

# Transforming *Through Expressions Of Art!*

Part 3

Story by: Frank Frontis

During my early youth—and let me be perfectly Frank, even some of my past adulthood— I experienced several Sunday church services nodding and dozing-off before, at times, eventually falling asleep—and, perhaps, even snoring a little. Thunderous preaching raining down from the pulpit couldn't even keep me awake. Actually, it seemed to have had the reverse effect. The louder it got, it seemed, the deeper I dozed.

At times like these it was only when a harmonious, melodious voice, of say, a female soprano or male alto or low bass would fill the air with an aesthetically pleasing sound quality that I would arouse, stir and began to awaken.

It was as if, unintentionally, my ears had been more attuned to the inspiring, melodious singing than it had been to the loud, thunderous preaching. Such songs, accompanied by music and artistically rendered, on days as these, transformed me from a Sunday morning "sleepy head" into an inspired soul "receiving the message through the music."

Truly, art in its many expressions—and especially through music—has the power to awaken, uplift and Transform us all.

A neighbor and harmonica enthusiast, Seth Parks, recalls playing his instrument to help transform a dire situation in 2007. "I'd had a collision with an elderly lady and she became very anxious and nervous, sitting in her car," he said. "While we waited on the police, I took out my harmonica and started playing it for her." Parks went on to say that this lady began crying softly, as if to his music, and when he asked her if she was okay, she quietly responded, "I feel better."

Jackson Russell, Music Director at Covenant Christian Church of Asheboro, speaking of the transformative power of music began by saying, "I believe music is a 'specific gift from God.' All of it is a gift from God—how we use it may vary. I can sing a song that may be uplifting but it may not be tied to Christian faith. I don't judge how others interpret their gift. I respect their gift."

As Russell spoke of what he felt was music's highest

purpose I could only envision a sparkling jetliner with the wings of an angel flying joyful loads from earth to the heavenly realm. "Music does two things!" he says emphatically. "One, it brings people together. Two, it serves as a vehicle to bring people closer to God. Music is a vehicle to the Divine realm," he says, while emphasizing that despite how impressive it may play in our ears and reverberate throughout our hearts and minds music is only a "means to an ends"—not the "Ends" (Divine realm) itself.

Cautioning that, of course, all music doesn't have such lofty aims, Russell clarifies the matter by saying, "You can tell the source of music by its fruit--by its outcome, what it does after it brings people together." If it's promoting violence, unlawfulness, immorality, etc., he points out that its message, then, of course isn't of the Divine.

In sharing his own personal transformative experience when he's performing on organ, playing guitar or singing, enthusiastically, Russell says, "There's an innate glory for the gift! I feel



Notes by Danilo Rizzuto

like I get to be who I am. I can open up and say what I want to say [through music]. I release emotionally that way. There's a moment when you wait to see where it takes you, and there's a feel of wholeness and unity and a 'completion of connection' with others--a feel of 'mass intimacy' [with them]!"

In terms of other examples of the transformative power of music, Russell points to the following two scriptures that are most inspiring to him: 1 Samuel 16:23 "...David would play his harp. Saul would relax and feel better, and the evil spirit would go away" and 2 Kings 3:15 "Then Elisha said, 'Send for someone who can play the harp.' The harpist began playing, and the Lord gave Elisha this message for Joram..."(both, Contemporary English Version).

Songstress/Poetess Brenda Bey ([www.vocalxpressions.com](http://www.vocalxpressions.com)) who recently resided in Greensboro before returning to Cleveland, Ohio, encounters elevation and something of a

transformative experience via a wide range of vocal genres.

In addition to the Inspirational and Blues songs she is well accomplished with, she also harmonizes to Jazz, R&B, Pop and even Broadway tunes. "I feel comfortable singing songs that I know well, that I can interpret clearly and strongly—no matter the genre," she explains. "I especially like singing ballads—love songs and songs of triumph over the human condition."

When asked how she feels when she's being inspired by her singing, she replies "I feel like I am doing the best thing I possibly can do on this planet. I am appreciative of the gift in the moment and at times very much awed by it, because there are times that the voice that emanates from me is not mine at all—something else has taken over!"

As Bey inspires and transforms her own personal being through the power of her voice, she is ever cognizant of igniting the same experiences in others. "People tell me all the time that my singing touches them deeply and they thank me," she says. "It doesn't matter where I am, I hear the same thing. When I sing, it is my intention to communicate with my audience, to touch them with words and feelings, and to have them let go of anything that is binding them, restricting them—to get [them] in touch with their 'heart center' and to inspire them to live their purpose."

Calm and well composed in demeanor, Greensboro music player/appreciator Brenda Root speaks of the life-long developmental and transformative roles of music in her life. Playing piano at age three and violin a few years later, she says, "As a child, there were many days I wanted to be outside playing with my friends instead of having to practice for my music lessons. Now I am more appreciative of my musical training. Learning to play piano and violin takes much time and effort. What a beautiful means, however, of fostering such qualities as self-discipline, perseverance and patience."

In addition to having helped shaped her into a patient and disciplined seasoned adult, Root also values other benefits through her music. "Playing piano and violin creates a sense of achievement," she says. "As I became more experienced, the sound of the music was more pleasing not only to me but to others as well. For me, this provided a type of uplifting or transformative experience."

Like many others, Root cites her particular choice of worship as being instrumental in fostering music appreciation and enrichment, saying, "Music is a force in our daily lives. It is our [humankind's] heritage and it provides us with a means for personal expression. In the Baha'i Faith it is especially praised. The Baha'i writings state that 'music is a ladder by which souls may ascend to the realm on high.'"

What is it about the make-up of voice and music itself that

inspires, uplifts and transforms?

Barbara Lister-Sink, Director of Salem College's School Of Music in Winston-Salem, where she also teaches piano, informs us on this. According to Lister-Sink, an internationally acclaimed pianist, a synergy of voice quality, music, lyrics and emotional expression well blended and refined with a high level of sensitivity is what makes for great performances that often take us to soaring heights.

Professor Lister-Sink opines that when we're appreciating what we feel is a wonderful vocal quality, we're not necessarily hearing talent. "Vocal quality is not talent," she holds. "What you do with it, how you use it—that's the talent!" Further, Lister-Sink says, "An individual might have the gift of a unique vocal quality but not be musically expressive. Or he or she might be good at musical expression but not have a unique or colorful vocal quality."

When we're tuning in to a favorite vocalist whose voice is inspiring and moving us, Lister-Sink believes it is because the particular vocalist has a "unique vocal quality that's appealing and he or she knows how to express it in a way that makes it a 'servant of the emotional content of the music.'" Lister-Sink refers to such individuals as "talented" and "very sensitive" in their ability to find and connect with the inner source of their art. "They are extraordinarily gifted in knowing how to convey the greatest depth of emotional expression," she says. "They can plunge into and experience the depth of the emotional content of the music."

With a tone of delight Lister-Sink points to the voice of music legend Barbara Striesand as an example of such artistic achievement. "She's one of the best!" she says. Lister-Sink is also quite impressed with the voices of legends Luciano Pavarotti (opera) and Diana Ross (Motown).

David Byrne (former Talking Heads) said: "We don't make music—it makes us." Hopefully, the next time you sing, play or listen to another one of your "great tunes" you'll better understand the reason it is inspiring, uplifting, transforming—"making you."

---

Individuals in this three-part series have portrayed art as being an integral part of their growth, development and uplifting, healing and transformative experiences.

Their lives, firmly centered in and enriched by the arts, testify convincingly that our continued involvement in them keeps us on the creative path of **Clearing, Healing and Transforming Through Expressions Of Art!**