

# Results of Major Music Studies

## Compiled by Roger Maxwell

For the past 10 years (April 25, 1999 – April 27, 2008) I have followed the THE DES MOINES SUNDAY REGISTER's special edition listing Iowa's **ACADEMIC ALL – STATERS**. Each year, 50 students, (10 each from five geographical areas throughout the state) are selected.

The focus of my research centered on the role which music may have played in the educational experiences of these academic scholars. Based upon the above information, 500 \_\_\_\_\_ ALL- STATE students were selected from a pool of 3605 academic scholars statewide during the ten year review period (April 25, 1999 – April 27, 2008.)

This writer in reviewing the files of THE DES MOINES SUNDAY REGISTER wanted to determine 1) the number of students who participated in music from the overall total of 500 students and 2) the number of students who participated in a stand- alone music activity such as band, choir or orchestra or, a combination thereof. (Each student was counted only once regardless if he or she participated in more than one music activity.)

From the research we were able to conclude that:

**331** (66.2%) of the **500**

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135 (40.8%) participated in band

73 (22.0%) participated in band & choir

70 (21.1%) participated in choir

18 (5.4%) participated in band & orchestra

26 (7.8%) participated in orchestra,

9 (2.7%) participated in band, choir & orch

In comparing the above numbers for band students (135) and choir students (70) with the 26 orchestra students, we found that the band and choir students were from an average of 365 Iowa high schools while the 26 orchestra students represented an average of 52 high schools having school orchestras. Had the number of orchestra programs (52) been equal to that of the band/choir programs (365), we project that 182 orchestra students would have been named academic all –state students.

This study did not address the scholastic achievements of the remaining 3105 Iowa students who in their own right were academic all – staters. If one were to apply the same methodology in determining how many of these students would have participated in music as was applied to the 500 Academic All – Staters (using 66.2% of students participating in a music activity), we would find that 2056 of the remaining 3105 students would have participated in a music organization while 1049 would not have.

This information has led me to further examine whether there exists a correlation or association of cognitive skills between music, mathematics, reading and writing. After reading “This is Your Brain on Music” by Dr. Daniel J. Levitin, I contacted him in order to seek his advice on this question. (Dr. Levitin is a neuroscientist at McGill University, Montreal, Canada. In addition, he manages the Laboratory for Musical Perception, Cognition, and Expertise at the University. He also serves as the Bell Chair in the Department of Psychology of Electronic Communications.)

In correspondence with Dr. Levitin, he informed me that “cognitive skill can be either a collective or a specific term. He states “I think of “cognition” as information processing and all those subprocesses related to it: memory, attention, planning, perceiving and “motor action plans” – preparing and implementing muscle movement to achieve some goal.” He continues, “We talk about cognitive ability or cognitive processes when referring to the collective, and about cognitive skill when referring to a specific skill such as math, reading, etc....It’s safe to say that math, music, visual intelligence, athletics, spatial intelligence, social intelligence are all independent mental faculties.”

Simultaneously I contacted Dr. Randall Hamilton, a graduate of the University of Iowa, Department of Neurology. While at the university he studied under Drs. Antonio and Hannah DaMassio. Dr. Hamilton is a neurologist at the Mercy Medical Center, Mercy Clinics in Des Moines, Iowa. Dr. Hamilton, in attempting to answer the same the question, referred me to the peer – reviewed studies that follow. (These studies are used with the permission of The International Music Products Association (NAMM) formerly known as the American Music Conference.)

1. Studies conducted in Georgia and Texas found that middle school and high school students who participated in instrumental music scored significantly higher than their non-band peers in standardized tests. The studies found a significant correlation between the number of years of instrumental instruction and academic achievement in math, science and language arts.

Source: University of Sarasota Study, Jeffrey Lyn Kluball; East Texas State University Study, Daryl Erick Trent

2. Students who were exposed to music-based lessons scored a full 100 percent higher on fractions tests than those who learned in the conventional manner. Second – grade and third – grade students were taught fractions in an untraditional manner by teaching them basic music rhythm notations.

Source: Neurological Research, March 15, 1999

3. Music majors were found to be the most likely group of college grads to be admitted to medical school. Physician and biologist Lewis Thomas found that 66 percent of music majors who applied to medical school were admitted, the highest percentage for any group. A study of 7,500 university students revealed that music majors scored the highest reading scores among all majors including English, biology, chemistry and math.

Source: “The Comparative Academic Abilities of Students in Education and in Other Areas

of a Multi-focus University,” Peter H. Wood, ERIC Document No. ED327480. “The Case for Music in the Schools,” Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1994.

4. Music study can help students understand advanced music concepts. A grasp of proportional math and fractions is a prerequisite to math at higher levels. Music involves ratios, fractions and proportions and thinking space and time. Second-grade students were given four months of piano keyboard training ,as well as time using newly designed math software. The group scored over 27 percent higher on proportional math and fractions tests than children who used the math software.

Source: Neurological Research March, 1999

5. Piano students are better equipped to comprehend mathematical and science concepts. A group of preschoolers received private piano keyboard lessons and singing lessons. A second group received private computer lessons. Those children who received piano/keyboard training performed 34 percent higher on tests measuring spatial-temporal ability than the others. This concept has long been considered a major obstacle in the teaching of elementary math and science.

Source: Neurological Research February 28, 1997

6. High school music students score higher on SAT’s in both verbal and math than their peers. In 2001, SAT takers with coursework/experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 41 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework/experience in the arts.

Source: Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers, The College Board, compiled by Music Educators National Conference, 2001.

7. Music training helps under-achievers. In Rhode Island, researchers studied eight public school first grade classes. Half of the classes became “test arts” groups, receiving ongoing music and visual arts training. In kindergarten, this group had lagged behind in scholastic performance. After seven months, the students were given a standardized test. The “test arts” group had caught up to their fellow students in reading and surpassed their classmates in math by 22 percent. In the second year of the project, the arts students widened this margin ever further.

Source: Nature May 23, 1996

8. A 2004-2005 study found that students in high – quality school music education programs score higher on standardized tests compared to students with deficient music education programs. The study conducted by Dr. Christopher Johnson, Professor of Music Education and Music Therapy and Associate Dean of the School of Fine Arts, University of Kansas analyzed test scores from 4,739 elementary and middle school students in four regions in the United States – South, East Coast, Midwest and West Coast. The breakdown of participants was 1,119 in either third or fourth grade and 3,620 in either eighth or ninth grade. Results from the elementary schools indicated that:

a) Students in top-quality music programs scored 22% better in English and 20% better in

mathematics than students in deficient music programs.

b) These academic differences were fairly consistent across geographical regions.

c) Students at the four elementary schools with high quality programs scored better than students participating in programs considered to be of lower quality.

Results from the middle schools indicated that:

a) Students in top-quality instrumental programs scored 19% higher in English than students in schools without a music program, and 32% high in English than students in a deficient choral program.

b) Students in top-quality instrumental programs scored 17% higher in mathematics than children in schools without a music program, and 33% higher in mathematics than students in deficient choral programs.

Source: Journal for Research in Music Education June 2007.

9. A McGill University study found that pattern recognition and mental representation scores improved significantly for students given piano instruction over a three-year period. Source: Dr. Eugenia Costa-Giomi, "The McGill Piano Project: Effects of three years of piano instruction on children's cognitive abilities, academic achievement and self-esteem," presented at the meeting of the Music Educators National Conference, Phoenix, AZ, April, 1998.

10. A ten-year study, tracking more than 25,000 students, shows that music-making improves test scores. Regardless of socioeconomic background, music-making students get higher marks in standardized tests than those who had no music involvement. The test scores studied were not only standardized tests, such as the SAT, but also in reading proficiency exams.

Source: Dr. James Catterall, UCLA, 1997

## **ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT RESEARCH STUDIES**

Source: Florida School Music Association as reported in the MENC publication June 2008

Source: American Psychological Association July 27, 2003

13. A special section of USA Today identified members of its 18<sup>th</sup> annual ALL-USA College Academic First Team. The 20 undergraduates were selected from 600 students nationwide and were nominated by their colleges and Universities. Five (25%) of these students were involved in music.

Source: USA Today February 15, 2007

14. A 1973 study found 18 Iowa high school bands reducing their sight reading errors by 74% after seven weeks in reading Alfred Reed's "A Jubilant Overture." The bands concentrated their efforts to playing one rhythmic figure per week, a rhythmic figure being defined as (examples; two eighth notes, a dotted eighth followed by a sixteen, four sixteenths, a dotted quarter followed by an eighth etc.) At the conclusion of the study, bands had played eleven rhythmic figures 13,244 times. Further, seven of the nine bands playing "Third Set for Band – E&M" by Jared Spears, did not make a sight reading error on their third reading of the work. Dr. Hamilton states that "repetition is important as it strengthens the synapses connections." (A synapse is where a nerve impulse passes from one nerve cell to another.)

Dr. Levitin on p. 196 of "This is Your Brain on Music" states, "Like experts in mathematics, chess or sports, experts in music require lengthy periods of instruction and practice in order to acquire the skills necessary to truly excel."

A follow up study conducted in 2003 using 9 similar type of Iowa high school bands found these bands reducing their reading errors by only 21% after seven weeks. (A condition for being accepted in the study was these bands could not have used either the junior high nor the senior high school edition of "Fourteen Weeks to a Better Band" during the previous five years). These bands made almost twice as many sight reading errors as did 18 bands thirty years earlier. Students participating in the pilot study were able to develop their cognitive skills both individually and collectively as evidenced by bands being able to reduce their reading errors by 74% in seven weeks.

Source: Roger Maxwell November 2008.

## CONCLUSIONS:

Due to the intricate workings of the human brain, some known and some unknown, one can understand the hesitation of brain level researchers to equate causation of music with that of mathematics, writing, reading, spatial concepts etc.

One would be remiss however in not recognizing the research studies mentioned in this paper. These studies strongly support the theory that a correlation or association does exist between music, mathematics, reading and writing. School boards, school administrators and teachers must become more informed regarding this new information before modifying or even eliminating school music programs in order to achieve academic goals as set forth under the "No Child Left Behind Act." School music programs are not a detriment but a major contributor to the educational development and achievement of young people in the United States and abroad.

Roger Maxwell a graduate of the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls IA was one of the founding fathers of it's "Dimensions in Jazz" program. He is the composer and arranger of many works for bands and choirs. He served as chief arranger for the U.S. Army Band of the Pacific while stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii. In 1982 he conducted an orchestra and 1965 singers in an unrehearsed presentation of "Everyone Sings the Messiah." He retired in 1995 from the Iowa State Board of Regents having served as its Equal Opportunity Compliance Officer. He and his wife Arenda Randolph Maxwell reside in Windsor Heights, Iowa. His email address is: [bunmax@mchsi.com](mailto:bunmax@mchsi.com)