

With all the craziness of the political season, the senseless violence throughout the world, and the overwhelming reality of the myriad issues that face individuals, communities, nations and the world (how's that for an upbeat opening phrase!), it's easy to be discouraged. Yet, there are those moments where you stumble into something so unexpected and beautiful that you regain hope in humanity and, for a moment, are carried on the crest of that wave of serendipity. Last week possessed one of those moments in my summer wanderings.

We were visiting a friend on Shelter Island for a couple of days. The setting is serene. The pace easy. It would be enough just to enjoy the natural beauty of the island and the retreat from the busyness of life. However, there exists this gem on beachfront property that is truly amazing: The Perlman Music Program. (Check it out at: <https://perlmanmusicprogram.org/>) It is a summer program for young, gifted string musicians founded by Toby and Itzhak Perlman. From the outside, it looks like any other summer camp setting, with small, white-washed cabins nestled into the hillside, and the beachfront a stones throw from all activities.

It is wholly something else.

High school students who possess musical gifts spend the summer honing their skills and working in close consort with one of the world's amazing artists. The residents of Shelter Island benefit from periodic concerts that the program puts on, and there are musical guests who visit year round. However, what is so wonderful is the ability to sit in on open rehearsals, which is what we did last week, and it was the providential moment that inspired trust, yet again, in humanity.

To begin, the students are amazing musicians. And they are teenagers. It is delightful to see them in rehearsal playing Bach or Brahms or Tchaikovsky as they attack the music with verve and gusto, and then tease their partner between breaks. It is all there. The seriousness with which gifted students engage their craft. The playfulness of youth and the inexorable desire to connect with peers and revel in being a part of something bigger than oneself. The vanity of self-importance and competitive streak that shows forth from time to time. And so much more. It's all on display in the transparency of youthful faces acknowledging effort, desire, mischievousness, good humor, and compassion. And, on Shelter Island, the ticket is free. You sit literally feet away from this wonderful work in progress and the beautiful music that is made.

Furthermore, the impact of the rehearsal is compounded by the presence of Itzhak Perlman himself. Living with polio, he uses a motorized chair to maneuver into the room. He then ascends to the rostrum with comments of encouragement and good humor before diving into the score. (The night we attended he had played the National Anthem at the Mets game the night before, and the video of the performance was projected on a far wall, beginning the rehearsal.) It is clear—and understandable—the respect that Perlman receives. However, it is equally clear that he would still receive such esteem were he not one of the world's great artists. His engagement with the music and the students is palpable and, yet, playful. Bottle up his experience of conducting and engaging in this musical process, and you would be able to sell joy to the world.

The students understand they are learning from one of the greats, and they also are offered a model of a love of something so deep and profound that it permeates the whole of your being. A love that does not isolate itself and desire to only be with the music. Rather, a love that pleasures in the process of making music and nurturing talent for the next generation. Which, I suspect, is the end product of any true love. We don't hoard or hide away when experiencing such love, nor do we sequester ourselves in a hermetically sealed bubble when we stumble upon such love. Such love opens us up to engage more fully the world around us and those within in it. To enter into such love is to also enter into a desire to explore it, share it, and invite others more deeply into it. In this sense, music is religion, for it taps into that which religion seeks to convey. Perlman possesses it. The youth at his summer program hopefully glimpse it and feel a bit of it as well. We were blessed to experience it for an evening. Such is the fleetingness of summer.