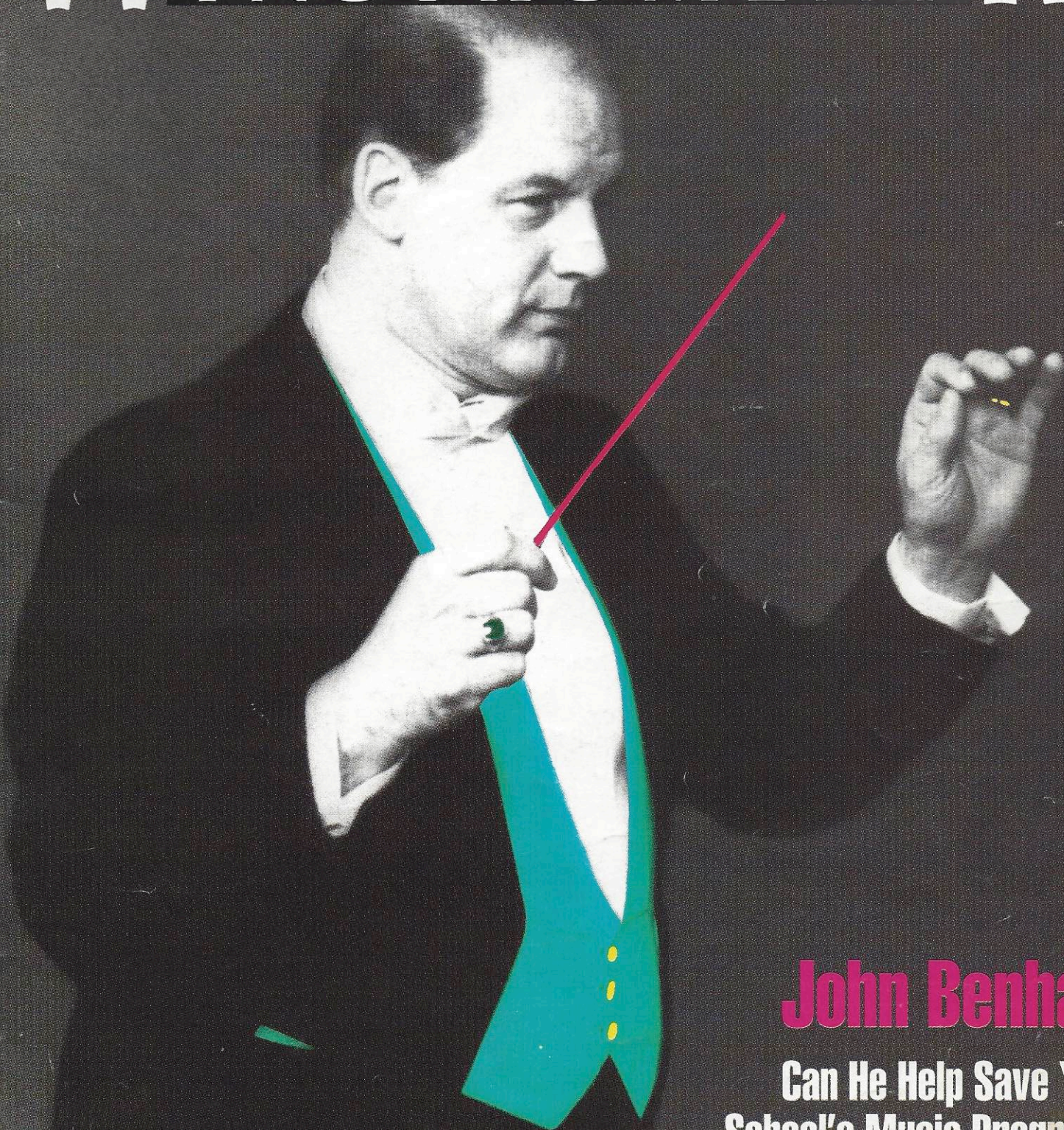


WIND RETAILER

INSTRUMENT



John Benham

**Can He Help Save Your
School's Music Program?**

Dr. John Benham, the on-the-spot firefighter against school music program budget flameouts: "Massachusetts, Nebraska, Colorado, California, Utah, Arizona and Kansas all have major tax proposals before their voters" which may result in school music program cuts. "If these various tax proposals get defeated, it's going to be a busy year."

By Lawrence Henry

Call him a Minuteman, call him the Lone Ranger, call him music education's equivalent of Red Adair, the famous oil field fire fighter. Whatever you call him, Dr. John Benham, peripatetic warrior against school music program budget cuts, has saved music retailers one heck of a lot of business.

And he continues to save music monies as he crisscrosses the country on behalf of music teachers, school districts, parents and music dealers. How? He's got a plan and a program, based around a concept called "reverse economics," that works—even, perhaps especially, in budget crunch times.

Benham, himself a school board member in his home community, Mounds View, MN, a music educator, and former music retailer, estimates that he has saved about \$1 million in school music funds in the Twin Cities in recent years. "And each of those dollars converts roughly to \$1.50 to \$2.00 a year in instrument sales," Benham says.

In Minneapolis and St. Paul, as in most dollar-pinched school districts around the country, the proposed cuts Benham and his partisans managed to reverse "were almost entirely in elementary music," Benham says. The music teachers who stood to lose their jobs "would be starting several hundred students a year, all of whom would be buying or renting musical instruments."

Music dealers are all too familiar with that kind of budgetary axe, with its rationale, and with its long-term effects.

"A lot of people will say, yeah, but we're just going to cut out elementary music," Benham explains. "That's where they usually start. What they don't understand, and what our research shows in the 17 states that I've worked in, is when elementary music is cut, secondary music enrollment has dropped by a minimum of 60 percent."

Woody Hoiseth, past president of the Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA) and past divisional president for the north central division of the National Educators Music Conference (NEMC), is music supervisor of the Osseo, MN school district, and a long-time associate of Benham.

Hoiseth considers Benham's assertion of a 60 percent enrollment drop in junior and senior high school music

conservative. "I can believe that," he says. "That figure is accurate, if it's not even worse than that."

Hoiseth also agrees with Benham's translation of every saved music education dollar into \$1.50 to \$2.00 worth of musical instrument sales or rentals. "He's been in that business," Hoiseth says. "He ought to know."

Fortunately, as a direct result of Benham's efforts to educate school administrators, school boards and parents about the effects of "reverse economics," as he calls it, much of that short-sighted budgeteering has been reversed. Benham's work has taken him to 17 states as an in-person consultant, and to as many more through the instructions in his self-published book, "How To Save Your Music Program—A Handbook For The Music Advocate."

Benham's "reverse economics" argument, which is the strategy he uses to convince school districts not to cut music programs, runs like this. Cutting music looks like an easy way to save teacher salaries—for most school districts, salaries are the major portion of their expenses. But enrollment in music classes outnumbers academic sessions by three to one: 75-90 students in a band, orchestra or choir; 25-30 in a class. And the kids in suddenly dissolved musical ensembles "don't just evaporate," as Woody Hoiseth puts it. They have to be handled by other teachers—three times as many teachers, in fact, as were required to handle the kids in musical ensembles. In the long run, that costs money, it doesn't save it.

"In one case," Benham recalls, "the district was going to cut 70 percent of the music program. We went in and showed them that instead of saving the \$100,000. they thought, it would only save them \$1,200. The second year, it would cost them \$100,000., and the third year, it would cost them \$200,000."

The money argument works where the aesthetic argument just doesn't cut the mustard. In fact, administrators tend to pick it up and use it themselves, it suits their purposes so well.

Hoiseth recalls one principal, whose ear he had already bent, countering a proposed music budget cut at a school board meeting by saying, "That's reverse economics." Hoiseth laughs. "He went through and explained the whole thing. I didn't have to."

It isn't, however, a simple job. In fact, preventing school music program cuts requires vigilance, expertise, and considerable organization.

Even in the successful fight mentioned above, Benham says, "We would still have lost that case if there hadn't been 500-600 music parents sitting in that auditorium. Because when it comes right down to push and shove, it's your neighbors you have to live with." Those well-organized parents were the school board members' neighbors.

Benham's career as a music program fighter began nearly 10 years ago. And a music retailer, the 20-store giant Schmitt Music of Minneapolis, provided important early support.

"It was strictly an accident, if anything can ever be considered an accident," Benham recalls. "We had moved to

Mounds View in August of 1981. The first week in September, there was a referendum, a levy in support of the schools. It was voted down. Music was already on the list of cuts, should the referendum fail."

Luckily, school music directors in the Mounds View district had already been organized for 10 years. "They had been maintaining all the right statistics," Benham says—a very important factor.

Teachers and parents organized to save Mounds View music programs, and Benham was appointed to head the committee those parents and teachers formed.


"I knew there had to be an answer here somewhere," Benham says. "I knew we were not going to save the program based on philosophy. It was a financial decision."

When the committee pulled together class enrollment statistics, the whole picture of music program cost savings came clear. It was then—and is still, for many districts—unusual to look at individual programs. Most districts simply work with the student-teacher ratio in

an entire school or district, and make their budget calculations accordingly.

"So we made a 14-page proposal—that's section number one in my book—and showed the school district how much they stood to lose," Benham re-

"When I introduce myself to a group of parents, I tell them that I'm a person who has been hired to incite a political riot. I have to take people who are beaten down, and have given up, and show them that they can win."



members. "The school board just came unglued. Because as far as they were concerned, the wool had been pulled over their eyes. The administrators had not stopped to consider individual programs. They had only considered ev-

erything averaged together. So the school board reversed the decision."

Benham and Hoiseth met at about that time. Soon after the successful fight at Mounds View, "with the help of Schmitt Music, we put on a music town meeting at my high school, Park Center High School," Hoiseth recalls. "We had about 150 people from around the state"—music educators, parents, members of music associations. "John was one of the speakers."

Benham spoke the next year as well, at "Town Meeting II," which had grown so much it had to be held in a downtown Minneapolis hotel. "A number of school districts contacted John afterwards for help," Hoiseth recalls. After that, "He got on our national conference program in Indiana, and he had a full house. He had finished his book at that time, and he contracted with a number of districts throughout the country to help them."

Schmitt Music sponsored a number of Benham's early consulting trips. "Because of geography" (20 stores in six states) "we were the first dealer that

Seven Steps to Help Save School Music Programs

What can music dealers do to help save threatened school music programs? Before action comes awareness, one educator emphasizes. "If you wait till the music budget cut is actually proposed," he says, "it's probably already too late."

1. Provide statistical and informational support help for your local music teachers. "If I were a music dealer," Benham says. "I'd have on my computer a list of music enrollments by grade level in every district I serve." This information translates into the essential ammunition for arguing "reverse economics" in front of a school board: The point you want to prove is that music teachers handle more children at lower cost than conventional classroom teachers. Benham admits that "The teachers should be doing that themselves, but quite honestly they don't. They're too busy." And quite often, he says, the first notice a music teacher gets of a program cut is his or her own pink slip.

2. Pull together all music educators, not just band leaders. Benham points out that, in many schools, band leaders and choir leaders don't talk to each other. Yamaha's Mike Bennett, also president of NABIM, says the problem is worse than that. "Sometimes there's even a mistrust between orchestra people and band people, much less choral people and general music people," Bennett says. "It all has to be one. You can't be divided. It's too easy to chip away" at an effort to save school music. It's a grassroots effort, Bennett says. "I don't believe for a minute that too much can be mandated at the national level. It has to come from the bottom up."

3. Help teachers and parents set up and maintain local music booster clubs. A music retailer can handle the club's mailing list, for example, and offer a regular monthly meeting space.

4. Talk to instrument manufacturers, and to your state retailers associations about extending booster clubs statewide. Statewide booster clubs can establish crisis intervention teams and information libraries to help school districts threatened with music program cuts. Benham notes ruefully that the Music Educators National Conference simply doesn't do this, though perhaps it should.

5. Stay on top of the political situation. "We know right now, for example, that the Massachusetts, Nebraska, Colorado, California, Utah, Arizona and Kansas all have major tax proposals before their voters," Benham points out. "If those tax proposals get a negative response from the public, you won't be dumping tea in the ocean, you'll be dumping music programs."

6. Get people elected on school boards who are music supporters. Benham himself provides the prime example. He has served as an elected school board representative for two years in Mound's View, MN, his home district. Although he is widely known as a supporter of music programs, obviously, he is also "seen as totally supporting the district." Music interests and school board interests are not in conflict. Music saves money.

7. "Be aware that there's help available," Benham says. "And be aware that there's a way to solve the problem." Curt Karls, vice president and instrument division manager of 20-store midwest giant Schmitt Music puts the proposition more forcefully. "Call John Benham," Karls says. Schmitt has funded Benham in a number of successful fights against music program cuts.

"To talk about the value of music—right brain-left brain, the kinds of things that educators talk about—doesn't always register with a school board when they're confronting budget problems," Karls says. "John comes in in a more matter of fact way. He says, look guys, you think you're saving money. But let me show you what's really going to happen if you drop this program.

"That final connection that he makes, that's the key. Most people don't think about it. You end up with more classroom teachers handling the same student load."

got involved with him," explains Curt Karls, Schmitt vice president and instrument division manager.

"His own home district came first," Karls says. "And he was very effective. Then as these other districts came up with the same problem, we'd call him, and do what we could to save these programs. For me, I'd say it's been very successful. And I think he would be successful in any way that he worked on it. He has a wonderful background. He's been in the music business at all levels. He's a member of a school board. He speaks to all those constituencies in terms that they understand."

Benham's reputation has continued to grow. Mike Bennett, general manager of Yamaha's band and orchestral division in Grand Rapids, MI, "got John to be our featured speaker at the NABIM breakfast in Anaheim, CA last January." Bennett is also president of NABIM, the National Association of Band Instrument Manufacturers. "John really made a good presentation. He gave the dealers in attendance some excellent information to use in combating music programs that were being washed out because of funding problems.

"As a result, we've got John scheduled to do the upcoming NABIM breakfast in Anaheim in January. Then the next day he's going to be a featured speaker at the National Association of School Music Dealers convention in Scottsdale, AZ."

The Benham arguments and the Benham strategy can, no doubt, work without Dr. John Benham. Benham himself is more than willing to supply copies of his book, and consultations over the phone, to school districts, parents, local booster clubs, or dealer associations.

But there's also no doubt there's something special about him.

"When I've been with him," Woody Hoiseth says, "there have been some people in the room who had some doubts. By the time we left, they seemed to understand him pretty thoroughly.

Is there anybody else who can do what he does?

"I haven't seen anybody," Hoiseth says. "He's unique."

And make no mistake, charisma and expertise count. Anybody who's dealt with the bureaucracy of local govern-

ment, and of school districts, can attest to that.

Benham acknowledges that the job is just plain tough.

"One must persevere," he says. "This is a way in which an outside consultant can be very, very important. When I introduce myself to a group of parents, I tell them that I'm a person who has been hired to incite a political riot. Now, those are strong words. But I have to take people who are beaten down, and have given up, and show them that they

can win. And I can come up with the questions that scare people."

To order a copy of John Benham's 79-page workbook titled "How To Save Your School Music Program—A Handbook For The Music Advocate" write to: Dr. John Benham, Music and World Cultures, Inc., 1507 Knoll Dr., Shoreview, MN 55126. Enclose \$10.95 per book. For more information, telephone Dr. Benham at (612) 783-0902.

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HOW DO WE PAY FOR THIS SERVICE?

Dr. John Benham saves music retailers money—an estimated \$1.50 to 2.00 for every dollar saved in school music programs saved from extinction by his efforts. That translates to millions of dollars in sales nationwide, an amount that grows every year as local school budgets get tighter and tighter.

In big business, a consultant like John Benham would earn big bucks. But Benham is working in the educational establishment, and in the musical instrument business. He's been paid—when he's been paid—by music booster clubs, parents' organizations, and music stores. In fact, he has to struggle to divide his time between the cause of music education programs and the need to support himself and his family. He currently works as a music minister in a local church, a full-time job. "And they're always asking me, 'Where are you going now?'" when a music program consulting trip comes up. "The time comes when you have to make a decision."

"The biggest problem is just getting him in front of the public," says long-time friend and colleague Woody Hoiseth, musical director of the Osseo, MN, school system.

Mike Bennett, general manager of Yamaha's band and orchestral division, and president of NABIM, has also known Benham for years. Bennett acknowledges ruefully that "I haven't discovered exactly what the right answer is" to funding an advocate like Benham.

"I worked with John in submitting a proposal to the NAMM people. That proposal was refused." Benham acknowledges that his proposal was perhaps too big. Bennett is currently talking with Karl Bruhn, NAMM's marketing director, and John Mahlmann, executive director of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) to "try to figure out a way for some materials to be produced. Perhaps some videotapes of John's presentation, as well as some support material. I'd like to think that they'd be made available through MENC or NAMM."

Bennett points out that "there is a wealth of material in the MENC catalog. There's some great stuff. Unfortunately, not very many people are aware of it. And a lot of it speaks directly to this whole issue of support for school music programs."

Benham himself thinks that some music organization or other should be a ready source for crisis intervention teams, or at the very least for training materials in the "reverse economics" technique of fighting school music budget cuts.

"He's a wonderful music industry resource," offers Paul Heid of Heid Music, Appleton, WI, and president of the National Association of School Music Dealers (NASMD). "How we can best use that resource is something that nobody has really answered yet. Funding [John Benham] is something that probably should be done. I hope we're smart enough to get it done before we're looking back and saying it's something we wish we would have done."