-16"	violins	"	"	150.00	900.00
10	1/2	size cellos	"	"	200.00	2000.00
10	3/4	"	"	"	"	2000.00
4	4/4	"	"	"	300.00	1200.00
22	1/4	"	basses	"	200.00	4000.00
3	1/2	"	"	"	400.00	1200.00
2	3/4	"	"	"	600.00	1200.00

Instrument cost per year \$14,900.00

Music for elementary orchestra and ensemble materials per year 200.00

Music for secondary school orchestra program per year 1500.00

Fees: In order to cover the maintenance cost on string instruments, it is recommended that students pay a \$3.00 per semester fee. Instruction, beginning 1964-65 should be free to all students. Method book, resin, and pitch-pipe should be purchases by the student.