

SOCIETY

Testing Young Artists

"The Art of Assessment" by Janet Waanders, in *Design for Arts in Education* (Sept.-Oct. 1986), 4000 Albemarle St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016.

What makes the *Mona Lisa* a masterpiece, and those clowns on velvet an aesthetic embarrassment? As with other fields of endeavor, formal standards for assessing the arts—dance, music, theater, visual arts, writing—do exist. Yet, says Waanders, an Educational Testing Service examiner, students in such fields too often get no more from their teachers than "inarticulate grunts or unexplained grades."

There *are* standard tests, such as the Advanced Placement tests. They rank high school pupils in terms of knowledge and performance, via "free response" essays and multiple choice questions. The Music Listening and Literature Examination might show a piece of composition like this:



Among the questions: Whether the music is "from a (A) double concerto (B) concertino (C) concerto grosso (D) solo concerto," and whether the composer is "(A) Bach (B) Mozart (C) Beethoven (D) Schumann."* Yet such tests yield only numerical grades; student strengths and failings are not assessed. And only top students take Advanced Placement tests.

Waanders proposes "instruction-based" assessment. For example, computerized "adaptive tests," in which questions become increasingly difficult or easy depending on how preceding questions are answered, could show individual ability. An adaptive music test might "ask a student first to identify simple intervals, then to make more difficult discriminations, as between fourths and fifths, heard in different ranges, heard as played by different instruments," etc. "Very quickly both student and teacher could learn the student's level of mastery" and determine what "listening practice will be an appropriate next step."

This is like teaching. But blurring the line "between teaching and testing," says Waanders, would "take the mystery out of evaluation."

[*Answers: (A) and (B). The music: The start of Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp, K. 299.]

Trials and Errors

"Science Takes the Stand" by Edward J. Imwinkelried, in *The Sciences* (Nov.-Dec. 1986), New York Academy of Sciences, 2 East 63rd St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

"Expert witnesses" have long appeared in court. Indeed, since the 19th century, physicians have often opined on the exact use of firearms in gunshot cases. Imwinkelried, a law professor at the University of California, Davis, worries that such testimony is now all too common.

Today, most major civil trials hinge on the word of specialists, from accountants to zoologists. In criminal cases, technical evidence is often