

M.U.S. -icology 101

Lecture No. 6
Topic: *Music Education Society*

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In Lecture No. 4, I alluded to another organisation of music students in this Department's history: the Music Education Society. (If you missed that lecture, or any of the others in this series, you can read them on the web at <http://www.canuck.com/~ace/mus/> with the help of Adobe Acrobat Reader.) At one time, they were larger than the Music Undergraduate Society. But some strong leadership of the M.U.S. by music education students made the M.E.S. redundant by the mid-1980s. So I was curious when I noticed that an effort was afoot to revive this once-notable society.

This particular effort was led by Music Education professors Jeremy Brown, Jerry Kerlin, Janos Horvath, and Malcolm Edwards. During the initial meeting on October 1, these professors spoke persuasively about the benefits of such a society to students (in *all* disciplines) and the department alike. Later that same day, the Theory & Composition and Musicology disciplines held a joint meeting of a similar nature, although it may have been less formal and more social in its goals.

Again, this was a professor-initiated effort.

My first comment is obvious: it's great that the professors in these disciplines are taking such an interest in this University—and *your* education. They saw a need and took steps to fill it. Even if these meetings only lead to improved communication amongst students, and between students and faculty, they are time well spent.

But that leads to an equally obvious query: is our Department in danger of becoming a big, faceless cyborg? Are we so self-absorbed as individuals that we don't reach out to other students if they are not in our own year or discipline?

In contemplating this issue, I thought back to a fellow student from the mid-1980s by the name of Cynthia Yuschyshyn. She was a trombone performance major who eventually transferred to U.B.C. Her observation when she returned for a visit was that the students there were very competitive and there was little of the camaraderie that she

was used to (as mentioned in my previous articles). Small wonder: she had gone from a department of less than 100 students to one that is similar in population to ours right now.

The trick for the U. of C. is to avoid those pitfalls of growth. As the late Rick Lea once quipped (in reference to the number of oboe players on our campus), we can no longer hold our meetings in a phone booth. Thus, getting to know everyone is not as easy as it used to be.

M.U.S. tries to provide a social outlet for students here. In fact, it could be argued that besides giving gig and lesson referrals, this is their only function. But even those social activities are pretty limited in scope. If parties that primarily involve dancing and/or the consumption of alcohol aren't for you, then you will have to work harder to make connections. M.U.S. cannot be all things to 200 people (although most years, they do try).

So the resurgence of a Music Education Society makes sense. As the Department gets bigger, the ability for one organisation to meet the needs of everyone gets more difficult. At the same time, areas other than Performance are in a minority position and need to be as cohesive as possible to make up for their lower numbers.

How should these groups proceed? If you look at the pattern used for graduate students here over the past two decades, I think you have a good model. Originally, there were just a handful of students, so M.U.S. welcomed them into their larger group. As the population got larger, a faculty member (usually the head of the graduate programme) hosted a couple of social gatherings per year for graduate students, faculty and staff. In the past two years, with a substantial jump in enrollment, we have seen the students organise their own social events on top of that and start to consider a more formal structure.

If you apply this model to the meetings that took place on October 1, your professors are trying to initiate the second step in the process. It is up to you as students to decide whether you want to take up this challenge and provide a richer experience for yourself, your peers, and those who follow you. I know I'll be at the next Music Education Society meeting on October 15.



Is our Department in danger of becoming a big, faceless cyborg?

