



EDITORIAL

GIVING CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Everywhere you turn these days, it seems some high-profile individual or company is forcefully extolling the benefits of studying music. When President Bill Clinton recently told a group of New York City elementary school students that he wouldn't have been president if it hadn't been for the life lessons he learned playing his saxophone, the story made front page news around the country.

In June NBC's top-rated "Today Show" devoted a week of coverage to the unique power of studying music. Amidst human interest stories about how music changed the lives of kids, host Matt Lauer sounded like he was reading from an industry-drafted script, repeatedly citing the academic and social benefits of music.

In the usually fractious House of Representatives, rancor and partisanship were temporarily suspended as members unanimously voted to pass Continuing Resolution 266, which acknowledges the benefits of school music programs. After the resolution passed, Representatives elbowed each other out of the way to pledge their everlasting support for music in front of television cameras.

Consumer giant Pepsi Cola recently staged a sweepstakes where bottle tops could be redeemed for musical instruments. With great fanfare, electronics retailer Best Buy donated over \$200,000 to a United Way program that establishes music programs in disadvantaged schools.

Then there's VH1. The cable network blankets the nation with a heavy schedule of public service ads extolling the benefits of music. In addition, its "Save the Music Foundation" has donated musical instruments to several hundred needy schools across the country.

Public advocacy for music of this magnitude is unprecedented in industry history. What's going on? Did all these powerful people and high-profile organizations simultaneously have a life-changing revelation about music? We don't doubt the sincerity of their proclamations about music, but it's worth asking the questions "Why promote music?"

and "Why now?"

From our vantage point, every one of these pronouncements on music can be traced directly to NAMM's highly publicized research linking the study of music to enhanced cerebral capabilities. Politicians and big companies, two of the most reviled groups in America, are perpetually trying to burnish their image by giving support on to popular causes. Now that NAMM has provided substantive evidence that studying music enhances a student's academic and social skills, the pols and the suits have concluded that promoting music may help them look good, or at least better.

While our analysis may seem cynical, our purpose is simply to give credit where credit is due. The politicians and corporate types are not so much promoting music as they are echoing popular public sentiment. And that sentiment derives, more than anything else, from NAMM-funded research. When an industry association launches a promotion, consumers instinctively tune out the message, saying, "They're just trying to sell more stuff." This would certainly be the case if the National Association of Music Merchants tried to tout the benefits of playing music; however, by enlisting the active support of disinterested third parties, from the President of the United States on down, NAMM has forged an incredibly potent public relations campaign.

How potent has this campaign been? Experience gained in 110 years of covering the industry has taught us that 99% of association-run promotions never even register on retail front line; however, in the past five years almost every retailer we've talked with has said that public awareness of music and the brain research has benefited their business. NAMM's role in all this often goes unnoticed, which just goes to show how much can be accomplished if you're not concerned about who gets the credit.

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