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Music Brings Us Together: Winners in MENC's Collegiate Essay Contest

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MUSIC BRINGS U

WINNERS IN MENC'S COLLEGIATE-

Biennially, an essay contest is held among collegiate MENC members. Each state student association chooses the best essay on an assigned topic; from the state winners, national winners are chosen. The first-place essayist receives a trip to that year's National In-Service Conference, courtesy of the Music Industry Conference; the winning essay is read at one of the conference sessions.



First-place winner
Lynn Hunter
College of Notre Dame
of Maryland, Baltimore
Christy Izdebski, advisor

As the lyrics in the song "Epithalamium" assure us, "whenever two or more are gathered . . . there is love." With a little poetic license, one might sing, "whenever two or more are gathered, there is music." But with a bit more rearranging, the best score would read, "whenever there is music, people come together." Whatever the tune, whatever the occasion, the memory of musical sharing lingers long after the final note is heard.

Children are welcomed into the world with a lullaby. They join in the song as toddlers, with Donald Duck at the player piano to accompany them. Friendships are chanted as the jumprope is turned and the mulberry bush circled. Nursery schools resound with songs of little witches, tiny shepherds, and fragile bunnies. Timeless are the classical strains from the movie *Fantasia*, as children everywhere remember the cartoons and the melodies. The young are surrounded by, soothed by, surprised by music. It is their warm fuzzy. It is their common bond.

Graduating from ring-around-the-rosy, young people still find music to be as magnetic as a one-man band on a street corner. Camp songs keep them, with their best buddies, by the fire late into the night. As tapes play continuously within the "boom box," children join with the top-ten artists and each other, singing and dancing, living proof of "the power of love." School trips are remembered for their bus songs, and many an impor-

tant athletic event has been enlivened by the marching band. Summer music camps encourage serious musicians. Concerts for the young, sponsored by professional orchestras, herald classical music as ageless as MTV for musical unity.

After the teen years, music continues to generate pleasure and relaxation, often coupled with creativity, learning, and purpose. College students might go to a rock concert as readily as they enjoy improvising in their own jazz ensemble. They might find themselves humming a familiar movie theme, then discussing the film with someone who recognizes the tune as well. As the Live-Aid concert used a musical medium to alert others to world hunger, so a young adult might choose music therapy as a career. So many lyrics bespeak the forgotten man that it seems natural for the universality of music to bring people together to alleviate life's pain. Thus, one sees the success of the yearly telethons, manned by volunteers and musical performers.

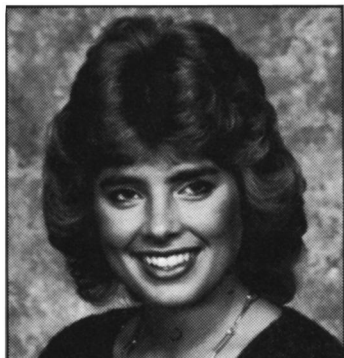
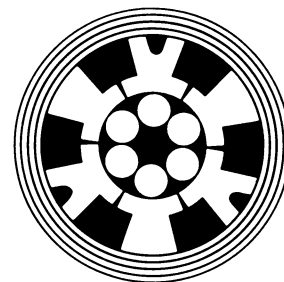
With such a solid musical heritage, adults relish their musical camaraderie. Caught in the rush-hour traffic together, they tap out the beat of a popular song playing on the car radio. Some join together to support the orchestra while others frequent ethnic festivals. Whether they experience the magnificence of Beethoven's "Fifth" or the lilt of a folk song from an Irish penny whistle, the musical sharing is rejuvenating. Adults attend dinner theatres and Broadway musicals. Their exercise classes would disband without the antidote for the boredom of fitness, musical accompaniment. Families gather on the Fourth of July for fireworks and symphonic Sousa. Parents treat their children to Epcot Center, where they can listen to anything from a Mexican band to a British vaudevillian trio. Often a winery, a mall, or a gallery features a bluegrass group, a DJ, or a chamber ensemble for its grand opening.

In the autumn years, with the leisure to travel, seniors may hear, first-hand, a Scottish bagpipe or attend an Italian opera. As we all joined to celebrate the Olympics, so our older citizens may feel the national pride of others by experiencing a parade in a foreign land or by hearing a national anthem sung by natives. With wisdom, they know that music has no barriers. The plea sung by an oppressed South African is the same as that of a poor Appalachian child. At home, seniors may enroll in a polka class or group around the piano in a retirement community. They rediscover, through music, that it is a small world after all.

Our lives are lived with others. Our lives are filled with music. Each age fashions a melodic square. Measure upon measure creates a beautiful patchwork quilt of sound. A young boy sings "take me out to the ballgame." A grandpa plays the kazoo at a family reunion. A woman sings a hymn. A girl plays a concertina. Their blend is perfect, their intonation clear. They are one in music.

S TOGETHER

MEMBER ESSAY CONTEST



Second-place winner
Sandra Snow
University of North
Carolina-Greensboro
Hilary Apfelstadt, advisor

Amid distant gunshots, the members of a small church in South Africa pause to join in song as they bury yet another loved one. Thousands of miles away, a New York audience jumps to its feet, marveling at the beauty and intensity of a Mahler symphony. Outside, children are creating music with crude rhythmic instruments as they dance to an inner, irrepressible rhythm.

Why is music so compelling to mankind and what purpose has it served centuries past and present? Music touches everyone's life, whether one is trained musically or not. We respond to music on infinite levels from the music of wind among tree tops to the sophisticated music of geniuses such as Bach or Beethoven.

Is it merely the sound with which we identify? Music is an abstract form of expression. It transcends verbal description to illuminate the very soul of mankind. It allows the expressor to relate to people individually and collectively. Not only can it probe the range of human emotion, but it can also link our diverse world together.

By leaving behind cultural biases and lingual differences, music bonds people together. It is the surviving legacy of our predecessors. Centuries of music are alive today; we can interact with music and use it as a foundation to build upon. It gives us a mirror to examine the past. Understanding the old traditions may provide insight to examine our own cultural values.

It is ironic, then, that much of American society shuns the exploration of this art form through music education in the public schools. Music education has certainly made great strides in the last twenty years, but is there not still a feeling in our culture that music is not essential to our high-tech, work-obsessed environment?

It is precisely because America has developed so quickly in the last century, and shows great promise for

future technological advancement, that music cannot be ignored. The opportunity for musical creativeness certainly develops skills needed to be an innovator in today's society. The kinesthetic, visual, and aural components of music education utilize a child's ability in a combination that may aid the learning process in other areas.

These ideas are secondary, however, to the monumental advantage of exposure to music. Music allows for and encourages individual aesthetic response. Every musical experience will affect the listener or performer in a way unique to that individual. Therefore, music education accepts that a child will make personal decisions about what he or she likes or dislikes and, unlike other subject areas, acknowledges many responses to a single question. The autonomy involved in this sorting process builds self-esteem and promotes conscious decision making.

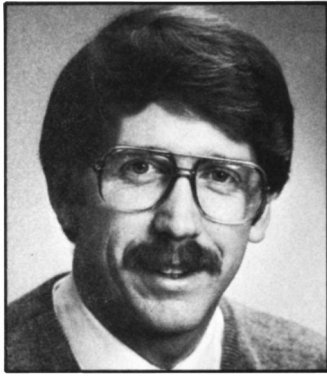
The notion of individual response also contains another crucial idea. Music can be experienced by all people, whether elderly or young, physically or mentally handicapped, visually or hearing impaired. At the level of individual response, music brings us to the same plane; reacting with an art that importance stems from the shared expressing of human experience.

Music in the schools is a link with the past and a catalyst for the future. We can learn of the great traditions before us and develop the skills to create a different world in the years ahead. The privilege of exploring music need not be forsaken by budget cuts, emphasis on other subject areas, or relegation of music to extracurricular status, if the goals of general education are kept in perspective.

We educate our children to give them the skills to be competent, contributing adults. Music education is integral to this concept. In the music classroom, especially in the older grades, we perform in ensembles or choruses as a working unit with the unified goal of enhancing aesthetic sensitivity; the music classroom indeed brings students together.

It is significant that music has survived since the beginning of time. There have been cultures that could not write, yet they expressed themselves in primitive forms of music. Music is a large part of twentieth-century culture as well. The rock concerts so popular in the 1950s and 1960s were often used as protests of unjustness against fellow human beings. The 1980s have seen rock concerts bond millions together to fight famine and starvation. Music is encouraging our young to feel something besides blind apathy.

Music will remain the living thread of history. Its power is the ability to persevere, even grow stronger in the face of adversity. Music unites a world that, despite appearances, has much in common and much to gain by listening to the universal ideals expressed in music.



Third-place winner
Terry Neal
Jordan College of Fine Arts,
Butler University, Indianapolis
Kathryn E. Smith, advisor

When I think about why music brings us together, I cannot help but think back, with fond memories, to the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. In the final scenes of that movie, the earth scientists communicate with the alien mothership by playing a very simple melody. As the "conversation" continues, the range of the melody expands.

While we view this as science fiction, perhaps there is a deeper message we had not realized. I believe the producers of the movie were demonstrating the universal appeal of the musical sounds by using them as the only possible link of communication between these two very different races. Music brought them together.

Music can, and does, bring together distinctly different groups of people. Take jazz, for instance. It is not possible to walk down the street and say, "That man likes jazz" or "That woman wears clothes that jazz lovers wear." In other words, jazz fans, like fans of

other styles of music, can not be stereotyped. Musical styles draw followers from all walks of life and backgrounds. Music is unique in this way. We can be ourselves, musically distinct, yet join in unison with others. The sounds are the same, only the arrangement of the sounds is different.

There are very distinct ethnic, religious, and social groups that draw on larger generic styles—classical, jazz, pop, rock, and so on—to produce music in their own way. The uniqueness of different styles brings us together, and those who would eliminate the variants in these styles seek to destroy that which binds us together. For it is not just the similarities in music that unite us but also our appreciation of the differences that exist between us. Indeed, the very things we share are our differences and what we learn from them.

Who can argue that the human race is not intrigued by challenge? That's why we continue to seek answers to questions... and why we continue to ask more questions. If all music were the same, there would be no intrigue, no challenge. The future of music brings us together, because as we seek to learn more about past and present music, we discover ways to improve and enhance the music of tomorrow.

Finally, in as simple and philosophical a manner as I can state it, music brings us together because it *appeals* to us. There are more music concerts scheduled than any other type of event. And how many people have some sort of record collection? We supplement television and films with musical soundtracks. Imagine Broadway without musicals! We lift our spirits with optimistic tunes or drown our sorrows in sympathetic lyrics and melancholy sounds. A classical music concert can lift our spirits to the heavens or plunge them to the dark recesses of the most feared places. Can anyone even begin to imagine life without music?

What is truly grand about music is that it transcends all of the political, social, and religious boundaries that otherwise separate us. Pure music—it speaks for itself, and it doesn't even need words. It is in the absence of known language that music brings us together through its own language.

EXCERPTS FROM OTHER NATIONAL WINNERS



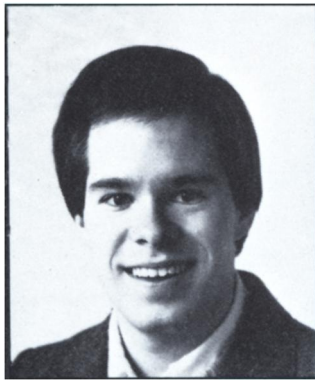
Fourth-place winner: Charity Salmonson, Mayville State College, Mayville, North Dakota, Anthony Stein, advisor

Music is the universal language that expresses what people believe in, hope for, dream of, and feel. One can travel anywhere in the world and still be able to appreciate the music being performed. Unlike words and languages, people can understand music without having to learn a new language. Throughout history, people have used this universal language to express things that cannot be put into words. Emotions such as love and hate, which are very difficult to express verbally, can be expressed through music. Also, music can express beliefs and strong convictions so effectively that people can be influenced by it.



Fifth-place winner: Kathy Holdway, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Marvelene Moore, advisor

Music is an important means of transmitting culture from generation to generation, as evidenced by the many folk songs that have survived through the ages. Many of these songs were passed along by parents who taught them to their children—who in turn did the same for their own children, until someone wrote them down. Of course, we also have music of the great composers whose manuscripts have survived, providing us with a very important cultural link to the past as well as allowing us to experience some of the greatest music ever written. . . . Music has a special way of bringing us together.



Sixth-place winner: Patrick K. Freer, Westminster Choir College, Princeton, New Jersey, Quentin G. Marty, advisor

Though we don't always understand the theoretical and physical elements of a performance, though we aren't always able to tap the emotional reservoir of the performer, there is a level of communication that occurs no matter what musical medium is employed. . . . As music educators, we work tirelessly to share our fascination and love of music. . . . Through musical communication the observer is no less a participant—witness the communion during the ensuing stillness as a Bach cantata comes to rest. One can never underestimate the surge of emotion as music speaks to and through a performer.



First honorable mention: Pam Cannon, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky, Roger E. Reichmuth, advisor

Even though people are exposed to different types of music at different ages and times during their lives, they all share an expression of unity or togetherness as one. Susanne Langer, in *Philosophy in a New Key*, says, "Music has all the earmarks of a true symbolism, except one: the existence of an assigned connotation. That is, it can mean different things to different people. . . ." This wide variety of meanings in music is what brings people together. Even though a group may present a concert together, each member may interpret their specific part in an individual manner with their own meaning behind it.



Second honorable mention: Lori Hunzeker, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Elza Daugherty, advisor

Music has the power to bring people together: people from different geographic and cultural backgrounds and even people with different physical and mental abilities. What is it about the art of music that it should possess such abilities to attract people? First, there is an atmosphere of fellowship among those who share music as a common denominator. Second, there is a sharing of cultural heritage; music is one expression of unique regional and national styles. Third, music brings us together socially. . . . I have witnessed this while at school and while on tour, while teaching and while being taught. ¶