

## Teaching music is good for business and law students

By Kathryn Fehrman

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There have been more articles recently about schools cutting arts and music budgets. As though music is expendable. As though we and our children can live without it.

I've been thinking about music in schools a lot this week, because other people have been talking about arts and music as well. Legal skills professors from all over the country have been talking about music, of all things, on our listserv.

It seems musicians are often top performers — in law school classes.

While the observations appear to be only anecdotal (no one has presented data yet) it's consistent. And it's been true in my law school classes. For the six years I have been teaching full time, music is one of those undergraduate studies or pastimes that produces a disproportionate number of successful law students.

We as lawyers do best at analyzing and communicating when we exercise both the left and right brain. Music enhances that ability.

I became interested in using the arts as a tool to teach lawyers and law students in the 1990s, when I was a part-time professor and still practicing law. Then, in 2005, an author by the name of Daniel Pink published a book called "A Whole New Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule the Future," which extols the virtues of teaching Western business people and professionals to use both their left and right brains.

Pink's hypothesis is: "The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind. The era of 'left brain' dominance, and the Information Age that it engendered, are giving way to a new world in which 'right brain' qualities — inventiveness, empathy, meaning — predominate."

Pink sounds an alarm of sorts. He posits that if the business and professional population in the United States doesn't seriously train for right-brain proficiency, we will fall tragically behind the rest of the world in our ability to think, and in the quality of our thinking. And this could cause a massive economic and sociological failure of our nation in the long run.

The arts provide the natural discipline to strengthen those right brains of ours.

Using music as a tool to teach new lawyers is not completely novel. Along with a few others at law schools throughout the nation, I've used the arts to teach in law school. It enlivens my legal skills classrooms, teaches organization of thought (form), introduces work-life balance, enhances human communication skills, and helps students fine-tune their thinking. I've taught music theory (and theater arts) as a communication skill to professionals, including professors in other disciplines throughout the world, law students and lawyers.

There are several logical reasons why using music works well to enhance students' knowledge and communication skills. For example, in the legal writing classroom, music allows us to add to the traditional basic tools of a writer (words, rhetoric, analysis, grammar, syntax, medium and form). Writers of words can borrow from music composition to add rhythm and meter, tempo (pace), dynamics, instruments, orchestra (permutations and combinations of instruments), timbre (musical color), melody, harmony, and musical structure and design.

Music's rhythms, melodies and tones communicate on multiple channels, to multiple parts of the brain, so musicians are adept at communicating in ways that pure left-brained logicians are not.

Music teaches people to create form from chaos or the void (creativity), which is certainly our job as lawyers — on many levels! The sonata form, which tells the audience what you're going to say (exposition or musical theme and tonic key), say it (development or variations), and tell them what you said (recapitulation or finale and return to tonic) is a perfect, albeit partly subliminal version of a classic legal writing organizational form: Issue and Rule, Explanation and Analysis, and Conclusion (IREAC).

Music teaches community, teamwork and listening. It has provided community identity and harmony since the first tribal dances.

Music teaches the deep understanding that all the others in the orchestra are equally important to the sound, and that working together in harmony makes the whole far greater than the sum of the parts — Charles Calleros, Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law, Arizona State University.

Just like prose, “[m]usic is the organization of phrases and sounds into cohesive progressions and patterns” — Joseph Machlis. Just like prose, a musical phrase is a unit of meaning. Two phrases together create a complete thought. Structure is unified by repetition and parallel phrases. Contrast comes through new material and variation of rhythm and key. Narrow and wide leaps of tone provide interest and movement. The return to the tonic at the end provides a sense of completion. The avoidance or failure of the tonic at the end provides a tangent or new direction.

Music communicates to the lizard brain, the subconscious brain that rules our basic drives and instincts, yet it allows us to access the sublime. There's a wonderful anonymous quote I'm fond of: "Music is the educator of the whole person."

In our sometimes mundane, oft profane world, music provides glimpses of higher levels of understanding and thought — a vehicle to move between the profane world and sanctuary.

“Art. Music. For a second in your dark life you got light, you got focus. You knew something. Something touched you. That is an intangible that some people just don't want to hear about. It doesn't matter whether you're conservative or liberal. This is not political.” — The Musician formerly known as Jack.

It's exciting for me to hear lawyers talk about music, not just as a form of entertainment but as an educator.

Our need for music as a nation goes far beyond the amorphous cultural enhancement or artistic sophistication. Our need for music is about our nation's need to get smarter, to think more like the rest of the world, to become adept at using both lobes of our brains.

Music strengthens our right brains, enhances writing skills, teaches organization, builds community, raises consciousness, elevates the spirit and provides methods to put form to chaos. One thing does all that? And perhaps, too, we will build a legal community in the coming years to be even more proud of.

And the dream? Maybe this conversation among law professors will produce the right ripples and will eventually, through a series of elegant variations, result in school districts around the nation funding music as a required course again.

Teaching music to our children is not a political issue. It's just good business.

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