SOME MAJOR IDEAS IN THE HISTORY OF THINKING ABOUT CHORAL PEDAGOGY
Subtitle: Ideas Have Consequences

Three Major Concepts of Music From The Ancient World Through The Present:

I. ETHOS (ethics, ethnic; “Ars gratia republicae”—art for the sake of the republic)

Contention that vocal/choral music, properly chosen, molds character, prepares the intellect, and makes good citizens.

For Plato and some other ancient thinkers: μουσική (mousike), a combination of poetry/words, music, movement/dance, and ritual, was so powerful a force for either good or ill that it had to be carefully regulated. Others simply advocated/promoted music thought to enable virtue and proper thinking, without as much attention to regulating/censoring music not congruent with such values. Keep in mind that in its ancient roots, the doctrine of ethos was not about “music alone” or sounds alone (a more modern definition of “music”). Hence the words/text were viewed as an essential ingredient of “music,” not an “extra-musical” phenomenon or as something tacked onto music.

Examples of ethos: religious hymns, choir schools, national anthems at civic events, debates about censorship of rock lyrics, establishment of music (N.B. vocal music) as part of the curriculum of public schools, choir competitions, etc.

Choir Handbook example of an ethic perspective: “Concert choir is teamwork. In this ensemble you will learn to work closely and in a disciplined manner with all kinds of people toward a common goal.”

Bands and Ethos: From the end of the U.S. Civil War (ca.1865) through the first decades of the 20th century, a movement to include instrumental band music in public schools also employed ethic arguments. Recall “Oh We Got Trouble (in River City)” from “The Music Man,” which captures this the gist of this conceptual framework. Bands that played marches, participated in civic events, etc. were promoted by this movement. Again, in its initial stages, it had little to do with “music alone,” but rather with a combination of music, civic ritual, and sometimes movement (marching bands).

II. SYMBOLISM (music as transcendent, cosmological and mathematical proportions)

Contention that music reveals and reflects the very structure of the universe, particularly in the mathematical proportions and ratios it exhibits. In the ancient world, Pythagoras, for example, constructed mathematical formulae on the basis of musical intervals. In terms of music education, this powerful symbolism was thought essential for exploring the essence of both the universe (music as science) and the human bodymind (for beauty was conceived not as that which induces a pleasurable sensation, but that which enables and leads persons to a temperate and just life. Both good intellect and good health were attributed to these properly balanced proportions.
Examples of symbolism: “music of the spheres,” debates over which musical intervals could be used (e.g., the language of “perfect” fourth, “perfect fifth,” perfect octave” and also “diabolos in musica” [or the tritone, the “devil” in music], is still with us). “Da Vinci Code,” music as a manifestation of or communication with a Deity, music as spiritual/soul-ful experience, music as enabling efficient thinking (cf. the modern “music makes you smarter” movement).

Choir Handbook example of a symbolic/transcendent perspective:

“For the common things of everyday
God gave us speech in a common way.
For the deeper things we think and feel
God gave the poet words to reveal.
But for the heights and depths that know no reach
God gave us music – the soul’s own speech.” (Anonymous poem)

INTERACTION OF ETHOS AND SYMBOLISM: The ancient Hebrews, some segments of ancient Greek thought, and the early Christian church facilitated a combining of the doctrines of ethos and symbolism that worked well in religious schooling and worship. For much of western world history, such religious schooling was the primary (if not only) vehicle of formal education. Even the first “public” schools, promulgated by Luther and other Protestant Reformers, were built on this model.

Present day manifestation: St. John’s University even today requires that every student, no matter the major, take a semester of chorus, considered to be part of a well-rounded education.

III. MUSIC AS FINE ART (“music for music’s sake,” music alone, music for aesthetic experience; not a part of thinking about music until the latter eighteenth century; seriously refined by nineteenth century Romanticism)

Music (primarily conceived as “sound alone,” is among a group of human pursuits (including the other “fine” arts) that manifest particular ways of knowing and cognition spurred by interaction with enduring musical “works.” Exposing students to these works, primarily through informed listening, inculcates habits/means of thought available through no other area of the school curriculum (except, of course, the other fine arts with which music is grouped).

Choir Handbook example of Fine Arts/Aesthetic model: Through participation in choir you will experience and learn to appreciate some of the great choral masterworks of the western world, and thus come to develop an artistic sensibility to music as expressive form.”
Major Historical Ways of Thinking About Music in Curricula

I. Music as Science (Music as part of the “quadrivium” of mathematics, geometry, astronomy, music) – the major educational/schooling paradigm from the ancient world through the Middle Ages; even today, such universities as Harvard and University of Virginia still emphasize “Music Theory” over “Applied or Practical Music”

II. Music as Art (Music as part of the “trivium” of language, rhetoric, music) -a major educational/schooling paradigm from the early Renaissance to the beginning of the eighteenth century. Texted music still supreme. Shift of thinking about music from “heaven” (cosmological frameworks) to “earth” (music as human activity).

Both Music as Science and Music as Art paradigms kept music among the traditional seven liberal arts (quadrivium + trivium) and hence a part of the “required” curriculum of many schools/universities for centuries.

III. Music as Fine Art (Music as one of a group of “fine arts,” including sculpture, painting, architecture, landscape gardening, etc.) -a prominent educational/schooling paradigm from the eighteenth century onward, but particularly gaining momentum in the latter nineteenth century to the 1980s.

“Music Education as Aesthetic Education” is a function of this paradigm. Coining of the word “aesthetic” by Frederick Baumgarten in 1735, thoroughly explicated by Immanuel Kant in the 1790s, particularly in his *Critique of Judgment* (originally titled *Critique of Taste*). Paradoxically, with this paradigm music began to be dropped from required curricula and become marginalized.

IV. GENUS/Species Relationships: Music Educators deal with two major domains of thought: “Music” and “Education.” Moreover, Philosophy of Education is arguably more healthy/substantial at present than thinking about Music. (For example, for the 1980 Edition of *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Editor Stanley Sadie could find no one willing or able to write an entry on “Music.”)
Some practical consequences of particular genus/species ways of thinking:

Is music education more properly housed in the School of Education or the School of Fine Arts?

At KU, music education was housed in Education (Education through Music paradigm) until the early 1990s when it became part of Fine Arts (Education in Music).

Should elementary general music teachers provide musical resources for language arts and social studies curricula or base their curricula on such considerations (Education through Music), or teach music appreciation, beginning theory and form (Education in Music)?

To Recap:

To “profess” (cf. Profession) entails both (a) something to profess (beliefs, techniques, ways of knowing) and (b) ongoing consideration of the effect of beliefs on the persons whom the profession serves (professional ethics). “The unexamined life is not worth living” (Socrates) applies to professions as well as individuals.

To philosophize (to do philosophy as opposed to simply talking about philosophy) entails critical thinking, i.e. “thinking about our thinking” in order to ascertain if the various assumptions informing our thought are still in good working order. In this case, thinking/concepts/assumptions/beliefs are evaluated according to canons of logic and credibility, somewhat akin to “rules of evidence” in a court of law.

To advocate (advocacy) is to rely upon rhetorical persuasion, i.e., whatever line of reasoning gets what you want/successfully persuades others. Advocacy has its uses. However, it is different from critical thinking/philosophizing, whose purpose is to examine propositions and arguments in terms of soundness and validity.