

## THE ARTS

### KEY TO A FULL AND FULFILLING CULTURAL LIFE

BY D. Paul Schafer



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The evidence is overwhelming and convincing. If we want to live a full and fulfilling cultural life, make the arts a fundamental part of it.

When the American psychologist Rollo May asked many years ago - "What if art and culture are not the frosting at all, but rather the fountainhead of human existence?" - he put his finger on the crux of the matter. For the arts, like culture, are not frills, luxuries, or the icing on the cake, but rather the elixir that is needed to live a happy, contented, and meaningful life at every stage in the life process, from the earliest signs of life to the final years of life.

Our encounter with the arts begins before we are born. Regardless of where we are born in the world, we are exposed to some of the most important aspects of the arts when we are still in the womb. This is true not only for language and the language arts - one of the most important arts of all but usually taken for granted because they are so commonplace - but also for music, literature, and other art forms. Many mothers sing to their babies and read stories to them before they see the light of day, knowing consciously or intuitively how essential the arts are for getting a good start in life. This is why many parents want music lessons, art lessons, or dance lessons for their children, even if they have been deprived of such opportunities themselves.

When we are born, our encounter with the arts escalates rapidly. This is especially true for the material arts, since this is when babies and toddlers manifest a keen desire to have tactile experiences by touching, holding, and feeling everything they come into contact with, including dolls, pillows, blankets, fingers, and hands. Not long after this, they begin to play with blocks and other materials. They also begin to dance, perform, and clown around, either by themselves or with others. They also experiment with paint, applying it to paper with their hands, feet, and brushes, as well as throwing it against walls or curtains to see what this will look like, much to the consternation of their parents.

This is an ideal time to capitalize on children's fascination with the arts and numerous other activities. As Fraser Mustard, a prominent Canadian educator and advocate of early childhood education stated in his book *The Early Years Study*, formal education should start much sooner than it does because this is when children's capacity for learning is greatest. This is why more and more educators are coming to the conclusion that the first three or four years in life are the most important of all in a child's education, despite the fact that most children do not begin their formal education until later.

One person who had a consuming interest in the education of children and especially their education in the arts was Sir Herbert Read, the distinguished British scholar and author. He produced a powerful rationale for arts education in childhood and youth - and indeed throughout life - in such books as *Education Through Art*, *Culture and Education in a World Order*, and many others. He also participated in the establishment of the International Society for Education Through Art as an executive arm of UNESCO in 1954. One organization that has capitalized on Read's remarkable vision in this area and carried it further is the International Child Art Foundation, which was created in the United States several years ago. This valuable organization employs the power of art in all its diverse forms to nurture children's creativity and imbue it with empathy and compassion. As a promoter and protector of children's imagination, it produces the Arts Olympiad and World Children's Festival, publishes the ChildArt Magazine, and provides many Peace Through Art programs.

If educators and educational institutions had capitalized on Read's far-reaching vision, arts education would not be in the difficult position it is today in many parts of the world. But it was not to be. When C. P. Snow's *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* was published after the Second World War, a chain of events was set in motion that eventually led to a strengthening of science education and a weakening of arts education in numerous schools.

While Snow was trying to come to grips with what he felt was too much emphasis on the arts and humanities in the British educational system and too little emphasis on science, he made such a powerful case for science, the sciences, and the scientific revolution going on in the world at that time that it tended to steer things in a different direction.<sup>(1)</sup> Along with many other developments taking place in the world at the same time - including linking up science with industry, technology, and governments - this had the effect of reinforcing the trend towards treating the sciences as "hard disciplines" and the arts as "soft

disciplines" in most educational jurisdictions. This led to a marginalization of the arts in many schools, the cutting of countless courses in the arts from the curriculum, and treating the arts as secondary rather than primary subjects of study in the education of children and young people.

Despite this, the arts have started to make a comeback in recent years and appear destined to play a much stronger role in educational systems in the future. A particularly important development in this regard was the creation of the *Seoul Agenda*, which resulted from the Second World Conference on Arts Education convened by UNESCO in Korea in 2010. The most important goals and strategies established for the Agenda were: ensure that arts education is accessible as a fundamental and sustainable component of a high quality renewal of education; apply arts education principles and practices to contribute to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing today's world; support and enhance the role of arts education in the promotion of social responsibility, social cohesion, cultural diversity, and intercultural dialogue; and *affirm arts education as the foundation for balanced creative, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and social development of children, youth, and life-long learning* (italics mine).

What is significant about the Agenda and the specific goals and strategies established for it is not only the high priority placed on the arts in the educational system - essential as this is - but also the priority placed on the dual role the arts are capable of playing in educational systems as "*ends in themselves*" as well as "*means to other ends.*"

In a traditional sense, the arts have almost always been treated as ends in themselves in most educational systems throughout the world. This has caused educators to focus the bulk of their time, energy, and attention on the many benefits that can be derived from taking courses in the arts. From the visual, material, and architectural arts, for instance, there is much to be learned about mass, density, shape, texture, form, proportion, colour, and perspective; from dance, drama, and literature: balance, movement, muscle control, physical coordination, tragedy, comedy, satire, and pathos; and from music: sound, rhythm, harmony, counterpoint, composition, and orchestration. There is also a great deal to be learned about discipline, largely through learning to play a musical instrument, paint pictures, act in plays, write poems, and tell stories. The underlying assumption is that most children will not be artists or have artistic careers when they grow up, but can still enjoy the arts as hobbies and experience a great deal of satisfaction from them as forms of entertainment later in life.

In contrast to this, there is a rapidly evolving awareness in many parts of the world that the arts can play a powerful role as means to others ends and not just ends in themselves, as is made abundantly clear in the Seoul Agenda and other developments taking place throughout the world. This results from the many other benefits that can be derived from having a solid education in the arts, such as cultivating creativity and excellence, developing a battery of skills and techniques that are useful in other areas of life, acting responsibly, mastering other disciplines, being compassionate, and contributing to the realization of a better

world. Clearly learning about the arts in all their diverse forms and manifestations is imperative if children and young people are to be prepared properly for life. There is little that can compare with it if the task is to make it possible for children and young people to experience fulfillment and well-being during the later stages of their lives.

There is more. While some art forms are more individual in nature - the visual and material arts for example - others are more collective in nature, such as drama, dance, music, and opera. It is impossible to put on a play, perform a symphony, or stage an opera or ballet without engaging in a great deal of cooperation and teamwork. This ranges all the way from working with others on the creation of sets and props and the rehearsal of scenes and movements to polishing up specific parts and putting on final performances. Through the preparation and presentation of works of art, people learn to work together in the realization of common causes, thereby developing collaborative skills and abilities that are in great demand today. This also produces more human interaction and social engagement, thereby counteracting the isolation that comes from contemporary technology and is such a major problem in the world at present.

Recognition of the two distinct strengths of arts education as means to other ends and ends in themselves results largely from the work of UNESCO and other international organizations, the involvement of many artists in a variety of social causes and humanitarian concerns, the advocacy of distinguished experts in the arts, culture, and creativity such as Sir Kenneth Robinson, and recent research and major assessments of arts education throughout the world. Without the ability to create, innovate, work together, think critically, respond imaginatively, stay out of trouble, deal with a host of internal and external problems, and apply what they have learned from the arts to other areas of life and other disciplines, children and young people will be at a considerable disadvantage in the future.

When the arts are seen from a holistic rather than partial perspective, there is little in the world that is not concerned with the arts in one form or another. This includes nature, the natural environment, other species, people, groups, institutions, communities, cities, countries, cultures, the past, the present, the future, and virtually everything else. This affirms that there is an enormous amount to be learned from the arts about life, living, reality, the human condition, and the world at each and every stage in life. This explains why Rollo May thought art and culture are "the fountainhead of human existence," and why Jean Cocteau said "art is not a pastime, but a priesthood." In doing so, he stretched a point to make a point like many good artists.

Taking the arts seriously should cause us to open up a commanding place for the arts in adulthood and not just in childhood and youth. This yields many benefits in our adult lives, such as the development of our personalities and our careers, the raising of children, the enjoyment of family life, the cultivation of friendships, and much more. Not only should we reach out to the arts whenever possible, but also we should allow the arts to penetrate into the interior of our being and our consciousness. There is simply no better time to explore the many different ways the arts can broaden, deepen, and enrich our lives, enhance

our understanding of ourselves and others, contribute to our identity, personality development, and well-being, and strengthen our relationships with other people, nature, and the world around us. It doesn't matter whether this happens on a part time, full time, casual, or intense basis. It can still lead to many transformative experiences and transcendental possibilities.

First and foremost, the arts bring a great deal of joy and happiness into our adult lives. This results from listening to beautiful music, watching superb plays, enjoying exciting opera and dance performances, looking at memorable paintings, cherishing fine craft objects, reading enlightening books, savouring outstanding stories, poems, and films, and seeing majestic monuments, especially if we open our hearts, minds, souls, spirits, and senses to these experiences. Surely this is why Walter Pater said, "art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass."

There are billions of people all over the world who are enjoying experiences like this as audience members, active participants, or both. While these forms of involvement in the arts are very different - with different outcomes, implications, and consequences - they bring an enormous amount of pleasure into our lives as adults, as well as help us to deal more effectively with the pressures, tensions, stresses, and strains of modern life.

One of the most fascinating things about the arts is that most of these experiences can be enjoyed through remarkable advances in technology and not just through live performances. Virtually every person in the world today can access everything that exists in the arts in both the historical and contemporary sense through the miracle of modern communications. They can enjoy the finest popular and classical music, see the most outstanding plays and paintings, and walk through the finest museums, galleries, and buildings through You Tube, iphones, itablets, virtual reality, and many other devices owned by family, friends, libraries, schools, community centres, or by themselves. This is a phenomenal achievement, one that promises to be even more phenomenal in the future.

As our involvement in the arts intensifies during our adult lives, it becomes apparent that every art form possesses some particular quality that makes it distinctive and unique. In music, it is sound, rhythm, and melodies, such as those created by Chopin, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Beethoven, the Beatles, and a host of other composers and melody-makers. This is what gives music its special quality and universal appeal, which is why some people think music is the highest art form of all and Hans Christian Andersen said, "where words fail, music speaks."

However, music is not the only art form that possesses a special quality that makes it distinctive and unique. In painting, it is visual representation, perspective, and the use of colour, as evidenced in the work of landscape painters like Joseph Mallord William Turner, Thomas Gainsborough, and myriad others. In poetry, it is the capacity to say profound things with a minimum number of words, such as when Keats said "A thing

of beauty is a joy forever," Blake said "To see a world in a grain of sand/And a heaven in a wild flower," and Shakespeare said "All the world's a stage/And all the men and women merely players." Talk about saying powerful things with the utmost simplicity!

Then there is dance. What sound, rhythm, and melodies are to music and simplicity is to poetry, movement is to dance. Here also, many examples abound, such as Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* with their graceful solos and elegant duos set to the most wonderful music imaginable. Architecture exudes a similar quality through the use of form, texture, materials, and mass, which is why some people refer to architecture as "frozen music." This is understandable in view of the fact that some buildings are so elegant, majestic, and ornate that they really do look like music that is frozen in time and space, such as the Taj Mahal in Agra, the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, the Jameh Mosque in Isfahan, and Kinkaku-ji or the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto.

In much the same way, theatre, opera, the literary arts, and film use stories as their special device and most identifiable characteristic. Theatre and literature are outstanding illustrations of this. They use stories to communicate things that are momentous and mundane, simple and profound. Take the works of Shakespeare referred to earlier. His stories are full of valuable insights into the human condition, different personality types, diverse social, political, and societal situations, and human triumphs and tragedies. And what is true for Shakespeare and his works is true for many other authors and their works, including George Bernard Shaw, Molière, Miguel de Cervantes, Dante Alighieri, Charles Dickens, Omar Khayyám, Molana Jalal-Din Rumi, and Paulo Coelho.

If the arts bring an immense amount of joy and happiness into our adult lives through the many different qualities, characteristics, and capabilities they possess, they also help us to express ourselves and our feelings and emotions in humane and sensitive ways. This makes it possible for us to feel better about ourselves, as well as connect with others on a deeper, richer, and more personal level. While the arts can be provocative at times - *and must be if they are to fulfill one of their most essential functions in society* - the feelings and emotions evoked through the arts are much more positive than negative. The arts seldom injure people, destroy things, or involve violent and destructive behaviour.

They also help us to cultivate our capacity for creativity and excellence to a much greater extent. As a result, they are ideal vehicles for helping people in general - and adults in particular - to respond imaginatively, intelligently, and energetically to the demands of modern life, as well as the rapidity of local, regional, national, and international events.

At one time, people were trained for a single job or profession during their adult lives. As a result, education was focused on learning specific skills and specialized abilities. With the high rate of occupational turnover and technological change today - it is now estimated that people will have fifteen to twenty jobs over the

course of their lives and in very different fields - this view is starting to change. It is now apparent that narrowly trained and highly specialized people may not be able to deal with difficult employment situations, as well as jobs that are constantly being transformed, downsized, or eliminated.

Clearly much more attention will have to be paid in the future to helping people to become more creative and entrepreneurial in their work, careers, and lives - people who are able to respond quickly and cleverly to whatever problems loom up in their paths because they have learned to use their mental, physical, and emotional powers in highly inventive ways. It is creativity - not conformity - that will enable people to perform effectively in jobs in the future, as well as to create jobs and fashion the new types of employment situations that are necessary for this. Nothing may do this better than involvement in the arts - the kind of involvement that brings out the best in people and makes it possible for them to express themselves in innovative and original ways.

What is true for creativity is also true for excellence. Regardless of what occupations or professions we end up in during our adult lives, achieving excellence will be mandatory in all occupations and professions in the future.

The arts tend to value excellence more highly than other activities because this is essential to master artistic challenges and perform aesthetic works. No one likes to watch an artistic performance that is inferior or mediocre, since this leaves a great deal to be desired. In order to prevent this, it is necessary to aspire to and achieve excellence in all artistic endeavours, which often turns out to be the key to realizing excellence in other areas of life. There is a reason why we use such terms as "the art of science," "the art of politics," and "the art of business," since each of these are art forms when they are performed with excellence. Henry David Thoreau went a step further in this regard when he said, "The highest condition of art is artlessness."

The same holds true for diversity. The arts are incredibly diverse because they are constantly changing, thereby exposing us to new, better, and different ways of doing things. While many techniques in the arts must be repeated numerous times in order to master them, one of the most significant things about the arts is that they are always evolving and mutating, not only in time but also in space. What is commonplace today will likely not be commonplace tomorrow, as the history of music, drama, the visual arts, and literature reveals. The arts are always on the move, so to speak, thereby helping us to deal more effectively with diversity, complexity, and a world that is in perpetual motion and dynamic flux.

The arts are also capable of strengthening our perceptual and sensorial abilities in our adult life. This should begin with cultivating the art of seeing, which Goethe thought was the most important sensory ability of all because it was with the eye more than any other sense organ that he learned to see and understand the world. This ability is cultivated most effectively through the visual arts, going to art galleries and museums,

and so forth. This enables us to develop our capacity for perception and perspective, comprehend foreground and background relationships, discover links and connections, and focus on details and parts.

This is merely the first in a whole series of steps that are required to strengthen our other perceptual and sensorial abilities. For the arts improve our ability to hear, smell, taste, and touch and not just to see. These other abilities can be cultivated through music, sculpture, the material, culinary, and literary arts, and others. While it may not be realized at the time, people who take craft lessons, modern or ballroom dancing, or cooking classes in their adult lives are more likely to have better developed sensorial abilities than people who do not engage in these activities. For involvement in activities such as this makes it possible for us to write more clearly, speak more coherently, express ideas more simply, hear more acutely, touch more gently, and see more precisely.

The arts also have an important role to play in bringing people, groups, communities, societies, and countries together. They do this through the ability of artists and arts organizations to create music, poems, pictures, stories, plays, and the like that can be shared. This does more than anything else to create strong bonds and a sense of belonging between people, regardless of whether they live in small towns or large cities. This ability to create social cohesion is urgently needed in the world. A good example of this is the work achieved by Gareth Malone, the distinguished British choral conductor who has created many choirs in England and other parts of the world over the last few decades, most notably in schools, communities, corporations, and among military personnel, most recently in connection with the Invictus Games initiated by Prince Harry.

There is another ability buried deep in the arts that is of vital importance to our development as adults, one that may be the most important of all. It is the capacity for holism. It derives from the fact that every work of art is a whole composed of many parts. While this is most apparent in the visual arts, it is also apparent in all other art forms. For regardless of whether it is a painting, a play, a musical composition, a poem, or a story, every work of art is a whole made up of many parts that are woven together in specific combinations and arrangements to form wholes that are greater than the parts and the sum of the parts. This is because new entities are brought into existence when the wholes are created that are not in the parts taken separately. This makes the arts ideal vehicles for seeing and understanding things as wholes and not merely as parts.

This has major implications for our development as adults, since it addresses one of the biggest problems of all in the modern world. While we have become remarkably skilled at breaking things up into parts in order to study the parts in detail, we have lost our capacity to put the parts back together again to form wholes. This is true not only with respect to people, but also with respect to communities, regions, countries, and the world, thereby making this one of the biggest challenges in the world today. We neglect it at our peril.



Since the arts involve the body, mind, heart, soul, spirit, senses, emotions, and intellect, they make it possible to bring all our human faculties together to create wholes composed of many interrelated parts. This explains why artists, arts organizations, and the arts have been in the vanguard of the movement to create "the whole person" ever since Matthew Arnold, the great nineteenth century poet and culture critic, emphasized the need to attend to the *harmonious development of all the faculties that comprise human nature*. Not only was Arnold opposed to the development of any one of these faculties to the detriment, exclusion, or dominance of others - especially when it comes to developing our personalities, characters, identities, and lives - but also he was devoted to the pursuit of perfection and the necessity of the arts and education, or "sweetness and light" as he called it. Not bad advice for people living in a fragmented and disconnected world and desperately searching for meaning and fulfillment in life.

This capacity in the arts to teach us a great deal about holism is not limited to ourselves and the development of our personalities and lives as "whole people." It also teaches us a great deal about the world around us, especially with respect to all the diverse cultures and civilizations of the world. This is because cultures and civilizations, like people and artistic works, are wholes made up of many parts, albeit on a much more colossal scale. The problem here, of course, is that we cannot see cultures and civilizations as wholes because they are composed of far too many parts, and it is not possible to see the organizing principle that is used to combine all the parts together to form wholes.

How, then, is it possible to know and understand cultures and civilizations in the holistic sense? In order to do this, it is necessary to turn to artists and arts organizations. This is because artists and arts organizations create many of the signs, symbols, myths, legends, metaphors, stories, and the like that are necessary to shed light on cultures and civilizations as wholes or total ways of life.

Artists and arts organizations are able to do this because one of their greatest assets is the ability to select parts that are most symbolic of cultures and civilizations as wholes and therefore epitomize cultures and civilizations in many ways. The old adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" is a cliché, but it speaks volumes about the ability of artists and arts organizations to convey an incredible amount about the character of cultures and civilizations as wholes that cannot be communicated in any other way at all, or cannot be communicated nearly as effectively using any other device. This point was driven home with clarity and conviction by Robert Redfield, who spent the bulk of his life studying cultures and civilizations as wholes:

The characterization of the artist... are of course not precise at all; but very much of the whole is communicated to us. We might call them all portraits. They communicate the nature of the whole by attending to the uniqueness of each part, by choosing from among the parts certain of them for emphasis, and by modifying them and rearranging them in ways that satisfy the "feeling" of the portrayer." (2)

There are many examples of this. There is a great deal to be learned about the cultures of France, the United States, China, Cambodia, and Australia as wholes, for example, from the Eiffel Tower, the Statue of Liberty, the Great Wall, Angkor Wat, and the Sydney Opera house, since these internationally known landmarks are symbolic of these cultures in the holistic sense in many ways. It is through symbolic parts like this - as well as through many other parts that are symbolic of these cultures as wholes such as musical, visual, and literary works - that comprehensive portraits of these cultures begin to take shape, much as they do for all other cultures in the world in exactly the same way.

What does all this have to do with our adult lives and the desire to live a full and fulfilling cultural life? Actually, a great deal. Developing knowledge of the diverse cultures and civilizations of the world not only makes it possible for us to understand and appreciate these cultures and civilizations as wholes or total ways of life, but also enriches our lives in countless ways. There is a wealth of information and insight to be gleaned from broadening and deepening our knowledge and understanding of the world's cultures and civilizations in the all-encompassing sense if we are wise enough to realize this, especially with respect to different ways of seeing, acting, and valuing things in the world, accepting and appreciating others, expanding our consciousness and mindfulness, enhancing our well-being, and improving our individual and collective behaviour.

This is also true with respect to our awareness and appreciation of nature, especially during adulthood. While the arts are not the only vehicles that are capable of doing this, it is remarkable how much can be learned about nature, the natural environment, and other species from the arts, as well as how imperative it is to revere nature and make it an integral part of our lives.

It never ceases to amaze me how many artistic works are concerned with nature. Artists have been concerned with nature in all its complexity, diversity, and grandeur for centuries, and have consequently created a vast array of works that deal with nature and its many diverse elements. In the western tradition alone, there are millions of artistic works that are concerned with the sun, the moon, stars, clouds, landscapes, seascapes, planets, morning, afternoon, evening, mountains, forests, and many different types of animals, as works by the French Impressionists, Canada's Group of Seven, Chinese brush painters, Beethoven, Debussy, Respighi, Richard Strauss, Vincent d'Indy, Alan Hovhaness, and numerous others confirm. One manifestation of this that is very symbolic and powerful is Dvorak's hauntingly beautiful *Song to the Moon*, particularly when it is sung by Anna Netrebko, Rénee Fleming, or any other well-known artist.

What is true for nature and its diverse elements is especially true for rivers. In fact, rivers have probably received more attention from artists than any other element in nature, perhaps because rivers involve flow and movement and flow and movement are essential at all stages in life but particularly in the adult and final stages. Some of the most obvious examples of this are *The Moldau* by Smetana, *The Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss Jr., and *Flow Gently, Sweet Afton* by Robert Burns and Jonathan Spilman, with its exquisite

melody and enticing words in the first verse: "Flow gently, sweet Afton, Among thy green braes, Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise; My Mary's asleep by the murmuring stream, Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream."

To these examples should be added Bruce Springsteen's popular song *The River and The Rivers of Babylon* by Brent Dowe and Trevor McNaughton of the Jamaican Reggae group The Melodians. There are also the many musical works written about such rivers as the Yellow River in China and the mighty Mississippi in the United States, as well as favourites like *Ol' Man River* and *Shenandoah*. And what about Handel's *Water Music*? While it was not written with a specific river in mind, it was written to be performed on a barge floating down a river - the Thames River in England - and had to be repeated many times because King George I was so fond of it.

And this brings me, via a circuitous route, to the ability of the arts to motivate, uplift, and inspire us, as well as to reach above and beyond ourselves in the search for spirituality and the sublime. Along with holism, these two final abilities may be the most important of all during the adult and final stages of our lives because they make it possible for us to do things that seem impossible to do and achieve things that seem impossible to achieve.

Take the ability of the arts to motivate, uplift, and inspire us. I have discovered over the course of my adult life that there are many artistic works that do this, which I suspect is true for all people. While I recognize that particular works and specific art forms do this in different ways for different people, I must confess that I am motivated, uplifted, and inspired whenever I hear the last movement of Saint-Saëns *Organ Symphony*, Sibelius's *Finlandia* or the last movement of his *Fifth Symphony*, John Stanley's *Trumpet Voluntary*, Max Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy*, Chopin's *Ballade No. 1 in G Minor*, Opus 23, Don Besig's *Flying Free*, and many others. This is also true when I look at landscape paintings by Vincent van Gogh, Tom Thomson, Arthur Lismer, and Lawren Harris, or watch the Gandhi movie. Whenever I see or hear any of these works, and many others I might mention, my instant reaction is to get up and get going, as well as to tackle things that I have left undone for days and possibly weeks and months.

These experiences are multiplied many times over by artistic works that cause me to reach above and beyond myself in the search for spirituality and the sublime. My experiences in this area are - and have been - especially exhilarating because they have propelled me to very lofty heights. The majority of these works are in the field of music, although here as well, I am aware that other people have similar experiences in other art forms and with different works of art.

In an earlier article, I wrote about a profound experience I had one night after I had gone to bed, turned on my radio, and fallen fast asleep. I don't know how long I was sleeping, but I slowly became aware that I was hearing one of the most spiritual and sublime pieces of music I have ever heard in my life. I actually thought

I had died and gone to heaven, at least until I heard an announcer say, "you have been listening to *Grant Us Peace* by Felix Mendelssohn."

Much more recently, I had a similar experience with another piece of music, but this time it was early in the morning rather than in the middle of the night, but still on my radio. While I set my alarm to let out a loud "beep" at exactly 6 o'clock every morning, for some curious reason I was awoken on this particular morning by another piece of music that was incredibly spiritual and sublime. When it was over, I listened attentively to hear what the piece was and who composed it. Unfortunately, I only caught about half of this. It sounded like "you have just heard a piece by Robert Han - or was it Hand? - for oboe and orchestra."

I immediately jumped out of bed, went to my computer, and began the frantic search for the title of this piece and its composer. After a long and arduous search, I discovered it was *À Chloris* by Reynaldo Hahn, a composer I had never heard of before. It is usually performed by a solo singer or oboe player with piano and small orchestra. Do you know this beautiful piece of music? If not, you may want to listen to it, along with the fascinating introduction that accompanies this particular version of the piece (You Tube "Ah Chloris" -- Reynaldo Hahn; Susan Graham, mezzo-soprano; Jake Heggie, piano).

I narrate these two experiences to you because there are many pieces of music that I find extremely spiritual and sublime, including Handel's *Minuet from Bernice*, *Fauré Cantique de Jean Racine*, the second movement of Beethoven's *Fifth Piano Concerto*, Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*, the Adagietto from Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*, the Cavatina from Emil von Sauer's *Piano Concerto No 1*, *The Holy City*, *Bless This House*, and many others.

I would definitely add *The Lost Chord* to this list. I discovered this piece quite by accident several years ago and it has been a favourite of mine ever since. It was composed by Sir Arthur Sullivan in 1877 during the illness and passing away of his brother. I was very surprised by this because Sullivan was part of the Gilbert and Sullivan duo that wrote many comic operettas, including *The Pirates of Penzance* and *The Mikado*.

*The Lost Chord* has been recorded many times by some of the world's greatest singers, including John McCormack, Webster Booth (You Tube - Webster Booth - the Lost Chord is a personal favourite), and Enrico Caruso, who sang it at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on April 29, 1912 to raise money for families who lost loved ones and family members when the Titanic sank off the coast of Newfoundland. One of the most remarkable things about this piece is not only the exquisite and memorable music, but also the evocative and captivating words. They are from a poem by Adelaide Anne Proctor. I quote them here at length because they are symbolic of the ability many artists and arts organizations possess to open the doors to spirituality and the sublime in profound and powerful ways, as well as to demonstrate the herculean heights to which the arts can soar in our adult lives and indeed throughout our entire lives:

Seated one day at the organ, I was weary an ill at ease,  
 And my fingers wander'd idly over the noisy keys;  
 I knew not what I was playing, or what I was dreaming then,  
 But I struck one chord of music like the sound of a great Amen.

It flooded the crimson twilight like the close of an Angel's Psalm,  
 And it lay on my fever'd spirit with a touch of infinite calm.  
 It quieted pain and sorrow like love overcoming strife,  
 It seem'd the harmonious echo from our discordant life.

It link'd all perplexed meanings into one perfect peace,  
 And trembled away into silence as if it were loth to cease;  
 I have sought, but I seek it vainly, that one lost chord divine,  
 Which came from the soul of the organ and enter'd into mine.

It may be that Death's bright Angel will speak in that chord again;  
 It may be that only in Heav'n I shall hear that grand Amen!

With these inspirational words, I come to the final two stages of life. The first is usually called "the retirement stage," although surely we must find a better term for this because it sounds like life is more or less over by this point, which is anything but the case. For this is an ideal time to be engaged in the arts if we did not have the good fortune to be involved in them to any significant extent in our childhood, youth, and adulthood, as well as to get more actively involved in them if we were engaged in them earlier in life.

This involvement can be achieved by ourselves or through organizations such as seniors' homes, zoomers' groups, community centres, and so forth that are rapidly increasing their courses and programs in the arts for people in the final stages of life. This is primarily because this is a perfect time to take up a musical instrument, paint pictures, make craft objects, have fun, fill in time, dance, engage in comedy and humour, and seek all the pleasures the arts can bring at this particular stage in the life process. I have found this a fruitful time for taking brush painting classes, singing in a choir, practising the piano, learning more about the artistic and cultural heritages of humankind, reacquainting myself with wonderful works of art, and perhaps most importantly, discovering outstanding works of art for the very first time.

What is most interesting about the last or final stage of life is that recent research is revealing that the arts have an indispensable role to play at this specific stage in the life process. This is true not only for people who are getting older but still enjoy reasonably good health, but especially for people who are suffering from such debilitating illnesses and diseases as cancer, strokes, deep depression, dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, M.S., ALS, and so forth.

In recent years, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of institutions, books, research studies, and other developments devoted to coming to grips with these illnesses and diseases. What is being discovered in countless hospitals, palliative care centres, organizations like The Society for the Arts in Dementia Care, Partnerships in Dementia Care Alliance, the National Ballet School of Canada, and many others - as well as researching books like *The Creative Arts in Dementia Care: Practical Person-Centred Approaches and Ideas* by Jill Hayes and *Dementia Arts: Celebrating Creativity in Elder Care* by Gary Glazer - is that the arts can be very helpful in assisting people with these illnesses and diseases during the last stages of life. They can help people to hear better, remember more, express their creativity, improve their balance, and interact more effectively, largely by listening to music, singing songs, dancing alone or with others, recalling favourite tunes and artistic experiences from the past, and much more. While the arts are not the only activities that can do this and cannot provide cures for these illnesses and diseases, they can make it easier for people to deal with these problems, as well as care givers and family members who are struggling to help people cope with some of the greatest ordeals in life.

When all the benefits to be derived from the arts at every stage in the life process are added up and considered collectively - in childhood and youth, adulthood, retirement, and the final years of life - it is apparent that the arts must be seen in a totally new light. After decades of downplaying the arts in many educational systems, governments, and countries throughout the world, it is clear that the arts deserve a prominent place at all stages in life. Not only is this the solution to achieving the balance, harmony, and parity between the arts and the sciences that C. P. Snow so desperately sought, but also it is the key to living a full and fulfilling cultural life. There is simply no substitute for this.

## Endnotes

1. It should be noted that C. P. Snow modified his position on this subject in a second book he wrote later in life. It was *The Two Cultures: And a Second Look: An Expanded Version of The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*. This resulted from the strong reaction that occurred to what was called "the Snow thesis," namely the conviction that a high priority should be placed on science education in the school system because Snow believed this was the best way to deal with the problems that existed in the world at that time. He also believed it was the best way to correct the imbalance he felt existed between the arts and humanities on the one hand and science and the sciences on the other hand in the British educational system and British society generally, as well as in many other educational systems and societies throughout the world.

One organization that has achieved the parity, balance, and harmony that C. P. Snow sought between the arts and the sciences and is demonstrating this in fact is the Scientific Research Institute of Spiritual

Development of Man and UNESCO Chair "Spiritual and Cultural Values of Upbringing and Education" in the Ukraine. For many years now, it has been applying well-established scientific facts, principles, and practices to understanding the crucial role that the arts and culture play in the education of children and youth, as well as the development of people's values, personalities, and spirituality at all stages in the life process.

2. Robert Redfield, *The Little Community: Viewpoints for the Study of a Human Whole* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1973), page 161.

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This paper was written in 2015.

IGCAT's mission is to empower and facility local communities to realise the potential of their distinct food, culture, arts and sustainable tourism and local resources.

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