

On a typical afternoon strolling down Broadway, Manhattan's pulsating streets radiate a cacophony of sounds that invade my ears. Unlike the three out of five passersby whose ears are budded against the clamor, tuned in to whatever sounds charm their senses, I opt to "be here now." That is, to be present in the dizzying orchestration of the moment, with its fast-paced pedestrian chorus, jostling for sidewalk space, voices a dissonance of languages, ranges of scale and syntax, chattering, shouting, laughing, or murmuring intently into mobile phones, as yet another section of the citysong, construction cranes, clash with the harmonics of honking taxis, playing its stop-and-go USA rendition of Gershwin's "An American in Paris." All of these sounds fuse into the symphony that performs the "here and now," cannily enchanting my senses: New York, New York.

Or, am I escaping into the chaos, aiming to avoid the bedlam prowling my innermost self?

Meanwhile, the earbudders tune in to their preferred sounds, usually music. Budders can enjoy a vast selection of symphonic, or not-so-structured, voices and musical instruments. Whatever rapture garners their attention, it's not this raucous traffic jam or the clicking high-heeled shoes on feet swirling around them. Instead, they're choosing to control what seeps into their consciousness. What beats of drums and clash of cymbals touch their deepest senses?

It's a pity that most hearing disabled are denied all but the beat of drums; this tone-deaf disability must frustrate those who desire more than what off-key, offbeat music they might conjure in their minds. I believe they compensate, though, by exploring their inner core through other natural means, such as following the flow of a river, watching trees sway in the wind,

and other trance-inducing activities that deliver them to their bliss.

Meanwhile in Manhattan, the budders focus on internal music, choosing, I can only surmise, sounds that create for them a beat that somehow propels them forward ... or deeper inwards.

The budders seem oblivious to their surroundings, sometimes dangerously so. Some non-budders take it personally. I don't. I'm simply waiting for the techies to invent an earbud that fits my ear without triggering pain, admittedly a first-world complaint, but real none-the-less, so I too may enjoy music that transfixes my senses, enraptures me in joy, laughter, bliss, even on occasion, in sorrow, whatever my psychic state craves at any given moment.

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I'd love to traverse Broadway under the influence of Gershwin, or Bach, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, the miraculous Beatles classics, or Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah," any Aretha Franklin song, Led Zepelin, or Stevie Nicks. I, too, could shut out dissonance and follow music down the path to the quintessential me, wherein I uncover the unique symphony that defines me at my core.

Music transcends all cultural walls, even generational lines, when it's brilliant enough to outlast the ages. Music unites us, just as pods of whales are united by their linguistic compositions, as crickets share their nighttime concertos, as songbirds reach across all linguistic

boundaries, and all these complex sounds, yet to be deciphered by humans, nevertheless stir the hearts of humankind.

Not all species possess the gift of language that grants a creature the ability to grasp their family's unique language and apply syntax. That's because not all species come equipped with the ability to develop the physiological passageways that, together with the inherited language genome, manifest complex vocalization.

Humans share the aptitude to create complex languages with dolphins, whales, elephants, seals, and just three species of birds: songbirds, parrots and hummingbirds. Scientific studies suggest that, like humans, these mammals and birds not only communicate complexly with others of their own species, but some may also correlate certain sounds in their languages with elements of their own wellbeing.

I wonder if a mother whale desperately clinging to her calf already dead from swallowing toxic substances finds solace in the nearby sounds of a human flutist playing "Loch Lomond."

When last summer Arizona Senator John McCain was laid to rest, the incomparable voice of René Fleming singing "Danny Boy" chilled me to the bone, drew tears of joy and sorrow from glen to glen, and the world was reminded that, above all, we will one day ourselves go away and we hope loved ones sing *Aves* at our graves, the resurgent music of dying and thence returning home touching that deep ethereal nuance within us. That same week, who wasn't moved to both joy and sorrow by Stevie Wonder's performance of "Amazing Grace" in memory of lately departed Aretha Franklin, Queen of Soul?

Music has that profound power to help us connect with something deeply human — and at the same time divine. ♦

The Sound of SILENCE

Dare we shut out the dissonance and follow music down the path to our essential core?

by Skye Moody

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