

Why Perform in an Ensemble?

By Nicole Millner

Now in the wake of our fabulous Spring Gala, I've been reflecting on what a valuable experience it is for the students to practice and perform in a group. Certainly, it's a wonderful excuse to see and hear all of the students in one evening. The Gala is also a great reminder of the diversity of artistic expression fostered by the Wirth Center. However, I personally think that the best aspect of the evening is how art comes alive when more people are involved.

The presence of an audience is a significant variable; art serves to express thoughts and emotions that could not otherwise be conveyed. Sometimes the performer discovers more about him or herself in the art, but more often, the act of creating art is about communicating and sharing something with someone else: the audience. As any performer can attest, the more people in the audience, the greater the amount of pressure, but the reward is that much greater as well. The other role is that of a fellow artist (or many other artists) either supporting you in unison, or adding harmony in a separate line that complements the original action. As more people become involved in the creation of art, so many amazing things begin to happen. You are drawn out from your own inner dialogue and suddenly have to listen to others. Your senses broaden out as you begin to feel the same pulse and sensations as the people around you—and the art begins to be not just something you are creating, but rather, something that is alive and independent of any one single person. There will be times when this new, independent entity leaves you behind, but you will also learn how to reunite with it.

You hear different perspectives, even in something as simple as playing the same musical line a different way. You will learn to take the dominant, leading role at times, and at other times, you realize that you need to step back to let another voice take the lead. Even more subtly, sometimes you need to look to that other voice and take on their characteristics and mannerisms to create a unity of expression and intent.

To me, this is why I find art incredibly valuable. One could read these things and deduce that ensemble performance fosters teamwork, leadership, support, selflessness, independence and resilience. While these would all be great skills and qualities to foster in children, or even to cite on a resume, these are the qualities that make us essentially human and allow us to thrive socially. At the end of the day, Art is the epitome of what makes us human. Art challenges us to embrace and work through our weaknesses and to continually be inspired by others to become better so we can do the same for others. The more we work together to create something beautiful, the better we will become, and our world will be more beautiful for our efforts.