



## MORE SOUNDS THAN SILENCE by Betty Sharp

I smell beer and sauerkraut laden hot dogs. I hear wild calls and foot stomps as I watch Uncle Carmen and Aunt Sylvia polka on old wood planks. It's 1960 and I'm a child at a Pennsylvania Polish picnic. A 1980's zydeco performance by Ponty Bone, The Squeeze Tones and Queen Ida at Liberty Lunch in Austin grabbed me and sent me back there. I had no say in the matter. All I did was click the Spring 2018 Heart Beat radio link and the music took over my imagination.

Emotional response to music is universal but individual response to specific music seems to depend on our own life experiences, regardless of the intent of the musicians. I'm sure some of my friends would quickly switch off zydeco music, but then I'll never sit through their Wagner operas. Different taste in music isn't news, but almost every human anywhere having access to all kinds of music 24/7 is news. It's astounding to me.

Think about this: Limited recorded music became accessible electronically in limited areas about 90 years ago, but in the past 10 years accessibility to innumerable music choices, old and new, has exploded. Worldwide, most humans can pull up any music they want at any time they want, battery included.

Much has been written about effects of loss of silence, but what about the intellectual and emotional consequences of constant music accessibility? For example, scientists who study brain development have known for decades of the tie between mathematical cognizance and musical ability. How musicians follow frequencies, scales, intervals and tones that can be expressed mathematically is foreign to me. Heck, I have trouble being on the beat. But will 24/7 accessibility increase brain development, and which comes first: the music or

the mathematics?

A retired high school principal said she once asked the band director if he knew the school's best mathematics students were band members. He said no one had ever mentioned it. Maybe we've been wrong in telling teenagers to turn off the music when they study, or is listening different from playing or singing? Regardless, it's nearly impossible to limit music accessibility anymore not only for teenagers but also for everyone worldwide. That's very different from the human music experience for most of our existence. I think we're in for a lot of unexpected surprises in creativity, intellectual growth and healing power just from increased accessibility.

I thought of a literary and entertainment example to explain what I mean—Sherlock Holmes and the PBS tv series, "Sherlock." It's not accidental that Conyan Doyle's intellectually superior 19th century detective Holmes plays the violin for solace, and plays alone, although he sometimes composes. He attends performances of virtuosos and appreciates a Stradivarius, but his own playing is largely to sooth his mind and strengthen his logic. There's nothing social about it.

PBS' 21st century "Sherlock," however, uses Holmes violin playing differently. Set in contemporary London, Benedict Cumberbatch's present day Holmes texts with his thumbs, holding his phone behind his back. Although often as anti-social as his 19th century counterpart, this Holmes composes and plays a waltz for John and Mary Watson at their wedding. He does it to give the gift of his esteem to the couple and to create a lovely, publicly shared moment for their memories. Then, in a dark finale, Holmes runs afoul of his mentally deranged and emotionally vacant sister, Eurus. Finally imprisoned in Brit-

ain's most secure facility, Eurus is given a violin. Holmes tries to reach her emotionally through their playing a duet.

This fictional scene parallels what many of us know about our loved ones who suffer from Alzheimer's or dementia. Many can sing a favorite song or play an instrument beautifully, even when they can't recall where they are or who we are. We're learning more about how to use music not only in these cases but also for those suffering from brain injuries, disabilities, depression and addictions. Of course, we've always used music to calm and inspire, to encourage movement and to celebrate. Now, however, Music Therapy is a formal field of study and the payoff could be tremendous. A good place to read more is the site of the Texas Heritage Music Foundation, founded by Dr. Kathleen Hudson, who reviews music for this magazine. Through its "The Music Connection" this foundation offers the "healing power of music."

With all this accessibility to unlimited stored music from all eras, however, why do we still flock to concerts and festivals? Why are bars and restaurants with live music events so popular, particularly in the summer when we can sit outside on the patios with a cold one? (or is that just me?). Do we need to worry about the eventual decline of live music performances? I don't think so.

First, we're tribal. There's no getting away from that. It's great to listen to my beloved Dixie Chicks at home but, wow, being with thousands of others jumping, screaming, singing along, is almost an out of body experience. I want to be with those who can belt out "Good-bye Earl" or who cry to the lyrics of Bruce Robison's "Travelin' Soldier." Its fantastic to share the same reactions with others. That's why we'll keep attending concerts and festivals in mass.

Next, I think we love hearing music in a live setting because its just a whole lot of fun, a break from the routine of every day. Then, there's the anticipation of hearing music that unexpectedly captures our private thoughts and experiences. It touches something we've held inside and didn't know how to

express. The music then becomes very personal.

That happened to me at the Pocket Theatre on Mockingbird in Dallas in—would you believe—the last century. I think it was 1989 when I heard "Thank Heavens for Dale Evans" in this tiny venue. The lyrics "Dale Evans made a cowgirl out of me" put words to the feelings I experienced watching Roy Rodgers and Dale Evans on a 1950's black and white TV. I was a steel mill town little girl who really belonged with horses and hats (cowboys came later). Dale Evans and Buttermilk, her Buckskin horse, were my heroes. I couldn't express it then, and didn't know others felt the same till that song put it all together for me. The musicians? Robin Macey, Laura Lynch, and two teenagers named Martie and Emily. I've been a Dixie Chicks' fan ever since, no matter what.

I know how musicians and composers make money has changed a lot, some of it unfairly, but the live music isn't going to stop no matter the technology and accessibility. The entries to music festivals attest to that. There will always be a younger singer, a younger musician, trying to make it. And I hope there will always be unaccompanied singing in the kitchen while doing chores, and busl oads of annoying middle school kids making chaperons crazy with "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall." It's the opportunities for use of music, the opportunities for learning, for creativity and healing, and for, hopefully, increased appreciation of others' music that I hope will change and grow. We'd be the better for it.

Besides all the Sherlock Holmes stories and the "Sherlock" series, for summer entertainment, I suggest reading Margaret Maron's Judge Deborah Knott mysteries, beginning with "Bootlegger's Daughter." Deborah has 11 brothers, all of whom play musical instruments. They get together at a barbecue joint every month to jam. Don't expect the Partridge Family because this band's Daddy is North Carolina's most successful bootlegger.