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Notes from the Editor

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A main element guiding conversations in last spring's University of St. Thomas undergraduate *Music of the U.S.: Oral and Written Traditions* course was Alan Merriam's functions of music as he delineated them in [The Anthropology of Music](#). While I was introduced to Merriam's work as a graduate student, I have long thought that this information would be a great component of undergraduate education, and I was pleased to find that students engaging with these ideas before embarking on their careers resulted in thoughtful discussions. As the class moved through the Sacred Harp, Mahalia Jackson, J.D. Sumner and the Blackwood Brothers, Sonny Terry, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, Pete Seeger, Scott Joplin, Glen Miller, George Gershwin, John Philip Sousa, Patsy Cline, Leonard Bernstein, Samuel Barber, Amy Beach, Aaron Copland, Esperanza Spalding, F. Melius Christiansen, Samuel Wesley, Quincy Jones, etc., and etc., we asked ourselves, "how does this tradition/performer/genre fit with what Merriam was writing almost fifty years ago, and do the concepts still hold? How does 'our' music hold up within a structure that Merriam intended to be broad and non-Eurocentric?" Examining a host of musical examples with the aforementioned ones being only a snippet, we engaged Merriam, and discussed the functions of:

- Emotional expression
- Aesthetic enjoyment
- Entertainment
- Communication
- Symbolic representation
- Physical response
- Enforcing conformity to social norms
- Validation of social institutions and religious rituals
- Contribution to the continuity and stability of culture
- Contribution to the integration of society

With the idea that music plays similar roles across cultures, and that current society seems to be increasingly aware of cultural distinctions and differences—and similarities—we concurred that studying Merriam is perhaps now more important than ever. We also discussed the idea that functions could differ for the same piece of music depending on whose view of the music we were taking—the performers', listeners', dancers', or composers'.

As the editorial board presents the ninth issue of *Research and Issues in Music Education*, I'm reminded that teaching and learning have been going on for a very long time, and that there are all kinds of ways to undertake these tasks with new ways of teaching being constantly developed—but that the musical functions with which Merriam challenged us remain as true now as they did when he published them in 1964. An examination of the variety of this issue's topics indicates that student, teacher, composer, conductor, professor and audience member all have much at stake as we continue to support the notion that music is good for the human soul. This issue of RIME is dedicated to Alan Merriam and to all who think likewise.

Alan Merriam, [The Anthropology of Music](#) (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 220 – 227.

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