

Advocacy Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow--- for the 100th Anniversary Celebration of OMEA.
Delivered by Jim Palmer.

I will take a few minutes today to talk about Advocacy in the OMEA, and I'll do that with reference to yesterday, today, and tomorrow... a tomorrow that will be at least partly shaped by the ideas that you have shared with us today.

Yesterday--- I joined the OMEA board at the turn of the century, and advocacy has indirectly and directly been part of my work with the organization for almost 20 years. Over that time, we've pursued many different advocacy paths on behalf of music educators. Some of the classics? *Listening to Mozart will make your babies smarter...* only it didn't. *Music makes you smarter....* Whatever smart means, and however you manage to measure smart... *Music is your ticket to success in math class.... Language and literacy development should be supported through music...* And most recently, *the importance of studying music to the development of 21st century skills* such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. These campaigns were quite successful, and there's certainly nothing wrong with using connections like these to leverage the position of music in Ontario classrooms.

However, we must not focus on the pragmatic coincidental benefits of studying music to the detriment of our foundational belief that music, and its

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study, is vitally important in an of itself. Music has the potential to help us become more artful, more complete, and more fully human. It has the power to celebrate and challenge, to express both joy and grief. Music has power.

Any, like any power... it must be used--- and taught--- wisely and with explicit purpose.

Towards that end, our music advocacy now falls into two broad categories: Firstly, advocating **FOR** music teachers, ensuring that music education stays front and centre in Ontario. And secondly, advocating **TO** music educators, to foster the development and delivery of a music curriculum that meets the complex needs of today's students, and reflects the diversity of culture and myriad ways of seeing that exist in our province.

Today: Advocating for Ontario music teachers

The OMEA supports three mainstay demands of all stakeholders:

Governments, unions, professional organizations, administrators, teachers, parents, students:

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1. All children in Ontario, regardless of economics and geography, have a right to a music education as outlined in the Ontario Curriculum.
2. Teachers of music should hold qualifications that allow them to effectively deliver that curriculum.
3. Music education needs to be supported with sufficient resources of both time and money

Three fairly simple requests that you can read more about on the OMEA website--- and here are some of the things we've done to try to keep those three needs front and centre in Ontario.

- We create annual responses to the excellent **People for Education Arts Reports**. Recently, our responses included concerns about hiring practices for elementary music teachers, and rural schools being 5 times less likely to have a music teacher than their urban counterparts.
- We worked with the previous Ministry of Education on initial stages of a planned "Curriculum Refresh", and consistently offer our critical ear and advice to the current government. We do all we can in traditional and social media, and in person, to ensure the government is accountable for

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their role in music education. This includes reminding them that Arts and Culture accounts for 100 billion dollars in the annual Canadian economy.

- Presented at the **Ontario Teacher Federation** curriculum forum on the role of music in 21st century skill development
- Presented on best practices in Arts integration to the **Ontario College of Teachers**
- Created and widely publishing our reaction to proposed changes to Education as outlined in the 2019 Ontario budget.

Quite frankly, all these efforts have been challenging, and at times frustrating.

As we see today, 100 years after the founding of our organization, Ontario music educators continue to struggle with challenges remarkably and disappointingly similar to those outlined in 1919--- We struggle with inequity of opportunities provided to rural parts of the province, with time provided for the music curriculum in school schedules, with qualifications requirements for music educators, and with inadequate technology and resources for music classrooms.

In spite of our frustrations, and partly because of them, we at the OMEA will continue to advocate for Music in Ontario, using current tools, and developing

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new partnerships with education and arts organizations to hold governments, federations, and all stakeholders accountable for the decisions they make.

But advocating **for** music education is not enough. Not today, in the complex and diverse world we live and teach in. We need to ensure we are not teaching music today in the same way and with the same content taught in 1919. We now know so much more about how children learn. We have a deeper understanding of the individual needs of our students. We know there are many more ways of seeing the Arts and music in addition to those popularized in 18th century Western Europe. We know that instead of simply rote performance, real collaboration, authentic creativity, and inquisitive critical thinking need be part of our current curriculum. In light of this, the OMEA also advocates **to** music educators, asking them to constantly examine and improve their own practice.

Our advocacy **TO Ontario music teachers: Building for Tomorrow:**

- We offer resources and presentations supporting integrating critical thinking, creative process, and collaboration into our classroom practice---
We need to explicitly teach, provide experiences in, and evaluate these

21st century skills in the music room if we are going to continue to claim them as authentic benefits of music education.

- We support building inclusive and supportive environments for music students with special needs. This has often been a part of our conference workshops, and I'm sure we'll hear more about this subject from our 2019

Opus 100 Conference keynote, Alvin Law

- We support creating music classrooms that support the mental health of our students as they navigate their increasingly complex and challenging worlds. Our current president, Isaac Moore, has spoken and written eloquently about this, and I encourage you to talk to him about his discoveries in this area.
- We are encouraging other ways of seeing in music, in projects like our massive collaboration with the Aga Khan Museum, developing resources to promote a broader understanding of music from many Muslim cultures. This commitment to broadening our scope of experience continues in our choice of keynote speaker for **conference 2020: musician, activist, and former child-soldier Emmanuel Jal.**
- We now observe First Nations, Metis, and Inuit land recognition protocols at all events and meetings, as part of our responsibility in a

journey towards reconciliation with the first peoples who share this province with us

- We are working to use Music as a support for reconciliation with indigenous people. The OMEA is currently beginning a project to help Ontario teachers include First Nations, Metis, and Inuit lenses in their classroom practice. We recognize that this is a huge responsibility, and further it's an area in which we not only don't have a great deal of in-house expertise, we actually don't even know what we don't know. To help with this, we have begun talks with the **FNMIEAO, the First Nations Metis and Inuit Educator's Association of Ontario**, to explore strategies and initiatives to support indigenous knowledge and practice in Music in Ontario schools. Our commitment is to work directly with indigenous elders, knowledge keepers, and musicians. Representatives of the FNMIEAO had planned to attend our celebrations today, but had to send their regrets due to other commitments. For our part, OMEA is excited by the challenges and possibilities of this new relationship.

Yesterday—a century of support to Ontario music teachers from Ontario music teachers.

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Today--- Relentless efforts to support teacher practice and hold all
stakeholders to account for music education

Tomorrow--- Our commitment to support authentic and sustainable practices
in teaching music in Ontario through the 21st century and beyond.