

Whatever happened to the sound of music?

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Anna Goldsworthy fears that the younger generation will soon be completely oblivious to her life's passion. The Australian pianist says, " It is difficult to escape the fact that my audience is several decades further down the road than I am. And I am less and less confident that a new audience will come marching in to replace them.

" In fact, the results of a study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that most classical concert attendants are ages 64 to 74. Like many other musicians, Goldsworthy voices the concerns of the plight of our future. Classical music used to be rightfully beheld as an integral aspect of society, a universal language at the heart and soul of global culture. Now, at least in our local towns, it is the first to take blows from the budget and last to catch the attention of non-classical musicians. Orchestras, once well-respected, now go out of their way to appeal to new audiences of technology-savvy young adults, whose short attention spans are demanding. It is deeply saddening that nobody seems to consider the benefits playing an instrument has on learning capabilities and the sense of community it builds.

Making music is proven to strengthen cognitive function and foster valuable learning skills. According to Dr. Anita Collins, award-winning music educator and researcher, it engages every area of the brain. Activity increases particularly in the visual, auditory, and motor cortices. Playing requires fine motor skills, controlled in both hemispheres. Because both the precision of mathematics and creativity are involved, activity also heightens in the bridge between the hemispheres.

This allows messages to travel faster and through more complex routes, resulting in better problem-solving skills and executive function.

Furthermore, careful practice teaches the brain to apply these concepts to other activities. Students who take music outperform those who don't on indicators such as grade point average, graduation rate, standardized test scores, attendance, and discipline, as reflected in a recent study from the University of Kansas. However, this is not always valued. Where I live, the school system has always understood the potential of music instruction starting from a very young age, as early as second grade. As a violinist of nine years, I hold music close to my heart.

The thought that we might be succumbing to cutting from the music department is alarming, including to many fellow orchestra and band students. Next year, in-school music lessons may be cut, and the underpaid teachers will have to stretch themselves across even more schools. Dr. Becky Eason, associate director of the Center for Public Partnerships and Research, says that music is essential for “creating a sense of belonging and purpose for the students...

they're motivated to come to school so that they can participate in music.” To us, music class is not just an activity, but a chance to create something special together. We hope our audience will share the same experience, but, if trends continue, those of us who go on to play professionally may as well be performing for a half-asleep hall. There are several ways we can reinstate classical music into our lives and prove that it is not an outdated, frivolous practice. The first is to speak out against budget cuts.

Change begins where passion lies. You can organize a petition to gain support from both instrumentalists and non-musicians. To address decline in viewer attention, orchestras and bands can think about adapting to more contemporary methods, while not derailing from their purpose of playing classical music. Modern artists, such as Maya Beiser and Lindsey Stirling, are already forging new paths in undefined genres. They retain their virtuosity while catching the interest of people who might otherwise not listen to such pieces.

Music groups can do the same in a tasteful manner, such as by featuring special instruments or playing arrangements of well-known tunes. This allows for a more interactive listening experience. Music, as a wise teacher once told me, is what sets us apart from others, making our culture so diverse and connected. He said that a society without music is one without heart, and that, in all his life, he has never heard someone say they hate all forms of music. The great orchestras today have withstood the test of time; we cannot lose this part of us now. Join me in preserving the sound of music.