

Music in a CM & Classical Education

Sursum Corda Patio Chat 2/16/2023

Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace.

—Plato, *Republic*, III.402a

The musical (coming from the same root word as “museum”) education was an education in wonder. It formed the heart and the moral imagination of the youth. The musical education was not primarily or exclusively about instruments and singing. It studied all the subjects inspired by the Muses (from epic poetry to astronomy) in a pre-critical manner. “Imitation precedes art,” went the ancient maxim. The musical education, directed toward joyful engagement with reality, offered this imitative foundation for the later learning of the arts . . .

The musical and gymnastic educations fitted the students’ hearts and bodies to reality, thus forming virtue in them. They taught passions more than skills and content.

—Clark & Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian Classical Education*

Discrimination of Sounds—A quick and true ear is another possession that does not come by Nature, or anyway, if it does, it is too often lost. How many sounds can you distinguish in a sudden silence out of doors? Let these be named in order from the less to the more acute. Let the notes of the birds be distinguished, both call-notes and song-notes; the four or five distinct sounds to be heard in the flow of a brook. Cultivate accuracy in distinguishing footfalls and voices; in discerning, with their eyes shut, the direction from which a sound proceeds, in which footsteps are moving. Distinguish passing vehicles by the sounds; as lorry, brougham, dog-cart. Music is, no doubt, the means par excellence for this kind of ear culture. Mrs. Curwen’s ‘Child Pianist’ puts carefully graduated work of this kind into the hands of parents; and, if a child never become a performer, to have acquired a cultivated and correct ear is no small part of a musical education.”

—Charlotte Mason, Vol. 2, p. 187

I should like, in connection with singing, to mention the admirable educational effects of the Tonic Sol-fa method. [[See Appendix A]] Children learn by it in a magical way to produce sign for sound and sound for sign, that is, they can not only read music, but can write the notes for, or make the proper hand signs for, the notes of a passage sung to them. Ear and Voice are simultaneously and equally cultivated. Mrs. Curwen’s Child Pianist [[See Appendix A]] method is worked out, with minute care, upon the same lines; that is, the child’s knowledge of the theory of music and his ear training keep pace with his power of execution, and seem to do away with the deadly dreariness of ‘practising.’

—Charlotte Mason, Vol 1, p. 315

If culture flows in through the eye, how much more through the ear, the organ of that blessed sixth sense, which appears to be distributed amongst us with partial favour. A great deal of time and a good deal of money is commonly spent to secure to the young people the power of performing indifferently upon an

instrument; nor is even an indifferent performance to be despised: but it is not always borne in mind that to listen with discriminating delight is as educative and as “happy-making” as to produce; and that this power might, probably, be developed in every body, if only as much pains were spent in the cultivation of the musical sense as upon that of musical facility. Let the young people hear good music as often as possible, and that under instruction. It is a pity we like our music, as our pictures and our poetry, mixed, so that there are few opportunities of going through, as a listener, a course of the works of a single composer. But this is to be aimed at for the young people; let them study occasionally the works of a single great master until they have received some of his teaching, and know his style.

—Charlotte Mason, Vol. 5, p 235

Questions:

How do we use music to develop virtue? Have you seen this in your children? Has the idea influenced how you teach music?

How do we teach observation in music? How can we attain “a quick and cultivated ear”?

How can we teach real understanding of theory as part of production, as Miss Mason describes in Sol-Fa lessons?

What works best to help students form real connections with a single composer at a time?