

Dramatic Benefits of Group Music Instruction Are Just Beginning to Be Understood

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Humans have the need to belong, to be part of a group of individuals who share interests, and who come together for a common purpose. Such needs are as important to children and teens as they are to people in mid-life and to senior adults. In fact, it is increasingly being understood that this need for connection with others may be the most important component contributing to quality of life.

That's just one -- albeit an important -- reason why learning to play a musical instrument in an organized group setting can be so beneficial. A three-year research undertaking called the Music Making And Wellness Research Project, has underscored the relationship between group music making and wellness, especially among the elderly.

Dr. Frederick Tims, principal investigator for the project and professor and chair of Music Therapy at Michigan State University says, "We feel strongly that abundant health benefits can be achieved by older adults who learn to make music in a supportive, socially enjoyable setting." In addition, he states, "We are just beginning to understand the positive effects of making music on our bodies and our physical health."

Researchers believe this to be the case because over and above the sheer pleasure and enjoyment of learning to make music, participating in supportive, socially enjoyable music classes provides the opportunity for social interaction in a totally non-threatening environment. And they have found that sharing music making often leads to people also sharing personal concerns and issues that are a part of life's experiences. For example, people who make music together in their communities, often travel together to and from lessons. As their interests grow, many also attend musical events with one another and continue to socialize after their classes or attending a musical event. As their knowledge and appreciation of one another grows, they may share things about their personal lives and in the process of opening up, discover meaningful new and lasting friendships. However, people who are not as comfortable sharing on a personal level focus their discussions on music and music making topics. In such a setting, sharing the music provides the basis and the reason for social interaction.

The benefits and joys of an individual learning to play a musical instrument generally have been well known. Less well known, Tims says, are the significant and additional benefits that come from making music in a supportive, socially enjoyable setting. He is an advocate in encouraging others that this is something worth looking into for anyone thinking about learning to play an instrument and making their own music.

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