

I was only at this school for my last 3 years of high school, but I really feel like those few years had a profound impact on me. I started violin in 4th grade in Bettendorf but it wasn't until my sophomore year of high school that I really got serious about my playing, and my mom would bring me to Iowa City once a week for lessons with Mrs. Preucil, and then pretty soon it was twice a week and I was in the orchestra and Espressivo Strings and the certificate program. My high school wouldn't normally allow free blocks your junior year, but luckily they gave me one just because I was so busy with music.

I started teaching high school orchestra and private lessons right after college, and I felt very well prepared, not just because of college, but also because of my 3 years at this school. Everyone talks about the horrors of your first few years of teaching and that you just have to be in survival mode for a while. And I will admit that for much of my first 7 years of teaching, I've been trying to convince everyone that I'm not a student at the school that I teach at. But honestly, it hasn't been a scary or stressful journey for me - it's been very exciting and rewarding, and I attribute that in large part to the exceptional models of teaching I experienced here at the Preucil School as well as the musical skills I developed here.

And I remember sitting where you are in 2005, and at the time, I don't think I fully realized what all I had gained from being here for just a few years. I think I was just kind of in that graduation mode that you're all probably in, where a lot's on your mind, and it hasn't really hit you yet that you're graduating, and you have no idea how that's possible because you don't even remember the month of April happening. I also just didn't realize the strong reputation of the Preucil School. I can't tell you how many people I've

run into outside of Iowa who know about this school and talked about what a great place it is. It's not just the Preucil name, but also the school itself is very well-known and respected in the music world, and it took me a few years outside of the Preucil School to realize that.

So it might be hard today to stop and truly reflect on what all you've gained from your experience at this school, but maybe you'll at least start that reflection process today. Because it's so easy to take this experience for granted and forget about how unique and special it is. To me, the Preucil School is like the mountains in Colorado - it's this amazing part of the state, but you may not really realize how amazing it is until you leave the state and see that it's not everywhere.

Around the time that I graduated from this school and for my first few years in college, I did a lot of reflecting myself. I started to realize, I was spending a lot of time practicing the violin and working with excellent teachers and getting better, but I wasn't really sure why I was doing it. We put a lot of work into getting better at our instruments, and going like this or like this to produce sounds isn't a very natural activity, and it takes a long time to develop those skills, so why do we do it? This question came up especially when I was a student at the Meadowmount School Music - many of you may know about it - it's a summer camp where basically just practice a lot. If you're under 18, you're required to practice 5 hours a day, and if you stop practicing, the counselors come by and tell you to get back to work or you get penalized. Usually you had to go do some kind of work in a garden or something weird. Luckily, I was over 18, but I still practiced at least 5 hours a day because that's just what everyone did and there wasn't much else to do there. To be honest, it was a great experience overall, but I did ask

myself a few times why I play an instrument. And I'm sure you all have this question in the back of your mind or maybe you will have it at some point. If you're planning on majoring in music, you may be thinking what am I doing with my life, and what am I accomplishing by playing an instrument. Or if you're not majoring in music, you may be thinking, why should I keep playing my instrument?

I think you'll find this question come up a lot over time, and it's not because music is somehow less valuable than other fields - it's because music just doesn't always fit neatly into the way our society works. Schools and business leaders and politicians all want numbers and statistics and test scores, and there's this big assumption that things can only be valuable if they can be measured. Music doesn't fit into that very neatly because it's hard to measure the benefits of music, so people assume it's less valuable than other pursuits. There are so many politicians on both sides of the aisle who focus only on the STEM subjects when they talk about education - science, tech, engineering, and math; and now we're even at a point where the funding for the National Endowment for the Arts is being threatened.

So because of this unfair treatment of music in our society, it's so important that we find the answer to that question of why we're involved with music. Now of course the answer is going to be different for each one of you, but there are some answers that just don't work and that we should try to avoid. For example, money isn't really a good reason for being involved with music. And most people probably understand that, and I actually think that's a good thing, because I never have to worry about working with people who are only it for the money. Raising test scores also isn't a good reason for being involved with music, but it's used all the time as a justification for music in schools

because test scores are measurable. I'm sure none of you are involved in music because you're trying to raise your scores on standardized tests. For some people, especially violinists, for some reason, they keep making music because they like the competitive aspects of it. They like that feeling of winning an audition or playing a solo better than everyone or showing that they can play a faster up-bow staccato than anyone else. We can probably all think of people like that, and we all probably have some of those elements ourselves to some extent, but I don't think those are good reasons for making music either. Because sooner or later we all have to accept that no matter how good we are, we're not going to win every audition, and we're gonna run into tons of people who sound better than us at our instruments. If your goal is just to be the best, then being a musician kind of just ends up being a series of disappointments.

So as you think more and more about why you play an instrument, you might find that the reasons are pretty simple and fundamental, not that you're necessarily trying to change the world, but just that it's something you enjoy doing. There's been research on this, and of course you can also just find this out by asking people who are really into making music. Some of the most common reasons people give for staying involved in music are just that they love their instrument or love to sing, or it provides a stress release, or it helps them connect with other people, or they like the idea of always growing and improving on a skill. So many people don't understand these basic justifications - Policymakers, politicians, and maybe even some of our friends scratch their heads when they hear these justifications for music and the arts, but we all understand those things, and we all serve as an important reminder to them that life is

about much more than just academics and advancing technology or tangible products and materialism.

Deep down, I know you all have a strong passion for music, or you wouldn't be here. But as you think about your future in college and beyond, your lives will change in many unpredictable ways, and it's important to never lose sight of that original strong passion that you have for music. I really strongly believe that the study of music only gets more and more fascinating and rewarding the longer you stay with it.

Some of you may be planning on majoring in music and pursuing a career in it. For others, you may be majoring in something else but are still planning to continue on your instrument. And *maybe* some of you don't have clear plans for continuing on your instrument, or you just not sure what you're gonna do. There are studies that suggest that about 75% of students playing an instrument in high school stop playing that instrument when they get to college. This has always kind of bothered me and kind of confused me, because so much time and hard work goes into learning how to play an instrument, and yet so many people stop working on it or set it aside as soon as they leave high school.

So a few years ago I decided to make a documentary about that. I wanted a way to show everyone, but especially high school students, that there are good reasons to continue making music after high school, AND there are many different WAYS to do that, even if music isn't your main focus. I figured a documentary would be an ideal format because then you could see and hear a lot of examples of people involved with music after high school. The only problem was I had no experience with filmmaking, aside from some really bad movies I had made with friends and family where we would

try to remake The Matrix or the Lord of the Rings in 5 minutes in someone's basement. So, anyway, I found a couple students who I knew were really interested in filmmaking, and we read as much as we could about how to make a documentary. We realized it would be pretty expensive, even for a super low-budget production, so we raised almost \$7000 online through Kickstarter.

Then for the next 6 months, we found ourselves navigating through this huge web of informal music-making communities that we had no idea existed. A typical day in those months would be going to school, and then right after school, driving to somewhere along the Front Range in Colorado to interview someone, and then maybe filming an ensemble rehearsal somewhere else that evening and scheduling more interviews. But we ended up collecting over 150 hours of footage during those 6 months. And then I spent the summer going through all of that and editing it down to a 70-minute film. A typical day for me during that summer would be waking up, editing, eating occasionally, and then going to bed. Looking back, it seems like an insane project, but we were passionate about the subject. And we had no idea there were so many people and groups out there just dedicated to making music for the fun of it, not necessarily to be the best at it. And the passion that we saw in so many people who actively stayed involved with music for decades of their lives, helped to feed our passion to spread their message through this film.

There's a lot that I learned from making that documentary. One thing I learned about is how powerful the label of a degree program or career can be. We found a lot of people who felt that their focus had to be narrowed in on their major during college, or on their career after college, and one way or another, that meant putting their

instruments away for long periods of time. We talked to several senior citizens who were starting their instruments again after having quit for 20 or 30 years, and they sincerely regretted that time away from their instruments - it was just something that they forgot they loved so much. There was one guy who actually realized there were a lot of those people in the software engineering company he was working for - and there were so many that he actually formed an orchestra of people who had put their instruments away for years and regretted it and wanted to keep playing.

So just because you're an engineering major doesn't mean you can't also take music classes or be in ensembles. And even if you're pursuing a very demanding, time-consuming career, there are still many ways to stay involved with music.

And in fact, it's often those people with the most demanding jobs who find the most benefits from music-making, because of the sense of balance it provides. I've talked to students at Harvard and MIT who have overwhelming amounts of academic work but still insist on making time for music in orchestras and a cappella groups because of the stress relief it provides. And there are groups like the Life Sciences Orchestra in Michigan and the Longwood Symphony in Boston and the Health & Wellness Orchestra in Colorado - These are orchestras that are almost entirely *medical* students and professionals who still understand the importance of playing their instruments. So it's easy to look at labels like psychology major or computer science major or lawyer and then feel like we have to narrow our focus into one of these fields to be successful, but I think the opposite is true - we have to broaden our concept of these fields and realize that limiting our capabilities to one field is unnecessary and unhealthy.

Now for those of you who know you're planning on continuing your instruments in some capacity, I think your challenge is not just to continue to grow on your instrument, it's also to maintain that underlying passion you have for music that's brought you this far. And that's a lot harder than it might sound. I know of so many friends and former students of mine who are very involved with music and are busy with practicing and performing, but sadly they've lost a lot of the passion for music that they used to have. And this problem isn't unique to musicians - there was study that suggested that up to 88% of the workforce in the U.S. is not able to contribute to their full potential because they don't have passion for their work.

So a narrow focus on the field of music can be as problematic and unhealthy as a narrow focus on any field, but I think there are a lot of ways to keep your musical passion alive. One way is to stop comparing yourself to others. Psychologists tend to agree that people are much more successful and motivated when they have a mastery mindset rather than a performance mindset - in other words, trying to be the best you can be rather than trying to be better than other people. Music is an inherently cooperative activity, but unfortunately, schools and music programs sometimes turn it into something very competitive.

Another way to keep your passion alive is to broaden your concept of what it means to be a musician. You don't necessarily have to go down the traditional path of taking lessons, playing in orchestras, and auditioning for a big orchestra job. In fact, more and more colleges are acknowledging the many paths you can branch off into as a musician, and they're starting to offer classes in music entrepreneurship. More and more classical musicians are playing at more unusual venues like coffee shops, parks,

hiking trails, and bars, and they're branching off into styles like bluegrass, jazz, and celtic music, and they're exploring the repertoire that best fits the tastes of their communities. So by building a passion for music in our audiences and communities, we're also keeping our own passion alive.

The final thought I want to leave you with is to consider sharing what you've gained at the Preucil School and what you'll continue to develop, by doing some kind of teaching. Now obviously I'm biased, because I am a teacher, but it's extremely common for musicians to start out thinking that they'll never teach and they can't see themselves working with kids, but then at some point, they see the value of it. And it's not just because they realize they need a source of income. My brother is a classic example of this, because he has always just seen himself as a performer and for the longest time insisted that he would never teach. He actually was recently accepted into the New York Philharmonic on bass, and you would think that his performing career would be very fulfilling and he wouldn't have much interest or time to teach. But actually he's told me he now realizes that something has been missing and that he wants to start teaching and he doesn't think his career would be fulfilling without some kind of teaching.

I remember Mrs. Preucil once said to me that it was a shame that so few of the best performers end up teaching music in public schools. There's been a string teacher shortage for quite some time, and while it's getting better, there's still only 30% of school districts in the U.S. that offer instruction on string instruments. Many of those teachers don't even play string instruments, so you can just imagine the amount of impact you could have by teaching at one of those schools, or even just giving lessons in the area or helping out at the school once in a while.

So one of these days, when you're able to clear your mind and not feel overwhelmed with graduation and the end of the school year and college orientation, I hope you'll all take some time to look back on all your experiences here at the Preucil School. Think about what has inspired YOU to keep playing your instrument. If you really stop once in a while and rediscover your own internal passion for music, I think you'll realize that it's something you'll never want to let go of. Thank you and congratulations.