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The Practicality of Creativity

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We live in a society where the value of work is measured by its practicality. The artist's role in today's world is not what it was in previous centuries. Recall that for nearly one hundred years the chief labor at Salisbury was the building of a cathedral. Remember how the bottegas of Florence were the center of a great city's commercial life.

People of the western countries compete for better housing, food, clothing, and material benefits that go beyond the necessities of life. By so doing, we contribute to an order that constantly monitors how much or how little one possesses of available worldly goods. From infancy, appetites are whetted by hucksters who seek to pressure us into possessing as many things as we can afford to accumulate. Most of the hours of our existence are spent in acquiring the means to accumulate more things.

There is an alternate viewpoint to consider. Wordsworth expressed it this way: "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers." These "powers" are the hidden resources within each of us that transcend the world of getting and spending. These springs of creativity, present in every individual regardless of native intelligence, talent, social status, or age, permit us to go beyond the nar-

row physical world, to enter the artistic/spiritual core of human existence.

The urge to be creative is so central to some persons that all other things become secondary. We become poets, novelists, painters, dancers, actors, and musicians. Our creative powers have responded to the creative environment provided us by home and school.

The home has increasingly lost the central importance it once exerted on a child's cultural and social life. With the disintegration of home life, the school has become chiefly responsible for the formation of the individual, including that of the creative spirit. But today, in the field of education, artistic pursuits tend to be considered impractical frills. Music training is on the decline in both home and school. There is a danger that it will continue to lose ground, especially when money is in short supply. How can young people nurture their spiritual and artistic natures if they are early deprived of an environment that could alert them to Wordsworth's "powers?" If children, after school hours, are fed a daily diet of televised entertainment devoid of artistic nourishment, and if the school offers them none, how is the reservoir of national artistic and spiritual heritage to be preserved or replenished? If there is to be little or no music and art in their homes

and schools, how can the countries of the western world consider themselves a spiritual and artistic world leader?

This is an age in which an immense volume of information can be stored and retrieved. How much of it is devoted to the enrichment of the human spirit? Young people today are buffeted about by popular culture which they themselves did not create. Much of what passes for entertainment aimed at the young has no link with artistic and literary heritages that convey civilizing elements to the individual. Schools, at all levels, should not passively acquiesce in the current cultural truncation by succumbing to performance fads of the moment. For professional musicians there will be no future audiences if no opportunity exists to build musical interests among children and young people.

The community at large can no longer, as in pre-industrial centuries, spend its energies in the erection of a cathedral or temple, in the musical and graphic pageantry of the liturgical year, or in the ornate decoration of a civic building. Current society is faced with determining how to provide health and prosperity for as many as possible. We are all cogs in this relentless productive machine.

The amount of information essential to the pursuit of most professions can now be scarcely crowded into the few preparatory years available or affordable. How does one justify the arts as being essential to this societal pattern? There is no doubt that academic test scores offer some measure of a student's capability to assume responsibility in the adult world, but if the wells of creativity remain untapped, the individual cannot live a full and rewarding life. The capacity to cope, in any work or profession, is partly dependent upon recognition that the good life goes beyond meat and potatoes.

There is an urgent need for teaching the *science of creativity*. Daily encounters between players in all walks of life require insightful creative interaction. The failure of personal and public relationships results largely from a lack of creative response to life. A society composed of persons whose ability to respond to creative stimuli has been reduced is a society in serious decline.

Nor can the creative impulse develop solely through personal experience. It requires immersion in the historical sweep of creativity. Without some awareness of how the poet, the novelist, the dramatist, the painter, and the musician have shaped thought and perception, of what real value are speed reading and computerized learning techniques? Do not the culturally blind and deaf form a major percentage of America's handicapped? Does not society in general also suffer from their loss?

It is astoundingly short-sighted to assume that music and art programs in schools and colleges are expendable whenever budgets need to be trimmed. American education is now reaping what was sown in recent decades when it began to replace the liberally educated person with the technically proficient person. Many high school and college graduates leave school without having learned to creatively modify the mundane duties that comprise much of life. Feeding, clothing, and housing the body do not satisfy human needs. Man cannot live by bread alone.

The performing arts are not frosting upon the educational cake. They are, in actuality, the very substance of education. What one knows is far less important than how one knows to put that information to creative use. Practical creativity can best be fostered by disciplines which may, at first blush, appear

impractical in a world where practicality demands the dominant role. The discipline of music is remarkable in its ability to release “powers” that lie dormant. Music making deserves high priority as a means to awakening the complete person.

For the largest number of people, the human voice is the most accessible of all the expressive media. Those of us who work with singers should actively join the battle taking place in today’s society, and give strong support to the preservation of the musical heritage so vital to the welfare of our children and grandchildren. •