

WHY WE APPRECIATE MUSIC

The appreciation of music is ubiquitous. From the city of Des Moines through the market streets of Rawalpindi to the hustle-bustle in Lagos, we listen, play, dance, and even breathe notes. Perhaps it is seeking a bit much, the title of this short essay. The fact that it is enjoyed by most humans and (seemingly) a few non-human creatures always tugs at the curiosity: Why?

Music is unusually considered a complex engagement of humans amongst themselves and the surrounding environment. Like other forms of art, it manages to transcend cultural boundaries – race, economics, education etc. – through an accepted and celebrated appreciation of similarities and differences. Its most loyal practitioners have offered listeners an understanding that contains and can initiate a deeper level of existential integration (or disintegration) within the self and society. Not only does music provide its human practitioner an outlet for communicating creativity, it similarly provides the listener with a metaphysical room for exploration and reflection. And as such, though music transcends boundaries, it is inseparable from context: a work of music may mean little to a listener who pays no attention to the surrounding circumstance(s) of the artist.

For the cultures of past civilizations, music and dance were mostly inseparable. This practice which usually involved whole communities (or segments thereof) allowed for expression, healing, unity, and celebration. It provided one important tool for the continuity of tradition, the fabric of community. In today's world, there are concert halls, dance clubs, festival gardens, bars and the like. Not that the traditional use of music is obsolete, but, the expansive transformation of music becomes interesting when technology is considered. Anyone can create music today, as opposed to the past, because of technology's – supposed – equalization property. For instance, ever wondered about the benefits of amusia (true tone deafness) while exploring the music on...bebo?...myspace?

"Recently a number of reports have appeared that attest to the connection between music and academic achievement. In a study of the ability of fourteen year-old science students in seventeen countries, the top three countries were Hungary, the Netherlands, and Japan. All three include music throughout the curriculum from kindergarten through high school. In the 1960's, the Kodály system of music education was instituted in the schools of Hungary as a result of the outstanding academic achievement of children in its 'singing schools'. Today, there are no third graders who cannot sing on pitch and sing beautifully. In addition, the academic achievement of Hungarian students, especially in math and science, continues to be outstanding. The Netherlands began their music program in 1968, and Japan followed suit by learning from the experience of these other countries. Another report disclosed the fact that the foremost technical designers and engineers in Silicon Valley are almost all practicing musicians." (http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/arts/dickinson_music.htm, 2008)

The direct relationship between music education and academic accomplishment cannot be understated. Playing an instrument has known and documented benefits: increased attention span, ambidexterity, higher academic achievement, broader range of creativity and so on. So does listening: self-help with psychological and physiological problems, stress/tension release, and education/increased awareness; only to mention a few.

And so, why do we appreciate music? Most of us obviously enjoy it as it is in every corner of the globe. Should we turn to the sciences? There is ongoing research you know. It claims that music is deeply embedded in our nervous system: humans seem to possess a natural rhythm.

Well, then...just play me some music.

Reference List

Dickinson, Dee. *Music and the Mind* New Horizons' On the Beam 1993.

Accessed from http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/arts/dickinson_music.htm Sept. 2008

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