

Musician Finds Enjoyment Alone and with a Group

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Music, of course, can be both a solitary and a social experience for an individual. School music education is an example of music surrounded by social circumstances, including orchestra, chorus and band. On the other hand, practicing a musical instrument is a rather solitary event that if done well can lead to social participation.

One example is listening to Ludwig van Beethoven's "Symphony No. 5" in C Minor, a practice that is shared with people worldwide. Even though Beethoven wrote the music 200 years ago in isolation, he later took part in its performance involving many people. Can you imagine the number of people who performed Beethoven's Fifth and have listened since 1808 in Vienna? The number must be in the millions, not to be taken lightly.

Before I went to school, I used to set up my late grandfather's music stand on the front porch in summer and conduct. Also, I listened to J.P. Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever" and Gioacchino Antonio Rossini's "Overture to William Tell" on my parents' 78 RPM record player, over and over.

Later in the 1960s, I got to play the solo snare drum part to Rossini's "Overture to La Gazza Ladra" for 15,000 people at Highland Park with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, and to be featured cymbalist in "The Stars and Stripes" elevated in the middle of the American Wind Symphony Orchestra downtown Pittsburgh, Pa., on July 4, 1964, with my parents in the audience. These were solitary and social experiences involving the same music years apart.

Years later, I have played "La Gazza Ladra" on snare drum in Michelsen Concert Hall in Noel Fine Arts Center with the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Symphony Orchestra, as well as at Sentry Theater with the Central Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra, and performed "The Stars and Stripes" on snare drum in the Grenadiers Band and on timpani in the Stevens Point City Band. These were very social events and a joy to perform.



Music can promote social development in the small city as well as in large cities. A recent educational experience has been for me to play cymbals to "The Star-Spangled Banner" while singing the melody, for an audience of children and adults in Gesell Institute at UWSP. This followed the exciting experience of playing cymbals in Columbus, Ohio, Ann Arbor, Mich., Iowa City, Iowa, Evanston, Ill., and Madison for the national anthem, being performed by the Ohio State University Marching Band for tens of thousands of people. The preschool concerts are especially rewarding because I can see the facial expressions on members of the audience. In conclusion, music can be a most successful social event for both listeners and performers and is very rewarding for those who put forth the work to achieve vocal or instrumental proficiency. Music is certainly a social event, and can be a most positive experience.

Dr. Geary Larrick is a retired music professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and has a biographical file in Kampenga Archives in University Library in the Learning Resource Center.