

Research & Issues in Music Education

Volume 10

Number 1 *Research & Issues in Music Education*, v.10,
2012

Article 5

2012

Himie Voxman: His Contributions to Music Education

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Recommended Citation

Gleason, Bruce (2012) "Himie Voxman: His Contributions to Music Education," *Research & Issues in Music Education*: Vol. 10 : No. 1 , Article 5.

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The Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education 17, no. 2 (January 1996): 85 – 97.

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Abstract

Himie Voxman is a name few instrumental teachers and students of the past fifty years would fail to recognize. His method books and arrangements are in school districts and private studios across the United States, serving as a testimony to his influence as a teacher, scholar, editor and arranger. His life and career as a prominent U.S. music educator is certainly worthy of the attention of anyone with an interest in the history of American music education.

Early Years

Born in Centerville, Iowa in 1912 to Morris and Mollie Voxman, Himie Voxman had little interest in music until he was twelve years old. Fascination for the subject came in 1924 when Voxman's classroom teacher submitted his name for instrumental instruction with William Gower, private teacher and director of the Centerville Municipal Band. Voxman's mother was hesitant, fearing that playing a wind instrument might be detrimental to the boy's asthma. However, the family doctor suggested he try it.

Himie's earnings from a local grocery store provided the wherewithal for clarinet lessons, and armed with an old \$35 rubber Albert system instrument, Voxman began studying the summer following his eighth-grade year. Whether playing the clarinet, or because the family moved to a different house and new surroundings, Voxman's asthma soon disappeared. He was on his way to establishing the Voxman name as a mainstay in instrumental music education.¹

Lesson material of the time was limited to a few advanced conservatory methods. This prompted Gower to write out the first lessons for his beginning students, whom he later transferred to the Klosé method. These experiences, coupled with the sight-reading work he did in silent movie orchestras, began shaping Voxman's ideas about the importance of rhythm and quality literature in music instruction.²

Voxman progressed quickly on the clarinet and was able to enroll in the high school band and orchestra by the beginning of the fall term. He recalled that although most of his instruction was exemplary, the orchestra director instructed the clarinetists to "pull out the joints" of their instruments to cover the parts for "A" clarinet.³

In addition to the Centerville municipal band, Voxman began playing in other area town bands conducted by Gower, and began teaching privately. A stint with the Murdoch J. McDonald band at the Missouri State Fair in 1928 led to a short tour, ending when Voxman decided to return to Centerville to finish high school. An attempt to return to the band upon graduation failed when thousands of theater musicians were thrown out of work because of talking motion pictures. McDonald, rather than rehiring Voxman and other single musicians, felt obliged to hire former

employees with families. While this proved to be the end of Voxman's professional band career, it set the stage for his teaching, research, and orchestral careers.⁴

Undergraduate Years

In addition to music, Voxman had a fascination for chemistry, which was in a period of advancement in synthetic drug development in the late 1920s. This fascination led him to enter the University of Iowa as a chemical engineering major. He also began teaching clarinet privately at this time. Voxman recalled that he selected chemical engineering rather than chemistry because engineering students were exempted from physical education requirements. He joined the band, which was part of the military department until 1936, exempting him also from the required military training. Several years later, to further support himself in addition to his teaching, he formed a small orchestra to play at university plays in McBride Auditorium.⁵

Voxman continued to play in the Centerville Municipal Band during his first two years at the University, hitchhiking from Iowa City to sight-read the Thursday evening concerts. The next morning he would ride with Gower to the city limits to find another ride back to Iowa City. During his junior year he began playing in the Tri-Cities (now Quad-Cities) Symphony under Ludwig Becker, which led to a position teaching woodwinds in the Davenport schools.⁶

A request to perform in Handel's *Messiah* under the direction of the University of Iowa music department's head, Philip Greeley Clapp, in 1929, served as Voxman's initial contact with the music department. This performance led to an orchestra librarian assistantship and appointment as first clarinetist with the University orchestra under Frank Estes Kendrie. Voxman recalled that rehearsals for *Messiah* were inconvenient, making it necessary to wait until after rehearsal to go to his night job of washing trays at the Quadrangle Dorm. Performing with the orchestra, however, led to Voxman's introduction to Carl E. Seashore through Scott Reger, an audiology student and principal clarinetist. This encounter would set the stage for Voxman's graduate work.⁷

Graduate Years

Upon completion of his degree in chemical engineering, Voxman decided to continue his studies at the University of Iowa in the psychology of music. Securing a research assistantship through Dean Seashore, Voxman began working on "The Harmonic Structure of the Clarinet Tone," using the clarinetists of the St. Louis Symphony as subjects. Finishing the M.A. in 1934, he continued seeking a doctorate, planning to study the differences in tone quality between metal and wooden clarinets. Disagreement with his advisor over the use of an artificial blower led him to abandon the project and his pursuit of the degree.

Career at the University of Iowa

In 1934 Voxman began teaching woodwinds at City High School in Iowa City. There he met his future wife, Lois, who was teaching strings. Voxman also taught part time at the University of Iowa, and in 1936, Clapp hired him as the first fulltime woodwind instructor. Gower, who took the job as band director at City High in 1939, later taught brass full time at the University. During these years, the major applied professors taught the music education instrumental techniques classes—with future music educators receiving their clarinet training from Voxman himself. Voxman's ability to point out beginner's problems quickly and concisely gave countless music educators a strong background in woodwind pedagogy.⁸

In addition to being an excellent teacher and scholar, Voxman persisted in broadening himself as a performer. Playing regularly in the university orchestra with other faculty members, Voxman provided a strong musical example and encouraged professional camaraderie. He remained a member of the Tri-Cities Orchestra for seventeen years until 1947 and enhanced his reputation as a soloist in faculty recitals by studying with Gustave Langenus in New York and at the National Music Camp, Interlochen, Michigan. He also took part in Langenus's workshops at the University of Iowa.⁹

An administrative position had not been a goal of Voxman's. He maintained a close working relationship with Clapp, who had learned to trust Voxman's administrative judgment and foresight. Because of Clapp's failing health in his later years, he asked Voxman to assist in some administrative tasks. In 1954, Voxman became Head of the Department of Music, and in 1963, he became Director, when the faculty voted to reorganize as the School of Music. He held the post in conjunction with that of clarinet teacher and graduate student advisor until his retirement in 1980.¹⁰

The University of Iowa Department of Music had already reached a position of national significance under the leadership of Clapp, who had become Head in 1919. Clapp had emphasized performance—a direction that the faculty felt Voxman would continue. Strengthening course offerings in theory, musicology, and music education, which were somewhat limited, were also of concern to the faculty. Consequently, under Voxman's guidance, additional courses and advanced degrees gradually became available.¹¹

Clapp had been knowledgeable in musicology but was not enthusiastic about extensive formal study of the subject. Until the early 1950s, the Department of Music offered no courses in music history. The two-year sequence of music appreciation, which Clapp taught, served this purpose quite adequately as far as he was concerned. Toward the end of Clapp's tenure, the Department created the musicology area upon the recommendation of the faculty. Professor Albert Luper was the first appointee. The area gained strength during Voxman's tenure with appointments of additional faculty.¹²

Music education had long been a part of the curriculum at the University of Iowa, dating back to the early days of normal school training. The first music education program was a two-year public school music course, instituted in 1916 to prepare students as public school music supervisors. By the time of Voxman's tenure, the University was awarding a four-year degree in music education. Perceiving that techniques courses in instrumental music were lacking, he was

able to secure instruments and initiate courses in instrumental techniques. With the aid of Dean Elmer Peterson of the College of Education, Voxman was able to acquire a large number of instruments to build up the band and orchestra in the University Schools, where music education students were practicing teaching. ¹³

Voxman was concerned with the image that the University of Iowa and the Department of Music had developed throughout the state. A fairly general feeling had been that the department was not seriously interested in the training of public school teachers. Consequently, musicians from some of Iowa's best music programs were selecting other colleges and universities. By reviving the pre-World War II All State Music Camp for high school students, along with summer sessions and workshops for teachers, the reputation of the Department improved, and it provided a service for the state. ¹⁴

A significant advancement for the School of Music occurred in 1971, when the School moved from its old overcrowded, Jefferson Street facilities to a new, multi-million dollar facility on the west bank of the Iowa River. The number of faculty and students had increased significantly in the two decades of Voxman's tenure making this move imperative. Overcrowded facilities had brought about plans for a new building in the 1930s, but the University had to drop these plans with the onset of World War II. As general expansion throughout the University of Iowa continued through the 1950s and 1960s, the music building question again came, and plans to build resumed. The new building, comprised of classrooms, studios, four major rehearsal halls, recording studios, offices, performance halls, and library facilities, gave the School of Music the space it had needed for many years. ¹⁵

Along with advances in program development, an important factor in Voxman's success was his ability to work with people. While Clapp's iron-handedness had not always set well with the faculty, Voxman's quiet demeanor served him well as a peacemaker. By hiring exceptional people and letting them do their jobs, Voxman encouraged members of the School of Music faculty to make decisions in course development and structure while he concentrated on administering the School. The expanded instruction in most areas of music, joined with a real commitment to music education and a reputation for excellence in performance, led to the School of Music's growth in size, diversity, and stature. ¹⁶

National Association of Schools of Music

The University of Iowa had long played a major role in the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), becoming a charter member in 1928. Voxman became involved in NASM in 1952, attending meetings in Clapp's absence. Working in the undergraduate division for a time, Voxman soon became graduate commission chairman, visiting and corresponding with institutions who were seeking initial or renewed membership. Of concern to NASM were faculty salaries and teaching loads, course and degree requirements, and library holdings.

While the University of Iowa Department of Psychology had been granting doctorates in the Psychology of Music since 1910, the Department of Music awarded its first Ph.D. in 1931, in

composition. The Department awarded its first music education Ph.D. in 1939, with doctorates in musicology-theory following shortly in 1942.¹⁷

During Voxman's tenure as chair, one area of controversy for the NASM was the new degree that institutions were proposing in performance: the Doctor of Musical Arts (D.M.A.). Before this time, a doctorate in music meant the Ph.D., or in some cases, the Ed.D., which most people considered research degrees. The proposed D.M.A., a performance based degree, called for a series of recitals in place of the dissertation.

The University of Iowa first granted the Ph.D. in performance and literature, with a substantial research component, in 1957. In 1968, under Voxman's guidance, the University of Iowa became one of the first institutions to grant the D.M.A. in performance. The Ph.D. in performance and literature continues as one of the doctoral degree options, but the D.M.A. is the more popular of the two degrees for performance majors.¹⁸

Publishing

Voxman began music publishing in collaboration with William Gower in 1938. After using Gower's written-out lessons with his own students, Voxman suggested that he and Gower collaborate and write out a year's worth of lessons. Jenkins Music company, Kansas City, Missouri, published the manuscript, leading to a successful first year's sales of 6,000 copies. Rubank, who published Voxman's arrangement of the "Romanza" and "Polacca" from Carl Maria von Weber's Second Clarinet Concerto, agreed to publish a follow-up book when Jenkins Music did not express an interest. This led to the publication of several method books and numerous collections of brass and woodwind material.¹⁹

Up to this time, wind instrument instruction books consisted mainly of cradle-to-the-grave conservatory methods: huge books that moved rapidly from simple rhythm and pitch drills to virtuoso pieces. Among these were the Klosé and Lazarus methods for clarinet and Arban's method for brass instruments. Although they contained excellent material, it was difficult to use these books with beginners.²⁰

Perceiving a gap in the continuum of sequential pedagogy, Voxman "hooked on" to what students needed in the beginning stages—filling in the gaps using quality literature. Writing intermediate and advanced books for all brass and woodwind instruments, Voxman and Gower were among the first to approach instrumental lesson material in a development sequence. Working along similar lines as Gerald Prescott, who had developed and published outlines for working with several conservatory methods, Voxman and Gower developed outlines for students and teachers to use with their methods. These outlines, which appeared on the first page of the methods, facilitated organized and systematic procedures for playing scales and arpeggios, melodic interpretation, articulation, finger exercises, ornaments, and solos.²¹

Duet and Ensemble Music

The idea of expanding the repertoire for wind instruments had been developing in Voxman's mind ever since playing violin duets with Frank Minckler, the conductor of the movie theater orchestra in Centerville. This experience, coupled with a familiarity of Hohmann's *Method for Violin*, had convinced Voxman of the importance of duet and ensemble playing and that wind instruction could also use good string literature. Consequently, after the success of the *Advanced Method*, Voxman was eager to fulfill Rubank's desire for duet and ensemble books, which began a lifelong search for material.²²

In 1954, Voxman and Charles Eble (of Eble Music in Iowa City and then secretary to Dr. Clapp) went to Europe to collect out-of-print material for the University of Iowa Library. Eble already had established contacts in Europe, where he had been purchasing music for some time. Making the rounds of used music dealers to collect items of interest to musicologists, Voxman also began collecting suitable duet, ensemble, and method materials for his proposed collections. Using the *Répertoire International des Sources Musicales* (RISM), this initial search turned into nearly twenty such expeditions over as many years, with Voxman searching libraries, archives and music dealers throughout England, Germany, Italy, France, Poland, Russia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. The gathered material yielded nearly 300 editions, articles, and compilations for wind instruments with U.S. and European publishers.²³

National Federation Interscholastic Music Association has estimated that one million high school musicians use Voxman's *Selected Studies* annually, and that it is in virtually every high school band room in the country. Voxman attributed the continued use of his methods and arrangements to convenience. While some music stores had access to quality literature, for most it was difficult to find literature of this type in one volume. Voxman's approach was to write and arrange music and studies for all of the wind instruments using the publications and manuscripts that he had collected from archives throughout the world. This gave students access to strong pedagogical material and quality literature that had been previously unavailable. Because of Voxman's meticulous procedures and well-organized methods, it has been unnecessary to revise or expand them.²⁴

Conclusions

Himie Voxman has been influential in the lives of generations of aspiring musicians, many of whom have taken positions with prestigious musical ensembles, colleges, conservatories, and universities. It is impossible to estimate the impact he has had on the myriad of students who have been instructed in schools and studios using his publications. Many honors and awards testify to Voxman's contributions, including the Bell System's Silver Baton, the Edwin Frank Goldman Memorial Citation from the American Bandmasters Association, the Iowa Music Educators Association's Distinguished Service Award, the honorary degree of Doctor of Music from Coe College, and a Doctor of Humane Letters from DePaul University. In 1991 he received the First Place Award from the National Federation Interscholastic Music Association, and in 1993 the University of Iowa honored him with its Distinguished Alumni Award. At the Mid-West International Band and Orchestra Conference in 1994, Voxman received the Mid-West Clinic Medal of Honor, and on February 15, 1995 the Iowa State Board of Regents agreed to

rename the University of Iowa music building the Voxman Music Building.

Comments from former students attest to Voxman's dedication, expertise, and caring attitude. Along with technical and musical expertise, Voxman demanded sincere scholarship of his students. In addition to overcoming the technical problems of their instruments, he expected students to investigate the historical and theoretical contexts of the literature they were playing. His vast knowledge of woodwind literature, coupled with his outstanding character as a gentleman, are qualities that will remain with his students throughout their careers. Through his quiet demeanor, Himie Voxman gave praise with a nod, discipline and criticism with kindness, and advice with humility. Through his ability to impress upon his students that they were worthy of his time, Voxman, along with being revered as a scholar and musician, became regarded by all as a friend.²⁵

—Sherwood Conservatory of Music
Chicago, Illinois

1. [^](#)Edwin Riley, "Featuring Himie Voxman," *ClariNetwork* 6 (Fall 1987): 4; and Himie Voxman, interview by author, 27 January 1994, Iowa City, IA. Riley studied clarinet with Voxman and received the D.M.A. degree in clarinet performance from the University of Iowa in 1977. He is professor of clarinet at Columbus [Georgia] College and principal clarinetist with the Columbus Symphony. Edwin Riley, telephone interview by the author, 2 November 1995, Columbus, GA.
2. [^](#)Hyacinthe Eléonor Klosé, *Méthode pour servir à l'enseignement de la clarinette à anneaux mobiles* (Paris: Meissonnier, 1843). Numerous publishers have published this famous method in various editions since then.
3. [^](#)Riley, "Featuring Himie Voxman," 4.
4. [^](#)Ibid., 5.
5. [^](#)Riley, "Featuring Himie Voxman," 20.
6. [^](#)Pearl West, interview by author, 24 March 1994, Iowa City, IA. West, also from Centerville, is the founder of West Music stores in east central Iowa.
7. [^](#)Riley, "Featuring Himie Voxman," 20.
8. [^](#)Ralph Paarman, telephone interview by author, 22 March 1994, Davenport, IA. Paarman earned his B.A., 1950, and his M.A., 1953, in music education. He studied trombone as a major with William Gower, and clarinet techniques with Voxman. Paarman retired after thirty-nine years of teaching high school bands in Iowa, twenty-nine of those in Davenport.

9. [^](#)Ronald Tyree, interview by author, 29 March 1994, Iowa City, IA. Tyree earned the Ph.D. in 1957 in music performance and literature. He studied bassoon, saxophone and clarinet with Voxman, and became professor of bassoon and saxophone at the University of Iowa. Gustave Langenus (1883 – 1957), eminent performer and teacher, was principal clarinetist with the New York Symphony Orchestra and later with the New York Philharmonic. He taught at the Juilliard School and at the Dalcroze School of Music, publishing many studies for clarinet. Voxman recalls that while in New York on his honeymoon, he spent several afternoons studying with Langenus. Himie Voxman, interview with author, 24 February 1994, Iowa City, IA.
10. [^](#)The title “Head,” an appointment for an indefinite period of time (in distinction from “Chairman,” which carried with it an allotted term), had been voted on by the music faculty. Many members of the faculty felt that an indefinite appointment would serve the department better. If the department was making satisfactory progress, there would be no need for a vote for additional terms; if it did not progress, a change of head would be simple to achieve. Himie Voxman, interview by author, 21 April 1994, Iowa City, IA.
11. [^](#)Himie Voxman interview by James Beilman, Iowa City, IA, 20 January 1977, tape and transcript in the hands of David Nelson, Director of the University of Iowa School of Music, 7.
12. [^](#)Ibid.
13. [^](#)Lauren T. Johnson, “History of the State University of Iowa: Musical Activity, 1916 – 1944” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1944), 2; and Voxman, interview by James Beilman, 6.
14. [^](#)Voxman, interview by James Beilman, 10 – 11.
15. [^](#)Daniel H. Culver, “A History of The University of Iowa Symphony Orchestra” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1978), 69.; and “Engineer, Psychologist, Head of U. of I. School of Music,” *Des Moines Sunday Register*, 8 March 1970, 2-T.
16. [^](#)Ellen Buchanan, “One of a Kind: Himie Voxman,” Iowa City, IA, Public Library, video cassette, 1993; and Culver, “Iowa Symphony Orchestra,” 68 – 69.
17. [^](#)William F. Bunch, “An Evaluation of the Ph.D. Curriculum in Music at The University of Iowa from 1931 to 1967 Through an Analysis of the Opinions of Its Doctoral Graduates” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1969), 5.

18. [^](#)Ibid.

19. [^](#)William Gower and Himie Voxman, *Modern Clarinet Method* (Kansas City, MO: Jenkins Music Company, 1938). “Romanza” and “Polacca” are two different movements in the Weber concerto. Voxman’s arrangement has the title “Romanza and Polacca.”

20. [^](#)Klosé, *Méthode pour servir*; Henry Lazarus, *Lazarus’ New and Modern Method for the Clarinet, Boehm and Ordinary System*, revised by Gustave Langenus (Boston: Cundy Bettoney Co. 1926); and Joseph Jean-Baptiste Laurent Arban, *Grande méthode complete pour cornet à pistons et de saxhorn* (Paris, 1864). Numerous publishers have brought out the Arban method in various editions for brass instruments in both treble and bass clef.

21. [^](#)Gerald R. Prescott, *Prescott Technic System Outline* (New York: Carl Fischer, Inc., 1936). Prescott published this for Arban, Klosé, and Paul Deville, *Universal Method for Saxophone* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1908).

22. [^](#)Christian Heinrich Hohmann, *Praktische Violin-Schule* (Nuremburg, Germany, 1849): 1939, ff; and Himie Voxman and William Gower, *Advanced Method*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Rubank, 1939). Hohmann (1811 – 1861) was a German composer and teacher. The Voxman and Gower books were [are] for various wind instruments.

23. [^](#)Shirley Strohm Mullins, “The Voxman Method,” *The Instrumentalist* 47 (June 1993): 19; and Voxman interview, 27 January 1994, Iowa City, IA. Mullins completed the B.A. in 1957 and the M.A. in 1958 in cello performance and music education at the University of Iowa. She teaches orchestra and strings at Yellow Springs High School in Yellow Springs, Ohio. *RISM*, a publication project sponsored jointly by the International Musicological Society and the International Association of Music Libraries, catalogues pre-1800 manuscript and printed music and writings about music submitted by libraries from throughout the world. Voxman spent time at the central collection in Kassel, Germany perusing catalogues, and subsequently traveling to the respective countries in search of appropriate music for forthcoming publications.

24. [^](#)Himie Voxman, *Selected Studies* (Miami: Rubank, 1952); *News*, The University of Iowa Arts Center Relations, 13 December 1991; and Voxman interview, 21 April 1994. *Selected Studies* contains advanced etudes, scales, and arpeggios in all major and minor keys for various wind instruments.

25. [^](#)Joseph Messenger and Charles West, “Paying Tribute to a Unique Master-Teacher,” *ClariNetwork* 6 (December 1987): 4; James Messenger, telephone interview by author,

28 March 1994, Ames IA; Mark Kelly, telephone interview by author, Bowling Green, OH, 8 March 1994; Donald McGinnis, telephone interview by author, 23 February 1994, Columbus, OH; Eugene Rousseau, telephone interview by author, 28 March 1994, Bloomington, IN. Messenger, M.A., 1968, and D.M.A., 1971, in clarinet performance, is Professor of Clarinet at Iowa State University. West, D.M.A., 1975, in clarinet performance, is Professor of Clarinet at Virginia Commonwealth University. Kelly, B.A. in music education, 1950, M.A. in clarinet performance, 1952, is Director of Bands at Bowling Green State University. McGinnis, M.A., 1946 in theory-composition, Ph.D., 1953 in music education and theory-composition, is Retired Director of Bands at Ohio State University. Rousseau, Ph.D., 1962 in music literature and performance in clarinet is Distinguished Professor of Music and teaches saxophone at Indiana University.

About the Author

Bruce Gleason, Associate Professor at the University of St. Thomas, holds a B.A. in music from Crown College, B.S. and M.A. in music education from the University of Minnesota, and a Ph.D. in music education from the University of Iowa. Teaching undergraduate courses in music history and graduate courses in music education history, foundations and research, he also advises graduate research and at the time of this writing has advised 95 M.A. theses to completion. His research on military band history has appeared in the *Galpin Society Journal*; *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*; *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*; *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*; *Journal of the Military Music Society*; *Journal of the World Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles*; *Irish American Post*; *Journal of Band Research*; *Military Heritage*; *North and South, the Official Magazine of the Civil War Society*; *Military Collector & Historian*, *Journal of the Company of Military Historians*; *Renaissance*; *Piping Times*; *Historic Brass Society Journal*; *BDGGuide*; *National Guard*; and *Winds, the Journal of the British Association of Symphonic Bands and Wind Ensembles*. In 2013, *the Encyclopedia of Military Science* (Sage, ed. G. Kurt Piehler) will be published with Gleason's article, "Bands and Music." As an active performer, he plays euphonium and trombone with several Twin Cities ensembles and is the senior choir director at Diamond Lake Lutheran Church and the Artistic Director of the Owatonna Community Orchestra. Gleason is the founding editor of *Research and Issues in Music Education*.