

Why Music? Why Music Education?

Masako Yamamoto (Ed.D.)

Since the release of the recent hit Disney movie “Frozen”, more children have developed an interest in singing. This summer, I offered a “Frozen” voice camp where students performed songs from “Frozen” at a mini concert held on the last day of camp. Each song consists of solo parts and chorus parts. Although we were originally going to pick only one soloist to sing the popular song “Let it Go”, many children were eager to sing the solo; thus, we ended up having six soloists for that song.

I was glad to see this phenomenon of children singing “Let it Go” joyfully and enthusiastically. It is not an easy song to sing-the rhythm is complicated and the vocal range is wide-however, even a young four-year-old girl was able to sing well. It is very important to start singing at an early age since the ability to sing in pitch is acquired during childhood. I hope children will continue singing.

Many teenagers want to sing songs sung by their favorite artists, such as Adele, Beyonce, or Maroon 5. Sadly however, most elementary schools do not provide students with enough vocal instruction or experience. Therefore, even when these students become teenagers, they continue to struggle to find the right pitch, causing some to feel uncomfortable singing in front of people.

Music plays an important role in our society. Can you imagine life without music in movies, church worships, Zumba or Body Pump exercise classes, or figure skating performances? Most importantly however, in my opinion, music has the magical ability to heal our hearts. For example, when the earthquake and tsunami hit in Japan in 2011, the people who lived in the affected area were devastated-they lost their loved ones, their homes, their businesses, and their belongings. Many people had no hope or energy to continue moving forward. It was during this time that a famous orchestra from Europe visited Japan and performed in front of the victims. Listening to the beautiful music helped inspire promise and optimism in the victims during their most time of need, and after the performance, one man even commented, “I was encouraged and I see hope in my life.”

Everyone is aware that music is important in our society. But why is music education crucial? There are many benefits of acquiring musical knowledge and taking music lessons, such as developing listening skills and concentration, fostering self-confidence, enhancing teamwork skills, and improving creativity and aesthetic expression. From my experience, however, I believe the following are the most important benefits of studying music:

1. The study of music helps children develop intelligence.

Many researches were conducted to discover the effect studying music on brain development. The most popular study is called the “Mozart Effect”. College students who listened to Mozart scored significantly higher on a spatial-temporal task than those who did not listen to Mozart.

Research by psychologist Frances Rauscher and physicist Gordon Shaw conducted research on young children. They demonstrated that preschoolers who received keyboard and group singing lessons scored higher on tests measuring spatial reasoning, a skill used later in math, science, and engineering than those who did not

receive music lessons. They also found that taking music lessons resulted in higher spatial reasoning scores than taking equivalent instruction in computer skills.

2. The study of music fosters physical coordination.

Singers need to learn proper posture, breathing technique, facial expression, and so on. They need to control proper breath (air) amount by coordinating abdominal muscles. Pianists need to develop right hand, left hand, and right foot (for pedal) coordination while reading musical notation. Therefore, playing an instruments or singing requires successful coordination of various parts of the body.

3. The study of music enhances self-discipline.

Nowadays, children lead busy lives with having to study or engaging in extracurricular activities. However, when students discipline themselves to set aside time in his/her daily schedule to practice singing or playing their instrument, they are able to improve their skills and progress quickly. This self-discipline the students acquired will help them succeed in many aspects of their lives.

4. The study of music enhances emotional stability.

A mother of one of my piano students once mentioned as follows:

"I remember how my son and I had an argument one day and he was angry. He then went in and played some soothing music with Ms Masako. When he was done with his lesson, he came out and told me that he had calmed down and that music really helps him deal with his anger and sorrow. To me, that was a profound statement. As Ms Masako says, "Music heals our hearts".

I have similar experiences. When I become tired or stressed out, I sing my favorite songs from Broadway or play soothing pieces such as Debussy or Chopin on the piano, and after a while, I feel soothed and relaxed. Therefore, playing or singing music helps with relaxation and stress reduction. In my opinion, this is one of the most important benefits in modern society since many people are stressed out from work, family, obligations, etc.

Studies show that it is better to include musical activities at an early age. At home, parents of young children can enhance their child's musical readiness by 1). singing their child's songs along with them 2). playing small musical instruments, such as bells, maracas, or tambourine, 3). engaging in finger play songs, such as "The Itsy, Bitsy, Spider" or movement songs, such as "The Hokey Pokey" and 4). marching around the house with small instruments. Such enjoyable musical experiences strengthens family bond and enrich children's lives as well.

In summary, music and music education play very important role for children's healthy development. The study of music helps development of children's intelligence and physical coordination, as well as enhancement of self-discipline and emotional stability. At our studio, we offer music classes which are developmentally appropriate and well-organized program. I strongly believe that all students can develop cognitive (thinking), emotional (feeling), and physical (moving) aspects through well-organized musical experiences.

August 25, 2014

www.masakomusic.net