

Music, Community, and Silent Applause

In the 1980s there was a historic exchange of musicians between America and the Soviet Union. Some Soviet citizens came to Boston to play and some American musicians traveled the other way. Friends were made and a certain gap began to close a little.

One of our choir members wrote a beautiful article for the October *TIMES* about the experience of singing in the Children of Eden musical production last spring; about the community that was nurtured in that group effort to rise to a challenge.

I have prepared entire concerts with people who speak only Japanese, using only 20 or so common German words, just enough for us to get by. The making of friends and forging of a musical interpretation happened only in the playing together.

Copious words in many languages have been written trying to describe what it is that music does. Many of them are beautiful and poetic and, taken together, they begin to give an idea of how music works. Brain scans are beginning to show what goes on when people listen to music, and to show the differences in the brains of professional musicians. But really, the whole point of music's mysterious magic is that it doesn't live in the world of words. Brain scans and words don't seem to come close to explaining what really happens. People who can't communicate with each other using words can talk through music, and even people who can talk with each other may enjoy a very different sort of communication through music.

Music has the special place that it does in houses of worship precisely because we don't have to talk about it – we can just experience it together. The musicians of this church, both professional and volunteer, regularly offer up their time and talent to allow their music to touch, encourage, and bind together all those who worship here together. These aren't performances, but real offerings for the greater good. Spoken appreciation after the service is always welcome, but silent appreciation – smiling eyes, hands rubbed together gently or fingers waving – is always best.