

MUSIC'S VALUE TO SOCIETY

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To be artistically creative means that one possesses the essence of creation within them. Artists of all types allow that creative impulse to express itself outward through their preferred medium. Musicians express their creativity through instrumentation or vocalization. They contribute to society by allowing that creative spirit to live inside of them and to share it outwardly. Both the audience and the performer benefit from the efforts of the artist. The value of the musician is the value of the artist in general—creativity that is inside oneself expresses itself outwardly, allowing society at large to appreciate the potential for creation in all of us.

Humans are naturally creative. For countless ages we have had a burning desire to create, modify, and improve our surroundings. Some creations, like paintings, have much beauty, but seem to have no apparent practical value. Other creations, such as electrical wiring systems, have decided practical value but no obvious beauty. Still others, such as magnificent architecture, combine functionality with beauty and creativity. Ruskin, when writing about Gothic architecture, described how it had both external forms and internal elements (422). The external forms are the physical shapes we see. The internal elements are the desires, predilections and inclinations of the builders. Similarly, music can be described both by its internal qualities and also by its external manifestation. That external expression begins on the inside as a collection of ideas and emotions before they are expressed outwardly through tone. There is always the bridge between the internal and the external regarding creative expression, and the artist knows this as well as, and perhaps better than, anyone.

Much creative effort goes into an art form such as a musical composition. William Morris wrote that when you become familiar with a work of art the beauty of it seems in stark contrast to the labors that may have gone into creating it (433). The sacrifice of the artist is often needed

to create the craft. The sacrifice of musicians is countless hours over many years of singular devotion to the study of their respective instruments. The worth of labor is great when the individual places value in excellence of achievement (Ruskin 430). That excellence inside oneself seemingly *wants* to be expressed on the outside.

Music's social value is potential at all times, but its optimal social value is realized when others experience it by hearing it, and sometimes also by seeing it performed. It is therefore observer-dependent. It requires an observer to experience the expression that is always latent. It is observer-dependent because "its very existence depends on the attributes, thoughts, and intentionality of observers, users, creators (and) designers" (Searle 82). Music's very existence supports the case for its value. In contrast to periods prior to the nineteenth century when great musicianship was experienced primarily by the aristocracy, music of all types is now available to almost everyone worldwide.

Strengthening its relationship with its social value is music's intrinsic value. Music doesn't need to be played publicly or even out loud for it to have value. The musician who doesn't perform publicly, preferring instead the option of music as a personal hobby, still experiences the internal creative effort. Does this individual still benefit society? Absolutely. That inner creative world which nurtures music as a private hobby is still active for an individual who will encounter others socially. That rich inner world where music resides privately may likely express itself socially through positive interactions with others. Also, if the individual is doing what he or she wants with the personal freedom to enjoy the hobby, internal happiness will likely result, and happy individuals make more fully-functioning social members. A musician doesn't even need to play out loud to experience the beauty of the inner world of music. What may appear to an observer to be the silent countenance of an individual may actually be a

musician who is “mentally” performing. Through the process of imprinting, musicians can silently hear, create and recreate songs in perfect tune. That inner creative world is active and alive, regardless of where they happen to be physically, and regardless of whether or not there is an outward expression of it.

Too much of traditional art had, in Morris’s view, been created by those who either didn’t have an honest desire for it, or else they were paid very little for their labors (439). But if art is created willingly, then its value for both the artist and the public will be more fully realized. If one really “loves music, (that) love comes as naturally as breathing” (Chopra 57). Music is of much greater value if it is desired by the artist with the full willingness to explore its rich nature.

There are a minimum of five primary benefits of music when experienced publicly. One benefit to the public of a musical performance is “... that a man receiving through his sense of hearing or sight another man’s expression of feeling, is capable of experiencing the emotion which moved the man who expressed it” (Tolstoy 121). As such, any observer of a performance gets a sense of the inner world of that musician. It is not just one emotion that comes forth. It is “something collective, ... emotions in a mix that must get out ...” (Underwood). From that mix of emotions comes forth the creative element in an attempt to make sense or structure out of it.

While graphic and sculpture artists provide a visual work that stimulates emotion, the musician offers an expression of intangibles through the aural sense. Certain chordal patterns and harmonizations are common in our Western tradition of 12 tones (half steps) per octave. Other cultures, such as those of India with a musical tradition that incorporates numerous semi-tones, offer more subtle variations for the expression of emotions.

The second benefit of music is the public’s exposure to talent and creativity. Great musicians possess “a sonically rich creative imagination” (Reil). As such, the audience gets “to

view or listen to ideas they may have never heard before” (Ruff). As audience members, even other musicians may be exposed to something new that inspires them to expand their own creative efforts.

Thirdly, the musician, as the bridge between a creative art and society, keeps the creative spirit alive in all humans. The audience gets “to see the creator recreate their (artistic) vision” (Underwood). Some composers push the limits of creativity by exploring new territories with experimental music. John Cage, for example, pushed musical creativity beyond convention several decades ago. His *Imaginary Landscape No. 2*, from 1942, was “... scored for tin cans, buzzers, water gong, a lion’s roar, and an amplified coil of wire” (Ewen 153). Regardless of whether people like experimental music or not, the desire to be creative is what is most important. The essence of creativity should be encouraged to be explored, not for the sake of exploration, but rather for the sake of creativity.

The fourth social value of music is that it is a means of communication between people. Tolstoy astutely observed that every work of art causes the receiver to enter into a singular kind of relationship with not only the creator of the art, but also with all those who have experienced it or who will eventually experience it (120). Thus a connection is made between individuals, and between artists and society. Once it is heard by others, music becomes a shared experience, a communication of commonality. One of the reason “pop” music is so successful is that so many people share its enjoyment on such a large scale.

Lastly, music has value in being pure entertainment for others. Entertainment is uplifting for the spirits of the audience who often leave a performance having had “a good time.” Having fun being aware of only the aesthetic surface is fine for the sake of enjoyment. It allows the

audience to be “transported to a different ... reality, for a while ... (and) this expansion is good for personal growth” (Maddox). There is value in the experience of having fun.

When music is played, listening on the part of the audience “can range from complete passivity to an intensely active process” (Rowell 130). Each listener will have a unique experience based on numerous factors including knowledge of the genre, familiarity with the performer(s), personal musical tastes, level of interest at the moment, and comfort of the establishment itself. Those who are pleased with the aesthetic surface will experience “immediate apprehension,” and those whose tastes are more refined and whose interests may be keener may choose to explore beyond the surface in the form of “synoptic comprehension” (Rowell 132). In the experience of the latter, value judgments are made, associations with prior experiences are acknowledged, and impressions are made that stimulate other imagery, memories, and emotions.

Through musicians, music benefits society at large by reminding us that the spirit of creation is alive in everyone. That creative spirit can be used constructively in other areas of life to solve problems and to make improvements upon our world. For those with a religious world view, the creative spirit is seen as inspiration from God. In whatever way artistic talent is inspired or expressed, musicians benefit in the process of sharing that talent by being a part of a creative process. During a performance, there becomes a blurring of the line separating the internal element of the music that resides inside the performer from the external element of the manifestation of that music played to an attentive audience.

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