

Editor's note: The following was part of a keynote address to the Utah Music Educators Association. Reprinted by permission of the author.

I have been heavily involved in music my entire life. As a concert violinist, recording artist, music teacher, former orchestral musician, wife to a DJ and mother to four aspiring musicians, I know how powerful music can be. Music truly feeds the soul, providing real mental, physical, spiritual and emotional benefits. These benefits are vital to the well-being of children and adults. But music education also truly enlarges the mind, providing real and concrete educational benefits. Music education actually improves the reading, math and science skills of children, giving them an increased propensity to succeed in life.

In his article, “Why Music Education Matters,” musician Blake Madden writes, “Research suggests that music training exercises so many different functions within the brain, that it’s kind of hard to engage with it fully and stay dumb for very long. When a musician first learns to read music, she develops a process of recognizing and decoding a complex system of symbols. The musician then translates those symbols into appropriate motor actions that use both hands, and confirms the accuracy of her actions through multisensory feedback (both sight and sound). In addition, musicians practice motor skills in the pursuit of metric precision, they exercise memory functions in the absence of written music, and create new combinations on the fly through improvisation.”

In his book, “A User’s Guide to the Brain,” M.D. John J. Ratey writes, “The musician is constantly adjusting decisions on tempo, tone, style, rhythm, phrasing, and feeling — training the brain to become incredibly good at organizing and conducting numerous activities at once. Dedicated practice of this orchestration can have a great payoff for lifelong attention skills, intelligence, and an ability for self- knowledge and expression.”

Music education truly benefits all kinds of children. And underprivileged children seem to gain the most from a musical education. I saw this firsthand as a music teacher in intercity New York. While attending The Juilliard School, I was awarded a Morse Arts in Education Fellowship, which gave me the opportunity to teach music classes over the course of two school years to underprivileged elementary school students at a New York City public school. It was incredible to see these children blossom as they were taught the basics of music, and then given the opportunity to become musical creators themselves. They felt empowered and I could see what a difference the musical training was making in their lives. I saw the same benefits as I taught music to less fortunate children in Philadelphia, and all over the Washington, D.C., area.

Blake Madden heralded, “You want higher test scores in math and science? *Music education will help.* You want children with higher mental faculty? *Music education will help.* You want to keep kids out of trouble and on-track towards college and future employment? *Music education will help.*”

I am so grateful to have been given an intensive musical education by my parents and I have given my four children music lessons since they were 3 and 4 years old. The

benefits I have observed in myself and my own children resulting from our intensive music education include the following: discipline, the ability to concentrate, an understanding of the connection between hard work and positive outcomes, hand-eye coordination, mental/emotional health, confidence, the ability to work together and to compromise for good of the whole, a connection to history, an appreciation for humanity, innate sensitivity, enhanced cognitive and memory skills, inner satisfaction, a tendency to stay busy and out of trouble, and the ability to perform under pressure, balance, use time wisely, multi-task and work hard.

The great leaders of history have known the value of music and the arts and have encouraged their study. Utah's first governor, Brigham Young, declared, (a study of) “Art can enlarge the mind, invigorate the body, cheer the heart, and ennoble the soul.”

John Adams, second president of the U.S., stated: “I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce, and agriculture, in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture, statuary, tapestry, and porcelain.”

John Adams knew how important the arts are to humanity and was willing to dedicate his life to politics and war so that his posterity would have the privilege of studying music and the arts. How much more of a priority it should be to us living in these incredibly chaotic modern times to give our children all the emotional, mental, social and intellectual benefits of a musical education.

Utah state legislators, as you hyper focus on a STEM (science, engineering, technology and math) curriculum, please remember the crucial role that the arts —especially music — play in the education of the "whole child."

Please take into consideration that on Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2015, with a landslide vote of 85 to 12, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act. This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is historic, in that for the first time ever, music is enumerated in federal statute as a stand-alone subject, explicitly listed among the components of a well-rounded education for *all* students. The resounding message coming from the United State government is that music matters! Now as Utahns, we have a chance to echo that sentiment. Will we continue to push STEM components through as the *only* resolution to our education woes? Or will we in Utah acknowledge that music is a vital component in the full and complete education of children and give it the legislative support and backing needed to make our music education programs and our children flourish.

Music education matters!

Jenny Oaks Baker — America's Violinist — is a Grammy nominated, Billboard No. 1 performer and recording artist. She received her master's of music degree from The Juilliard School and her bachelor's degree from the Curtis Institute of Music.
www.jennyoaksbaker.com