KEVINNE STREDDE

Kevinne Stredde is a graduate from Oswego High School, where she was a member of the National Honor Society and played on the varsity badminton team. In addition, Kevinne started her high school's chapter of the National Music Honor Society and served as its president. Kevinne is now pursuing a degree in science education and hopes to teach; she also acts as treasurer for NIU's first French Club, Paris à DeKalb. As music has always been an important part of her life, Kevinne argues in her essay that our society needs to recognize the value of music education.

Kevinne wrote her research paper in Clare Foland's English 105 course during the fall of 2010.
Music: A Gift We Cannot Lose

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Music classes, such as band and choir, are often seen as unimportant and expendable compared to everything else within the scope of district budget cuts. I mean, it’s just music, right? Wrong. Music is very important in our school systems and students who are able to participate in such activities are very privileged. Music programs, both in and after school, can help keep students safe and out of trouble. Such programs also provide a great source of entertainment for the school and the community. Music, be it orchestral or choral, is educational to students and has been proven to raise test scores by allowing students to tap into both hemispheres of the brain simultaneously. Music is a language in itself and is spoken all over the world in various ways. It surrounds all of us, whether we turn our ear to it or not. Therefore, music should not be cast aside but should be held onto and offered to every student.

Music classes not only help students become well-rounded, but they also provide something to do in place of inappropriate activities, such as drugs and violence. Music can be an outlet for one’s emotions. Music expresses that which cannot be expressed in words. In most cases, students involved in music are less likely to be involved in criminal activities. Co-curricular and extra-curricular music programs are a great way to keep kids out of trouble. They offer students a distraction and something else to fill up their time. They give students less time in which to become bored and give into the temptations that surround them.

Having music classes in our schools also provides entertainment for the school and community. Concerts are generally open to the community and are a great source of enjoyment for all involved. There are also several opportunities for afterschool bands and choirs such as jazz band, marching band, pep band, madrigals, barbershop quartets, dance choirs, all girl groups, and more! Groups like marching bands provide entertainment at football games and lead parades all over the world. Pep bands play the music at basketball games and get the team and crowd pumped up. Barbershop quartets, jazz bands, and
other groups can perform at various town activities and banquets. There are so many musically-oriented things for students to be involved in to give back to their community.

Music is educational all around. One must read notes and rhythms, move his or her fingers and hands or sing, listen to others, and watch the conductor all at the same time. It takes much coordination for students to learn to do all of these seemingly easy tasks at once. Music is also educational because many pieces have historical meaning behind their creation. Music, for years and years, has been used to tell a story. Stories, both fictional and non-fictional, are told in band and choir. Choir music can either literally tell the story or allude to its true meaning through its lyrics, whereas band music forces the audience to feel the story and feel the emotions behind it.

For example, the piece “Symphony #1: In Memoriam Dresden – 1945,” by Daniel Bukvich, has the ability to teach the band members a lot about a particular historical event, the bombing of Dresden, Germany. Between February thirteenth and February fourteenth, 1945, 1300 Allied air bombers flew across the sky dropping 3300 tons of bombs on Dresden, the seventh largest city in Germany. “Dresden had been northern Germany’s cultural center—a city filled with museums and historical buildings … By February 1945, the city was filled with refugees … No one knows how many people were in Dresden when the city was bombed” (Trueman). Most of the bombs that were dropped were incendiary bombs—meaning they were designed with the intent to cause fires. The fire became massive and caused a firestorm. “The more the city burned, the more it sucked in oxygen—and the greater the firestorm became” (Trueman). Between 35,000-135,000 citizens and refugees died from complications from the fire or by drowning in Dresden’s water reserve as they tried to escape the devastating firestorm.

Not only is music beneficial historically, but it also increases students’ knowledge of cultures and languages through different rhythms and sounds that are unique to certain parts of the world. Many students are used to singing along to music on the radio that is in their native language, with the occasional lyrical passage in another language. But music classes, such as choir, enhance the knowledge of different languages and utilize them often. Many holiday concerts feature several songs in other
languages—some that are not as common around here, like Creole and Swahili. The song “Noël Ayisyen (A Haitian Noël),” by Emile Desamours, is a traditional Haitian Christmas song. Not only does this song dive into cultural, religious beliefs about God and about Jesus the Son of God being born, but it also teaches the choir a new language, Creole, which is similar to French. “Noël” also goes into musical techniques that are norms for the Haitian culture, such as the clicking of the tongue that presents itself throughout the piece and the soloist clapping to emulate a “cracking” whip. These things are much more common in other cultures than they are in American music, using them teaches the choir a great many things.

In addition, music has the ability to make students use both sides of their brain at the same time. It activates the left and right brain, which has been proven to affect memory and learning. Laurence O’Donnell mentions, “The information being studied activates the left brain while the music activates the right brain.” Playing an instrument or singing does this and causes the brain to “be more capable of processing information” (O’Donnell). Music has been proven to maximize retention of information and improve learning as well as test scores. Listening to music like Mozart has been known to improve test scores because it releases neurochemicals in the brain that help one relax (O’Donnell). Getting higher test scores is not only beneficial to the individual, but it is also very valuable to the school. If scores on standardized tests are raised, then the school gets more funding and means to improve the school in other ways.

In Rhythm in Psychological, Linguistic, and Musical Processes, Charles A. Elliott writes, “Humans are constantly engaged in trying to explain their surroundings” (5). This means that the audience members will analyze each part of the music, even the most subtle effects, to try to explain the story being played to them. Indeed, Bukvich uses this fact of human nature to his advantage throughout his piece, Dresden, primarily in the fourth movement. The fourth movement, “Fire-Storm,” begins with a cluster chord stacked in the low brass and percussion-euphoniums, trombones, tubas, timpani, and tom tom. This creates a definite feeling of suspense and anxiety for the audience because of its unnerving sound. Next, the bassoon, horn, low clarinet, and bass clarinet players come in, humming as low as possible as opposed to playing their instruments, to add to the suspense. Then the trumpets and
saxophones await their cue from the conductor. When they come in, they say “shhh” and make a whistle sound that creates the effect of the bombs dropping and exploding on the unsuspecting city. The first group of low brass continues to crescendo their cluster chord at a steady pace, creating more and more anxiety in the audience. The percussionists then enter on the gong and bass drum to create more explosions off in the distance. The last group to join includes the piccolos, flutes, upper clarinets, oboe, and English horn. Rather than using their instruments, this group starts out at a soft whisper, randomly murmuring German words that gradually crescendo to shouts and screams. The words the audience hears are those of the terrified people: “hilfe”-help, “rauch”-smoke, “feuer”-fire, “feuersturm”-firestorm, and finally, “feuertaufe”-baptism by fire. The shouts and screams in German emulate the intense fear that the people and refugees in Dresden felt during those three waves of bombings. Each group builds up and crescendos until the conductor cues the cymbal crash after about sixty-five seconds of playing. The crash then sets off the dying down of the storm, and with it, the dying down of the people. This effect is created by the piccolos, flutes, trumpets, and horns randomly blowing air through their instruments and gradually fading away. The low brass section, like the fire, then decrescendos into nothingness. After all of the instruments have disappeared and the feuerturm has ended, a flute soloist comes in with a steady low ‘C,’ mimicking sobs of the Dresden people. The flute player lowers his or her instrument and silence falls over the auditorium, just as silence reaches the city limits of Dresden. The audience, with no real cue from the conductor signifying its end, is left to ponder if the song is really over—if the bombings have finally ceased.

In *Rhythm*, Manfred Clynes states, “Music has meaning” (171). Most people will try to figure out what that meaning is. Clynes also says, “Music needs to be looked at for what it actually is: musical thought and performed musical sounds … Much of the meaning of music resides in such unnotated musical forms” (171). Even the most subtle sounds can reflect great meaning to a musical storyline. Bukvich makes a point of this by having low brass members murmur German words in the first three movements. It is so very quiet, but it adds just the right effect to the music to push the story of Dresden along. The solo flutist at the end of the piece also reflects great meaning. It is the final sound that can touch the
audience and leave an impression as they feel the story come to an end. “This meaningful sound is a reflection of the subtlety of our own natures. As we study this subtlety, we become increasingly amazed at the seemingly unlimited ability to evoke meaningful qualities (through sound) in their pure form” (Clynes 171). As Clynes mentions, humans are astounded by the ability for music to reflect our own nature. As stated, music expresses that which cannot be expressed in words. Dresden reflects our own nature of fear, terror, and sadness. Bukvich uses our natural instinct to analyze our surroundings and give them meaning by having each instrument bombard the audience. This forces them to feel that which cannot be said, allowing them to truly connect with the story and grasp the meaning accurately.

It is necessary that our society realizes the importance of music and its significance in the lives of all students. Music needs to remain in our schools so that students can become well-rounded individuals. Keeping music courses and activities will not only improve test scores for the individual, but it can also increase funding for the school through higher standardized test scores. Band and choir classes will also continue to enrich our students in history and cultures that they may not learn about in the average curricular course. Music must stay a major part of our society and continue to better the lives of our students and communities. Music is not a thing to be wasted.

WORKS CITED


