

Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman or Lady Gaga: Appreciating art is a timeless tune

A few weeks ago, a Barrington High School student participated in an evening presentation to the board of education. He attended in his tuxedo, having just played clarinet in a band concert down the hall in the school's auditorium. Attempting to infuse some humor, I asked him, "Who is your favorite clarinet player: Benny Goodman or Artie Shaw?" His hesitation indicated that he was either unsure of the two all-time great clarinetists, or of which one to pick. I laughed and quickly reached for a modern performer I thought might produce an instant reaction: "Lady Gaga?" I joked.

THAT EXCHANGE SPEAKS TO THE IMPORTANCE of connecting generations through music, drama, design, painting, sculpture or other forms of art. Not every student experiences a home environment that includes the arts, but such exposure and the inspiration it brings are highly valued throughout Barrington 220.

I can speak firsthand to the impact of the arts on a young child. Growing up in a musical family meant there was always music in my childhood home. My father was a draftsman by day and a jazz saxophone player every weekend. He met my mother while playing jobs in Chicago. She was a pianist and singer. Her father was a professional musician who played French horn with the Chicago Symphony and trombone with show bands in the city.

Playing a musical instrument in our family was a given. My mom recalled when she was a little girl and asked my grandfather if she could start playing an instrument. He said, "Sure; go into the basement and pick out any instrument you would like to play." Excited, she raced downstairs, only to find four trombones and nothing else. She wound up playing the trombone for 10 years until she switched to piano. As kids, I picked the saxophone, my sister chose the flute while my brother

avored the trumpet. Looking back, I now pity our neighbors who had to listen to the early stages of our practicing. I am sure we drove the songbirds out of Cook County.

The arts bring tint and texture to our world. In my family, the "color" of the arts came from music. Whether it is music, drawing, dance, architecture or any other form, the arts provide a special outlet for our emotions and passions. Personally, I have always found that playing the piano late at night, after a particularly long day in the schools, soothes my spirit and centers my mind.

Community support for the arts in Barrington 220 is strong, and the number of our students who participate in the arts is noteworthy. At Barrington High School alone, more than 1,400 students take at least one visual or performing arts class each year. More than 1,100 students in grades K-12 participate in instrumental music, with approximately 40 percent of students participating in band or orchestra in the 4th or 5th grade.

There is respected research that supports the arts in our schools. The correlation between the arts and student achievement within the academic disciplines, such as mathematics, language arts, science and social studies, is often documented and research contends the arts are integral to the



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education of the whole child and offer lifelong learning benefits.

But most organizations must do more with less these days. As districts everywhere face budget cuts, ironically, the first programs to suffer are often the arts – the very disciplines that improve brain development and higher-order thinking skills. In Barrington 220, we may need to make some difficult decisions in the future but we will try hard to protect the rhythm and melody, the texture and tint of the arts in our schools. We cannot afford to drain the color from the sunset or the song from the skylark. It would truly be a shame if one day a child eagerly scampers down to the basement looking for a musical instrument only to find an Xbox.

And just in case anyone is interested, my vote goes to Artie Shaw. 