

# WHY MUSIC? WHY BAND?

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## 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.

## 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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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:

\* 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?

### **STRIKE UP THE BAND!**