Soundtrack to my life

I wake up to the sound of my iPod alarm clock. I sing in the shower. I turn on the car stereo on the way to work. I hear the radio in the background at the store. I know my cell phone is ringing by the distinct music of my ringtone.

I get that annoying product jingle stuck in my head, just before the little ditty comes on to introduce the evening news broadcast. I get caught up in my favorite TV show, with the music playing up the emotions of the characters. I pump myself up for my workout, and I calm myself down after a frustrating day.

Music is the soundtrack of our lives. Just take one minute to think about how much of your day is affected by music.

OK, now picture what your life would look like without music.

There would be no first slow dance at the junior high social, no school song for the halftime show at the football game. The groom wouldn't be holding his breath as his bride marches down the aisle, and there'd be no tears shed as Olympic athletes hear their national anthems.

Worship at church would be drastically altered, and movies would become dull and boring. What would the holidays look like without Christmas carols? And what would TV look like without American Idol, The Voice and Dancing with the Stars?

There would be no rock stars. No pianos, guitars, violins, lullabies, musicals, operas or concerts.

I think you get my point.

Last week I attended Phillips County Arts Council's concert with a cappella performers called Street Corner Symphony, the group of six guys who claimed runner-up honors on the 2010 The Sing-Off on NBC.

They made a comment that really struck me—they would not be where they are today without their high school music programs.

Granted, I'm not a nationally-known musician, but I can say the same thing. I would not be where I am today without school music programs.

I can't imagine my life without music, and I sincerely thank all my music instructors as well as all the band, orchestra and choir teachers across the country. We need music in our lives, and they make that possible.

March happens to be Music in Our Schools Month. Here are a few facts for you about the importance of music in our schools.

—Young children who take music lessons show different brain development and improved memory over the course of a year, compared to children who do not receive musical training. They performed better in a memory test that is correlated with general intelligence skills such as literacy, verbal memory, visiospatial processing, mathematics and IQ (Dr. Laurel Trainor, Prof. of Psychology, Neuroscience and Behaviour at McMaster University, 2006).

—Study of the arts yields increased academic performance, reduced absenteeism and better skill-building. For at-risk youth, the arts contribute to lower recidivism rates; increased self-esteem; the acquisition of job skills; and the development of much needed creative thinking, problem solving and communication skills (The Impact of Arts Education on Workforce Preparation, The National Governors Association, May 2002).

—Schools with music programs have significantly higher graduation rates than do those without programs—90.2 percent as compared to 72.9 percent. They also have significantly higher attendance rates—93.3 percent versus 84.9 percent (Harris Interactive poll of high school principals, 2006).

—Across the country, students in high-quality school music programs score higher on standardized tests compared to students in schools with low-quality or no music programs, regardless of the socioeconomic level of the school or school district (Christopher M. Johnson and Jenny E. Memmott, Journal of Research in Music Education, 2006).

—Students of music continue to outperform their non-arts peers on the SAT (The College Board, Profile of College-Bound Seniors National Report for 2006).

—Mastery of the arts and humanities is closely correlated with high earnings (Tough Choices or Tough Times: The report of the new Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 2007).

And the list goes on. Music benefits students in school, learning, development, society and in life.

OK, so maybe the last time you picked up a musical instrument was in fifth-grade band. And the only time you'll be caught singing is in the car, where nobody can hear you. Don't pretend music doesn't affect you. It not only affects your entertainment choices, but also your day-to-day living and our society as a whole.

Our music students are the next rock stars, songwriters and orchestra directors. They are our future business owners, doctors and politicians.

Let's give them a chance to shine. Happy Music in our Schools Month!

For more information on the benefits of music in schools, visit menc.org and supportmusic.com .

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