

Music 1952

I cannot remember a time when I was not enthralled by the sounds of musical instruments. I developed a way of organizing the common sounds of the world into musical pieces heard only within my head. At a very young age I became entranced with the piano, producing random sounds by manipulating the keys in whatever sequence struck my fancy. I quickly discovered I had the ability to reproduce on the keyboard any melody I heard played on the piano and repeat them at will.

My mother would play hymns on our old upright piano and when I was as young as five years old I could already distinguish the chords accompanying the melodies. I was able to make out the structure underlying the melody and I intuitively knew it to be vertical, that is, notes stacked one upon another to produce the harmony.

One morning I saw a film on television, a movie called *Carnegie Hall*, a “Goldwyn Follies” type of thing where the motion picture is nothing but a bloated throw together bringing together several performers. The makers of this film, however, had actually assembled talent worthy of the name, and certainly people I enjoyed hearing.

Arthur Rubenstein played Tschaikovsky’s *Piano Concerto*, which was fine, but what really gripped me was Jascha Heifetz’s performance of Brahms’ *Violin Concerto*. This was the birth of my passion for classical music, a life-long love affair that continues to the present.

I found myself utterly captivated by the sounds pouring forth from the master’s violin. The music possessed a quality that possessed me. The quality of the sound itself, the vibration of the strings, the use of the bow, all of it held me transfixed and it was far more than a serious infatuation.

Determined that one day the name Myron Dyal would be spoken in the same breath as the greats of the instrument, I requested violin lessons. At first my mother was reluctant but youthful enthusiasm can be difficult to overcome and she capitulated. I started my studies almost immediately.

My grammar school had a good musical program as part of its general curriculum, offering classes in both band and orchestra. I joined the school orchestra and, fortunately, the school itself loaned me an instrument. Mother did her part by securing the services of a private music tutor and I was on my way, hopefully to the London Palladium.

The violin is notoriously difficult to learn, as many generations of well-intentioned young students have discovered to their chagrin, or their delight if they were being railroaded into lessons by starstruck parents of above average sophistication but slender formal musical experience.

The left hand, of course, provides the fingering positions, but the sound itself is produced by the bow wielded by the right hand. The nerve-shredding cat screeches often produced by beginning students (and more advanced students whose dedication outweighs their talent) is caused by the inability of the student to exercise proper control over the bow, which can seem to have a life of its own.

At least the piano can be more easily bent to the will of man; if you push down a key, the construction of the piano demands the production of a pure sound. Whether or not the player can properly fit that isolated sound into a harmonious arrangement with others to produce something identifiable as music is another story, but a definite note will be produced each and every time the same key is hit. With hand-held string instruments, including the violin, viola, cello, and upright bass, it may take years to master the playing of one piece so as to be in tune and recognizable.

All the individual notes, octaves, and scales are produced by precision fingering and can present intimidating obstacles to mastership. There are three secrets to the acquiring of expertise with stringed instruments: practice, practice, and even more practice. Of course, innate talent and manual dexterity are also handy things to be able to take into the practice room, and without them, the door may as well remain locked.

Most children become discouraged and give up, often quitting with more enthusiasm than they began, or else they move on to a more easily learned instrument. I was one of those rarities who actually loved the violin and, far from shirking practice for contact sports and similar pursuits, applied myself to my studies as often as possible. Music became my prime focus, for it was the only thing that soothed my nerves and diverted my attention from feelings of inferiority.

The downside (isn't there always one?) was that my lengthy practice sessions were causing me to neglect my schoolwork, which I didn't mind in the least, though it did raise concerns in my parents' minds and made them think twice concerning my musical proclivities.

I was hooked on music, but as with any blessing, it was double-edged, one the one hand I had finally found my *métier*, something upon which I could completely focus my thoughts and my energies and into which I could be absorbed without fear, not to mention an activity that actually provided some much needed self-esteem, while the other side of the coin was the toll it was taking on my academic work.

One thing in my favor was that my older brother also had a strong interest in good music, his taste in radio fare leaning heavily towards Bach, Beethoven, Ravel, Debussy, and many of the other giants. What he called an interest I called captivation, delighting in losing myself in the purity of the beautiful sound that man is capable of creating when he stops speaking and starts composing.

I still recall my forays into the local record stores and having nonplussed proprietors direct me to the children's section when I asked for the classical department. My objections would usually result in a reluctant escort to the land of the classics. I never could understand their hesitancy to indulge my tastes. You would have thought I'd gone into a liquor store and attempted to

purchase *The Police Gazette* or one of those early above-the-waist-only editions of *Playboy*. Was I somehow “too young” for classical music, or did the shopkeepers think their classical records were somehow as fragile as Ming vases and I would wind up breaking them? Truth be told, I couldn’t have cared less what they thought. My money was as green as anyone else’s and that, after all, was the bottom line for the merchants.

I loved poring through the seemingly endless stacks of records, and particularly enjoyed the reproductions of elegant paintings, illuminated manuscripts, and other appropriate renderings that graced the album covers. Just looking at the records made me feel good. They were all 78-speed records and all I could afford were short compositions. I distinctly remember my first purchase, Beethoven’s *Lenore Overture No. 2*, along with a few short violin pieces by Fritz Kreisler.

My records became worn out from repeated playings. As long as the turntable was spinning and the fruits of the world’s musically creative geniuses were coming through the speakers, I was free to become one with the music, to experience the magic of it. This feeling assisted me through my first solo recital before an audience. I don’t think I was afraid; nervous, but not fearful. I would become so identified with the music itself that, for a brief time, I did not exist as a separate entity. I wasn’t concerned with anything as pedestrian as audiences and their approval or disapproval of my playing. My only interest was the music itself. Everything else could take care of itself or not, as it so chose.

In the 1950’s and 1960’s, schools provided musical programs all the way through high school. Apart from that the church choirs extended additional training in harmony and vocal sight-reading. As musical production is a group effort, it does provide social contact and experience and, admittedly, I did gain valuable social skills through my musical pursuits.

Music was always able to restore to me certain levels of self-esteem following a seizure or some other situation where it would crumble, allowing me to pick myself up, physically or emotionally or both, and get back to living life.

The final word is that, without music, there can be no doubt that I would never have fought my way through the introversion that otherwise would have engulfed me. Music has been an integral factor in the attainment of the worldly success I have been fortunate to achieve.