

HEATHFIELD SILVER BAND-TER

I've recently been shown an article from The Times which reports on a study claiming that learning music makes children feel cleverer. It claims that people (so not just children then) use the experience of learning an instrument and acquiring a new skill to expand their means of expression. It boosts their perception of what they can achieve and expands their cognitive abilities and intelligence. And so the Times piece goes on.

Speaking for myself I definitely know that learning an instrument has given me a new challenge, something to think about. But the jury is out on whether it has made me any cleverer! The opportunity came at a time when I was looking for something new to get involved with and, like so many things, nothing's easy! But then that comes down to natural ability, whether it's the thing that's perfect for me or whether in fact there might be something else, yet to be discovered, which I'd be a whole lot better at because it's "my thing". How wonderful it must be to find the very thing in life that you are destined to do, and do well, maybe even to excel at, maybe even to become a world expert. Like when there's a national event, disaster or news piece on the national news there's always someone who's an expert in it, no matter how extreme the subject matter. How does that work, how do they manage to locate that very person so instantly and have them speak so eloquently on their often-random subject?

The Times article reports that academic achievements rise along with musical achievements, so learning an instrument helps with other school subjects. Learning music promotes confidence and empowers children. Well that can't be a bad thing. I wish I could go back to school and put it to the test. But if it is true what a shame it is that schools are not teaching instrument learning as much as they did in the past. Certainly in Heathfield the band used to draw in children from schools where they were learning brass instruments, so they learnt at school and with us – before disappearing off to university. Would they have gone to university without learning an instrument is another question. No way of measuring that of course.

Music has been shown to reduce stress, increase productivity, develop creativity, and build confidence. The Chinese philosopher Confucius said that "music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without". Music apparently increases the capacity of your memory. Musicians, an online report says, have organisationally and functionally different brains compared with non-musicians. The parts of your brain that control motor skills actually grow and become more active. Playing music boosts team skills – learning to cooperate with people around you in a band situation, social skills develop, mixing with people of all ages is healthy. It teaches one patience and perseverance – there's almost always a need to work on different sections of music many times before it is correct. Learning an instrument improves coordination, mathematical ability even. Listening skills are sharpened and breathing techniques can be improved over time.

All in all, not a bad hobby.

PS The recent concert in which Heathfield Silver Band played alongside Wadhurst Brass Band raised £2,489.17 for Cancer Research UK, soundly beating the hoped for target of £1,500. Hoorah! Many thanks to all those who came along to hear us play.

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