

WHY MUSIC? WHY BAND?

by Tim Lautzenheiser

Below is a chapter written for the Teaching Music Through Performance in Band series by Tim Lautzenheiser, published by GIA Publications. While it is directed (specifically) to the band idiom, the essence of the message is applicable for ALL music/arts areas.

Author's note:

After three decades of traveling across this nation and around the world visiting music rehearsal rooms, speaking at music conventions, presenting in-service workshops to music teachers, and enjoying the chance to work with our finest public and private school students, it is clear today's young musicians have a distinct advantage over non-music students as they enthusiastically complete their elementary, middle, and high school careers at the top of their class roster, then they predictably head full speed to their college-of-choice. They truly are destined to be "the leaders of tomorrow." WHY?

- What gives these children an advantage?
- What do they have the non-music students don't have?
- Why are music students recruited with such intensity by every profession?
- Are they different or does learning music make them different?

We are on the cutting edge of breakthrough mind-research concerning "how the brain works." With the improvement of technology we can now watch the mind creating an endless (and infinite) network of dendrites (maps-of-learning) as the neurons continuously fire establishing an ever-growing structure supporting the learning process. It is believed music learning activates various areas of the brain and synchronizes the mind for learning at a fast pace while stretching the memory to a higher level of retention. Music enhances cognitive learning and facilitates growth in many areas of human development, i.e., motivation, social skills, time management, situational awareness, aesthetic appreciation, etc. As we learn more about the integration of emotional intelligence and cognitive learning patterns, it is ever apparent the study of music has a direct relationship to the measured success of the individual/student via reasoning, creative thinking, decision-making, and problem solving.

The following chapter is dedicated to the non-musical benefits of music study, however let me quickly add, the reason to LEARN MUSIC is to MAKE MUSIC. Music touches a part of our psyche that helps us regulate our lives. Music helps us understand and express our moods and attitudes. Music helps us reorganize our thoughts and feelings while keeping us on track. Music allows us to respond appropriately in social structure that is often confusing and complex. THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR MUSIC; MUSIC FOR THE SAKE OF MUSIC.

This essay does not suggest the reason for music education is to bolster math grades, or increase S.A.T. scores. However it is clear these are important educational benefits to parents who are making choices about their child's participation in music. The following pages are designed so you can share this compelling information with parents and decision-makers. It will not make your band play better in tune or offer a suggested program of outstanding repertoire; however it will open many eyes to convincing data in support of music for every child (the "musicians of tomorrow") as you introduce them to art and the joy of music making today.

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.

- Pablo Picasso, 1881 - 1973

WHY MUSIC? WHY BAND?

"Music for the sake of music." Any responsible music educator will emphatically echo this important mantra; it is the keystone theme that serves as the foundation of music teaching, music learning, and music performance. There is no substitute or replacement for music making as it relates to the positive growth and development of the human mind, body, and spirit. Participation in band avails the musician to the infinite journey of creative expression connecting to a language (music) that is understood, communicated, and appreciated by all of mankind around the globe. More importantly, MUSIC IS A PLACE FOR EVERYONE.

Rightfully so, the emphasis of most music educators is the teaching-of-music. The young men and women who find their way to our rehearsal rooms are the focus of our daily teaching efforts and energies. The mission is to teach the mastery of musical skills so our students can access quality music and experience the joy of an ever-evolving sense of aesthetic expression. The intrinsic value of this musical blueprint is priceless, and every musician will attest to the immeasurable benefits of making music. The music culture adamantly agrees on the importance of music; it is a fundamental need of life.

Granted this philosophical perspective is very convincing, especially to those who have been involved in some aspect of music. In fact it is inconceivable to musicians that music education is not considered a core subject in every school curriculum, and for EVERY child. Unfortunately this is NOT the case, therefore if we want the students-of-today to become the music-makers of tomorrow; the responsibility of "sharing the good news about the importance of arts education in our schools" must be embraced with a serious commitment accompanied by a diligent follow-through. We no longer can teach only the "interested students;" we must plant the seeds-of-interest and personally escort the students to the gateway of their musical future.

WHO ARE THE STUDENTS WHO STUDY MUSIC?

- We know the majority (over 85%) of music literates LEARN music in the school setting, whether through general music classes, choir, orchestra, and/or band. It is apparent if students are not part of the school music program, there is little (if any) chance they will seek to develop their musical skills outside the school setting.
- Many traditional recruitment programs do not offer multiple opportunities to "join the band." Although most music educators are eager-and-willing to accommodate any student who demonstrates an interest in being a part of the ensemble, the bulk of the students come into the program during the "beginner sign-up" event. One out of six possible candidates opts to become involved in band, orchestra, or choir. Shouldn't we ask ourselves, "What about the other five?"
- Over half of the students who enroll in a beginning music program during the middle school (junior high) years do not participate during their high school careers. For various reasons, they opt to drop their study of music within the first two years. Why? Are the parents privy to the negative effects this choice will have on their child's future?
- Most parents have little if any knowledge about the POSITIVE BENEFITS OF MUSIC-LEARNING. The compelling research generated over the last two decades has not (for the most part) made its way to the general public. While the music advocacy data is powerfully convincing, it certainly is not common knowledge.

Suffice to say there are many potential music students who, for one reason or another, have inadvertently missed the window-of-opportunity, and therefore they will (most likely) never have the chance to participate in a music ensemble.

Unlike teachers of other academic subjects, music educators must recruit (and retain) their students/musicians. With the evolution of everything from extended sports teams to advanced placement classes, the growing list of before, after, and during school time commitments amplifies the importance of choosing which organization/s will become an integral part of the student's school culture. Such a decision must be approached with the knowledge and awareness of the impact it will have on the creation and nurturing of personal success habits of the individual. What stands to be gained as a result of the investment of time and energy? WHY MUSIC? WHY BAND?

Do parents (and students) understand the "indirect" benefits of music learning? Do we highlight the potent character building disciplines as part of the reason to be involved in band? Shouldn't we tout the fact there is more to this music making than the intrinsic musical rewards? Unquestionably, MUSIC FOR THE SAKE OF MUSIC is primary, but can we afford to stop there? Many argue we could dilute the value of music education by focusing on the by-product rewards stemming from the group activity perspective; teamwork skills, self-discipline, healthy self-esteem, personal confidence, learning to reach short and long term goals, etc. This is a valid consideration, particularly from the

educated/literate musician's standpoint. We know music itself is the driving force, the ultimate payoff; however does this mean we should ignore the obvious data that quickly gets the attention of the non-musician parent? We cannot "teach young people musical skills" if they aren't in our rehearsal halls and music classrooms, therefore perhaps we will best serve ALL students by widening the spotlight of known life-advantages enjoyed by musicians.

Parents must know there's far more to band than buying an instrument, taking private lessons, adding music class to the school schedule, and rehearsing for a concert. Being a musician maps the human mind for success; success in all avenues of life. The learned skills needed to excel in music are transferable to every academic subject. Playing a musical instrument creates a multi-dimensional template-of-quality adaptable (and applicable) to every personal and professional challenges.

Through music learning we teach:

- An understanding of QUALITY as well as the rewards of QUANTITY.
- Behavior based on ETHICS as well as the importance of obeying the RULES.
- Respect for AUTHORITY as opposed to fear of DOMINATION.
- A working WISDOM as well as a solid transcript of ACHIEVEMENT.
- An ongoing development of INNER PEACE as well as a workable plan for personal SECURITY.

QUALITY – QUANTITY

Our educational system is heavily focused on assessment/testing. We measure the success and/or failure of the learning process through a series of evaluations. Clearly there has to be a scale to review, benchmark, and monitor the teaching process; it's the way we determine LEARNING. All-too-often the numerical outcome becomes an end within itself and it tells us very little about the pragmatic value of the class material. Shouldn't we be more concerned how this "subject matter" is relevant? We must ask, "Can the 'quantitative results' be integrated into the student's lives to promote better living, learning, and being?"

Music, by nature, triggers both the cognitive and affective mind. Not only does the young artists experience the input of facts and figures, but he/she simultaneously develops an appreciation for art. We don't make music to get to the end of the musical composition; we make music to make music. The personal reward is not the final evaluation (as in a quantity-driven curriculum), but rather the intrinsic satisfaction generated as a result of MUSIC-MAKING. Music teaches an appreciation for QUALITY as well as an understanding of QUANTITY.

ETHICS – RULES

For the survival of mankind and the perpetuation of our communal form of living we must have RULES to ensure the welfare of the community members. For the safety of the drivers on our highways, we have speed limit RULES, and if these restrictions are not properly observed a penalty is assigned to the violator. Society protects itself with guardians (law enforcement), spokespersons (attorneys), interpreters (judges, juries) to guarantee we live in harmony while still enjoying freedom-of-choice. Although it is altruistic, it is feasible there could be a society absent of rules if each individual believed, practiced, and lived an agreed code of ethics. In principle, the members of the group/community/BAND would be responsible for his/her behavior as it related to the welfare of the community/BAND; the responsibility for "harmony, balance, and blend" then falls on the shoulders of the individual rather than a policing agent. The choice for "doing what is right" is based on ethical understanding rather than the fear of admonishment.

The band culture (by design, by nature) requires each musician to behave in an ETHICAL fashion. While there are certainly rules-and-regulations, the very fundamental structure of program excellence is based on the individual self-discipline contributed to achieve the group's goals. These are the character values we seek in every leadership role: BAND is shaping the lives of our "leaders of tomorrow" through the ethical habits they establish each day in the rehearsal setting.

AUTHORITY – DOMINATION

We often muse about "the podium" being one of the last bastions of a unilateral leadership position. Yet we know a social order cannot move forward without efficient and effective decision-making. Band members quickly learn to focus on the band director's thoughts, instructions, and suggestions; the welfare/success of the band is (figuratively and literally) in the hands of the band director. Unlike many organizations where a committee reviews every choice, the band world (accustomed to a fast-paced schedule of practices and performances) requires a LEADER/DIRECTOR who will make-the-call and move forward accordingly. Band members do not have time to argue or discuss the band director's choice/s. Quite the contrary, they have learned to embrace and support the power of the authority-figure and trust the director's decisions will be in the best interest of the group. Healthy, happy societies are not solely based on the individual opinions of the members, but rather on the mutual understanding of the importance of UNITY and the willingness to make personal sacrifices and contributions (time, effort, energy) to the agreed mission. The power base of the leader (the authority, the band director) is supported by the cooperative contributions of the followers (the band members). When the "respect for AUTHORITY" overrides the "fear of DOMINATION," it establishes a positive atmosphere that opens the unlimited possibilities of the group's synergistic potential; it is virtually unlimited.

Domination, by intent, discourages creative thinking. The emphasis is on obedience (often "blind obedience") that supports the choices of the leader. As opposed to encouraging "creative thinking," the environment of domination dictates "what to think" rather than "how to think." It rewards compliance (agreement and conformity) without the consideration for the welfare of the followers. Authority, on the other hand, encourages creative thinking while focusing on the importance of cooperation and the ability of the members to "agree to disagree" while still moving forward to sustain and promote the group's agenda.

WISDOM – ACHIEVEMENT

Our educational community continues to increase the testing component as an end-all for knowledge comprehension. The subtle implication is, "If it cannot be assessed, it not worthy of academic consideration." Of what value is all this rigorous data-exchange if it is not applicable to the individual's life? Now there is research indicating we can only remember and access the information we reinforce in our daily habits. Content (information) without context (an understanding of the benefits) is a dead-end street. The value of learning is not WHAT we know, but WHAT WE CAN DO with what we know. Memorizing a long list of anything for the mere purpose of passing the test is an exercise in memorization, nothing more. Information recall is not the key to MASTERY; being able to see the RELEVANT-VALUE of the information is the key, AND it should be the focal point of the educational process. If we are only going to credit the value of higher test scores, we're doomed to be a world of facts and figures. Certainly the quantitative aspect of LEARNING is crucial, however should we not be concerned about the qualitative value? Isn't this the very reason we choose to learn in the first place?

Being in the band deals with both achievement (a measurable set of disciplines and guidelines) and wisdom (learning that will support a positive, purposeful lifestyle). Band is one of the few areas of the school day that supports expression as well as impression. Music learning embraces all forms of cognitive learning and goes a step further by integrating the data into the human soul: EMOTION. Music reinforces the principles and ideals that have a significant and lasting effect on the way we choose to live. It teaches the ability to work with others, nourishes the love of learning, encourages cultural awareness, promotes cooperative flexibility in a communal climate, develops self-discipline, extends understanding, etc. All the while it does have standards and it can be assessed; there ARE testing evaluations that measure ACHIEVEMENT, and there IS solid testimony that evidences the WISDOM gained impacts the welfare of the learner. Simply put: band makes better human beings and makes human beings better.

INNER PEACE – SECURITY

We humans continue along the pathway of SECURING various things to promote personal happiness. Whether it is a new car, a college education, a house, a boat, a job, a title, or any other extrinsic reward; the chase (and the race) for

goal attainment is threaded into every aspect of the educational docket. When and where do we come to the point of personal satisfaction, the payoff, the joy of living life, and the very reason we choose to educate ourselves in the first place? Is success measured by what we have or who we are? Are we training students to "focus on high test scores," or teaching students to "enjoy a life filled with personal satisfaction?" These are serious questions, for they determine the learner's mind-maps. Is the student connected to the product (the grade at the end of the semester) or the process (the holistic experience of blending intelligence, aesthetics, and emotion)? It's not about "just knowing the right answers." It's about "using the right answers" for what they can yield as a reference to meeting the challenges of daily living.

Every individual must determine his/her personal criteria for happiness. Nobody can (nor should) dictate what brings pleasure and joy to the human spirit. Whether dealing with short term goals or long term goals, we often become so goal-driven we ignore or simply don't recognize the importance of enjoying the journey as we attain our given goals; the very reason for WHY WE EXIST. Band offers a new paradigm-of-learning. The music IS the reason, it IS the reward, it IS the substance, it IS the payoff. The means and the extremes are one-in-the-same. We do not play music to get to the end of it; we play it to make music. In fact if we are truly "connected to the process" we do not want the music to end, or the rehearsal to stop, or the concert to be finished. We acquire and develop a desire for expressing our inner thoughts and feelings through the music; we become artists and enjoy the highest form of personal satisfaction, CREATIVE EXPRESSION, the fundamental component of self-satisfaction.

WHY EDUCATION?

As the educational system continues to evolve we often become so focused on the HOW, it is easy to lose sight of the WHY. Let us stand back and take a careful look at the development of the entire school system to gain a clearer perspective of not only WHAT we are doing, but WHY we are doing it.

If the objective or purpose is to maximize the learning, we have to be boldly honest about what LEARNING has lasting value and what LEARNING is short-term and only for the sake of the test score. Are we more interested in producing students who are libraries of "commit-to-memory" information, or are we looking to develop well-adjusted students who are sensitive to those around them and interested in exploring their own human potential? Certainly there is a need for both these avenues of educational focus, however it seems we often sidestep the implementation of the learning in favor of MORE LEARNING. The value of knowledge is measured by the fulfillment it brings to the knower. Is it worthwhile? Is it "worth my while?"

We have many high achievers (straight-A students) in our schools who have missed-the-mark in correlating their KNOWLEDGE to personal happiness, social contributions, leadership skills, acceptance of others, desire to communicate with others, and the ability to adapt to all facets of society. Is this the goal? Shouldn't our curriculums be designed help the students open their hearts and minds to a life of ongoing LEARNING while clearly demonstrating the benefits of critical thinking, integrity, dignity, compassion, honesty, ethics, responsibility, fairness, and creative expression?

If there is a shred of reasoning in the above thoughts, then the discourse (WHY BAND? WHY MUSIC?) takes on new meaning. We often tend to answer these questions from an artistic position:

* Music lifts our spirits. * Music helps us share our inner thoughts and feelings with a vocabulary beyond the common word. * Music avails us to emotions we otherwise will suppress or ignore. * Music is a universal language. * Music makes life worth living by bringing joy to our soul. These are all well and good and a resounding "AMEN!" is extended by this author, however it is often difficult to express the importance of music making to someone who has never made music. The only way one can explain music is with music; it is a language unto itself. If we are to convince non-music makers about the importance of music learning, we may have to step off our podiums and put the recruitment spotlight on the extended human needs and essential human qualities: *Music has a direct impact on academic achievement. * Music creates a forum for healthy human exchange. * Music enhances perceptual-motor skills. * Music supports the qualities needed to survive and thrive in the modern day society. Music is NOT a frill subject or a fringe activity, but music-study is a microcosm of society bringing the requisite disciplines of success to the ensemble experience. Music learning for the sake of music; and music learning for the sake of life. What better way to prepare for a successful future?

Who should study music? Who should be in band?

Music is a place for everyone. Our traditional music programs have inadvertently promoted a false concept of "music is for the musically talented students." This elitist view has found its way to more people than we might expect. The study of music actually breaks down societal barriers from race to socioeconomic strata. Music often "reaches" the students who are struggling with their other academic studies. Advanced brain research continues to verify and confirm all brains are "wired for music." Eric Jensen, research author on brain-based learning, writes, "Music is part of our biological heritage and is hard-wired into our genes as a survival strategy." (Jensen, E. 2001, Arts with the Brain in Mind, p.15.)

Do parents, administrators, community leaders, and teachers of other disciplines understand (even know) this information? Are we (as music educators) sharing this extraordinary news with our educational partners? Music is NOT for the "chosen few," but music is for all those who want to pursue this exciting pathway of learning, and shouldn't that be everyone?

Why the study of music if my child isn't going to be a musician?

So many parents (at the point of registering a student for beginning band) do not understand the extended value of learning music. There's far more to this than investing in an instrument, scheduling lessons, driving to-and-from rehearsals, and/or attending concerts. The discipline of music making is transferable to every learning situation in and outside the academic community. We have pointed to music students as "the smartest and most responsible students in the school." We now understand it is really the study of music that puts them in this favorable posture alongside their non-musical counterparts. We must be cautious not to suggest "music makes you smarter," but we certainly can point to the overall accomplishments of the students of music and find a similar high level of achievement in both academic and non-academic arenas; this is NOT an accident or a coincidence. Arguably no other discipline in school can better prepare the mind and spirit for the challenges of, medical study, law school, classes in engineering, education/teaching, business college, etc. Ultimately, don't we want MUSIC to be a part of every person's life? From singing in the church choir to playing in the community band, music should not be relegated to the school environment, but music becomes our trusted friend-of-expression forever.

Framing the message for the welfare of the child.

What is the most important priority for all parents? THE FUTURE HAPPINESS OF THEIR CHILD! Mothers and fathers around the world dedicate their lives to creating an even better life for their children. In a highly competitive society they want to see their sons and daughters have every possible advantage in their educational climate, their chosen profession, and their selected community-of-living where, once again, the cycle will repeat itself with-and-for the next generation. The complexity of society's evolutionary standards (some favorable, some not) puts responsible parents "on alert" 24/7. What is the best use of their child's time and energy, both in the classroom and outside the classroom? Might I suggest the study of music is a cultural imperative fulfilling all the wants, needs, and wishes of every caring-sharing parent.

Instead of being overly cautious about emphasizing the "off the podium" benefits of music learning and music making, we might consider SHOUTING this news to every accountable parent, and to every administrator who seeks a better school environment, and to every student who wants to enjoy a life of happiness and success. This is not to replace or overshadow "music for the sake of music," but to reach out to all students so they can avail themselves to the

rewards of MUSIC. We know we have the most convincing recruitment information available to bring them to our rehearsal rooms: MUSIC CREATES SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE. The "learned outcome" of music study is a certain success blueprint. What parent could say NO once he/she understands the immeasurable value of music study?

WHY MUSIC? WHY BAND?

It might be more appropriate to ask: WHY NOT MUSIC? WHY NOT BAND? It is evident music education should be experienced by every student. We, as a culture, will be best served if the hearts and minds of our youth are filled with the knowledge and the understanding of MUSIC. The time has come, the time is now:

STRIKE UP THE BAND!