

Good morning! I am very glad to be able to share some of my musical experiences with you this morning.

My Great Aunt Nancy gave me a piano on my sixth birthday. Music has been a central part of my life ever since. I have two college degrees in music, one in piano and another in music therapy. I have worked as a music therapist or piano teacher since graduating college, and am currently doing both. I have been coping with fibromyalgia for about the past 25 years. The physical limitations greatly impede my ability to practice piano. For no particularly good reason, I've found that even playing simple pieces makes me nervous these days, so I no longer enjoy performing. But there are plenty of other musical opportunities in my life.

Since today's topic is rather huge, I've tried to narrow it down just a tad and focus on rhythm.

George Leonard writes in his book, The Silent Pulse:

"At the heart of each of us there exists a silent pulse of perfect rhythm, made up of wave forms and resonances, which is absolutely individual and yet connects us to the universe."

I try to approach LIFE as my spiritual practice, and part of that practice has focused on eliminating the barriers to that "silent pulse of perfect rhythm". Everything in the physical universe has rhythm. $E=mc^2$ tells us that everything physical is energy. Energy vibrates and therefore has rhythm. We walk in rhythm, we talk in rhythm, read, write, act, draw, play sports and breathe in rhythm. The artistic realm exists in rarified rhythmic form. I tell my students that when we refine our sense of rhythm, we improve just about everything we do.

Another concept I take with me from modern physics is that the quantum universe transcends the rational, opening up whole new realms of possibility.

About 20 years ago, I was doing a progressive relaxation exercise when I began experiencing subtle energies – for simplicity sake, I will liken them to "chi", the energy that is released in acupuncture. When the flow of subtle energy is strong, I feel relaxed and energized at the same time, and the boundaries between myself and others start to dissolve into a sense of intimate connection.

Some people spend years in meditation to get in touch with subtle energies, but it came to me quite simply. It is my theory that I paid my dues on the piano bench. Musical training fine tunes the mind-body connection and musical performance is tantamount to *moving meditation*.

I believe all of my students are musical and they prove it to me time and again. We all possess that perfect rhythm. Some merely have more barriers to expressing it than others.

With my music therapy students, musical goals are not my top priority. Because of music's highly integrative nature, therapeutic applications of music to clinical goals are endless. Many of the high functioning autistic and asperger's students with whom I work tend to have an affinity for music. A person who is autistic has compromised sensory systems. The autistic brain can interpret normal sensory input as dangerous, and produce a fight or flight response. At the same time, the brain likes patterns. When a rhythmic musical pattern is perceived, the fear response relaxes and allows higher level functioning to occur.

One of my autistic students is a teenage boy with very low energy and very slow processing skills– he could sleep through his entire day in school if allowed. But he has a great voice and really comes alive when he sings. At one point, I put an aria on Youtube and asked him if he would have any interest in singing opera. He responded, "how about Figaro?" So, with the wonders of modern technology, I brought Pavarotti up on Youtube and the young man intoned every note, without the words, but with considerable skill and incredible animation. He had learned it from a cartoon.

I was breathless he was so stunning. But what is more beautiful – hearing a young 16 year old sing amazing opera, or watching him come to life, giving us a glimpse into his soul? The music itself breaks down the barriers to his perfect rhythm.

I would like to conclude by reading a poem that I wrote for the final project in a Martin Buber class that was taught by Kathryn Burt, one of Countryside's intern ministers. I am not a poet, but the poem is my best shot at describing an experience I had playing a hymn for a service at our old church on Brockway. At one point, the energies surrounding me dramatically shifted and I had the sensation that the piano was playing itself.

SHALL WE DANCE?

Just another Sunday service
Playing just a simple hymn

A *SUDDEN WIND* at my back
whisks me into a powerful



An impetuous shift into cruise control
pro-P-E-L-S-t-h-e-m-u-s-i-c-f-o-r-w-a-r-d
in an effortless dance.

Fred and Ginger at the keyboard
wholly dependent, totally free

Not catching the flame
The flame caught me.

Fleeting *WINDS OF GRACE*
reveal the essence of the word



"Tolerance" falls short
cannot fill the space

ENTRAINED and
AWARE
all the more we



I and YOU
PARTNERS IN THE DANCE

