



# GUITAR

## Classical Guitar in the American High School: Part of a Comprehensive Education and the Scientific Process

by Grant Wilcox

### Plato's model

The idea of the comprehensive high school has been around well before the time of John Dewey and his model of inclusive education. To Einstein, music was fundamental. He viewed much of the world through the filters of the designs of music. Plato, maybe the first person to write about music education, was very clear. His philosophy on education was made up of a balance between math, science, music and gymnastics. It is my contention that education that is balanced needs to be comprehensive; it must stimulate mental comprehension, build understanding and develop skill.

### The Scientific Process

The balanced or comprehensive education is as important today as it has been at any other time in history. This balance is the process of blending skill mastery and mental understanding together to be used for focus and to be transferred into interests. This comprehensive process defines all complex systems. The areas of study Plato chose were not picked by accident or because they were his favorites but rather by discipline and the process that they share. The scientific process used in math and science is the same process used by the classical musician and the gymnast. Although the process varies in different fields by skill-specific tasks, this fundamental process ensures that no detail is overlooked in the building of the model, performance or event. Correct performance practice is based on the solid establishment of fundamentals and a

disciplined approach to solution, resolution, skill and performance.

"OK!" you then say; "I get it. That is why we have the arts and music in our school." I remind us though, that we have music in our schools for some students but not for all who are interested, and that not all music in schools develops or requires the scientific/artistic process.

### Classical Music

To be more successful and more comprehensive in our music education we simply have to get more students involved in the study of *classical* music. I ask the rhetorical question: does singing and moving around on stage to a pop song have the same educational value as decoding a complex piece of music and taking the time to study, learn, polish and perform it? Of course not. Simply learning to sing or playing a piece of music by rote is avoiding the scientific/artistic process and is much like having someone feed you. This great music is called classical because the piece is classical in design. The study of this music requires a fundamental knowledge base, the decoding process, refined skill, use of the artistic/scientific process, time and the discipline to re-create it.

### Comprehensive Music Education

To be comprehensive in our approach in music education our high schools should offer classical music for each medium: wind, voices, percussion (including piano) and

orchestral strings (including classical guitar) in the form of classes and ensembles.

Thus in a balanced, comprehensive education, all students will be offered a musical experience that requires the scientific/artistic process to study classical music in order to develop discipline, reading of notation and musical success.

### The Classical Guitar

For a large number of students in our schools, the guitar is a perfect instrument. It is inexpensive, mobile, and the most popular instrument of our time. It will take only a little effort to move this instrument from the popular venue or retire it from closets and basements to have it waiting with music stands and great music to be practiced and played in homes for ongoing pleasure as an avocation, outlet and a means for classical music expression.

*Grant Wilcox teaches orchestral music at Brainerd High School. This past year he offered: An early bird String Quartet class, Chamber Orchestra, three sections of Classical Guitar I, one section of Classical Guitar II, one section of Classical Guitar Ensemble, First Orchestra and Sinfonia Orchestra. His guitar ensemble performs between orchestras at each of his orchestra concerts. Grant's ensembles have performed twice at the ASTA National Orchestra Festival, five times at MMEA State Conference, four times at the MNSOTA Tier II Festival in Orchestra Hall and at the MENC National Convention. ‡*