



FAME Keynote  
by John Feierabend  
at the First Biennial FAME Conference  
July 26, 2014

Welcome to the First Biennial FAME Conference. This morning we began with a couple of musical activities to remind ourselves that all people our age, 30, should be TUNEFUL, BEATFUL and ARTFUL. And we are here at this conference to learn and share how being tuneful, beatful and artful builds community.

Truly, I never would have imagined that 40 years of teaching would culminate in an International Organization and Conference. My 40 year teaching career has been filled with adventure, challenge, laughter, fun, fellowship, research... and I guess a few bumps. Through those years I have been blessed with several major grants, many recognitions and awards, a PBS series, and countless publications (...ok to be specific, 70 books, CDs and DVDs and 31 articles). And there are no words to express my depth of my gratitude for such a rewarding career, but, I am much more grateful that all of you are here because you believe we can make a difference in the lives of everyday people by helping them become tuneful, beatful and artful.

Over the years, as I had the pleasure of sharing my philosophical and pedagogical approaches with music educators throughout the world, I would frequently be asked if there might be some way to create a forum where like-minded teachers, who were working with our shared goals, could have a way to communicate with each other to learn and share. Well, thanks to a group of inspired teachers (or I should say inspirational teachers) FAME was created in the summer of 2012 to fulfill that purpose through the creation of a non-profit organization, a website, through establishing a procedure for certification and teacher training, and by offering biennial conferences such as this.

When discussing the possibilities for starting FAME, the first question we all considered was what is it that FAME is advocating that necessitates the birth of a

new organization. In telling others about the birth of FAME I searched for valid justifications and clear distinctions. In so many ways we are the same as other music education organizations in that we promote, well, music education. So what makes us different?

FAME is a Fanfare for the Common Man.

Common people have created and expressed beautiful singing and movement experiences for centuries. Those moments have been and continue to be accessible and enjoyed by other common people. Great artists also have created and expressed beautiful singing and movements. And those moments also should be accessible, understandable and appreciated by common people. FAME promotes the idea that music teachers are the essential link who can provide developmentally appropriate and beautiful music and movement experiences so that all students will come to embrace and be edified by the wonders embodied in music that is both from and for the common man as well as from the most artful composers.

There already are music education organizations for choirs showcasing talented, well-rehearsed singers often selected for annual conferences through auditions or performance recordings. And there are organizations for bands and orchestras showcasing instrumentalists who have spent years perfecting their playing abilities so they could be selected to perform at other national conferences. There are elementary organizations that showcase the pinnacle of achievement through auditioned children's choirs or through well-rehearsed performances of singing, movement and children playing classroom instruments.

FAME promotes music education from another viewpoint. That is, ALL people are tuneful, beatful and artful and can synchronize joyfully with others while being musical. There is no need to rehearse the voice or an instrument, take private lessons or practice for years in order to share in the enormous benefits of "musicing" with others. There is no need to spend countless hours preparing for some audition with the hopes of being selected to reap the rich satisfaction that happens when we make music together. FAME will strive to be inclusive not exclusive...to provide access to the rewards of music for...not just the talented and well-practiced...for all people. If it isn't easily accessible for all people it doesn't belong at FAME.

There also already exists forums for early childhood music educators to gather. And while FAME strongly promotes developmentally appropriate early childhood music education...it is not solely focused on early childhood development but promotes developmentally appropriate learning at all ages with a purpose of building community through musical participation.

Still, let me be perfectly clear, building a universal community through experiences that are accessible to all people does not mean teaching random accessible musical activities to children with no vision of musical growth or artistry. Instead, FAME seeks to promote an educational approach with a long term goal, a 30 year goal, of helping students grow into their full musical potential, and thus enriching their lives, through carefully sequenced, fun, artful, research based and developmentally appropriate experiences.

Over the years I have received many e-mails from folks sharing their stories of successes and clips of children on their journey achieving tuneful, beatful and artful goals. I have learned so much from all that sharing and I have, in turn, shared what I have learned from them with others. The power of sharing was and is an important impetus for the creation of FAME...let this be a place where we can ALL share and learn from each other and help each other better help children live and grow through music.

How easy it would be to build community through music if each of US shared our inspiration with just two other people and each of them shared with two other people...etc... To imagine the outcome consider the song game "Turn Cinnamon Turn." The first player, selected another, then those two selected new partners and there were four. We only needed to share the game 7 times and all of you were singing and dancing (128). But, if we continued to play it just 21 times, over 1 million people (1,048,576), (approximately the population of Greater Hartford) would be singing and dancing together. Play it 5 more times (26 times) and over 300 million (335, 544, 432) (approximately the population of the United States), would be singing and dancing. And if you played it just 8 more times (34 times) we would involve every single person in on the planet singing and dancing together (8,589,934,592). Only 34 repetitions could change the world into one great musical community.

I often step back and reflect that I have not only been the organizer of a large body of educational materials but, I have, more importantly, been given the opportunity to be a voice for building community through music. And, given, the response of you here today, and thousands of other music educators, I am not alone in believing that when we enable children to become tuneful, beatful and artful, we grow students who potentially will become adults who's musical instincts will enable them to share and celebrate life with others experiencing all the fellowship and joys that a musical community can provide.

I confess I am very proud of the quality the publications I have assembled over the past 30 years. But I would be remiss if I did not share with you that each and every publication is in such excellent shape because Lillie Feierabend has spent hours and hours pouring over revision after revision of every single book with her eagle

eye. You can all thank Lillie that you have such well-polished materials to teach from because, Lillie is a master teacher, contributing many ideas and a supremely patient editor who, without question, has uped everything I ever wrote.

You can also thank two other teachers who influenced my life and work; changing my teaching and influencing my subsequent work. Without question it was Sr. Lorna Zemke who taught me how to teach. Her pacing, careful sequencing, humor and zest for learning started me out the right gate for a lifetime of intuitive inspirational teaching. And Katalin Forrai, who, under Zoltan Kodaly's watch, wrote the Kindergarten curriculum for Hungary, and who gave me a whack on the side of the head that inspired me to be innovative from what I had previously learned. She shared with me insights about Hungary's early inspirations from other countries that would become the formation of the Kodaly approach in Hungary and encouraged me to examine THOSE principles and innovate them further for the benefit of children in our country.

Still, none of these ideas would go very far if there weren't people who believed in my work and worked hard to promote it. Hence, I would be remiss if I did not thank GIA, especially Alec Harris, President of GIA, Tom Hawley, Vice President of GIA and Marguerite Wilder, who thinks she runs GIA and has pretty much convinced us all she does. These three folks provide support beyond belief and trust me to create what I believe needs to be done next. That doesn't happen very often in the world of publishing.

Another group of inspirational people that have been pivotal in moving this tuneful, beatful artful mission forward is the FAME Board of Directors lead with exceptional inspiration by the first President Sandra Doneski. This board as contributed countless hours and unimaginable amounts of creative thinking and humor toward proliferating the ideals for which we are gathered today.

And there is one final group for whom I am deeply grateful. YOU. One of the most rewarding things I hear during my presentations at conferences and in my summer classes is that my ideas often validate things that were felt by teachers but not often expressed. But also, I am the lucky beneficiary of meeting so many teachers who share THEIR ideas or activities with me; ideas they found exceptionally meaningful to their students. This is an important benefit of spending many days on the road at state conferences and teaching classes at various locations around the globe...learning from so many of those I meet. I have often reflected how fortunate I am to be the beneficiary of learning so many wonderful ideas and am grateful I am to be in a position to share those valuable insights with others. Often someone in a summer class will ask me if I have read this or that...or heard such and such a speaker...and often I have not, but I seek it or them out. One such moment occurred decades ago when a graduate student, Andy Mayo shared his

undergraduate senior paper with me. It was based on Plato's idea that art was unique for its power to express something "below the surface." That phrase has had a lasting impact on much that I have thought ever since. Focusing on what the Germans call *Innigkeit*, or "inwardness" I began advocating for teachers to be aware of developing in students the "Art part" of music; or what is below the surface.

In addition to Andy, there were many graduate students at Hartt who have influenced what would become *First Steps in Music and Conversational Solfege*; students who explored research that taught me how to teach better including Betsy Greene, Jeff Rhone, Lisa Feltes, Stephanie Schall, Brent Gault, Sandy Doneski, Lynn Rechel and many others.

*First Steps in Music and Conversational Solfege* are a summary of what I have learned in my journey as a music educator. I always believed we should use "real music" to teach children and not contrived "School Music." This frame of mind, started in my early introduction to the Kodaly approach and the profound writings of Mr. Kodaly himself. Ever since then, I have believed that there would be an audience for a "health food" or "organic" version of music education. And while, like health food, there initially was a small following, I soon discovered there was an ever growing audience for a health food approach to music education; teachers who wanted to promote how real music from people for people could and should be the primary repertoire to develop music skills and enrich lives.

There was a time when health food was hard to find, but gradually, the local grocery stores started offering a small selection. Demand evolved over the years creating the need for major health food and organic food stores as more public awareness of healthy eating developed. Well, just as health food eventually captured more and more of the public's attention it seems that my "health food" approach to music education has become more and more embraced by an ever-growing group of music educators. I knew in my journey, even though there would be occasional financial temptations, I could never accept lucrative offers to work for textbook companies or television if I would be willing to give up my convictions that folk music and classical music were the most important vehicles for musical learning. I stuck to my guns, at first self publishing, believing that gradually my publications might catch the attention of others. I stood by my convictions of not selling to broad commercial appeal but by holding onto standards that might or might not "pay off" only to eventually discover that there were gradually more and more like-minded teachers who shared my vision of a healthier music education diet. And here you are.

As I journeyed through my early teaching years I was immersed in refining and culminating what I had learned from my early Kodaly training. But, as I continued

to learn from research I was occasionally conflicted with what I had previously learned. Added to my conviction that music education should use as its core carefully selected literature that embodies “the art part,” of music; my educational journey also led me to embrace field research and empirical research; some by me, some by my students, and some by other researchers. From that research, even more guiding principles eventually emerged that would be the foundations of the First Steps in Music and Conversational Solfege pedagogies.

In my music history classes I had learned that pivotal moments in the evolution of music composition were a result of either great culminators or innovators. Bach was a culminator and Mozart was an innovator. Well in my case, the discovery of new information through research caused me to not be content as a culminator, but compelled me to take the courageous journey as an innovator. And as an innovator I had to accept the burden and the responsibility of self-evaluation and be willing to adapt when research would teach me new things. I hope I have been true to those principle in all my innovations.

In music education there have been many significant innovators. I salute:

*Guido d'Arezzo* – the inventor of solfege

*Emile Cheve* – the inventor of rhythm syllables

*Sarah Glover* and *John Curwen* – the inventor of solfege  
pedagogy for children

*Fritz Jode* – the inventor of a folk song based sequential  
pedagogy in Germany that later influenced the Kodaly  
approach in Hungary.

Like those before me, I strove to innovate but this time for the purpose of thoughtfully blending quality folk and classical music with research based pedagogies. And, in addition I reflected on and was influenced by my own personal musical development.

Living in the projects of Detroit as a young child, I recalled many songs and rhymes playing on sidewalks, parking lots, and driveways. For many hours, especially in the summer the neighborhood kids would gather to skip rope, bounce balls, play hand-clapping games or use a “counting-out” rhyme to choose the first “it” for a game. It is interesting to think that since, at the time, there were no elementary music programs in Detroit Public Schools where I grew up, the other kids were my first music teachers. I delighted in learning a new counting out rhyme, or being challenged with a jump rope chase game. In addition, my mother, Alice, knew dozens of songs and rhymes from her childhood where she spent many summers at summer camp and she would enjoy sharing them with us kids. I can't chant “One, Two, Three, A-learie-o” and not see Alice lifting her leg over the

ball, or clap “My Mamma Gave Me a Nickel” without hearing her voice singing it. Many of these childhood memories are the basis of my newest collection “The Book of Playground Songs and Rhymes.”

Later in junior high school I can remember exploring music in a manner that was then thought to be “Cheating” and now seems forward thinking! I would escape to the choir room during lunch and bang on the piano. Having never had piano lessons (but 3 years of accordion lessons) I knew enough about how to read the right hand but only a little about the left hand...which led me to improvise the left hand as best I could. I remember my friend Steve, who had studied piano for a number of years, accusing me of “cheating” because I could pull off playing decently from the sheet music although most of the left hand I had “cheated.” Looking back at what I had done was that I got a few clues from the notation and made up the rest as long as it sounded right. And now, reflecting on what I was doing, I was thinking tunefully and making aural musical decisions. Perhaps more students could benefit musically if they were encouraged more often to “cheat.”

The value of being part of a musical community came to me shortly after meeting Lillie in the first year of college where we were both freshmen music education majors at Wayne State University in Detroit. Shortly after the first semester we starting seeing each other and I learned she was part of a rather large extended family of Syrian decent. We would attend weddings of various cousins and friends and I was quickly taken by the inter-generational camaraderie that was shared through their folk-dances and songs. It seemed that all those attending the wedding receptions knew the traditional folk dances that unfolded whether they were men’s dances, women’s dances, mixed dances, bride and groom dances, or celebratory songs...and I experienced an energetic joy in them I had never before experienced. I loved being included in the dances and experiencing the spirit that was being shared by the young, middle and older people dancing and singing together and marveled how they had been able to pass on the spirit of their culture through dance and song. I wondered why I had never before experienced anything like this. If they did exist outside the Arabic Community, how I had missed them? I eventually learned there were many community songs and dances from many cultures that have been shared by many generations, I just hadn’t discovered them yet.

Because of the joy those Arabic songs and dances ignited in us, when Lillie and I married 40 years ago we chose to have a traditional Syrian wedding reception with Arabic food, an Arabic band and Arabic folk dancing. (photo of Arabic dancing). There were three hundred attending from her side and eight German/English relatives from mine. We were swept up by the magic of the singing and dancing community we had experienced at other Syrian wedding receptions and celebrated the beginning of our life together in the same manner. Looking back, these early

experiences were the germ of what would become a life-long journey and an ongoing discovery of how to build community through singing and dancing; to promote the idea of building community through tuneful, beatful and artful experiences.

It is fascinating to think that the germs of those early experiences would ultimately led to this, a Conference of like-minded people. Since then, I have held onto the goals of building community through music education, and eventually developed the emerging methodologies of First Steps in Music and Conversational Solfege, not only constructing those methods with building community in mind but also with as much pedagogical research as I could personally do or lay my hands on, always holding onto the idea that all people can enrich their lives by connecting to others in a tuneful, beatful and artful community.

Today we are here to share what we have learned and we will continue to explore innovation for the goal of making a more musical world through the pedagogies of First Steps in Music and Conversational Solfege.

Regardless of what you take away this three days...Always keep Tuneful, Beatful and Artful growth in the front as the primary focus...whether it is through singing lullabies to babies, helping young children experience their first echo songs or finger plays, or with older students learning folk dances and singing canons. These goals will improve the quality of life for all people.

Today you are here at the first FAME conference because you are committed to helping all people become tuneful, beatful and artful. This conference will enable you to meet other teachers who share your enthusiasm for this philosophy of music education. You will have the opportunity to choose from 24 presentations that I know will inspire you even more.

Your support by being a member of FAME and attending this conference has the potential to help build communities that can synchronize with their voices, bodies and spirits. You are creating a tipping point that will lead to the improvement of people's lives through the development of musical skills. You are to be congratulated on your commitment to making the world, through music, a better place for children to live and grow. Give yourselves a hand.

Following this conference, I invite you to continue to visit the FAME website and especially visit the forums. After the inspiration you receive at this conference, you will then be able to continue connecting with like-minded people. In the Forums questions can be raised and solutions can be shared by me and many others. We hope to grow the website into a virtual learning community facilitating dialogue, research, and providing resources.



In closing, I am sure we all have moments when we are awed by the wonder in the world around us. The drifting clouds in the sky, the phases of the moon, the many songs of birds, the splendid diversity of flowers fruits and vegetables, the remarkable rhythms of the surf, the amazing energy of the sun, the undulating magic of the seasons, the cycle of life, and the vast spectrum of human emotions. It is truly awesome that we possess five beautiful senses to savor this miraculous world in all its' beauty and, even greater, have deeper artful sensitivities that enable us to appreciate what is below the surface, the "art part" of life. We, music teachers, are especially blessed with the opportunity to help our students become aware of the art in all of us. And we hold the power to ensuring there is a sense of community in the future...a tuneful, beatful and artful learning community. This weekend I hope you find enlightenment and fellowship as you share many tuneful, beatful and artful moments with others who like yourself, are committed to building a better world through building musical communities.

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