

## Why Music? by Dr. Julia Ray

### From Birth to Death

From birth to death, music is a part of our lives. Mothers around the world sing lullabies to their infants. School grounds ring with the songs of childhood. Pre-teens are enthralled with the latest pop star. For years after high school graduation, an “oldie-but-goodie” on the radio can call back the night of the prom. Couples agonize over what music to play at their weddings. People in the autumn of their lives, often leave instructions as to the hymns to be sung at their funerals. And in between the seasons of our lives, every celebration has its songs. Would you blow out the candles without, “Happy Birthday”? Or pass the hour of midnight without, “Auld Lang Syne”? Christmas without carols? No mariachis at the Quincinera? No drums or cymbals at the Chinese New Year celebration? No music at whatever religious or ethnic celebration is circled on *your family's* calendar? No band for the football team? No song for the visiting dignitary? No jingle for the latest breakfast cereal? Music permeates every corner of our lives from birth to death. Music is every child's birth right. It is literally a part of what it means to be human. **Music is one of the major ways society passes on its culture, values, history and heritage to its youth.**

### A Mind is a Horrible Thing to Waste <sup>1</sup>

Anyone who has been around children knows how fast they grow. What you may not know is that music develops the brain in a way that no other subject can. A myriad of research studies have demonstrated it. One of the most reliable is the College Entrance Exams, which has shown that students who study music score higher than those who don't. <sup>2</sup> This result has been true for every exam since they began to measure. In addition, University of California Irvine has conducted extensive research that has demonstrated consistently higher IQ levels for students who listen to music, with even better results for those who have participated in singing and keyboard. <sup>3</sup> Then, to highlight just two, the Calvert, Jarman, & Gomes studies, which demonstrated the enhanced memory and retention accomplished through learning through music <sup>4</sup>, and the UCLA studies, conducted by Dr. Scheibel, which demonstrated that music can actually create new neural pathways in the brains of Alzheimers patients <sup>5</sup>, have shown the power of music in memory and retention. In summary, **music develops brains that not only process information more effectively, but better store and retain that information for future use.**

### Emotional Well-being

Cognitive development is important, but of equal, if not greater importance is emotional development. Music releases endorphins in the brain, creating pleasurable feelings of well-being. <sup>6</sup> Singing or playing instruments, putting on a school musical, provide happy experiences that create a joyful bond between pupils, teachers and school. Music literally brings students together at a time when many young people have startling feelings of inadequacy and alienation. **The collected efforts of making music together, builds self-esteem, creativity, tenacity, discipline, and cooperation.**

## Capturing the Attention of the Learner

Igniting an interest in learning and school is a challenge facing today's educators. Schools are having trouble competing with the plethora of multi-media to which all students have access. Yet repeatedly, pleasing things are cut out of the curriculum. Many seem to equate drudgery with learning, while fun, engaging things are equated with frivolity. Yet research demonstrates the opposite. **Research tells us that optimum learning occurs when circumstances are emotionally charged.<sup>7</sup> Of course, music provides a particularly emotionally-charged way to learn.**

## Results

So what has happened to schools who have embraced the arts, in particularly, music? In the last two decades, failing U.S. schools, that incorporated music, showed dramatic progress over a surprisingly short period of time. In fact, **"...schools who produce the highest academic achievement in the United States today are spending 20 to 30% of the day on the arts, with special emphasis on music.** Included are St. Augustine Bronx elementary school, which, as it was about to fail in 1984, implemented an intensive music program. Today 90% of the students are reading at or above grade level. Davidson School in Augusta, Georgia (grades 5-12), which began its music and arts program in 1981, is #1 academically in the country. Ashley River Elementary in Charleston, North Carolina is #2 academically, second only to a school for the academically gifted."<sup>8</sup>

So in Summary: Why music? Because:

- Music is one of the major ways society passes on culture, values, history and heritage.
- Music develops brains that process, store and retain information more effectively.
- Music develops self-esteem, creativity, tenacity, discipline, and cooperation.
- Music provides the type of emotionally pleasing environment most conducive for learning.
- "...schools who produce the highest academic achievement in the United States today are spending 20 to 30% of the day on the arts, with special emphasis on music..."<sup>9</sup>

## References

- <sup>1</sup>United Negro College Fund advertisement.
- <sup>2</sup>(1987-1993). Profile of SAT and achievement test takers. (Annual Reports ): College Entrance Examination Board.
- <sup>3</sup>Rausher, Shaw, Levine, & Ky. (1994). Music and spatial task performance: A causal relationship. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association 102nd Annual Convention, LA, CA.
- <sup>4</sup>Calvert, Jarman, & Gomes. (1993). Preschoolers' recitation versus understanding of a televised song. (Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development. 143). New Orleans, LA: Society for Research in Child Development.
- <sup>5</sup>Scheibel, A. (1994). You can continuously improve your mind and your memory. Bottom Line Personal (November), 9-10.
- <sup>6</sup>Levinthal, H. (1988). Towards accelerated schools. New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education.
- <sup>7</sup>Sylwester, R. (1995) A celebration of neurons: An educator's guide to the human brain. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, VA.
- <sup>8</sup>Dickenson, D. (1993) Music and the mind. New Horizons for Learning, An international, non profit 501 (c) (3) educational network founded in 1980: <http://www.newhorizons.org>.