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Ten Reasons To Let Your Kid Major In Music

Liz Ryan , CONTRIBUTOR

Dear Liz,

My daughter is a junior in high school, and she is sure that she wants to major in music in college.

She wants to attend a music conservatory. That plan scares my husband and I greatly.

We love the fact that our daughter is a talented musician, but how can we in good conscience tell her "Sure, get a degree in music performance."? What could she possibly do with that degree?

How many people earn their living playing the cello?

My recommendation is for her to get a more conventional degree but to minor in music. My husband wants her to study engineering or math (she is gifted in both math and science) and keep her musical activities out of her academic program entirely. He says she can play in an ensemble as an extra-curricular activity.

I trust your judgment, Liz. You are a musician, a mom and a business person — what's your opinion?

Thanks Liz!

Yours,
Janet

Dear Janet,

Your daughter has a little flame inside her, the way we all do. Your job as a parent is to help her grow that flame.

No "practical" degree will keep your daughter from learning the lessons Mother Nature has in store for her.

However, your efforts to keep your daughter from exploring her musical talent and passion in the name of practicality will dim her flame, and that's the worst thing you can do to a kid.

Musical kids are smart. They could major in lots of things apart from music. They choose to major in music because they love it — and that's the best reason to support your daughter's plan.

When you tell your child "Honey, we think you're great, but you're not strong enough to follow your own path.

Take the safe route!" you send a strong message.

The message is "Our fears for your future outweigh your desires, and your confidence in yourself."

I lucked out when I asked my parents to support my decision to go to conservatory after high school.

I was the sixth of eight kids. My parents were over it.

They were tired of arguing. My voice teacher weighed in on my side. He told my parents, "Hey, if she can get into the school she wants to attend, let her go!" and they did.

Gradually I learned the truth about the working world: except in a few narrow areas of expertise, your undergraduate college major has very little influence on your career path — or your success.

On the other hand, a kid with the strong muscles every young musician grows will be able to prosper in life.

Following the tough road of a music major will make your daughter more sturdy and flexible than kids who drift through "safe" degree programs.

Traditionally "safe" degrees are no longer safe. The world is changing too fast for any one field or career path to remain stable for forty or fifty years.

All of us have to bend and flex in the working world these days, whether we major in music, astrophysics or accounting. You cannot shield your daughter from the real world, so why not let her confront it on her own terms?

Here are ten reasons to let your kid major in music:

1. Musical kids are hardy. They get that way sitting on a freezing bus at five in the morning going to a band or orchestra competition. They practice for countless hours. They compete, lose, compete, win and then compete and lose again. You think your hardy kid is going to be daunted by a tough job market?

2. Musical kids know about focus. They know about giving up good things (time hanging out with their friends or playing video games, e.g.) to reach their longer-term goals. A kid who is good enough to get into music school and get through it will have no trouble reaching their other goals, whether they want to run a bank one day or create a whole new musical genre. Support their goals -- then stand back and watch them surpass them!

3. If you choose a program that you can afford without student loans, your child will have incurred no risk in pursuing their musical passion. If your child wants to work for a multinational corporation upon graduation or at any point in their career, they will get hired fast. Corporations know how smart and capable musical kids are.

4. If you worry about child being overwhelmed by the freedom and the social norms at college — too much partying, for instance — definitely let them major in music! They won't have enough spare time to go off the rails.

5. Music instruction is all about patience and listening. Over and over, music students are told "Listen to your tone. Listen to this phrasing. Is that what you're going for?" They know how to tune in. They know how to make course corrections. If the kid doesn't land a plum job working for a symphony orchestra straight out of school—and they won't — they know how to put one foot in front of the other and keep walking.

6. The real world favors confidence, tenacity and an entrepreneurial outlook — three things every music student cultivates.

7. Musical kids are scrappy. They know how to improvise when they forget notes, forget a piece of concert attire or lose a page from their sheet music. Managing a career these days is all about improvisation. That is something all of us could learn from music students!

8. It is insulting to tell your child "Being a musician is a sure path to poverty." Some musicians are poor, and others are fabulously wealthy. Some musicians are unhappy, but so are vast hordes of cubicle dwellers. Let your kid figure out their own path to a happy, successful life that never puts a lower value on their health and happiness than on their financial well-being.

9. When your daughter auditions, your heart will burst with pride. The love and anxiety parents feel as they stand outside a closed audition room listening through the door and praying for their child is a mighty force. When your daughter gets her acceptance letter, you will

marvel at the fact that you raised a musician with the talent and proficiency to study under master teachers.

10. When your daughter comes home on her first break you will be struck by the improvement in her playing. You will see her maturing before your eyes — stepping into her power as a performer and a person making a mark on the planet. You can't do better for your child than to encourage her in that journey.

Of course you will support your daughter in her conservatory ambitions.

If you were invited to make art at the highest level, would you turn down the invitation because you couldn't predict how it would help you earn money down the road?

We know this much: pursuing your art will never hurt you!

Tell your daughter, "Follow your passion, sweetheart. Of course we trust you to follow your heart — after all, Daddy and I raised you to be the solid, confident young woman you are!"

All the best,
Liz

Liz Ryan is CEO/founder of Human Workplace and author of [Reinvention Roadmap](#). Follow her on [Twitter](#) and read [Forbes columns](#).