Wind Bands and Cultural Identity in Japanese Schools
Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education

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Wind Bands and Cultural Identity in Japanese Schools
That this book should be the first by a Western scholar on the institution of the school wind band in Japan is quite remarkable – legendary for excellence, supported at the world's center of instrument manufacture, and fostered by the largest music competition of any kind in the world as it is. The sources explored, the issues raised, the information gathered and the perspectives brought to bear range widely and are presented in well-organized, easily readable fashion. This is a major contribution to studies of international music education and of music in Japan.

Introduced for the purpose of strengthening the Japanese nation, Western music has been a part of the school curriculum since the foundation of a new educational system in the Meiji era (1868–1912), with singing the primary medium for instruction. Part I (particularly, Chapter 2) of this book provides a thorough tracking of the introduction of Western music to Japan with, of course, particular focus on wind bands – their introduction through military functions, the early emergence of community organizations and associations with popular music, influential instructors and other individuals, the development of the educational system and motivations for bringing wind bands into the schools.

While wind music has been closely associated with Japanese school music programs, bands are not a program of formal academic instruction. Rather, they (like orchestras and choruses) are an extracurricular club activity at all levels of Japanese education, endorsed by the Ministry of Education as part of “moral education,” for the purpose of character development. Without formal training as band directors, school music teachers of academic courses are responsible for the clubs beyond their full-time instructional duties. Students, who are highly pressured to succeed academically, nevertheless spend over 20 h/week and in excess of 600 h/year in school band rehearsals. This book demonstrates that the system of school bands in Japan, while highly successful in terms of Western performance standards, is based upon quite different assumptions, values, objectives and practices than are commonly seen in European and American school music ensembles.
David Hebert writes as an experienced band musician and director, music educator in the United States and Japan, professor of music education in Scandinavia and the United States, and also as an ethnomusicologist. His skills of ethnographic observation are acute, and his use of documentation thorough and critical. From the moment of setting the scene in Chapter 3 – the urban setting, the neighborhood in which Hebert’s primary site of research is located, the middle school itself and finally the band room, Hebert creates a sense of place that is at first particular, but from there we are taken in the book to Japanese culture “in general”. Filling the band room with students and the director for a rehearsal in Chapter 4, Hebert guides us gradually through the book to an understanding of ranks and roles, gender and class, and issues of identities (Chapters 15 and 16) in a system of cooperative learning and peer tutoring that developed in the particular context of Japanese history and modernity. In Chapter 5 the roles of the band director are compared to those of an American sports coach and a teacher in the *iemoto* system of traditional Japanese music. This is a system that, unlike the Suzuki method that is known so well known internationally, functions well with little parental involvement (Chapters 10 and 11).

As we learn through the book, school wind bands in Japan are a form of community-based music. Lacking the structure of a set curriculum, they are undergirded by a network of community institutions that have vested interests in the survival of the practice. Research into those institutions—their histories, motivations and involvement with the bands – permitted Hebert to understand their individual contributions and the network among them (Chapters 12 and 13). Among the institutions (to which Hebert devotes more attention than usual in such a study) are instrument manufacturers – Yamaha, Roland, Korg – that are committed to community music education. Professional wind bands including the Tokyo Kosei Wind Orchestra that Frederick Fennell directed for ten years and also multiple band associations have roles to play in the network. Particular attention is paid to the All-Japan Band Association that mounts the fabulous competition (in recent years, roughly 700,000 musicians in over 14,000 bands typically performing in the three tiers of this annual national contest), drives composing of new repertoire, and provides the primary goal for the school bands of outstanding musical achievement. Composers are the focus of Chapter 9.

The lively issue of competitions Hebert addresses in three chapters. Notable in Chapter 6 is the first detailed English-language description of the final stage (national level) of the All-Japan Band Association competition that is annually attended by a number of Western band directors. In Chapter 8 the AJBA goals for the competition are revealed, the Japanese system is compared with the Texas competition on which it was modeled, and Hebert provides an overview of research on competition in music, including Eurovision and American Idol. The student perspectives on the competition are the focus of Chapter 7, and we see Hebert as a sympathetic ethnographer.
Addressing music educators especially, David Hebert offers two theoretical possibilities that he amply demonstrates were effective for his analysis of the school wind bands of Japan. In Chapter 14 he pursues the role of metaphor to engender key insights into the significance of musical practices in the context of education and culture. While that has been a key analytic in the fields of linguistics and ethnomusicology, it is a recent interest in music education philosophy (particularly in the work of Marie McCarthy and Patricia Shehan Campbell). In Chapter 17 Hebert proposes from his observation of successful Japanese wind bands a theoretical model that illustrates the ensemble leader’s role in guiding musicians toward the acquisition of further musical skills and understandings. Within this Ensemble Ethos Model, the music teaching process is reconfigured beyond mere transmission of instructional content, toward a perspective that accounts for collective learning and social interaction: how an effective music teacher will nurture a culture of musical achievement.

This excellent book has the potential of bringing music education and ethnomusicology (and other fields) closer and of bringing Japanese culture more into focus as a contributing partner in the cosmopolitan shared space of Western/Japanese music. There is much to learn from it.

Berkeley, California                              Bonnie C. Wade
Author Biography

David G. Hebert, PhD is a Professor of Music with the Grieg Academy, Bergen University College, Norway. He previously held academic positions with universities in the USA, Japan, Finland, Russia, and New Zealand, and has directed (or currently directs) music research projects on six continents. Widely published and cited as a scholar of global music education, he is chair of the Historical Ethnomusicology special interest group of the Society for Ethnomusicology.
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