

## The World Does NOT Revolve Around You

"Listen, you spoiled little cretins, the world does not revolve around you," I patiently explained.

&nbsp;"You're kidding right?" hooted my students derisively.

"Pick up your instruments, start together on the downbeat and count carefully."

&nbsp;How many music teachers have had the first part of that conversation?&nbsp; Almost none, at least not out loud.&nbsp; The second installment is an every day plea for many.

Our youth-obsessed culture seems to make a liar out of me, but lest you think your work is in vain, let me present you with a few ideas.

One of the things adults commonly complain about in their later years looking back on school, aside from a lousy prom, was that they felt 'alone' and like an 'outsider'.&nbsp;&nbsp; The band and orchestra students that I have canvassed don't often feel that way.&nbsp; Isn't that interesting?&nbsp;&nbsp; I'm lobbying to have my son do a graduate research project on this issue.&nbsp; I'd love to see the results, wouldn't you?

Common sense, that harbinger of things 'everybody knows' insists that if you learn to be part of a group that needs you in order to get something done, you will feel valuable and worthwhile. Anecdotal evidence supports this concept. &nbsp;

Our sports-mad country feeds us with stories of the scrawny child who becomes Mr. Olympia seven times, makes multimillions in movies and then governs California. What is often overlooked is that music serves many valuable parts of the maturation process that sports do not.

Let me elaborate briefly. Most people involved with music know the statistics. Music makes you brighter, helps you focus in all areas of study, gives you greater mastery over fractions than heretofore thought humanly possible, etc.

But here's a thought for all those guitar players strumming alone in their garrets.&nbsp; When you have to listen and fit in, when there is the tyranny of a written part to play you are going to find yourself learning new musical concepts at light speed.&nbsp; Why?&nbsp; For the same reason that learning say, mathematics, is easier with some formal guidelines. Reinventing multiplication or discovering every formula newly takes a few lifetimes of inquiry, just check your history texts.&nbsp; Solitary inquiry is necessary and good and I hope it has a place of honor in everyone's intellectual pantheon, but it cannot be the only method of realization.

One thing ensemble music instruction teaches you is that you must 'make nice' with others in order to get the job done.&nbsp; "So what?" you say. It gets back to the heart of both of our issues.

One of the signs of maturity, which my adorable dumplings in the lower grades find difficult to exhibit, is one's place and involvement in an activity. In spite of what our youth worshipping culture and media would have you believe individuals are generally not the most important things on the program.&nbsp; In music you learn that you can have a part that is vital to the results, but so are the other parts. Together you all help to create a whole that is satisfying to everyone.

This is something that musicians learn and team players discover, but many other people miss completely.&nbsp; Unlike sports where there can be a competitive factor to be the 'best', music requires everyone be good to make the whole creative performance satisfying.&nbsp; This is an even higher level of sophistication than sports because creating your part well and thoroughly gives you no personal glory but makes the whole experience better for all the other players and the audience. And all without someone else having to 'lose'.

A good musician must practice alone but still be able to play with a group to create something larger than themselves.&nbsp; The product of this collaboration?&nbsp; All of us have favored pieces of music associated with the times of our lives, and a majority of those pieces were created within a group, rather than by a solo artist.

Both musician and listener profit from this synergy. With recordings you can hear your favorites repeatedly extending the memories for a lifetime.&nbsp;

