

Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”



Linda DeGraf © 2013

Dear Friends ~ The world we perceive with our senses is resplendent with texture and color and form. I am in love with this tangible world—the one of weight and substance, the one I can hold and stand upon, see and touch. And yet the iridescent blue in a butterfly’s wing comes not from pigment but from the way light bounces off myriad tiny scales, one wavelength converging on another, the unseen world creating color in the perceived world. There is a pulse beneath the flesh and blood, a resonance even within the stone, that cannot be explained. The alchemy of unseen interactions is at play and we humans need help in order to perceive them. Perhaps that is why music penetrates so deeply into our souls—because it is so much more than the wood of the instrument, the vibration of the strings, the touch of fingertips. A doorway through our senses into mystery, it can take us beyond everyday perception into the realm of feeling and of wonder. Cynthia Bourgeault recounts a narrative about a doctor who treated an entire monastery of monks for a baffling and debilitating illness. Months before, a new abbot had replaced the age-old practice of Gregorian chant with activities he believed served a more useful purpose. When the doctor advised them to sing again, however, the monks’ well-being returned. “Unbeknownst to all, the Gregorian chant, perfectly captured by the acoustics of the monastic chapel, was an energy directly feeding not only their souls but also their bodies.” As the old hymn says,

Since love is lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?



As Jacob Boehme puts it, “I am a string in the concert of God’s joy.” ... We need to experience our own personal aliveness as part of that greater cosmic aliveness... When I become “a string in the concert of God’s joy,” I am “sounded through”

by the music, and in that sounding, in harmonic resonance with all the other instruments, is revealed both my irreplaceable uniqueness and my inescapable belonging.

~ from THE WISDOM WAY OF KNOWING by Cynthia Bourgeault

The universe is always singing,
And we must learn to listen,
So that our heart may join the universal chorus.

~ Sarah Martha Baker—19th c.

All that is ripest and fairest in the wilderness is preserved and transmitted to us in the strain of the wood thrush. This is the only bird whose note affects me like music, affects the flow and tenor of my thought, my fancy and imagination. It lifts and exhilarates me. It is inspiring. It is a medicative draught to my soul.

~ from Henry David Thoreau’s Journal

Music is medicine for the soul and a pathway to the heart.

~from TALES OF THE WOUNDED HEALER by Maria Fenton Gladis

We must pass through solitude and difficulty, isolation and silence, to find that enchanted place where we can dance our clumsy dance and sing our sorrowful song. But in that dance, and in that song, the most ancient rites of our conscience fulfill themselves in the awareness of being human.

~ from “Letters of Solitude” in *The Spirit of the Earth* v. 5, no. 2

As we listen to music we enter into the mystery of another person’s inner life.

~Margaret Rizza



May the music of our souls
Be accompanied by grand gestures
And the persistent clapping of hummingbird's wings.

~from a prayer by Lisa Colt in from WOMAN PRAYERS

I live by breathing in
and breathing out. I
sing by transforming
this breath into sound,
the sound which in turn
forms the material for
contents of the soul.
Our life stretches from
morning until evening,

from dusk to dawn embracing the night...In these elements the soul rises and falls in equal measure between above and below, between light and dark. The human voice is based on the same elements. ~ Alfred Wolfsohn

There is a quiet place I know where nature sings to me the music of the mountains and the forest and the sea. It is not far away, and yet it sometimes seems a place removed from daily life, a distant dream of time and space. I have been lost in city streets, in traffic fast and loud, where sirens scream and nature's voice is drowned out by the crowd. And so I go to seek that place where I become a part of nature's song—that quiet place I've found within my heart. ~Paul Conrad

My Lord,
Lord of the mountain grove,
At dawn
Hosts of warbling sparrows
Sing a song.
They keep repeating
Your name. ~Andal, India, 8th c.
from WOMAN PRAYERS

Silence is disturbing because it is the wavelength of the soul. If we leave no space in our music, then we rob the sound we make of defining context...It's almost as if we're afraid of leaving space. Great music is as often about the space between the notes as it is about the notes themselves...What I'm trying to say here is that if I'm ever asked if I'm religious, I always reply, "Yes, I'm a devout musician." Music puts me in touch with something beyond intellect, something otherworldly, something sacred.

~ "Silence in Music" from a commencement speech by Sting

Most of us go to our graves with our music still inside us. ~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

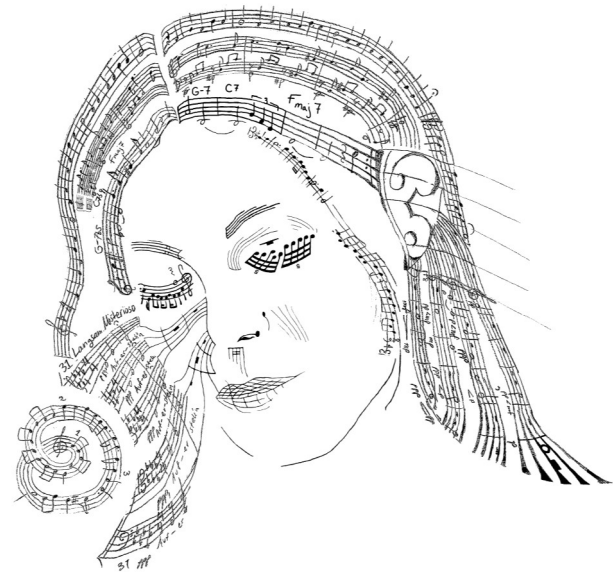
Listening is our bridge from the outer world to the inner world. Music creates multiple levels of listening. Learning to listen to music in creative ways provides the means for health improvement in the body, enhanced communication, and expression. For music has all the universal components of language, emotions, and expression. There is music in silence; thus meditation and hours of silence heighten awareness of our body rhythms and sounds. ~Don Campbell in THE SOUL OF CREATIVITY, ed. By T. P. Myers

Play needs no purpose. That is why play can go on and on as long as players find it meaningful. After all, we do not dance in order to get somewhere. We dance around and around. A piece of music doesn't come to an end when its purpose is accomplished. It has no purpose, strictly speaking. It is the playful unfolding of a meaning that is there in each of its movements, in every theme, every passage: a celebration of meaning.

~ from GRATEFULNESS, THE HEART OF PRAYER by Br. David Steindl-Rast,
as reprinted in AN ALMANAC FOR THE SOUL by Marv and Nancy Hiles

On a desolate island off the west coast of Scotland, the sand "sings" when it's touched. Walking across the beach produces a wide range of musical tones, like playing a musical instrument. Scientists think the structure of the sand creates the sounds. The grains of sand are tiny pieces of quartz, rounded by the sea. Each grain is surrounded by a pocket of air. When the sand is touched, friction between the air and the grains produces musical tones. We may not have a chance to hear the strange music of singing sand, but we all have a chance to hear the music of rustling leaves. Happiness need not be pursued in exotic places. The joyful music of Creation surrounds us. All we need to do is listen.

~from BETTER TO LIGHT ONE CANDLE by The Christophers



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You are only a little wave.
Let yourself do and undo things,
But sing out of your own liberty.

~ Jean Sullivan