

Connect, Contribute, and Heal Through Musical Outreach

By Lisa Garner Santa

In a complex world where communication has become so fragmented, it's critical that we find ways to connect with others, contribute to our community, and heal. Music can be a most effective medium through which all three can be realized. When we recently asked university students why it is so important to approach music in this way, we heard the following:

- Music is a way to touch other cultures.
- Music adds color and dimension to emotions that otherwise can't be expressed.
- Music serves our community as well as ourselves.
- Music is a way to honor tradition, and to break it.
- Music heals and restores the whole person—body, mind, and spirit.
- Music is a way to play, to have fun.

Outreach Through Experiential Learning

When students connect with members of their communities in meaningful ways, they develop rich skill sets. Perhaps one of the most valuable assets is communication, particularly when connecting with populations outside of the usual social networks, including those of aging, youth, and disabled communities.

Providing music services opens doors to dialogue between students and audience and between the students themselves. Interacting in significant ways with those from different cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and varying exceptionalities helps students develop a broader understanding of humanity—locally, nationally, and globally. It also ultimately cultivates greater empathy in students toward those with circumstances different from their own. Students become encouraged to explore their individual values and beliefs and the actions, or inaction, related to them. Community outreach helps students learn about social issues and how music can play a role in addressing those issues. Outreach performance activities cultivate a stronger sense of purpose within



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each student musician and potentially within our future music educators.

Teachers Also Benefit

Interactive and reciprocal learning between the teacher and students is a great benefit of outreach performances. Is there a more powerful example than students and teachers developing new perspectives and insights related to the community in which they live? Engaging in outreach opportunities may also fuel new areas of research and publication interest for teachers. Through community outreach, teachers also develop relationships outside of their familiar professional circles, thus broadening their sphere of influence and enriching their sense of purpose, both as individuals and in terms of the impact of their music programs. A natural extension of these outreach experiences is the opportunity for meaningful advocacy for your program and music education overall.

Creating an Outreach Experience

To get started, identify existing needs in your community. Reach out to local volunteer organizations to learn about upcoming events, contact local professional arts organizations to see if they could sponsor your participation (pay for transportation, etc.).

This is also a great opportunity to have meaningful conversations with your students and increase their ownership by having them discuss community needs and opportunities that interest them. Perhaps one of your students has a family member served by a community organization that has an opportunity for your outreach. Look for ways in which you can match the identified needs of the community with the interests of your students, and find opportunities that can be served by the types and sizes of ensembles that can offer a meaningful musical outreach. Every opportunity will vary in terms of available space and location, so this will influence your planning for the ensemble type, size, and repertoire.

While it can become a challenge for student and teacher time,

planning a series of events with a community organization can increase interest and meaningful connections between the students and their community. One simple example is a biannual offering, once per semester, over successive years. A regular offering deepens the relationship between the teacher and the community organizers, fostering the relationship with and trust in your program. The success of established programs may also improve chances for the award of grant funding to expand your offering, particularly if cost-sharing is involved.

Programming

Be sure to consider the available preparation time and program music that will engage your students and be meaningful to your audience. When performing for aging communities consider what types of music *they* listened to between the ages of 20 and 50. This might include marches, patriotic music, and various styles of jazz. For school or youth outreach programs, consider programming around a theme (e.g., music of other cultures, music inspired by film, beatboxing, or programmatic music).

Programming for hospitals may be best met with music from the classical period, meditative works, or pieces with soothing melodies. Consider that the music might be heard throughout the hospital by a variety of patients experiencing a wide array of conditions. Check with the hospital regarding any limitations prior to visiting, such as visiting hours, regulations involving sound volume, required permissions, or sanitation concerns.

Music to Fit Your Budget

If your music library doesn't support your need, the online International Music Score Library Project (ISMLP) is a great and free resource for music in the public domain (subscription donation suggested). This works particularly well for finding chamber music from the classical and romantic periods. Another option could be to invite a local music store to sponsor the project through the provision of scores and parts in exchange for publicity.

Preparing Students for Outreach

Visit with students prior to the outreach regarding considerations and concerns for the outreach audience. For example, educating students on the types of conversa-

tions that may come up in assisted living facilities can be helpful. These include stories from a variety of cultural backgrounds, stories of war, and more. Prepare students that in some cases with older audiences, they might experience issues with racism, sexism, or gender equality and identity. Help students engage in conversations around these topics with empathy and also appropriate boundaries. Keep the intention of the outreach clear and teach students how to redirect conversations if needed.

Follow Up After the Outreach

This is an important aspect of outreach projects and one that is often overlooked. Meet with the students who participated soon after the event. Discuss what they learned, what challenges they had, and if there were any shifts in perspective. Discuss what went well, and what they might change if they were to do it again. Have students share the ways their own lives were affected by the outreach. Share any feedback you may have received

from the outreach participants, including thank-you letters.

Initiating and sustaining outreach programs requires a contribution of time and resources, which initially may seem like a deterrent. However, the benefits gained by the students, the teachers, and the community at large make for incredibly rewarding experiences of connection and healing. ❏

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