

Guest editorial: Putting some Harmony in our lives

Ross K. Goldberg

Your Turn

Published 12:33 p.m. PT Mar. 13, 2021

On the California coast, just south of Cambria, sits the tiny town of Harmony. It is home to the former Harmony Valley Creamery, a dairy cooperative that closed 65 years ago. Every time I drive by, I can't help but wonder if the 18 people who live there feel just an extra little sense of pressure to get along.

Seems to me that we all could use a little more harmony in our lives these days. A little more harmony in Washington, on our political talk shows, in our communities and at dinner time wouldn't be a bad thing. Lech Walesa once called living in harmony "a basic source of strength."

One place we found harmony in the past was in our music — first records and radio, and later movies and television. Today it's podcasts and downloads. But even with music today, it often seems like true harmony is getting as hard to find as corner newsstands, movie palaces or buffaloes roaming the prairie.

Fortunately, there still is one place where Harmony can be found, and that is in the incredible Laby Harmony Project of Ventura County which uses music training to promote the healthy growth and development of children. This program of the New West Symphony is currently providing musical opportunity and pathways to musical success to more than 160 children in under resourced communities in Ventura. It does this by engaging these K-12 students in a multiyear continuum of rigorous afterschool music

training. Through offering tuition-free, long-term, and high-quality musical opportunity, Harmony builds social equity and that results in a stronger, healthier, and more musically engaged community.

During this year of the pandemic, the LHP quickly pivoted to bring classes online and create equitable access to “live” educational experiences. It also increased its scope of programming to integrate arts and well-being workshops into its curriculum. In doing so it has offered its students meaningful opportunities for personal and musical growth through an array of virtual weekly classes and workshops via Zoom: small group instrument lessons, a variety of electives, and large group classes are all offered online. For many students these programs have been a steady “rock” within the storm of a global pandemic and the scaffolding on which their futures will be built. And all of this — the instruments, the instruction, the books and all that goes with it — is free and funded by the New West Symphony and its generous donors.

On April 18 the Laby Harmony Project will honor its first decade of operation and the incredible teaching artists who provide over 2,000 hours of training each year to students to help to make this program possible. This special celebration will pay tribute to its student musicians and tell the story of the program’s decade of making a meaningful difference in the lives of so many. It will also feature special student collaborative projects that are sure to tug at your heartstrings. You can find out more at <https://newwestsymphony.org>.

As we slowly and hopefully emerge from our health nightmare, the Laby Harmony Project is one activity that can brighten rather than dampen our spirits. It is as joyful as if scripted by Walt Disney, yet as important as if produced by Ken Burns. Won’t you join me in supporting this wonderful program that speaks to the best in all of us and the best of what we can be.

A resident of Westlake Village, Ross Goldberg is a member of the New West Symphony’s board of directors and author of the book “I Only Know What I Know.”

<https://www.vcstar.com/story/opinion/editorials/2021/03/13/guest-editorial-putting-some-harmony-our-lives/6944718002/>