

CYBERSENSE

MUSIC, MIGRATIONS, AND HOPE

IMAGINE YOU ARE PART OF AN EXPEDITION 200 YEARS AGO, VENTURING INTO THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST. As a voyageur, you strain from dawn to dusk to help paddle a 40 foot canoe. Where there's no water, you hump a 90 pound pack, and later the canoe itself. Up and down wind the portages, across treacherous, rock-strewn ridges. Hernias, or bone-breaking falls are common. Either, in this wilderness, can end a life. Still you only get paid half as much as the little guy sitting next to you with the prodigious memory and loud voice. Who's he? the boss? the guide? No, actually he's the chanteur, the expedition's singer. He leads the different songs sung many times a day by your entire company. It's his contribution that is worth twice yours. Shared music brings rhythm to your strokes, and keeps a smile on your face. In some fundamental way, the songs keep hope alive in your struggling heart.

OK. So our low-tech our ancestors placed a high value on sing-alongs. That's nice, but surely not relevant to us, struggling with a globalized, 21st century recession. After all, most people, we know, can't even carry a tune. And who needs to, with CD's and smart phones that play our favorite music perfectly on demand. Who cares if ragged bunches of backwoods grunts sang their way across the continent? Had Ipods been available, wouldn't those voyageurs have all plugged in to enjoy their separate favorites?

Good cybersense means telling both sides of the story. Though wonderful in many ways, the universally available perfection of digital music is quite possibly the reason so many people today cannot carry a tune. And what if carrying a tune, or drumming, or dancing around with your family and friends can bond and uplift you in ways that Beethoven on your headphones cannot?

Music Together is a organization devoted to "teaching" tone and rhythm to pre-schoolers and tots. Two decades of experience have now pretty well proved that, with some differences in aptitude-



all children are musical. This means that all children are able to sing rhythmically and in tune—so long as they can imitate, early on, their siblings and elders engaging in and enjoying these activities. This is why **Music Together** classes always include a parent or family caregiver. Tone and rhythm are, like language itself, primed to develop during the child's early years. What happens is thus not so much "teaching" as providing a rich and musically relaxed family environment. Once older than five or six, however, the child's brain changes. Learning music then becomes harder—a bit like learning a second language.

Interestingly enough, most children will not model on high-tech recordings or videos of musicians playing. Why not? Well, they are everywhere, always perfect, and promote a separate classes of professionally "gifted ones," on the one hand, and passive consumers on the other. Simply playing, singing, and moving with family and friends is different. It transmits a relaxed feeling of, "hey... we all enjoy doing this together." The emphasis shifts from performance and perfection to the uplifting joy of simply participating. Mistakes, as they happen, are fun and silly. And mistakes are, after all, how we learn anything.

We are social animals who still inhabit physical bodies. The renewed energy and sense of well-being derived from singing, drumming, or moving together with those close to us—these are fundamental forms of support for difficult times. They are "hardwired" into the human

organism. From this perspective, double pay for the chanteur on an expedition makes perfect sense. And plugging each and every voyageur into a separate Ipod might not have had nearly the same unifying, rejuvenating effect. Perhaps shared work songs had as much to do with successfully crossing oceans and building the pyramids as any particular technology.

Consider balancing your activities in cyberspace with the physically and emotionally renewing juice of family drum circles, sing-alongs, yoga-classes, dances, and so on. If you have pre-schoolers, **Music Together** (www.musictogether.com) is worth looking at. If you don't have young children, another organization, **Music for People** (www.musicforpeople.org), offers wonderful adult workshops and gatherings. They make it very easy to rediscover your own spontaneous musical expressions.

Though our Westward expansion is long past, we are migrating today more and more into Cyberspace. Money went in with the earliest explorations. Augmented there by blinding transaction speeds, complex, computation-based financial "products" took root and flourished. They have evolved now so quickly that even their designers cannot be sure how they will interact with one another. And so our current struggle with global recession stems in part at least from the loss of human understanding and oversight. We left that behind somewhere when we set out.

Similarly, our human heritage of simple, self-made family music was left pretty much behind when "performing" migrated to the electronic world of a capitalist economy. Passive consumption of the products of a class of "performers" became the norm. To sing was in some sense to be measured against them. Be wary of this shift. Music is a universal human birthright. Surviving the recession may not be so different from a long paddle upstream. Making music together can be a profound source of strength, hope, and magic along the way. ▲