

# Both Performance and Informance: Not “Either–Or” in Elementary General Music

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## Abstract

The author of this article encourages teachers to present not only general music performances but also informances. Multiple examples and potential themes are given, as are the rationale and suggestions for planning such a program.

## Keywords

informance, performance, demonstration, process, participatory, interactive

I had NO IDEA that Ethan was doing all this!

No wonder Shemika loves to come to school on music day.

I wish that I had had music classes like this—all we ever did was sing.

Will you show us more on another program?

Music makes SENSE this way!

These are comments that I often heard after presenting an *informance* for parents.

## What Is an Informance?

Simply put, an informance is your “show and tell time.” Rather than performing a musical or a polished program of songs and dances as is typical in an elementary school, it is a demonstration of what goes on in the music classroom all year long. It is an opportunity to show parents what the music curriculum really is and how the concepts are being developed. It is an opportunity to demonstrate that you, as a music teacher, are developing critical thinking, creative thinking, decision making, and problem solving. An informance can involve demonstrations by many grades, or it can focus on a single grade.

What else can you show? Your passion and enthusiasm for arts that feed the soul, your love of learning as you put theory into practice—by showing your understanding of needs of individual learners—your ability to integrate the

arts into the curriculum! It is an opportunity to demonstrate that you believe Purkey’s (1978) words that to be an educator is to invite children to celebrate their potential. Parents will resonate with Joyce Boorman’s (1987) words that “no child will stay on an island if there is a tempting rainbow to cross” (p. 18) as you highlight the special magical moments that occur in a music class when children discover the joys of music.

When you demonstrate the joy of learning in action instead of only showing the finished product, parents become excited. When you show them that their children are really geniuses using Armstrong’s (1998) definition, “Genius is a wonderful choice for a way to talk about that very deepest source of what drives the learning process in every child. . . . Genius is giving birth to one’s joy” (p. vi), they will become vocal supporters of your program and will defend it against budgetary cuts. An informance (in an abbreviated form) is also strongly recommended for district administrators and school board members as an advocacy tool for the arts.

## The History

Where did the word *informance* originate? I simply made it up 37 years ago and because I was convinced of its value. I shared it at state, regional, and national conference

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presentations. The word entered the vocabulary of many music educators.

In 1972, I was assigned to an elementary school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At that time, classroom teachers were responsible for teaching their own music, art, and physical education. As part of contract negotiations, each school could select one specialty teacher to provide released time for planning.

The staff and principal were excited to have me join the school staff as the music specialist. As the faculty became more excited about the learning taking place in the music classroom, the principal asked me to present a music program for the parent–teacher association. We all were aware that programs with children always brought an increased attendance to these meetings.

I could have presented the standard musical performance with the children, but I really wanted to inform the parents; I wanted to demonstrate what a vibrant music program could do, so I called it an informance and proceeded to demonstrate what we were doing in class. In advocating informances, I am not negating the value of performances! Children never forget the thrill of both types of programs! It is not an “either–or” but a “both–and.” Perhaps because the first informance was such a resounding success, I incorporated them into my teaching for the rest of my 30-plus-year career.

### Why an Informance?

An informance has the potential of demonstrating more than a performance might show. It illustrates for parents and administrators that

1. Music class is *not* simply singing songs along with a CD player. This is a common perception of parents and teachers, perhaps based on their own elementary experience.

Let’s create a giant incinerator for ways of thinking that are no longer functional, for thoughts that are getting in the way of new ideas and new creations, for all those cobwebby beliefs and assumptions that need to be discarded. (Thinksmart.com, quoted in Pautz, 1999, p. 1)

2. Music education is vital to the education of the whole child and can provide value that other subjects cannot. As Sylwester (1998) identified, “From fine tuning muscular systems to integrating emotion and logic, the arts have an important biological value. For their unique contributions to brain development, the arts must take center stage in schools” (p. 26).

3. Parents (and administrators) need to know why children who may not succeed in the regular classroom can shine in music. Children who are disruptive in the regular classroom may succeed because of the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic nature of music class; children who may not be the best in math or reading may excel when the music activity involves nonverbal expressive movement. The child with an active imagination will blossom in music classes that include composing and improvising. These aspects of the music curriculum can be demonstrated and explained in an informance.
4. Parents (and administrators) need to know that there will be budgetary requests to enrich the music program! Because more than singing is involved, there will be a need to purchase instruments such as tone chimes and *angklungs* (inexpensive Indonesian instruments made of bamboo). Similar to tone chimes, each student plays a single pitch. The student holds the base in one hand while the other hand shakes the instrument rapidly from side to side causing the sound. Another budgetary implication is the use of technology in the music room such as the SMART Board.

The temptation for an elementary music teacher is to present a lovely artistic performance of songs that students have learned. It is also safe because you, as the teacher, are in control. However, I encourage you to step out of the zone of safety and familiarity and risk an informance. Consider the following statement. “On a spring program, the length of song should not be the only difference between first grade and fifth grade!” (Boardman, quoted in Pautz, 1997, p. 1). Perhaps we should inform the parents of those differences. Perhaps we should share how the progress has been made.

### Planning an Informance

1. Begin the presentation with a song or dance with Orff instrumental accompaniment. Parents are thus seeing what they are accustomed to—the performance of a finished work.
2. Announce that the rest of the program will be different. Explain that the activities demonstrated are all works in progress; they are not to worry about mistakes their children may make. Explain that in the learning process the only real mistake is being afraid or not being willing to try. Explain that the children are going to be demonstrating what they are learning when they come to music class.

3. Keep explanations clear and succinct. “Interactive” and “participatory” are the key elements in an informance. This is a key difference between a performance and an informance. At a performance, the focus is on the finished product and little verbal explanation is given. In an informance, parents see and hear an explanation of what activity is being done, why, what concept is being developed, and the necessary prior knowledge. Encourage students to do some of the explaining before each activity. For example, students may explain that they are learning about Native American music and that they found it strange sounding at first; they may tell parents that the Hollywood version of Indian music is not authentic and demonstrate the differences. You, as the teacher, can ask them specific questions to guide their discussion.
4. After the body of the informance, close as you began: with a finished performance of a song that will send the audience home humming.
  - c. Fourth graders can demonstrate expressiveness and phrasing with a beautiful arm movement using long white feathers in an arc to music by Native American R. Carlos Nakai.
  - d. Fifth graders demonstrate their understanding of rondo form with the use of a colorful parachute borrowed from the physical education teacher with movement to “Sleigh Ride.”
  - e. Other fifth graders demonstrate timbre by creating a “light show” using flashlights with colored cellophane paper lens. Use a jazz quartet or trio with clear instrumental choices such as piano, trumpet, flute, and percussion. Each colored lens represents a specific instrument and “dances” on the screen only when it is heard. Darken the room for heightened effect.

*Theme 2.* Pick a specific concept and show how it is introduced, reinforced and refined through the grades.

### Possible Themes for an Informance

The possibilities of themes for an informance are endless. Here are eight suggestions.

*Theme 1.* Simply take lesson plans from the previous quarter and demonstrate a potpourri of learnings. These are not *new* activities for the children on the evening of the presentation. Rather, they are portions of your past lesson plans and are familiar to the children. Choose segments that are favorites of students and are clear examples of what is being taught.

- a. Nothing captivates an audience more than kindergarteners squealing with delight as they participate in an activity! One surefire activity to show parents involves tempo. Children sit in a circle on the floor and pass a yarn or squishy ball as you play a beat on a drum. After establishing the beat, speed up and slow down. Children *do* squeal with delight especially as the tempo increases and the ball is passed to match the tempo.
- b. Third graders could demonstrate form with an all-time favorite, “The Chicken Dance.” They will be showing and explaining AB form, which determines when and why they change their motions. After the children have completed dancing once, they then go out to the audience and take an adult for a partner to dance in the aisles. Parents may not say no. Great fun!

### Dynamics

Kindergarten students sing a train song, varying dynamics when it is far away, coming closer, arriving at the station, leaving, and in the distance. Add appropriate percussive accompaniment.

First graders play “Dynamics Game.”

One child is chosen to be “Ms. Dynamics” and closes her eyes while a child in the circle is designated “Forte.” “Dynamics” then walks around the outside of the circle as a song is sung. The closer she comes to “forte” the louder the children sing. The farther away, the quieter. Ms. Dynamics determines who “Forte” is. If correct, the class sings the song once more at a forte level!

Fourth graders divide into teams of four. Each team has four cards that reveal a number: 1–4–7–10. As they listen to Mussorgsky’s “Great Gate of Kiev,” they determine the dynamics and hold up corresponding card (1 = *piano*, 4 = *mezzo piano*, 7 = *mezzo forte*, and 10 = *forte*) Some teams will creatively combine 4 + 10 for fortissimo!

As fifth graders prepare a song for a performance, they are asked to determine where there will be dynamic changes. Experiment with suggestions.

Parents will understand that concepts are learned over time in a variety of experiences. They will see how conceptual development progresses from nonverbal, as in the kindergarten singing the train song or first graders playing the Dynamics Game to sophisticated decision making by fifth graders as they decide how to perform a given song.

**Theme 3.** Demonstrate Jerome Bruner's (1961) *modes of knowledge representation*. If you need more information regarding this topic, refer to Boardman (1998) in *General Music Today*. Without being overly technical, simply explain that we all learn by sensing and doing (*enactive*). It is experience based rather than age based and is nonverbal, and thus this mode is as appropriate for adults as for young children. Supply parents with examples for each grade and various concepts.

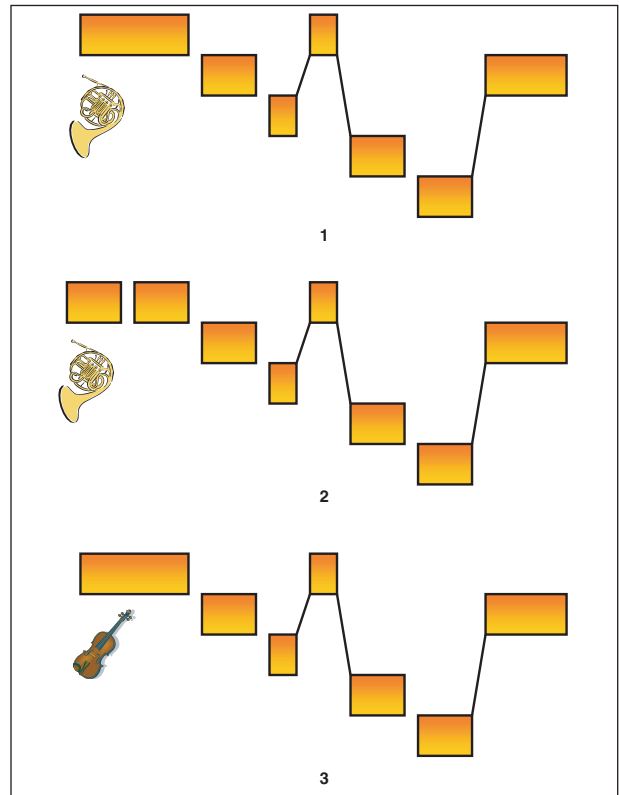
The next mode is *iconic*—the visual that looks like the sound or simple verbal imagery. It is the time of internalizing musical sounds, in that pictures show the relationship of the length of rhythmic sounds or the up and “downness” of a melody. Careful attention is paid to producing icons that really do look like the sound. For instance, rhythm relationships are *not* shown in terms of big and little but in pictures of long and short. This is often the missing link in music literacy, and parents are intrigued and astounded by it. Provide as many examples as time allows.

See Figures 1 and 2 for two iconic examples of the “Finale of Firebird” and “Button, You Must Wander” (Calbaum, 2005a, 2005b).

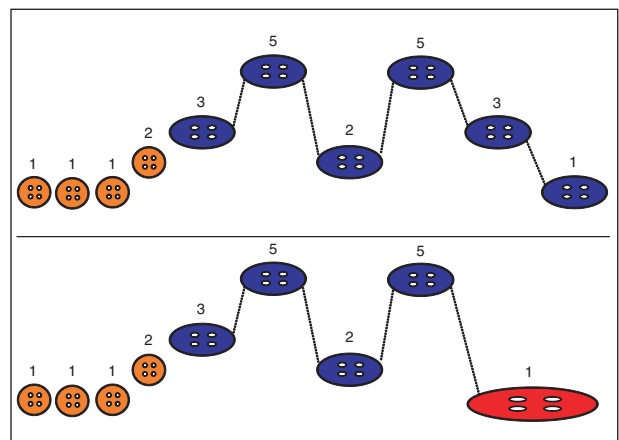
Explain that the final mode is *symbolic*—where students are introduced to abstract concepts of notation and vocabulary. Discuss the fact that, unfortunately, this is often the starting point of instruction rather than the final mode. It may be the reason that adults do not understand music today. This informance will assist the adults in learning as they are watching what their children are doing. It is not possible or desirable to give a lengthy explanation but instead give a promise that a future informance will further clarify the subject.

**Theme 4.** Integrate music with other curriculum areas. Demonstrate how you enrich songs with children's books that feature songs or lives of composers or musical instruments or musical compositions. In addition, show integration of other books that can be used for development of tempo, dynamics, and other music concepts and provide opportunities for creating musical compositions. There are literally hundreds of children's books related to music. Some are appropriate for the nonreader, and some are very sophisticated.

*A You're Adorable* (Kaye, Wise, Lippman, & Alexander, 1994) and *Old Black Fly* (Aylesworth, 1992) are alphabet books that can be used by both music teachers and classroom teachers. There are countless versions of the song “A You're Adorable” that can be downloaded from the iTunes Store. They are useful in helping children compare and contrast styles and expressiveness. Susan Kujawski introduced singing the book *Old Black Fly* to the tune of “Battle of Jericho” in workshop presentations across the country. Both books are favorites of children.



**Figure 1.** Finale of Firebird  
Copyright 2005 Laurie Calbaum, Music Education Creation, LLC. Used with permission.



**Figure 2.** Button You Must Wander  
Copyright 2005 Laurie Calbaum, Music Education Creation, LLC. Used with permission.

*This Land Is Your Land* (Guthrie & Jacobsen, 1998) is a treasure trove. The stirring lyrics and the captivating folk art paintings by Kathy Jacobsen invite readers to take a trip across this diverse United States. Also included is a biography of Guthrie as well as a tribute by Pete Seeger. Students love watching videos from YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5KnYADCSms>)

with Pete Seeger and Bruce Springsteen singing all the verses (as mandated by Pete Seeger).

Three books using the lullaby “Hush Little Baby” provide musical enjoyment as well as discussion on how the lyrics and pictures are the same and different. They can also be the impetus to use different expressive styles when singing (Aliko, 1968; Frazee, 2003; Long, 1997).

*When Marian Sang* (Ryan, 2002) is a magnificent book about Marian Anderson. Because there is no CD accompanying the book, it is important that you purchase one and play portions as the songs are presented in the story line.

The same is true of *The Sound That Jazz Makes* (Weatherford, 2000). This “must-have” book traces music from an African forest to a slave ship and on to a Harlem nightclub. Each double-page spread highlights slavery, spirituals, escape from slavery, cake walk, the Delta bluesmen, and others. It will take some work to find just the right musical cut to play for each double spread. This fantastic book could be used for an entire semester. Pair it with the book *Seeing Jazz (Artists and Writers on Jazz)* (Goldson, 1997).

*Moses Goes to a Concert* (Millman, 1998) features a deaf boy who goes with classmates to a concert. Although the percussionist in the story is not identified, the resemblance to deaf Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie is unmistakable. Find her biography and videos by visiting various Web sites ([www.evelyn.co.uk](http://www.evelyn.co.uk) and [search engines](#)). There is a particularly wonderful video available from her TED (technology, entertainment, design) presentation where she illustrates how listening to music involves much more than simply letting sound waves hit your eardrums.

Another rich category of books is those that do not appear to be about music or musicians but are great for creating musical accompaniments. Classics such as *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* (Martin & Archambault, 1989) and *Boom Chicka Rock* (Archambault, 2004) as well as *Hailstones and Halibut Bones* (O’Neill, 1961/1989) and *Listen to the Rain* (Martin & Archambault, 1988) are four such examples.

Share these books with parents at an informance and explain how they relate to language arts, social studies, and other aspects of the curriculum. Share snippets of the videos and provide them with a handout with titles and authors of books about music and encourage them to purchase them as gifts for upcoming celebrations. It will increase the chances that parents will extend music experiences into the home. It might also be a time to suggest that books, CDs, and videos are always welcome as gifts to the music room.

In addition to sharing children’s literature with parents, demonstrate how a class has integrated the musical composition of “Planets” into their science study. Still

another great possibility for an Informance would be to show how thinking techniques such as compare and contrast are used in music class through the use of Venn diagrams.

**Theme 5.** Demonstrate listening contest or project. You will organize the listening portion of your curriculum in a specific way if you subscribe to the belief that we love what we know well and that

by engaging students in content requires us to change our pedagogy by limiting the amount of stuff we teach, so that our students can learn the important things well and dig deeply into the subject; by posing interesting questions, setting up the framework for inquiry and then getting out of the way to let the students do the work. (Fried, 1995, p. 57)

Thus, 8 to 10 musical compositions are carefully chosen and studied in an in-depth manner for an entire year rather than listening to a single exposure of 20 or 25 compositions. This study culminates with a final contest at the end of the year.

A sample list (Pautz, 1996) for a year’s study with fourth and fifth grade students could include,

- Bach, Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 (Movement 3)
- Pachelbel, Canon in D
- Mozart, Horn Concerto No. 4 (Movement 3; rondo)
- Haydn, Trumpet Concerto (Movement 3; rondo)
- Schubert, Die Forelle (The Trout; vocal)
- Tchaikovsky, Nutcracker Suite (selections)
- Strauss, R., Also Sprach Zarathustra (Sunrise)
- Mussorgsky, Pictures at an Exhibition (Great Gate of Kiev)
- Stravinsky, The Firebird (Finale)
- Chavez, Toccata for Percussion (Movement 3)

To demonstrate that the study is progressing, hold a mini contest as an informance. Teams of three students compete to identify title, composer, form, style, and timbre as well as transfer knowledge to pieces not studied to identify form, timbre, and style. (Wisconsin has a state-wide project of this scope. If more information is desired, contact the author.)

**Theme 6.** Demonstrate learning centers. Learning centers are an efficient and wonderful way of organizing the classroom for at least 50% of instruction time. If classes meet twice a week, then one class is devoted to learning centers and one to whole-group participation. Enough centers are positioned around the room so that teams of two or three children directly participate in music making by playing instruments rather than waiting for a turn in a whole-group lesson. The centers could be set up by

concepts, by behaviors of performing, by describing and creating, by program needs and accompaniments, or by whatever organizing tool the teacher desires.

*Concept:* For example, all centers could relate to harmony—autoharps, Orff instruments, singing of partner songs, pop bottle harmony, and so on

*Behavior:* For example, creating; each group would be creating a section for a “Weather Suite” such as “Hurricane,” “Gentle Rain,” “Windstorm,” “Quiet Snow,” and so on

*Program needs:* Accompaniments—small groups work on guitar accompaniments, Orff instrumentation, and bell accompaniments to songs that will be performed at a program

**Theme 7. Technology:** Parents are truly amazed when they see students comfortably manipulating a SMART Board. The key is to carefully develop lessons so that the board does not become a huge worksheet. Make sure the activities are interactive—that students add instruments they are hearing, compare and contrast, use Venn diagrams, create rhythm and melodic accompaniments to songs, and so on.

**Theme 8. Demonstrate Armstrong’s 12 qualities of genius:** curiosity, imagination, sensitivity, playfulness, creativity, flexibility, wonder, inventiveness, humor, wisdom, vitality, joy. Demonstrate how each quality is featured in the music curriculum.

In this informance, you can have children demonstrate activities that develop these qualities. Parents will be surprised as they watch their children not only perform their musical composition but also explain how it evolved.

The following is an example of one such experience shared with parents. (If one videotapes classes along the way, they can be shown as an effective visual.)

This project was a cooperative project with two second grade classes and their teachers. The classroom teachers began the project in their language arts time. They read “why” and “how” stories such as *How the Leopard Got His Spots* (Fontes & Fontes, 1999/2002), *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears* (Aardema, 1975/2004) and *How Anansi Obtained the Sky God’s Stories* (Washington & Skivington, 1991/1994). Grammar, spelling, phonics were all part of this portion.

Now the children were ready to create their original story and then the music. We started with the story idea. This discussion was held during music class with the classroom teachers attending. The classroom teachers led the discussion and wrote the students’ ideas on the chalkboard while I videotaped the class. What would the story be about? The board was filled with ideas; imagination was running rampant. Ideas fed off of ideas. Even

though some ideas were silly, none were discarded or evaluated.

When all the suggestions were written on the board, children were asked to look at the list and choose three topics that they thought would work. The shortened list was scrutinized and discussed, and the children arrived at consensus: They would write about how the first rabbit came to earth. (The fact that they had a black and white rabbit in their classroom influenced their choice.) In addition to answering the question “How did the first rabbit come to the earth?” they decided that they would also ask and answer “Why was it black and white?”

The children went back to their rooms, and during the next few language arts classes they began writing a group story. When they were satisfied with the story, they brought it, written on chart paper, to music class. We began to explore which musical sounds should be added—a tambourine here, a triangle there. Initially the ideas were written on the chalkboard: “She bounced off the side—flex-a-tone”; “It started raining—rain stick.” When the children were satisfied and changes had been made, the instrumentation was added to the chart paper story.

The children had been studying Libby Larsen’s musical composition “Parachute Dancing” and decided to do what other composers did—borrow a bit of her music. (They had listened to “Fossils” from Saint-Saens’s “Carnival of Animals” and were aware of borrowing.) It took two entire music classes before the children were satisfied with their composition. They then decided that they needed readers, a conductor, and musicians. After some experimentation, they decided that musicians would sit in the order the instruments played to make it easier for the conductor.

While we were practicing the music and still making changes in the music, the classroom teachers were busy helping children make the story into a big book. A different child illustrated each page. The big book was laminated and spiral bound. In addition, 8.5” × 11” copies were made for each student.

On the day of performance, Mademoiselle, the classroom rabbit, accompanied very excited second graders to the music room. The performance was videotaped but had to be redone—not because the *teachers* thought so but because the *second graders* were not satisfied. The readers did not have enough dynamic expression, some of the musicians were not watching and missed their cue, the conductor was not clear enough regarding cutoffs. Perfectionists that they were, they were determined to accept nothing but the best effort. Indeed, they took this composing, conducting, and performing very seriously.

At the informance, the parents were given an explanation of the process and shown snippets of the videotaping. It was obvious that they were stunned at the process as well as the end result. After the project was completed,

the teachers reported that they could hardly move on to a new story because children wanted to turn every story into a musical composition (Pautz, 1998a).

## A Final Plea for Including Informances

Both performance-type programs and informance-type programs are suitable for general music presentations. In fact, each program should involve some of both aspects. I encourage you to take these words of challenge to heart as you consider choosing to do an informance for your parents:

Practice to the best of your ability and at the edge of your field. Accept responsibility for your own professional development. Stay alive intellectually. Become a lifelong learner. (Sergiovanni, quoted in Pautz, 1998b, p. 1)

Music is human kind's most perfect invention for it is the ultimate fusion of emotion, cognition and action. To be a music educator—to participate with learners in the journey leading to the discovery of this perfect invention is the ultimate challenge. (Boardman, quoted in Pautz, 2000, p. 1)

Share this challenge with parents through informances. After your initial success, you will continue to inform parents as long as you teach.

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