

Musical Genius in Children

Everyone has different strengths and abilities, which is what makes each one of us a unique person. Some people, however, are born with the gift of being extremely proficient in certain areas or professions. Such people are described as geniuses and it is so easy to notice them, especially in the Arts' world. A lot of research is taking place in order to help us realize what defines a "genius", especially a "musical genius".

We have all heard of people who were born with a special gift; the gift of having well developed intellectual abilities in certain subjects. It is really difficult to be certain whether a child has unique abilities or not, however it is not impossible. In Music, it is acceptable to say that someone can have unique music talents which help in succeeding in the field.

Undoubtedly, everybody inherits some characteristics, which could either be biological or intellectual. It is very easy to tell if a child is a musical genius or not because such children tend to stand out with their achievements. However, this does not necessarily prove that the unique abilities exhibited by these children are hereditary.

Musical abilities usually develop during the first few years of someone's life. However, even if children are born with the tendency to be good in music, they will lose their interest if they are not brought up in a suitable environment. Musical geniuses most often stand out because of their impressive memory and their ability to hear musical notes precisely, also known as "Perfect Pitch".

Personally, I do not believe that "Perfect Pitch" is hereditary. Every note has a unique sound, which has a certain frequency. It would be foolish to believe that someone can have the ability to recognize these notes since birth. How can one know how a note sounds if they have never heard it before? Therefore, I believe that if children get to hear those notes really often early on in their lives, then it is possible to have "Perfect Pitch". For that reason, it is not uncommon to see that children coming from musical families turn out to have "Perfect Pitch".

It is really easy to explain extraordinary phenomena by saying that they are hereditary gifts. This is not, however, completely true. The environment surrounding the child plays a huge part in defining the children's strengths and abilities. I would say that 80% of the factors

determining whether or not a child is a genius depend on the environment the child grew up in. Only 20% of the factors are genetic reasons.

History is probably the greatest proof; let us take a look at some families which had young musical geniuses. The Bach family offered a plethora of musical geniuses in Europe. Also, let us not forget Mozart and his sisters, or Django Reinhardt and his son Babbitt, who both were exceptional and very influential guitarists. These are only a few of the millions of cases where the environment proved to be an important factor determining whether a child will do well in Music or not.

There is a mystery surrounding musical genius in children which is really difficult to explain. German philosopher Immanuel Kant says that genius is a gift that is hard to comprehend. It cannot be passed on or taught; it comes from birth and it is lost at death. At this point, let us think about Mozart and the perfection of his compositions. It only takes listening to "The Magic Flute" to realize the kind of genius Mozart was. Musical genius is one of the eight kinds of geniuses. It is impossible to explain how Mozart was able to compose spectacular music at the age of 4. By the time he was seven, he was already a virtuoso of the violin and harpsichord and

had already composed a lot of masterpieces. Mozart also had an impressive memory. He was able to write all the 8 voices (2 choirs) of Allegri's Misere just by listening to it once. He was able to listen to 8 voices simultaneously and remembered a huge piece by heart, which he then wrote on paper without making a single mistake.

So, what is a genius? What kind of people are they? First of all, they are people who show a great interest and devotion to what they do. Children who stand out in music from a young age are usually very self-confident and know what they want. Einstein said that curiosity, persistency and hard work are the three main constituents of a genius. Musical geniuses usually have a lot of special abilities such as logic, mathematical abilities, speaking and expression abilities and so on.

Children who have unique or unusual musical talents are also described as musical geniuses. Such children display skills that are usually acquired after years of practice and experience, before the age of 10. To this day, there is still no explanation behind this phenomenon. Research focuses on determining whether such genius is genetic or based on the way children are brought up. I believe that it is a combination of both.

There have been a lot of musical geniuses in the past. The first name that pops up on everyone's mind is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, which is probably the most unique case. At the age where other children can only pronounce words or simple sentences, Mozart was able to compose brilliant music pieces. Certainly, the environment he grew up in was ideal. He was the son of Leopold Mozart, a well known musician who was definitely Wolfgang's first teacher and influence. However, I do not believe that a five year old child would actually sit down and pay attention to any type of class, so I am convinced that schooling was not the reason why Mozart was so brilliant.

Let us remember of George Bizet, who went to the Paris Conservatory of Music at the age of 10, just like Isaac Albeniz. Frederic Chopin composed complex music pieces since the age of seven. Liszt appeared as a solo pianist at large concerts since the age of 11. The same applies for Felix Mendelssohn. Also, Franz Schubert wrote exceptional pieces when he was twelve.

We can find similar examples of musical genius in the more recent history too. For example, Vanessa Mae was able to play the violin since she was 5,

just like cellist Yo-Yo-Ma. Another example is Charlotte Church who managed to have a complete soprano voice at the age of twelve. Usually, soprano singers have a complete soprano voice around the age of 40, after a lot of practice and experience. Jazz trumpet player Wynton Marsalis was able to play since the age of the 6. Drummer Buddy Rich learned how to play the drums at the same time he learned how to walk. Also, Christina Aguilera, Gladys Knight and Stevie Wonder had a very unique voice from a very young age.

As a guitarist, I would like to talk about a few guitar geniuses. After studying the guitar for so many years, I can say that I am able to recognize a musical genius. There are a lot of examples; Joe Pass, Wes Montgomery, Steve Vai and many other guitarists have skills that could be described as “superhuman”. Another example of that is the gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt. Gypsies usually learn to play guitar from a very young age. Jimmy Rosenberg, for example had a million dollar contract with Sony Classics when he was just 15 years old. Blind Tom Wiggum wrote music since he was 6. Derek Paravicini was playing with the London Philharmonic at the age of nine.

A lot of research took place over musical geniuses. I found a particular research of the University of Hong Kong to be very interesting. This research proved that music can improve memory and learning skills. It also showed that people who study classical musical have stronger brain skills. This research was published in the Neuropsychology magazine. The conclusions of this research suggest that studying music can be beneficial for all the children, especially those who are recovering from a brain trauma. During this research, the memory and learning skills of 90 children aged from 6 to 15 years old were studied. It was observed that children who studied music did much better than children who did not. Researchers believe that this is because music stimulates the left hemisphere of the brain which is responsible for verbal learning. Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University states that music genius is as important as mathematical genius.

It is clear that music is a vital part of our lives. Musical geniuses of the present and the past are proof that musical skills come from within. Some develop their skills early on in life and they are described as musical geniuses. Maybe musical geniuses are not as unnatural and out-of-this-

world as some of us like to think they are. Musical geniuses are completely natural and real.