

THE POWER OF MUSIC

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM MUSIC ABOUT OURSELVES, OUR LIVES, OUR CULTURES, NATURE, AND THE WORLD

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I believe music is one of the most important activities in our lives and in the world. While this belief is personal and has been shaped largely by my experiences in the western musical tradition, I would like to share my reasons for this belief with you, especially as I have encountered many people who have similar beliefs regardless of where they live or what kind of music they listen to or prefer.

My encounter with music began when I was very young. My parents arranged piano and singing lessons for me and enrolled me in a choir at Grace Church-on-the-Hill in Toronto when I was in public school. This was one of the greatest experiences - if not *the greatest experience* – in my life. I loved singing hymns - such as *O for the Wings of a Dove*, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, *O Perfect Love*, *Come Down O Love Divine*, *Abide with Me*, and *Jerusalem* – as well as many beautiful anthems. I also became aware of how important the “setting” is or can be for the enjoyment of music, not only the cathedrals, mosques, churches, synagogues, temples, and so forth but also at home, in concert halls, outdoor venues, and other places in the natural world.

These are not the only experiences I had in music when I was young. I also spent many memorable hours listening to music with my father. We would lie on the couch in the living room together listening to musical masterpieces on the radio or our record player by such well-known composers as Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Rachmaninoff, Chopin, and many others. My father was especially interested in the music of Schumann, who, he said, had a tendency to create musical problems for himself and then extricate himself from these problems with great imagination, ingenuity, and creativity. My father also learned to play the piano without any lessons and would often sit down at the piano after dinner and play the first movement of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*, Debussy’s *Clair de Lune*, and the first couple of pages of Chopin’s *Etude, Op. 10, No. 3 (Tristesse)* before it got too difficult. I admired him so much for this, as well as the fact that he produced many beautiful water colour and oil paintings that hang in our home today.

While I didn’t know it at the time, I discovered later in life that I was in very good company when I was exposed to a great deal of music in my youth and enjoyed it so much. Many renowned scholars have been strong advocates of music in general and music education in particular, especially at a very early age. Their convictions on this matter can

be traced back to classical times. The Greek philosopher Plato, for instance, was a strong advocate of the importance of music in our lives, especially when we are young. Not only did he say, “I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy, but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning,” but also he believed that, “musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten.” Moreover, in his famous book *The Republic*, which is filled with references to the powerful role music can play in the development of people, their personalities, and lives as well as the development of societies, countries, and the ideal state, Plato expressed his belief that, “Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything.”

Beliefs such as these with respect to the importance of music are not limited to Greek philosophers or classical times. Far from it. In the nineteenth century, for example, the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called music “the universal language of mankind (humankind).” This is what gives music its incredible attraction and international appeal, which is why Hans Christian Andersen claimed that “where words fail, music speaks,” and Walter Pater felt that “all art constantly aspires toward the condition of music.”

As luck would have it, my experiences in music were not limited to my youth, primary school, or classical music. It was expanded considerably when I went to secondary school, but in a very different way. While I had listened to a great deal of classical music and sung a great deal of religious music in the choir, I had not been exposed to much music of other kinds. This changed - and changed dramatically - when I was in high school. I listened to a great deal of popular music at that time and developed a keen appreciation for it. As a result, I enjoy popular music today as well as classical music, despite the fact that I listen to much more classical music than popular music at present. However, if I like a piece of music and find it enjoyable, I will listen to it regardless of what people think or whether it is popular or classical in nature.

Many popular songs were all the rage when I was in high school, such as “Love is a Many Splendored Thing,” “Unchained Melody,” “Shangri-La,” “My Prayer,” “I Believe,” “Stranger in Paradise,” and my all-time favourite “Tammy” sung by Debbie Reynolds. I enjoy listening to these songs whenever I hear them - which unfortunately is very seldom these days - as well as the songs of many other talented popular singers and composers.

It was in high school that I was exposed to musicals for the first time. Most of these musicals were written by American composers and lyricists, such as Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Jerome Kern, Alan Jay Lerner, Frederick Loewe, and many others. Two of my favourites were and still are *Carousel* and *Oklahoma*, both of which were

performed at the high school I attended. While I was not involved in either of these productions, they filled me with a real love for musicals in general - and American musicals in particular - that has grown steadily over the years and still exists today, and includes such favourites as *Carousel*, *Oklahoma*, *Showboat*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *Brigadoon*, *The Sound of Music*, *Les Misérables*, and many others.

These musicals have many wonderful songs in them, such as “If I Loved You,” “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” “Some Enchanted Evening,” “Oh What a Beautiful Morning,” “Climb Every Mountain,” “Edelweiss,” “I Dreamed a Dream”, and many others. These songs are deeply embedded in my mind and memory and contain messages and melodies in them that are far more inspiring than most present-day messages and melodies. This is especially true for the messages provided by Oscar Hammerstein II, who had a remarkable gift for words as well as an uncanny knack of combining them with exquisite music written by Richard Rogers and other composers. A good example of this is when Richard Rogers combined his captivating music to go with Oscar Hammerstein II’s remarkable words for such songs as “You’ll Never Walk Alone” from *Carousel*: When you walk through a storm/Keep your head up high/And don’t be afraid of the dark/At the end of the storm is a golden sky/And the sweet silver song of a lark,” as well as “Climb every mountain/Ford every stream/Follow every rainbow/Till you find your dream!” from *The Sound of Music*.

It was about this time that I was exposed to jazz for the first time. This is because my brother Murray, who also took piano lessons and sang in the choir at Grace Church-on-the-Hill, became a composer later in life and would often sit down at the piano when he was younger and improvise on various sounds and melodies for what seemed like hours on end. He was especially captivated by jazz, and like everything Murray did, put his whole heart and soul into it. He was always studying and listening to the music of jazz greats such as Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Count Basie, and many others. He knew the music of these musical giants like the back of his hand and incorporated much of their music into his improvisational activities. He also taught me to play a jazz bass one day so I could play this bass while he experimented with different sounds and chords in the treble. One afternoon, I mustered up the courage to play this jazz bass on the organ at Grace Church-on-the-Hill before choir practice when I thought nobody else was in the church. It wasn’t long before this jazz bass was reverberating throughout the church and the entire neighbourhood around the church, which was situated in one of Toronto’s most exclusive and up-scale neighbourhoods. As it turned out, the Rector was working in his office at the Church that day. As soon as he heard it, he came flying across the chancel without even stopping at the centre of the chancel to bow to the cross and insisted that I put an instant stop to this. Boy, did I get it that day. I got a severe reprimand from the Rector and was docked a month’s pay by the organist and choirmaster who was also my piano teacher.

By the time I had completed high school and commenced university, I was able to add two more musical genres to this list. The first was opera, which a Hungarian refugee taught me when my parents took him into our home after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Like many Europeans, he was very knowledgeable about opera and especially European operas and taught me a great deal about this remarkable art form. The other was folk music, which Murray introduced me to when he sent home many records of Romanian, Bulgarian, Yugoslavian, and Greek folk music when he was travelling in these parts of the world. This area was and still is well known for its folk music and composers, especially Zoltán Kodály and his *Variations on a Hungarian Folk Song* and *Dances of Gálanta*, Béla Bartók and his *Romanian Folk Dances for String Orchestra*, and George Enescu and his popular *Romanian Rhapsodies*.

While I didn't know it at the time, interest in folk music by composers such as these and many others led to the creation of a colossal treasure trove of folk music from every region of the world. This began shortly after the Second World War when musicologist Alain Daniélou, UNESCO, the International Music Council, and the Smithsonian Institute in the United States collaborated on creating a vast reservoir and repertoire of folk music from every conceivable part of the world following its enormous popularity in Europe. As a result, the *UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music* now includes 127 albums of folk music from all over the globe. Commencing in April 2014, and continuing to July 2015, two albums were released by UNESCO every week and now all 127 albums are available through digital downloads, streaming services, on-demand physical CDs, library streaming, and audio subscriptions.

There is one final musical experience I had in my early twenties that I would like to tell you about because it had a profound effect on me and has played such an important role in my life ever since. It occurred one day when I was walking past Hart House at the University of Toronto and heard the most exquisite music lofting out of one of its second floor windows. I stood there for the longest time listening to this music because it was exquisite and I had never heard it before. When it was over, I rushed to the music room at Hart House to find out what it was and who composed it. It turned out to be *The Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi, one of the greatest composers of baroque music. While I had been exposed to a great deal of baroque music by Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frederick Handel, and Franz Schubert when I sang in the choir, I had not been exposed to much baroque music by other composers and certainly nothing by Vivaldi that I can remember.

Listening to *The Four Seasons* opened a whole new musical world for me. It instilled in me a keen desire to learn more about the music of Vivaldi - the so-called Red Priest - as well as many other baroque composers including Arcangelo Corelli, Giovanni Gabrieli, Alessandro Scarlatti, and Tomaso Albinoni from Italy, François Couperin, Jean Baptiste Lully, Jean Philippe Rameau, and Marc-Antoine Charpentier from France, Henry Purcell, Thomas Tallis, Jerimiah Clark, Charles Avison, and William Byrd from England,

Georg Philipp Telemann, and Heinrich Schütz from Germany, Domenico Scarlatti from Italy and Spain and the son of Alessandro Scarlatti, Dieterick Buxtehude from Sweden, Denmark. and Germany, and many others.

This was a real “find” for me because baroque music has played a prominent role in my life ever since. Put simply, I love baroque music and the music of baroque composers. It is so majestic, inspiring, and accessible that it never fails to move me and fill me with a great deal of contentment, satisfaction, and delight. This is confirmed by many other people. In fact, contemporary research is revealing that baroque music has a favourable effect on people’s health and well-being because it is very regal and evocative in nature and affects that part of the brain that produces positive feelings, emotions, and sensations.

By the time I had completed my academic studies, I had been exposed to a great deal of music of many different types – classical, popular, jazz, musicals, opera, baroque, romantic, folk, and so forth – even if the bulk of this music was in the classical and western musical tradition. What struck me most about my many experiences in this area when I reflect back on them today is how little there is in the world that is not connected to music in one form or another or can’t be communicated or conveyed through music in many different ways. This is much truer today than it was in the past due to all the phenomenal developments that have taken place in digital technologies, playlists, and other devices as well as organizations such as YouTube and many others.

What is most fascinating about music is that it possesses the potential to bring an enormous amount of joy, happiness, knowledge, understanding, health, and well-being into our lives if we are wise enough to realize this and take full advantage of it. This is true for music as an “*end in itself*,” as well as for music as a “*means to other ends*.”

Unfortunately, this enormous potential music possesses in both these areas is far from being realized at present. This is because music is seen and treated in the world we are living in today largely as a form of entertainment and recreation and valued primarily for its contribution to economic growth. As a result, we are not able to capitalize on music’s ability to broaden, deepen, and enrich our development and lives, enhance our overall state of health and well-being, produce many more enjoyable social experiences and group situations, and, most importantly, learn much more about ourselves, our lives, the world, and everything in it and around it. This includes music that is concerned with people, groups, places, experiences, events, communities, towns, cities, regions, countries, cultures, the world, the natural environment, nature’s many diverse elements, other species, the sun, moon, stars, planets, universe, and cosmos. It is all there in one form or another for our enjoyment, pleasure, and fulfillment, regardless of whether it is music from the western musical tradition or any other tradition.

In order to unleash music's remarkable potential, let's consider music *as an end in itself* first and foremost because music in this form can teach us a great deal about ourselves and our lives by reaching right into our hearts and souls and enhancing our lives, wellbeing, and consciousness. We have all been so moved, touched, and uplifted by music over our lives that we feel we have transcended ourselves and entered a very special place. Composers and musicians know all about this, which is why they use sounds, melodies, rhythms, harmony, counterpoint, and so forth to produce musical experiences and masterpieces that resonate strongly with our hopes, dreams, aspirations, feelings, fears, emotions, and ideals in unique and far-reaching ways. Not only is music created to be enjoyed, savoured, loved, and appreciated before anything else, but also there is a great deal of music that can suit our every mood, occasion, need, and situation.

Listening to music is the most obvious way of realizing this. There is probably no better way to achieve this than by listening to music while we are sitting in a comfortable armchair in our own homes. However, music can also be enjoyed by listening to it in concert halls, outdoor venues, and other environmental settings. Heard or experienced in this way, music can stimulate, invigorate, and get us going, activate and agitate us, soothe and relax us, inspire us, and enable us to soar to great heights. And this is not all. Music is also beautiful, sublime, divine, nostalgic, and emotional, helps us to express our feelings, emotions, love, and compassion, as well as learn an incredible amount about ourselves and everything that exists within us as well as outside, around, and beyond us.

Take music that stimulates, invigorates, and gets us going. There is an incredible amount of music that does this. In my own case, I am stimulated, invigorated, and get going whenever I hear trumpet voluntaries, especially those composed by John Stanley, Henry Purcell, Georg Philipp Telemann, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Jeremiah Clarke, and Johann Friedrich Fasch. This is also true for J. S. Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor*, Charles-Marie Widor's *Tocatta* from his *Fifth Organ Symphony*, Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No.1*, Handel's *Zadok the Priest*, Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, and the last movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, which is totally different from the first movement. Every time I listen to any one of these pieces, and others I might mention, my lethargy dissipates, eventually evaporates, and I want to tackle things that I have left undone for days, weeks, months, and perhaps even years. (1)

Added to this is music that activates and agitates us. This is because it is concerned with some form of activism, advocacy, or commitment to a cause. Some of the best-known examples of this are the activist and advocacy activities of many American folk singers, such as Woodie Guthrie, Pete Seeger, the Weavers, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Johnny Cash, and Bruce Springsteen. These musicians, and many others that could be mentioned, were involved in numerous social and political causes that were designed to bring about change, especially during the Dirty Thirties, the Great Depression, the Vietnam

war, the American civil rights movement, and others. In the process, they popularized such songs as “Where Have All the Flowers Gone,” “This Land Is Your Land,” “If I Had a Hammer,” “We Shall Overcome,” and many others.

What makes the activist and advocacy activities of composers and musicians like this so important is the fact that music like challenges our existing ways of doing things and helps to create new ones, and along with this, different worldviews, values, lifestyles, and ways of life, much as Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* did when it was first performed in Paris. Nowhere are initiatives like this needed more desperately at the present time than with respect to sustainability and conservation of the natural environment and addressing the many difficult social issues, racial injustices, and political and ecological problems that exist throughout the world today.

While many pieces of music stimulate, invigorate, activate, and agitate us, others have a different effect. They sooth and relax us, especially when we are feeling out of sorts, charged up, or experiencing anxiety, apprehension, or depression. Whenever I find myself in this situation, I usually listen to Rachmaninoff’s *Second Piano Concerto* or the third movement of his *Symphony No. 2* to calm myself down – much as many other people do by all accounts - especially those magnificent chords at the beginning of the first movement of his piano concerto and the quiet and calming effects of the third movement of his second symphony. I am also soothed, however, whenever I listen to Emile von Sauer’s *Cavatina* from his *Piano Concerto No. 1*, the second movement of Beethoven’s *Violin Concerto*, and *Dinner* from Morricone’s *Lady Caliph Suite*. These pieces, and many others, wind me down rather than wind me up.

Then there is music that inspires us. Music of this type tends to be very personal and subjective in nature, since music that inspires one person may not inspire another. However, music that inspires us is extremely important because it causes us to reach above and beyond ourselves and create altered states of mindfulness and consciousness. I am inspired in situations like this whenever I listen to the last movement of Saint-Saëns’ *Organ Symphony*, Wagner’s Overture to *Tannhauser*, and a great deal of the music of George Frederick Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach. Music like this is often associated with music that enables us to soar to great heights and “fly with the eagles” so to speak. Many popular songs do this for me, such as *You Raise Me Up*, *Wind Beneath My Wings*, *Flying Free*, *Give Me My Song*, *Ladies in Lavender*, and many others.

Many people are inspired by music that is extremely beautiful, which is an individual matter as well. This is one of music’s most cherished qualities and revered assets, even if music that is incredibly beautiful, much like beauty in many other areas of life, is in the eyes - or should I say the ears in this case- of the beholder. While some pieces of music are very beautiful from beginning to end, others are only beautiful in certain sections or

segments. This is because it is extremely difficult to sustain beauty for a very long time or from start to finish. As a result, music that does this is often quite short and very rare. If I was asked to provide a list of pieces that are beautiful throughout, I would probably include Chopin's *Etude in A flat, Op. 25, No. 1* (Aeolian Harp), Mascagni's *Intermezzo* from his opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Handel's *Minuet from Berenice*, Schubert's *Impromptu in G Flat*, the first movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, Bach's *Prelude No. 1*, and Morricone's *Gabriel's Oboe*.

In the western musical tradition, Chopin, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Dvořák seemed to have had a special affinity for creating beautiful pieces of music or beautiful sections in music. This is especially true for Chopin, who had a real knack for creating exquisite melodies, which may explain why there are so many young people in China taking piano lessons and playing the music of this outstanding Polish composer and pianist.

While some of Chopin's most beautiful melodies come at the very beginning of his pieces – think of the *Etude in A flat* (Aeolian harp) mentioned earlier for example - others are buried deep in the middle of pieces, such as the exquisite melodies in his *Fantasia Impromptu, Opus 66, Scherzo in B flat minor, Opus 31*, and *Ballade No. 1 in G Minor*. One has to wait for some time to hear the exquisite melodies in these pieces, which is also true for the second movements of his first and second piano concertos. However, these are only a few examples drawn from many in the western classical tradition. There is a cornucopia of exceedingly beautiful pieces of music in every musical tradition, genre, culture, country, and part of the world – pieces that employ sounds, melodies, harmony, counterpoint, rhythms, and so forth to create a great deal of beauty regardless of whether they are classical, popular, historical, contemporary, or environmental in character.

Music that is exceedingly beautiful often produces a sense of awe, wonder, and ecstasy, as well as feelings of the sublime and occasionally even the divine. Choral music often does this for me, especially choral music written during the Renaissance by such composers as Corelli, Gabrieli, Palestrina, Monteverdi, Striggio, Tallis, and others. Some of Wagner's preludes and overtures do this too, especially his overtures to *Parsifal* and *Lohengrin*. Added to this would definitely be Gounod's *Sanctus*, Barber's *Agnes Dei*, Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*, Elgar's *Lux Aeterna* (the choral version of *Nimrod*, one of his *Enigma Variations*) Fauré's *Cantique de Jean Racine*, Franck's *Panis Angelicus*, Mendelssohn's *Verleih Uns Frieden (Grant Us Thy Peace)*, Bach's *Air on a G String*, Mahler's *Adagietto* from his *Fifth Symphony*, the second movement of Beethoven's *Fifth Piano Concerto*, and Mendelssohn's *Song Without Words, Op. 8, No. 6*. These pieces cause me to float in space and project me to very high heights whenever I hear them.

Added to this is music that is nostalgic. This is without doubt one of the most fascinating dimensions of music of all. This is because nostalgia, which comes in many

different forms and is encountered in many different ways, is almost always “*bittersweet*.” It produces fond memories that flood into our consciousness, but regrettably, also creates memories that are tinged with a certain sense of sadness and disappointment because they can never be experienced again in real terms, despite how close they are or may seem. This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult feelings to come to grips with in music and in life, since it seems like you can relive cherished moments and memories from the past in a real sense until logic and rationality set in and inform us that cherished moments and memories like this are gone forever and will never occur again. Despite this, we still replay them over and over again in our minds because they are so precious and remind us of so much.

A good example of nostalgia in music is the Irish folk song Carrickfergus. It is about a person who would give anything to return to the town of his or her birth or where they experienced so many wonderful and memorable activities decades earlier. However, they are now too old, feeble, and worn out to cross over the ocean that is required to do this and can’t find a boatman willing to take them there. With heartfelt words and evocative music, it is incredibly nostalgic, moving, and sad to say the least.

There are many songs like Carrickfergus that are very nostalgic, such as “Time to Say Good-bye,” “Danny Boy” or “Londonderry Air,” “Loch Lomond,” “Auld Lang Syne,” “The Last Rose of Summer,” “Shenandoah,” “Ashokan Farewell,” and many others. It is no coincidence that many of these songs are Scottish or Irish and draw heavily on Scottish and Irish traditions because Scotland and Ireland are filled with music like this. This is probably because it has always been extremely difficult to eke out a living in these countries and parts of the world due to inclement weather, tough terrains, and isolation from the rest of Europe and the world. Pieces like this always leave us hanging in a certain sense because they are usually concerned with a family member, close friend, loved one, or experiences that may last forever but will never be experienced again in fact.

One of the reasons for nostalgia in music is that it is usually filled to the brim with powerful feelings and emotions, much as Tchaikovsky’s *Symphony Pathétique* (*Symphony No. 6*). This is also true for music that helps us to express our feelings and emotions as well as our love and gratitude. We have all had many experiences with music that does this, but I would like to tell you about one experience I had that was especially emotional because it was filled with deep feelings. It was when my wife and I decided to take a family vacation in Arizona with our two daughters Charlene and Susan when they were very young. This memorable experience occurred when we were driving towards Sedona one day and suddenly entered “red rock country.” We were all feeling very elated that day. Not only were we totally free, fully alive, and savouring the moment, but also Elton John’s highly emotional song – “Can You Feel the Love Tonight” –was playing on the car radio with the volume cranked up as far as it would go. With exquisite scenery, beautiful music, and wonderful words – Can you feel the love tonight? The peace that evening brings/ The

world, for once, in perfect harmony/ With all its living things – it was one of these rare occasions in life that will simply never be forgotten, often talked about, and will be cherished and recalled by every member of our family.

This expression of feelings, emotions, and love with and for others is evident in countless pieces of music and undoubtedly every person has his or her personal favourites in this area as well. A favourite of mine is “I’ll Walk Beside You.” It was written by Alan Murray and Edward Lockton many years ago and is sung with a great deal of emotion and compassion by Bryn Terfel, the great Welsh singer. This song was very popular during and after the Second World War when it was popularized by the superb Irish tenor, John McCormack. The words to this song, like the music, are so exquisite, expressive, and very sentimental that I can’t resist providing them here:

I'll walk beside you through the world today
While dreams and songs and flowers bless your way
I'll look into your eyes and hold your hand
I'll walk beside you through the golden land

I'll walk beside you through the world tonight
Beneath the starry skies ablaze with light
Within your soul love's tender words I'll hide
I'll walk beside you through the eventide

I'll walk beside you through the passing years
Through days of cloud and sunshine, joy and tears
And when the great call comes, the sunset gleams
I'll walk beside you to the land of dreams

Most of the music we have considered thus far is concerned with bringing us an enormous amount of personal satisfaction and fulfillment, and, as a result, with music as *an end in itself*. However, as indicated earlier, there is also an enormous amount of music that is concerned with music as *the means to other ends*, be it social, economic, political, educational, ecological, or anything else in nature. This is without doubt one of the very best ways to learn about the world and everything in and around it. Music that does this takes us out of our own skin and into the world of “the other” that exists all around us as well as above, beneath, and beyond us.

I have always found music of this type very compelling because we can learn and benefit an enormous amount from this. Needless to say, paintings and pictures do this too, and do it very well, and, in some cases, even better than music. This because painters, photographers, and the like are able to depict things in the world in visual and

representational terms that are very realistic as well as impressionistic. Despite this, paintings and photographs lack one capability that music, composers, and musicians possess in abundance, namely the capacity to depict things *over time* rather than a specific moment in time, and consequently in dynamic and evolutionary rather than static and stationary terms.

Take depicting other people and their lives for example. Included here in real and imaginary terms are Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* which is concerned with the life of the great Roman emperor Coriolanus, Aaron Copland's *Billy the Kid* and *Lincoln Portrait*, Richard Strauss' *Don Juan*, *Macbeth*, and *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Fantasy*, Aram Khachaturian's *Spartacus - Adagio* from his *Ballet Suite No. 2-1*, Rodrigo's *Fantasia para un Gentilhombre*, and many others.

Telemann's *Don Quixote Suite* also does this and does it extremely well. I find this piece very intriguing, not only because the music is so expressive and alluring, but also because Telemann depicts the hidalgo Alonso Quixano, his squire and peasant friend, Sancho Panza, his worn-out horse Rocinante, and his lady love Dulcinea del Toboso in very descriptive, fascinating, and clever terms. You can almost see Quixano dressed up in medieval armor and carrying his trusty lance attempting to revive chivalry in the world. He undertakes many heroic deeds to impress the greatest love of his life, such as tilting at windmills and trying to overcome the many injustices that exist in the world as Telemann's depictions unfold and enable us to conjure up images in our minds of scenes and situations like these and many others. His ability to do this exposes the fact that many composers and their works possess the ability to tell stories, such as the one told by Miguel de Cervantes in his popular book *Don Quixote* that provided the content for Telemann's remarkable *Don Quixote Suite*.

This same musical and temporal talent is apparent in some of Telemann's other compositions that depict experiences and events similar to this, such as his *Tafelmusik* (Music for the Table), and *La Bourse* (Stock Exchange). It is easy while listening to these pieces to visualize people sitting around a huge table engaged in conversations, telling stories, and enjoying fine food and drink, as well as officials scurrying around the stock exchange floor laughing and joking as they buy and sell stocks and bonds. This is equally true for the music of many other composers and their ability to depict experiences, events, scenes, and situations similar to this and countless others, such as Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, Borodin's *On the Steppes of Central Asia*, Morricone's music for *The Mission*, Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Wagner's *Overture to the Flying Dutchman*, and many others. In this latter work, we are tossed around at sea in the middle of a violent storm to such an extent that we can even feel sick to our stomachs.

This ability to narrate experiences and events like this as well as tell stories through music is amplified many times over when we shift our attention to operas, which is probably one of the reasons why so many people enjoy operas and musicals. Think, for example, of the beautiful, tragic, and often touching stories told by Puccini in *La Bohème*, *Madam Butterfly*, and *Tosca*, Verdi in *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, and *Aida*, Mozart in *The Marriage of Figaro* and *The Magic Flute*, Wagner in *Tristan and Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg*, and Bizet in *Carman*, as well as such musicals as *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Hamilton* to cite only a few examples in the European and American operatic and musical traditions.

What is true for people, events, experiences, and stories is also true for places and particularly cities. A long list could be drawn up here, such as Ferde Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite* and Rodrigo's *Concierto Andaluz* and *Concierto Aranjuez* in the case of places. Another composer who had a real penchant for depicting places in musical terms is Albert Ketèlbey. Many of his pieces, such as *In a Monastery Garden*, *In a Persian Market*, *In a Chinese Temple Garden*, *In the Mystic Land of Egypt*, and *Bells Across the Meadow* provide splendid examples of this. As far as cities are concerned, songs such as *New York, New York*, *I Love Paris*, and George Gershwin's *American in Paris* are obvious illustrations of this. Interestingly, the English composer Eric Coates accomplished this in a much broader, deeper, and more all-encompassing way by dividing the city of London into six specific parts that he felt were symbolic of London as a whole in his musical composition *The London Suite*. These parts are Covert Garden, Westminster, Knightsbridge, Oxford Street, Langham Place, and Mayfair. It was a fantastic idea, which is enjoyed and appreciated by countless Londoners as well as the floods of tourists and visitors who pour into this world-famous cosmopolitan city every minute of every day from many different parts of the world.

There are also many pieces of music that are intended to depict countries and their cultures or specific parts of their cultures. I am thinking here, for instance, of the national anthems of countries, Joseph Canteloube's *Songs of the Auvergne*, Borodin's *Polovtsian Dances* from *Prince Igor* that symbolizes the cultures of the Kipchaks and Cumans as nomadic Turkic people, Max Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy*, Fritz Kreisler's *Tambourin Chinois*, Sibelius' *Finlandia*, and many others. While these pieces do not depict entire cultures, they do depict some of the most salient and symbolic parts of these cultures of countries as wholes, thereby making it possible to conjure up what these cultures are like in holistic terms.

One of the best illustrations of this more all-encompassing character of countries' cultures as wholes or total ways of life is the culture of Spain, thanks to such talented composers as Isaac Albéniz and his *Iberia Suite Asturias*, Manuel de Falla's *Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, Enrique Granados' *Goyascas*, Pablo de Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*

(*Gypsy Airs*) and *Spanish Dances*, Edouard Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* and *Danse espagnola*, Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Capriccio espagnol*, Emmanuel Chabrier's *Espagne*, Maurice Ravel's *Rapsodie Espagnole*, and many others. Through these works and countless others that could be included, it would be possible to create a "musical portrait or portraits of the culture of Spain" that is characteristic of this country, its people, and its culture as a whole if enough symbolic parts were provided for this purpose. And what is true for Spain and its culture is also true for all other countries and their cultures in this holistic sense. While it would take time and require many symbolic examples, it would be possible to create a musical portrait or portraits of the culture of any country in the world that is comprehensive, authentic, enlightening, and engaging.

Nowhere is music's ability to depict a variety of things in the world such as this more in evidence in real and symbolic terms than with respect to nature and nature's many diverse elements. Not only is music of this specific type capable of broadening, deepening, intensifying, and enriching our knowledge, understanding, awareness, and appreciation of nature and the natural world, but also there is an incredible amount that can be learned from music like this about this world in the all-inclusive sense and how important it is to preserve, protect, maintain, cherish, and learn about it.

It is amazing how many composers have been fascinated with nature and its many diverse elements over the course of history, thereby creating a vast cornucopia of musical works that have to do with nature in all its complexity, diversity, grandeur, and abundance. Included in this cornucopia of diverse elements are rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans, mountains, flowers, trees, and forests, sunrises and sunsets, the different periods of the day and seasons of the year, other species and especially animals, as well as the sun, moon, stars, planets, universe, and cosmos.

This is apparent in the compositions of countless composers in the western musical tradition and many other traditions as well. It is manifested most effectively in the ability many composers have to create musical works based on elements taken from nature that are *symbolic* of something substantially larger and possibly even the overall way of life of people and countries. An excellent illustration of this is Smetana's *The Moldau* or what is called *Vltava* in Czechia (the Czech Republic). This is a musical portrait about a remarkable river that flows majestically from its origins in the mountains of the Bohemian forest, then meanders leisurely through the Czechia countryside, and finally arrives at the capital city of Prague. It is a very patriotic work that captures Smetana's love for his homeland and fellow citizens. It was completed in 1874, performed the following year, and constitutes the second movement of his six-movement suite *Ma Vlast*, or *My Country*. (2)

Interestingly, rivers like this and many others have also been a favourite subject of composers for a long time. This is probably because water is one of the world's most

precious assets - if not *the* most precious - and rivers have a great deal to do with movement and flow that are basic requirements at all stages and ages in the life process. Other well-known examples of how rivers have been depicted by composers are *The Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss Jr. and *Flow Gently, Sweet Afton* by Robert Burns and Jonathan Spilman. This latter piece has a wonderful melody and captivating flow of its own set to very evocative words, especially in the first verse: “Flow gently, sweet Afton, Among thy green braes, Flow gently, I’ll sing thee a song in thy praise; My Mary’s asleep by the murmuring stream, Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.”

Bruce Springsteen’s song *The River* as well as *The Rivers of Babylon* by Brent Dowe and Trevor McNaughton of the Jamaican Reggae group Melodians should also be added to this list. However, there are countless others musical works that have also been written about rivers – such as Yin Chengzong and Chu Wanghua’s *Yellow River Piano Concerto* based on Xian Xinghai’s *Yellow River Cantata*, as well as such well-known American favourites as *Ol’ Man River*, *Shenandoah*, and *Rolling River* or Sketches on “*Shenandoah*” by Peter Boyer. And what about Handel’s *Water Music*? While it was not written with an identifiable river named, it was written to be performed on a barge floating down a very specific river –namely the Thames River in England - and had to be repeated several times because King George I liked it so much.

Like rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans have also been a favourite subject of popular and classical composers, such as Taylor Swift’s *The Lakes*, Maxwell’s *Lake by the Ocean*, Redding’s *Sittin on the Dock of the Bay*, Nirvana’s *Lake of Fire*, Bobby Darin’s *Beyond the Sea*, Debussy’s *La Mer*, and Benjiman Britten’s *Four Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes*, to cite a few examples among many.

And what it true for rivers, lakes, seas, and oceans is also true for mountains, flowers, trees, and forests. This is a domain that seems to be much more attractive to classical composers than popular composers, such as Vincent d’Indy’s *Symphony on a French Mountain Air*, Alan Hovhaness’ *Mysterious Mountain (Symphony No. 2)*, Richard Strauss’s *Alpine Symphony*, John Denver’s *Rocky Mountain High*, the “Flower Duet” from Leo Delibes’ *Lakmé*, “The Rose” made famous by Bette Midler, “Waltz of the Flowers” from Tchaikovsky’s ballet *The Nutcracker*, Georges Bizet’s *Flower Song*, Fauré’s *Les Roses d’Ispahan*, Johann Strauss’s *Roses from the South*, Sebelius’s *The Spruce*, Handel’s *Ombra mai fu (Ode to a Tree)*, Schubert’s *The Linden Tree* from his *Winterreise* masterpiece as well as *The Walnut (Nut) Tree*, Ottorino Respighi’s *The Pines of Rome*, Wagner’s *Forest Murmurs*, and many others.

Added to this is the world’s sunrises and sunsets, the different periods of the day, and the various seasons of the year. It wouldn’t take long to create a lengthy list of examples in this area as well. Think, for instance, of John William’s *Sunrise, Sunset*,

Haydn's *Sunrise Quartet*, Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloé*, *Sunrise* from the *Grand Canyon Suite*, Mascagni's *Iris*, Strauss's *Im Abendrot* from his *Last Four Songs*, *Morgen!*, and *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Greig's *Morning Mood* from his *Peer Gynt Suite*, "Morning Has Broken" sung by Cat Stevens, "Oh What a Beautiful Morning" from *Oklahoma*, *This Afternoon* (Nickleback), Ravel's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'une faune* (Prelude to the afternoon of a fawn), *In the Evening* (Led Zeppelin), *Some Enchanted Evening* from *South Pacific*, Engelbert Humperdinck's *Evening Prayer* from his opera *Hansel and Gretel*, *Strangers in the Night*, Modest Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*, Arnold Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*), Don McLean's *Starry, Starry Night*, and countless others.

The seasons of the year also figure prominently in this category. Several composers have written major compositions about the seasons, such as Joseph Haydn's *The Seasons*, Alexander Glazunov's *Seasons*, and especially Antonio Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* mentioned earlier. It is easy in Vivaldi's case to be captivated and get fully submerged in each of the four seasons as he depicts them, which has played such an important role in setting the stage for other composers to address this matter as well through the excitement and enthusiasm aroused by the first signs of spring, the torrid heat of summer with its scorching sun, the beauty and melancholy nature of the fall with its splendid colours, pungent aromas, and falling leaves, and the harshness of winter with its ice, snow, and bone-chilling cold. Added to this list should be Schumann's *Spring Symphony* (*Symphony No. 1*), Schubert's *Im Frühling* (*In Spring*), Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, Delius's *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring*, Gershwin's *Summertime*, Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and many others.

Nature's many diverse elements are also a very fundamental component of music. Most notable in this regard are the rain, snow, ice, wind, clouds, sky, lightning, thunder, and others. There are many examples of elements like this, such as Chopin's "Raindrop Prelude" (*Prelude Op. 28, No. 15*), Debussy's *Jardins sous la pluie* (*Gardens in the Rain*) and *The Snow is Dancing*, R. Murray Schafer's *Snowforms*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Snow Maiden*, Offenbach's *Ballet of the Snowflakes*, Yoko Ono's "Walking on Thin Ice," Drake's "Ice Melts," Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Alceste – Les Vents* (*The Winds*), Stobbs' "Blow the Wind Southerly," the long-time favourite "Blow the West Wind," Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," Sid Acharya's *Stories from the Sky*, Debussy's *Nuages* (*Clouds*), Franz Liszt's *Nuages Gris* (*Gray Clouds*), John Travolta's "Greased Lightnin'," and many others. Most obvious here would be Beethoven's *Symphony No. 6* (*Pastoral Symphony*) which is all about nature and its various elements and includes a terrible thunderstorm and then exquisite clearing after the thunderstorm in the last movement.

Animals are also a very important subject in the works of many composers. A lengthy list could be drawn up here as well without a great deal of difficulty, most obviously

Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, Ralph Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* and *The Wasps*, Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, Bach's *Sheep May Safely Graze*, Schubert's *Trout Quintet*, Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*, Saint-Saëns' *The Swan*, Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, Handel's *Cuckoo and Nightingale*, Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite*, Rimsky-Korsakov *The Flight of the Bumble Bee*, Copland's *The Red Pony*, *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square* which was popularized by Vera Lynn during and after the Second World War, and many others. In addition, many composers have had a special affection and fascination for birds, probably because birds, like composers and musicians, are able to produce many different types of sounds and therefore make music of a particular type. In addition, many composers have used birds or bird calls in their musical compositions, such as Janequin and *Le Chant des Oiseaux (Bird Calls)*, Respighi and *Gli Uccelli (The Birds)*, Olivier Messiaen and *Oiseaux Exotiques (Exotic Birds)*, Vivaldi's *Il Gardellino (The Goldfinch)*. and Mozart's *A Musical Joke* about his pet starling.

The sun, moon, stars, planets, universe, and cosmos are also a very essential component of this musical commitment to the diverse elements of nature. Think, for instance, of *Here Comes the Sun* by the Beatles, Murray Schafer's *Ra* and *Sun Father, Sky Mother*; Nielsen's *Helios Overture* (The Greek God of the Sun), Debussy's *Claire de Lune*, the Marceles' *Blue Moon*, Henry Mancini's *Moon River*, Dvořák's *Song to the Moon* from his opera *Rusalka*, Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, Arnold Schonberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, J. S. Bach's "How Brightly Shines the Morning Star," and numerous others. As far as the planets are concerned, one of the most well-known pieces in this area is Holst's *The Planets*. This is an orchestral suite in seven movements where each movement is named after a specific planet in the Solar System and imbued with its presumed astrological characteristics, such as Venus, the Bringer of Peace, Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity, Mercury, the Winged Messenger, on so on. Added to this in the case of the universe would be the Beatles song "Across the Universe" and David Bowie's *Space Oddity*. Then there is Hildegard von Bingen, who is best known for her spiritual concept of *Viriditas* or "greenness" – the cosmic life force that infuses the natural world - as well as her *Symphonia Armonie Celestium Reverationen* or *Symphony of the Harmony of Celestial Revelations* and many other compositions. One of her most famous quotes is, "I am the fiery life of the essence of God; I am the flame above the beauty in the fields; I shine in the waters; I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. And with the airy wind, I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life."

When all these examples are added up and considered in totality, it is clear that music in all its diverse forms and manifestations possesses the potential to produce a comprehensive and compelling portrait of the world and the universe and everything in them. It is also capable of creating portraits of cultures as dynamic, complex, and organic wholes and overall ways of life, and possesses the capacity to teach us an enormous amount about ourselves, our lives, the world around us, and the universe and cosmos. It is hoped

that this article and the information contained in it will provide a prototype or model that people, organizations, and countries in all parts in the world can use to apply to their own lives, cultures, and countries. This prototype or model could be enhanced by many other elements, such as food, cuisines, paintings, plays, stories, videos, films, digital devices, and much more. In many ways, however, music and musical works top the list in this respect.

Notes

1. While most of the examples used in this article are drawn from my own musical experiences and tradition, I hope that readers of the article will use examples taken from their own musical experiences and tradition in order to make the case that a great deal can be learned from music about ourselves, our lives, and the world at large.

2. Smetana conceived this particular orchestral piece as a series drawn from the legends and landscapes of his homeland, or what he called “musical pictures of Czech glories and defeats.” It took the better part of the 1870s for Smetana to bring this idea to full fruition in *Ma Vlast (My Country)*. Each movement of this suite is a self-standing symphonic poem with its own particular story. In the order of their placement within the suite, the movements portray chivalrous deeds at a medieval castle (*Vyšehrad*); a river journey with scenes of rural life (*Vltava*); the legendary revenge of a spurned maiden (*Šárka*); the fields and woods along the Elbe river (*Z č eských luhů a hájů*); the perseverance of Czech warriors (*Tábor*); and the reminder of their eventual return in victory (*Blaník*).

Má vlast ultimately became Smetana’s most enduring composition, and, of its movements, the second, *The Moldau (Vltava)*, has remained the most popular by far. The movement starts with light, rippling figures that represent the emergence of the Moldau River as two mountain springs, one warm and one cold. Water from the springs then combines to form a powerful river, symbolized by a thickly orchestrated, stately theme that recurs periodically throughout the rest of the work. Farther downstream, the river passes jubilant hunters, portrayed by a horn melody, and then passes a village wedding, signaled by a passage in a polka rhythm. The river then enters a gorge where, according to legend, water nymphs - conveyed by serene and mysterious melodies - bathe in the moonlight. With the morning light, the main river theme returns, though it soon breaks into tumultuous dissonance as the river enters the St. John’s Rapids. Beyond the white water, the river eventually reaches Prague, where, to grand arpeggios of a regal hymn, it flows past the castle Vyšehrad, once the seat of power for Bohemian kings. After fading to a trickle, the piece—and the journey—come to an unambiguous end with a loud two-chord cadence. (This description is based on a write-up provided in the Encyclopedia Britanica).

I have worked in the arts and cultural field for almost sixty years and am the founder and director of the World Culture Project based in Markham Canada. For more information on this article and my work, please visit the World Culture Project Website at: www.worldcultureproject.org or email me at dpaulschafer@sympatico.ca.