

## A School Without Music?

I stopped by to watch one of our outstanding music programs present their holiday concert in the Platteville High School Auditorium. It was clearly a well-attended event because I ended up parking out on the street, quite a walk from the school. I greatly enjoyed the concert and equally enjoyed seeing the smiling faces on the video of experiences from the marching band season. After the concert, I stopped in to watch the girls' basketball game, noticed the Pep Band playing in support of the team, and could feel what it added to the overall atmosphere of the gym. I was struck by how important music was, not only in our schools, but in our lives. I imagined for a second what it would be like to go to a school that only focused on the academic four: Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies.

As a definite non-musician but great appreciator of music, I knew it wouldn't be a school that I would have wanted to attend, nor one I would have wanted to send my children. Even a day without music would seem strange. As a culture, we celebrate and mourn with music. As communities, we come together in common expression of beliefs, values, and hopes for the future. As a school, our music programs teach our students how to express themselves musically and how past and present cultures use music to capture their history, sustain their present lives, and communicate their thoughts of the future.

How important to a school is that? Could there be such a thing as "school spirit" without music? Does the value of music in schools go beyond the music rooms, auditorium, and gym? I first turned to the experts to gather a little research on the benefits of music programs in the schools. If you go to the National Association for Music Education's website (<http://www.menc.org/>), it showcases study after study documenting the benefits of music education on student learning, school climate, and future college and career success. Rather than posting study after study, I then decided to go to the local experts in Platteville schools.

Rachael believes that music is her life. "It's a safe haven during the day...a way to blow off steam and express myself...to get outside of daily stressful classes." According to Tianna, "If I didn't have music, I wouldn't feel like I belonged because sports just isn't my cup of tea." Shallon would be "sad and mad" because she loves to "sing and dance." Noah goes so far as to state "The middle school without music is a place I would never want to be. According to Jordan, "it gives you something to do when you are bored." Lilly points out that some people wouldn't know about "ti-ti's and rests." Erin is "making her life with music and "walks with a beat in her step and a tune in her ear." I have been reassured by Lara that "You are never too old for music." According to Ronald, "I like everything about it, it is fun. " Stephanie suggests that, "No matter

where you are in the world, music is the universal language that conveys words that can't be spoken."

Stephanie reminds me of an incredible story from World War I and a favorite read of mine. "Silent Night (2002)," by Stanley Weintraub, tells the story of the 1914 Christmas Truce that "took place in the improbable setting of the mud, cold rain and senseless killing of the trenches of World War I" Quoting from the book's description:

*in spite of orders to the contrary and in spite of language barriers...it still stands as the only time in history that peace spontaneously arose from the lower ranks in a major conflict, bubbling up to the officers and temporarily turning sworn enemies into friends...men who suddenly threw down their arms and came together across the front lines -- to sing carols, exchange gifts and letters, eat and drink and even play friendly games of soccer. It began when German soldiers lit candles on small Christmas trees, and British, French, Belgian and German troops serenaded each other on Christmas Eve.*

My hope is that all of us, regardless of our age, background, or belief system, can come together and appreciate the beauty of the winter season and the expression of hope and joy through music.