

## **Celebrating Make Music Day: Why It's Time To Play and Sing Like the Survival of the Species Depends Upon It.**

By John Motay

I am a music maker. Ever since childhood, rhythms, melodies, and harmonies, have bounced around in my head and resonated within my soul. It is very difficult for me to listen to a song without tapping my feet or singing the words.

Unfortunately, I was also born with a limited amount of “natural musical talent” *and* an even lower level of common sense so “leaving well enough alone” was never an option. As a result, I have spent a lifetime prodding along in my chosen avocation, as an aspiring (and limited) musician, playing and singing songs, often with the same degree of excitement and joy that I felt as a child.

So when I read the promotional material for this year's upcoming *Make Music Day*, I was thrilled: “*Imagine* a day of song and music where people, regardless of ability, age, or musical persuasion, turn streets, parks, plazas, porches, rooftops, gardens and other public spaces into venues to celebrate and create music with friends, neighbors, and strangers.”

However, after hearing that the Greenwich Arts Council is going to launch and host this year's Make Music Day/Greenwich, I quickly realized time spent “imagining” might be more productively spent “preparing” to make music.

Thanks to the Council's effort, on June 21<sup>st</sup>, Greenwich will be one of the thousand towns and cities across 120 countries slated to be part of the world's largest annual music festival.

### **What is Make Music Day?**

A key feature of Make Music Day is its focus on ‘desire and interest’ rather than ‘talent’ as a pre-requisite for participation (Sort of the antithesis of *Dancing With The Stars* and *The Voice*). Specifically, it assumes as “natural music-makers,” we all harbor a deep-seated desire to use instruments and/or our voices to make song.

But do we? Is everyone really a “natural music-maker?”

There is no doubt that music plays an important role in the lives of most people; it has the power to move us, both emotionally and physically. In addition to being a source of fun and enjoyment, author M.A. Arbib, reminds us, “music is also used in religious ceremonies, for therapy, for identification with social and cultural groups, as a product, and for art.”

Music is deeply embedded in our psychic and cultural development. Psychologists have long recognized the emotionally evocative nature of music and have extensively researched how human beings are biologically “wired” to respond emotionally to music. Darwin attributed our passionate response to music as the by-product of the rhythmic, repetitive, yet varied, chants that were used by prehistoric humans during courtship. These “love calls,” designed to assure the survival of the species, cemented the foundation for music’s importance and communicative powers.

Adding further to the power and universal appeal of music is the cathartic call of musical instruments and singing voices that helps us express and release the joys, sorrows, frustrations, and anxieties aroused by daily life. From this perspective, a “wailing” electric guitar emitting a piercing “scream” gives voice to our own internal pain, perhaps the same pain so vividly illustrated in Edvard Munch’s 1893 painting, *The Scream of Nature*.

So, in conclusion, given the depth and breadth of the relationship human beings have with music, it is clear, yes, we are all natural music-makers.

Those who embrace “music-making” believe it adds to the quality of their lives and is essential to their well-being. Additionally, recent scientific studies have shown how music making can change the structure of the brain, which, in turn, translates into functional benefits such as improved long-term memory, cognitive clarity, and increased mental alertness and sensory-motor processing abilities.

### **So if it’s so good, why isn’t everyone doing it?**

The sad truth is most people do not make music, although many express an interest. For example, a 2009 Gallup-Poll found that 69% of adults in the U.S., would like to learn to play an instrument and 85% regret never having learned to play one. A 2015 study by the National Endowment For The Arts found that only 15% of Americans report they regularly make music with other people.

However, recently, more and more people are discovering the joys of making music. In *Human Potential and Lifelong Learning*, author Jacquelyn Boswell references the “growing population of adult learners-young, middle-age, and older professional and novice musicians who play all types of music, from chamber music, to pop, to jazz, who are actively seeking out music-making opportunities.”

Recent data confirms an increase in the number of adults taking music lessons. For example, according to Joanna Stryjniak, Vice President of The New York Conservatory of Music, their *Special Program For Adult Students* has grown by 10% during the past 5 years. Joe Summa, at Greenwich Music, reports, “More and more of [their] students are retired people want to learn how to play an instrument,” proving that it is “never too late.”

Amy Nathan felt the dramatic increase in the number of people who want to spend more time making music warranted a book. *Making Time for Making Music*, is based on surveys and interviews with 350 non-professional musicians who have successfully integrated music making activities into their lives, and offers “inspiration as well as tried and true strategies to those who want to become music makers.”

So to all you music maker wannabes... Make Music Day is calling, inviting, encouraging, and summoning anyone and everyone, who used to make music or wants to make music, to be a part of this festive event. I hope to see you there. I'll be the guy standing in the front row, singing slightly off key, wearing a blue beret, and strumming a Sea Form green hollow body electric guitar.

**John Motay, Ph.D. was trained as a psychologist and is a leadership consultant, writer, and part-time musician. To learn more about Make Music Day/Greenwich: <http://www.greenwichartscouncil.org/Make-Music-Day.html>**