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Tri-M/Encore Tours Scholarship 2016

Music is Universal

25 September 2016

United in Music

When I was young, my parents say I learned my alphabet through the song, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star,” just like every other child. When it came time to add the letters to the tune, I would often mix the letters up, or not remember what the next letter was at all. If I did forget a letter, I was still confident that I knew my alphabet, since I knew what “Twinkle Twinkle” sounded like. I would mutter nonsense letters to keep the beat going. I’d stomp around my house in diapers, yelling out lyrics that made no sense to the rest of the world, but to me, they sounded perfect.

Even though I hadn't quite learned my English alphabet, I *had* learned another language, a universal language: music.

In school, I was taught that the best way to learn about another culture was to listen to their music. In first grade, we learned African songs in the Swahili language. My sophomore year, my World Geography teacher often played different songs from around the world, the rich textures and different styles of music swirling around the classroom. I learned that each culture has their own distinct style. Through the music, I felt connected to a body of people that I knew I would more than likely never personally meet.

My interest in these different styles helped me to understand musical language. The musical alphabet is the same across the globe. While the term “A-flat” may be pronounced

differently--la bémol, la bemolle, la bemol, etc.-- it is notated the same way on the staff. A treble clef, a bass clef, a tenor clef-- all clefs look the same regardless of first language. If you were to receive a piece of sheet music from a composer whose first language was different than yours, you would be able to play it just the same. Furthermore, the words used to identify musical terms are not even translated into English from their Italian, German, and French origins. That is, we use musical terminology such as “forte” or “diminuendo.” These same “foreign” vocabulary words are taught in music classrooms around the world. Regardless of what languages a musician knows, music vocabulary is expected to be known universally.

Music is a way of conveying deep feelings and emotions with rhythm and melody. Spoken words aren't always needed, especially in instrumental music, yet the emotions are still real. Music written in a minor key sounds dark, while major keys are lighter, leaving the listener with happier emotions. Slow, legato pieces have the potential to pull at one's heart strings in one country just as much as it is the next. Music is special because words are not needed to communicate. A composer does not need to title a piece so that the audience knows what he or she is portraying. A good piece of musical literature can be felt deep within the heart and soul, no matter where you are in the world. A study supporting my claim was published in March 2009 by *ScienceDaily*. The study shows that Native African people who have never listened to the radio before can still grasp the concept of happy, sad, and fearful emotions in Western music.

For these reasons, music is a bridge between all persons across the globe. It's a universal language, uniting us in the way we learn, the way we feel, and the way we interact. It's a language that comes second nature to most. Music has the power to calm a baby to sleep at night,

to energize a sports player before a big game, or to move an adult to tears when a piece brings back long-forgotten memories.

Music is the first language we ever come to learn. We learn to recognize songs before we ever learn our ABCs. Before we can speak, we can sing. Not only is music a language, but it's the most important language we will ever come to know. And so, I have this to offer: The next time you see a little kid smiling and laughing, believing that he or she is singing the ABC song correctly (even if it's completely wrong), just laugh it off and correct him or her gently. While it may take him or her awhile to get the hang of English, remember that a lifelong universal language is already starting to develop in their head: Music.