

Music: A Language of Inspiration...

This morning I want to begin by thanking Debra Morris-Bennett. She is an amazing Music Director and brings incredible melodious selections to our sanctuary each and every Sunday. We are both passionate about our music. I remember during candidating week when I met with the staff, Debra shared with me as an aside, that canned music would never be allowed in worship, but this morning I am bending the rules slightly. She knows of course, and I appreciate her patience, her participation, and her thoughts, as we will be engaging in a collaborative sermon this morning... So lets try something different, lets rock!

Grand Funk Railroad... The lead guitar starts out by playing a couple of notes, Base guitar comes in deep low resonant, the electric guitar plays a cord... (WAIT) and then kicks in a wawa peddle making that classic sound, the drums keep time... The lead singer, guitarist and song writer Mark Farner tells the listener, "Everybody listen to me... and return me my ship I'm your captain, I'm your captain though I am feeling mighty sick"... He goes on to tell a story about being lost at sea, the fear of mutiny, and he cries from his cabin, "Can you hear me, can you hear me, am I all alone?" I know that feeling The words and the music together break something open in the listener. I feel the story more than I hear it. Written in 1970, "I'm Your Captain/Closer To Home" was Grand Funk Railroads biggest hit, 9 minutes and 59 seconds of pure rock and roll bliss. I was ten years old when the song was written, recorded, and produced, and it wasn't until I was 12 that I discovered the album at a thrift store. Don't ask me why but I was compelled to have it... it was my first music purchase with my own allowance. I had never owned an album before, I only listened to AM radio, WOLF 1490 on the dial, and what my father played on our TV/stereo console system in our living room – mostly classical, opera and big band (all of which I still love)....

Yet, I played that Grand Funk Railroad vinyl till it was worn out. I'm your captain was my favorite song on the album and it was last in the line up. It went from hard hitting to acoustic, adding violins and cellos and a flute (seemingly a full orchestra) and then Farner calls out: "I'm your captain yeah, yeah, yeah yeah", the base guitar helps us to find our way home... the words tell the listener, "I'm getting closer to my home..." with the sounds of the surf and seagulls in the background... this was a song that truly touched my 12 year old heart. It made me think about the ocean, something that I had never seen in person, being on a boat, something I loved with all of my heart and being closer to home, a place that I have yearned for my entire life.

For me Music tells a story that words alone cannot...

Ludwig van Beethoven once shared that, "Music is ... A higher revelation than all Wisdom & Philosophy"

(JLS) To break me out of falling into a rock and roll chasm my father, in 1973, purchased the album by Neil Diamond, Jonathan Livingston Seagull. Neil Diamond wrote music to accompany the story of the same name written by the author Richard Bache, someone who I would find as a teacher many years late. My father and I listened together and sang together the music that would be so formative in my little life...

(.35)The book tells the story of a seagull who is bored with the daily squabbles over food. Seized by a passion for flight, he pushes himself, learning everything he can about flying, until finally his unwillingness to conform results in his expulsion from his flock. An outcast, he continues to learn, becoming increasingly pleased with his abilities as he leads a peaceful and happy life.

One day, Jonathan is met by two gulls who take him to a "higher plane of existence" in that there is no heaven but a better world found through perfection of knowledge, where he meets other gulls who love to fly. He discovers that his sheer tenacity and desire to learn makes him "pretty well a one-in-a-million bird." (1:20) In this new place, Jonathan befriends the wisest gull, Chiang, who takes him beyond his previous learning, (Neil Speaks) teaching him how to move instantaneously to anywhere else in the Universe. The secret, Chiang says, is to "begin by knowing that you have already arrived."

(2:35) Not satisfied with his new life, Jonathan returns to Earth to find others like him, to bring them his learning and to spread his love for flight. His mission is successful, gathering around him others who have been outlawed for not conforming. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Livingston_Seagull)

And so the music reminds us...

Transcend, Purify, Glorious...

And with that I invite Debra up to share some of her thoughts about music as inspiration...

(Debra Shares her thoughts)

Albert Einstein once shared, "If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music." I would have to agree with Einstein when I personally need balance, and need to take care of myself, I turn to music. Whether I play my guitar or breathe some notes through my flute or listen to a song on the Internet, music has inspired me and held me in my grief. I have spent my life singing in the

car or in the shower, I have fallen in love to music and have been bolstered to speak my truth to power because of music.

I was a radical in my early teens, twenties, thirties, forties, and yes, even now in my fifties...I have protested and marched and leafleted as I listened to the words and music of a man whom I considered to be a justice-seeking leader (Pete Seeger.) It was Seeger in 1965 that sang out his song, We Shall Overcome on the 50-mile walk from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and 1,000 other marchers; a piece of music that would go on to become the anthem for the civil rights movement.

Music has been with every human being since the beginning of time, since that first mother somewhere hummed to sooth her child to sleep or a warrior danced to a drum helping him to calm and steel his nerves. Music gives us patience, strength and courage.

Music, as with any art, has been banned at times and held up as seminal at others. If you want to be truly inspired turn your ear toward music. The poet Maya Angelou once wrote, "Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness."

This is something that Debra spoke about this morning – the silence between the notes - and she and I have actually talked about this a lot. The silence, the breath between notes and how important that place is and yet it, in large measure, goes unnoticed. Leaving space for the air that we breathe is a very important lesson that music can teach us.

As Unitarian Universalists I am surprised that we do not have a principle or source that addresses the importance of music in our religion, but music is not trapped in, but transcends, all religion and for this I am truly grateful. Kurt Vonnegut a lifelong Unitarian Universalist once explained, "If I should ever die let this be my epitaph:

"THE ONLY PROOF HE NEEDED
FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
WAS MUSIC"

Another musical genre that has gained wide acclaim is the music video; believe it or not the music video has been around for as long as we have had talkies. I consider the words, music and images that you are about to see to be emotionally vulnerable, challenging and yet very inspirational. The song is called "Beautiful" it is performed by Christina Aguilera, but was written and produced by Linda Perry, a woman who was born right down the road in Springfield, Massachusetts. In many ways I feel that this

video holds us accountable to our first UU principle “affirming the inherent worth and dignity of all people.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAfyFTzZDMM&ob=av2e>

The flower that is shown at the end of that video, in my humble opinion, is the same flower that the Buddha held up in his wordless “Flower Sermon” it silently teaches us about the importance of personal experience. Music is all about personal experience and what inspires me might be totally different than what inspires you. The real question this morning is how does music inspire what we and, do we listen to music that does inspire us? Music is like self-talk. It can bring one up or down. choose wisely.

Let us take a moment in Silence between the notes...

“Spirit of Life and Love thank you for the presence of music in our lives and in our worship, may we be inspired by it and may it bring peace unto our hearts as we are reminded by the lyrics that we are not alone, that we will in fact overcome, and that we are all beautiful in every single way.”

For this we pray, blessed be, amen

Please rise in body or spirit to sing **Hymn #108** – in the grey hymnal: **How Can I Keep From Singing**