

CAN MUSIC MAKE A LITTLE GENIUS OUT OF MY CHILD?

Many studies have proven that children who grow up playing an instrument score about 51 points higher on the verbal section of the SAT and 39 points higher on the math.

How does this happen?

Brain-mapping research shows that while students are learning to follow a musical passage, the areas of the brain that process language, reasoning, and math skills light up - because they're being exercised at the same time. Claire Lerner: L.C.S.W., author of 'Learning and Growing Together'.

The brain has trillions of neurons, but scientists have found that if it does not use some of them and does not form pathways between the neurons, it starts to trim them.

EITHER YOU USE IT OR YOU LOSE IT.

If a child sings or plays structured melodies, the brain generates neural circuits and patterns. Dr. Mark Tramo, a neuroscientist at Harvard Medical School states, "We believe a handful of neural codes are used by the brain, so exercising the brain through music strengthens other cognitive skills. It's a lot like saying: If you exercise your body by running, you enhance your ability not only to run, but also to play soccer or basketball." {PARADE, June 14. 1998}

WHAT KIND OF MUSIC?

An experiment by two high school students in Virginia proved that certain types of music stimulate the brain in different manners. They ran 72 lab mice through a maze and found that on an average it took the mice 10 minutes to complete the maze. The mice were then placed in three groups. One group listened to Mozart; one group listened to Anthrax, a heavy metal group, and the last group listened to no music. After four weeks, the Mozart mice could negotiate the maze in 1 1/2 minutes; the Anthrax group took 30 minutes to negotiate the maze (remember - prior to exposure to this music, they could complete the maze in 10 minutes); and the group that listened to no music was able to trim 5 minutes off of the original 10 minute maze. Clearly the Mozart group fared the best, knocking 8 1/2 minutes off of their original time.

Could it be said that if you have no exposure to music, it is better than exposure to negatively mind altering music? According to this study it is.

MUSIC AS STRONG MEDICINE?

Neuroscientist, Michael Thaut at Colorado State University explains that "therapeutic use of music seems to activate different parts of the brain, including networks associated with motor control, memory, emotion, and speech."

Therapists at the music therapy clinic at California State University in Northridge have found that patients who listen and practice music, see their levels of stress hormone drop and their immune systems get stronger.

HOW IMPORTANT IS MUSIC IN YOUR CHILD'S CURRICULUM?

Over 2300 years ago, PLATO said, "Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education, and children should be taught music before anything else."

One of the least affluent schools in Needham, Massachusetts improved their test scores dramatically by having the students engage in daily music and art classes. When the fourth graders were tested by the state, they got 1600 out of 1600 in math, 1580 in reading, 1570 in science and 1560 in social studies. The state average was 1330.

BUT MY CHILD DOES NOT WANT TO BECOME A CONCERT PIANIST OR OPERA SINGER!

Taking piano or voice lessons does not have to end up as a career choice to be useful. You will improve your test scores on other subjects, just by studying music. And I have personally experienced students who have come out of their shell by performing. This is one of the most important tools a child can carry into their adulthood. CONFIDENCE. I recently heard about a poll that asked adults across America if they would rather have a root canal or speak in front of a large group of people. Overwhelmingly, the answer was - root canal. Well, I have experienced both and my choice would definitely be to speak in front of a large group of people. This is an important asset whether you want to be a lawyer, teacher, performer, doctor, or the C.E.O. of a major company. Music lessons are not a waste of money or time.

IF YOUR CHILD DOES WANT TO PURSUE THEATRE OR MUSIC AS A CAREER CHOICE, ARE YOU TAKING LESSONS WITH A TEACHER WHO CAN ADEQUATELY PREPARE YOU FOR COLLEGE?

First of all, make sure your piano teacher or voice teacher has a degree. If not, it's highly unlikely they will be able to coach your student on all of the entrance requirements. Every college has a different set of requirements and you should begin early to prepare for them. I have had past students pursue music or theatre degrees at the University of the Pacific Conservatory of Music; Azusa Pacific University; Point Loma Nazarene University; Redlands University; UCLA; Biola University; San Diego State University; and Concordia University.

A degree in vocal music will require knowledge of Italian art songs, as well as a mastery of music theory. Auditions for entering the theatre department at most colleges will also include a song audition, dance audition, and a monologue. Students, as well as parents, are often surprised when the college audition requires a more professional approach than what is expected from them in community theatre. Do not rely on your participation in community productions to serve as a springboard for a musical theatre degree.