

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

More than gorgeous sound or painful noise, music can make a difference. If we're feeling down, music lifts us up. It brings hope. Certain kinds of music can increase productivity. Lyrics might educate masses about a cause. A song can express religious or secular philosophy and encourage listeners to care, relax, or take action. Identity and culture are tangled up in music, as is compassion across borders. And sometimes, music is a gift given to an audience by volunteer musicians. What would the history of humanity look like without any music?

Even mediocre instrumental knowledge could enhance a student's intellectual abilities. Studies have shown various links (although the relationship isn't well understood) between listening to classical music and performing spatial tasks, or taking music lessons as a child and having a small but lifelong cognitive improvement. It seems that listening to the right kind of music for the right kind of task is the ideal approach.

Our favorite kinds of music may help relieve stress and increase our resilience during difficult times. For those who are lonely or sick, music can help them feel connected to a community or recover from illness. If you play an instrument, consider volunteering to play at a nursing home, food pantry, church or hospital. (Don't know how to start? Call their number and ask who you could speak to about providing 30 minutes of free music either during a meal or for a special program.)

Composing songs – even though it may not get us fame and fortune – is a wonderful way to be creative and express what's meaningful to us, even if nobody ever hears our songs. Maybe you wouldn't want them to! That's ok. Sing in the shower or tinker around with a portable instrument, and see if it brightens your day. Anything that makes your life healthier and happier will make ripples in the lives of those around you.

YouTube and the internet are full of musicians supporting themselves with their work. They might take song requests or compose their own songs or arrangements of popular soundtracks, and post them online, getting paid very small amounts by many hundreds of patrons who like their work. Some of them are also teachers, and release a new song at intervals along with instructions for how to play it. This is an acceptable career path, allowing people to earn money without causing harm and while being of service to others.

How might you make a difference with music? The options are probably endless!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.