

The Need to Share

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It is not enough to share our surpluses,
for to share surpluses is not really to share at all.
- - Harry S. Truman¹

Music has always been about sharing. Unlike all other pursuits, be it painting or politics, sporting or speech, laboring or literature, the very essence of music is its ability to be shared inadvertently. It penetrates walls, escapes through windows, rushes down the street and over the landscape (even in complete darkness), all in an effort to enter our hearts. Music will never be confined within geo-political boundaries and will always transcend barriers of class and race. Isaac Stern once said, “Music is not about creating musicians, it’s [about] creating a civilized society.”² What he meant is that music teaches us to share.

In the last year I have noticed an increase in those who shuffle between subway cars looking for a handout. The tales of woe are oft repeated and skillfully honed. Yet, no matter how convincing the delivery, I rarely reach into my pocket. Such is not the case with musicians who arrive on the scene, for unlike the others, their story is verifiably honest. “I am a singer,” stated one man matter-of-factly, and sure enough, he was. Another group performed on conga drums—for three stops the subway car was alive with sound! One of them announced “We’re trying to do something positive...” and indeed, they were succeeding. These impromptu sessions offer refreshment and provide us all with brief glimpses of sincerity and truthfulness. I am happy to share with such wonderful community servants!

Other musicians working for positive change include a certain bargaining committee charged with negotiating a union contract for music teachers in the Precollege Division at a prestigious New York conservatory. Collectively, these few individuals have unselfishly donated hundreds of unpaid hours on behalf of nearly 140 music teachers. Thus far, despite *hundreds of thousands of dollars* spent to thwart their efforts, the committee has negotiated many improvements (i.e. sick days, transparency of work assignments, etc.), greater job security and higher minimum wages for some. And, while more must be done, we are sincerely grateful: music teachers do deserve better!

My own musical community service has taken the form of founding a free concert series at a church in upper Manhattan. My efforts as artistic director, coordinator, and occasional performer are entirely *pro bono*. The interest has been to involve as many musicians and composers on the programs in an attempt to attract large audiences and bring our society closer together. Since the church is both covering its bottom line from other resources and has the status of being *not-for-profit*, the money raised for the concert series has become a tremendous opportunity to share. At one time or another, there has been: free child-care during the concerts, free receptions after the concerts, musicians guaranteed fair compensation with additional bonuses if we have a larger-than-expected crowd, bonuses for composers, special gifts for the volunteers, sharing the space with visual artists... I get excited searching for excuses to extend the list!

In a world where some would sooner die than share, we must be reminded that musicians of all kinds provide a sorely needed antidote to such madness. Music’s inadvertent essence also reflects the true nature of sharing: it can become contagious. A surplus of sharing? Now, that I’d like to see!

¹ Harry S. Truman, “Address in Chicago on Army Day,” Soldiers’ Field, 6 April 1946 [3 p.m. national broadcast].

² Isaac Stern, *Musical Encounters*, Educational Broadcasting Corporation and the Hopewell Foundation, Inc., 2000.