A Code of Ethics for School Musicians

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A Code of Ethics for School Musicians

This clear-cut analysis of the community service functions of public school musical organizations, with the concluding regulations governing "outside" performances, represents the "Code of Ethics" recently approved by the Pennsylvania State Education Association and the Conference of Pennsylvania Locals of the American Federation of Musicians.

The public schools exist for the education of youth. The public is entitled to, and should demand, the best possible educational results. Worthy and appropriate educational results are often such as are interesting and useful to the public, not primarily as educational exhibits but for intrinsic worth as entertainment. Of such nature are the results attained by groups of students in the orchestras and bands.

The public is interested in the school orchestras and bands for educational reasons, but frequently it is desirous of music for some occasion outside of the schools. These occasions may be motivated by the thought of contributing stimulus or encouragement to the school music organizations, or by the hope of attracting attention to its own projects without regard to the effect upon the schools. Consequently there are numerous requests for the services of school orchestras or bands, or small groups of players from these organizations, to provide music to all sorts of occasions.

The effect of any pupil activity undertaken under school auspices, upon the educational, physical, mental and moral welfare of the students, is the first and most important consideration that must be weighed by public school officials. That is their specific responsibility.

The social and ethical education that results from participation in the right sort of civic and community affairs should be weighed as a value to the students. These values, however, may be highly variable and are relative to other values.

The occasion may be one which represents a comparatively low order of civic interest and purpose.

The occasion may represent the principles or program of only a small group of citizens and be contrary to the principles or purposes of an equal or larger group.

The occasion may be sharply limited to the interests of a sect, a church, a club membership or a society. Though these may be good in themselves, service to one would imply principles or purposes of an equal or larger group.

In a clear-cut case of proper civic interest, the students who are asked to play for an occasion may be asked to lose more than they gain. Incidents are known where school bands have lost a half-day of school, marched in a cold rain for several miles (with disastrous after-effects), played nothing that could possibly have done anything for them musically or mentally, and bruised their lips by playing while marching over rough ground so that they were unfit for their scheduled playing at school for several days. They gained nothing comparable to what they lost. They had a right to ask an accounting of those who are their guardians in school-music matters.

School organizations have no justification for playing outside of the schools on the basis of statements to the effect that funds are not available for the employment of professional musicians, or that if a school organization cannot be had professional musicians cannot be or will not be employed, or that the school organization is to play without remuneration of any kind.

In view of the foregoing discussion, it is recommended that public school organizations contribute music only as hereinafter provided:

1. For school functions, initiated by the schools as part of a school program, whether in school buildings or other building.
2. For community functions organized in the interests of the schools strictly for educational purposes, such as those that might be originated by the Parent-Teacher Association, educational committees of community organizations such as Civic Clubs, Women's Clubs, Music Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, etc.
3. For school exhibit purposes as part of the school district's courtesies to educational organizations or educational conventions being entertained in the district.
4. For civic occasions of local, state, or national patriotic interest, of sufficient breadth to enlist the sympathies and cooperation of all persons, such as the G.A.R., American Legion, and Veterans of Foreign Wars in connection with their Memorial Day services in the cemeteries, but only when such participation would not in the least usurp the rights and privileges of local professional musicians.
5. For worthy local charity, such as the Welfare Federation, Red Cross, hospitals, etc., when and where local professional musicians would likewise render their services gratuitously.
6. For any educational and civic service that might beforehand be mutually agreed upon by the Superintendent of Schools and the official representative of the local professional musicians.

Members of the "Code" Committee: Will Earhart, President, Department of Music, Pennsylvania State Education Association; Frank L. Diefenderfer, President, Conference of Pennsylvania and Delaware Locals, American Federation of Musicians; Ralph Felder, Secretary, Conference of Pennsylvania and Delaware Locals, American Federation of Musicians; M. Claude Rosenberry (Chairman), Director of Music Education, State Department of Public Instruction.