

Art and music played a very critical role in my life growing up. I was involved in a number of musical groups and went through a number of phases where my main hobbies were fine arts related. One of my earliest memories of arts exposure was from my mother. She played a number of instruments including the piano, the accordion, and the Irish tin whistle. Both she and my dad played traditional Irish music in the house. This was only enhanced during my yearly summer visits to Ireland. When I was six years old, I was asked to sing at my grandparents 50th wedding anniversary. One of my uncles taught me a transitional children's song called, "I'll Tell Me Ma," and he played the accordion along with me. While this experience was both exciting, and nerve wracking, it started a tradition of me singing at family events.

While I enjoyed singing to a certain extent, I didn't feel my most comfortable while doing it. Around this time, in elementary school, I started taking art classes where we first learned to draw simple landscapes and portraits. We were also exposed to water color paintings, and some oil paintings. I immediately took to painting. I started to develop an interest in Renaissance artists, as well as some Impressionist art. I grew up in Manhattan, so my dad and I began going to the MET with some frequency. I would go with my sketchbook and paint them when I went home. This was a remarkably significant part of my life in second and third grade, but I don't remember how or why I stopped painting with regularity. One theory has to do with me starting band at the end of third grade.

My elementary school required that all students learn an instrument for at least one semester in third grade, and I took to trumpet immediately. I practiced most days, and even spent hours on the weekend playing in the park. This year was also my first opportunity to perform in front of a large crowd of people, and it was something that I loved right away. I remember being pretty nervous beforehand, but these nerves washed away soon after the first song. This would become an emotional phenomenon I became more familiar with as time went on.

Following this year, I joined my church choir and this was something I did up and through 12th grade. Of all the art and music activities I took part in, this was the one I liked the least. My parents wanted me to try it out for a year or two, and it became something I reluctantly did after some time. Part of what kept me involved was my friends. Even in high school, it felt grounding to have one time per week where I would see this small, select set of friends. During my time in the choir, I was both a tenor and a bass singer, and I learned how to better read music, how to better keep time, as well as learn about various music concepts such as crescendos and decrescendos. While I never had a solo, I continued to experience performing in front of groups of people. Moving towards 8th grade, I took part in weekly choir and trumpet lessons, but I felt myself losing interest in both, overall. It was around this time that I started getting into hard rock and heavy metal, and took interest in learning bass guitar. This ended up being the game changer. I took to practicing every day, I went to weekly lessons, and I was always looking to jam with friends. This continued into high school, where I actually made a decision not to continue organized sports and devote most of my extracurricular time to playing in my school jazz ensemble. The experiences I had in my jazz ensemble are my most memorable from high school. Not only would we organize music showcases in the spring, but we would provide the music for our school's winter musical. In my three years as the bassist, I learned the music for Fiddler on the Roof, Les Miserables, and Jesus Christ Superstar. I continued to love the performance in front of people, but the part that stands out most to me is the community I had with both the band and the cast of actors. We would work tirelessly for months towards putting on a performance, and it was a kind of emotional investment that was mostly unfamiliar to me up until that point. It felt distinctly different from when I did band and choir growing up, given my age and my emotional development. At the end of the day, I felt proud to create and share something with a group of people and for a group of people.

After high school, my involvement with music and performance changed dramatically. My first semester, I wasn't involved with anything, but during my second semester, I started

jamming with friends. This slowly turned into a band and we proceeded to play campus shows for the next three years. The college I went to had a pretty vibrant live music scene and it always felt exciting to take part in events with a long lineup of artists. At the same time, we did plenty of shows just for our close friends, and this felt equally as meaningful. By the end of college, many of our friends knew some of our lyrics which is something I still treasure and reflect on from time to time.

When I reflect on these experiences, it's clear to me that art and music was something that I created and shared with others. I lived for live performances, as well as the preparation leading up to the live performance. I would struggle in practice with my jazz band mates in high school, as well as my band mates in college. The payoff was always extremely rewarding. Whenever I listen to Les Mis or any of the songs we wrote in college, I'm immediately transported back to the time and the people I performed with. As a musician, I was always very hard on myself. I practiced tirelessly, but also expected to be good with pieces after listening to them once. I remember messing up during shows, but made sure I corrected for this the next go around. At the end of the day, these are not the first things I think about. I was a good bass player, but no savant by any means. The emotions brought about by the music and the joy from the company alongside with me, sticks out above all else. When I think about this more, I must admit that I felt some embarrassment for not being good enough to formally join an ensemble in college. In fact, it took some digging for me to remember this: I auditioned for a jazz band my first week of college and I completely floundered. While I might have done better if I were given a piece to prepare, I was asked to play a few different bass lines on the spot. After one minute, the instructor said I wasn't equipped to join his ensemble. It felt like a kick in the teeth, given how much time I had invested in playing bass up until this point. I felt like a failure for a few months, and quite frankly, didn't feel motivated to play. This started to change as I met people with similar music taste as me who also played instruments. We started jamming with each other and as mentioned above, this turned into a band opportunity. It took me some time, but I

had to figure out how playing music was going to serve a positive role in my life following this poor audition.

When I think about art, I think of it as an expression or externalization of one's emotional experience. While it is deeply personal to all involved, art can be created and built upon by a collective or group of people. Throughout my life, art was in collaboration with others, specifically with music. This might not have been the case when I was drawing or painting, but it certainly became true as I joined musical groups throughout my adolescence and young adulthood. With that said, I think art can be an individual physical manifestation of one's thoughts, emotional state, or emotional process. It also has a remarkable potential for enhancement and meaning through collaboration with others, as well as consumption and interpretation by others. We make art for ourselves, but we also allow art to breathe, live, and grow through its interpretation from others.