

## DR. PETER SIMON: WHY MUSIC SHOULD BE PART OF EVERY PERSON'S LIFE

*This is the transcript of Dr. Peter Simon's speech at the 2024 Royal Occasion which honoured his 33-year legacy and leadership as President & CEO of The Royal Conservatory of Music.*

So apart from loving parents – who allowed me to be who I am – and finding the right woman to share my life – my luck was to find something that I absolutely loved – which was music. And my comments will be about why I believe it is something that should be part of every person's life.

Music added another *dimension* to my life, a beautiful realm that was rich with all of the deep and complex emotions that are part of us as humans. For all people I believe, the exploration of the musical realm leads to a heightened sense of emotional awareness that lays the groundwork for understanding the feelings of others. In this way music plays an indispensable role in human communication and connection.

Ultimately music opens you up to the wonder, joy and marvel of life. The expression – that you need to lose yourself to find yourself – could not have been more true in my case. It was through music that I was able to invent the meaning of my own life and why I think it is so important that all children are given opportunities for self expression and emotional exploration through music.

Which is why I am not very happy about the general absence of music and the arts in public education. In failing to teach music and arts – our educational system does not teach life – the important things of life – it does little to nurture the intricate emotional systems that are so vital to the development of the psyche in the young.

The *success* of our entire social fabric relies on the notion of caring and respecting each other – and this requires emotional development and depth. Surely at a time when there is so much toxic cynicism about the future and a tribalistic judgement of others – we would want to do all we could to give people the capacity to achieve mutual accommodation with others.

In suppressing opportunities for self exploration, we allow many young people to be left adrift. In excluding the arts – not exploring great literature, we offer young people little to no moral vocabulary. We offer no counterbalance to the online universe which fosters a somewhat delusional sense of self importance and neglects what is actually important – humanistic values. Personally, I prefer to have ten good friends than a million online followers.

The second critically important reason why young people must have access to music – is the fact that the musical and creative realm is where our imagination is stimulated to

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create new realities. Imagination is – I believe – the very greatest human attribute – and virtually everything in life arises from our imagination.

The third reason that music and art are essential is that when we make music and art – what we say is – we exist. The ARC Ensemble of the RCM performs music that was written, in many cases, in concentration camps where death was all around. And yet, people created and made music – because – creation of art says I am alive – I exist.

The American playwright James Agee said that “In every child who is born, under no matter what circumstances, the potentiality of the human race is born again – and in each of us – our terrific responsibility towards human life.”

We have to do better than what is currently on offer to young people, and this is why the work and existence of The Royal Conservatory is so important today – more than ever before – because we bring music into the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people every year and offer a counterbalance to the ill-conceived direction of our public systems.

To succeed The RCM needs your ongoing support – but in so doing – you can change the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. I am immensely pleased that we have a future President of the RCM – Alex Brose – in whom we all have so much confidence as a future leader. He is a wonderful person – and a real bond has emerged between us. He is also truly passionate about this institution and our mission to develop human potential through music and the arts. We welcome him and his wife Carmen and their children Niko and Sebastian to our city.

I want to close by speaking to what we can see as success in life. The American author Bessie Anderson Stanley summed it up simply and well: “Success is to laugh often and much – to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children – to earn the admiration of honest critics – to appreciate beauty – to find the best in others – to leave the world a bit better – whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition – to know that one life has breathed easier – because you lived here.”

I leave you with this one last comment – there is only one race on our planet – the human race – and there is nothing more powerful as a means of bringing us together as one race – than music and the arts.