

## The Power of Music

Vitamin L is now in its 25th year of providing inspiring music via concerts and recordings. One thousand (yes, 1,000!) Vitamin L concerts have been performed since 1989! Over the past 24 years, we have witnessed time and again the power of music to uplift, inspire, and in the case of the Vitamin L songs, to convey thought-provoking ideas about important themes.

There have been countless convincing scientific studies about the positive effect of music on brain chemistry, on the immune system, on stress levels before surgery, on seriously ill children, on premature babies, and on health in general[1]. A new documentary, *Alive Inside*, demonstrates the transformational power of music for elderly dementia patients who are given iPods loaded with their favorite music. The previously unresponsive seniors respond to the music in a stunning way[2].

Music plays an important role worldwide across cultures. People across the world use music for important occasions and rituals such as weddings, various forms of worship, and memorial services, and for pleasure. In May 2012, the BBC reported on the earliest musical instruments that have been found to date - flutes made from bird bone and mammoth ivory that are between 42,000 and 43,000 years old! It's intriguing and exciting to imagine people playing flutes that long ago[3]!

Yesterday at a wedding I witnessed the use of music preceding the ceremony,

during it, and at the reception. Music enhanced the day and helped make the experience full and memorable.

Over the years we've received lots of feedback that demonstrates the power of music. The following is from an email on 5/28/13:

*To Whom It May Concern,*

*I have no idea why Vitamin L popped into my head just now, but it did and I am delighted to see from your website that the organization is still around.*

*The ensemble came to Wellwood Middle School in Fayetteville, New York when I was a student in the mid-90s and I remember the concert very well. Teaching lessons about character values through singing was something you exercised long before the success of the hit show Glee, and I just wanted you to know that I still remember songs like "Walk a Mile" and "People are a Rainbow."*

*Thanks for all of the work you do in helping young students better understand themselves and each other. School at any age is extremely difficult, but I'm comforted to know that you still perform and make a difference. Kind regards, Jimmy Byrne*

The fact that Jimmy remembers the concert and specific songs 16 years later speaks to the power of music. We appreciate that he took the time to contact us, and these reminders are like booster shots that help us continue Vitamin L's ongoing work.

Becky Merges, the music teacher at

Owego Elementary School, wrote in June: *The students absolutely loved the music and the message that it brings. They were asking to sing the songs we learned for the assembly right up to the last day of classes, and are already requesting that we do them next year. The students felt a special tie to the song "I Want to Say Thanks"...during class discussions about what it means to be thankful, students repeatedly brought up being thankful for things we've recovered or replaced after our school was lost in the flood of September 2011. To hear the kids finding anything positive to say about such a horrible situation truly shows the healing power of music.*

Professor Graham Welch, Chair of Music Education, University of London, wrote in a blog: *Music is a birth right, central to our humanity and the human condition, and should not be treated as marginal within our educational systems lest we miss the opportunity to maximize its potential for improving lives, whether it be premature babies or older people*[4].

I extend a giant thank you to each person who has been part of the Vitamin L experience in any way – as a singer, a donor, a board member, the parent of a chorus member, a music teacher who embraced Vitamin L songs, or an audience member. We are committed to continue using the power of music to convey Vitamin L's messages of hope, love, and goodwill towards all.

-Janice Nigro, Director, The Vitamin L Project

[1] Daniel Levitin, Professor of Psychology, Behavioural Neuroscience, and Music is just one of many scientists who have written about the power of music in numerous articles and in books including [This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession](#).

[2] To see a clip of this profound response in a patient named Henry, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKDXuCE7LeQ> or see the documentary in full (release date, Sept. 9, 2013).

[3] To view photos of the flutes and to read more, go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-18196349>

[4] From Prof. Welch's 5/2/13 blog post: The Health Benefits of Live Music on Premature Babies



*"Dear Vitamin L,  
I want to thank you for going to my school. I like to sing a lot of your songs. My favorite song is the one about Dr. King. The song made me think I want to be like him one day."  
Love, Kiara  
- Southside  
Charter School*

## From a Vitamin L Singer...

If you could make a difference in the world, how would you do it? Would you write a letter to your local legislator about an issue in your community? Would you give a speech to a large crowd of people? Maybe you would try going from door to door to try to get people to rally behind your movement. Or maybe, like Jan Nigro, you'd just sit down and write a song about walking a mile in someone else's shoes.

Janice Nigro is always telling us before shows that when we go to schools and community events, we are making a positive impact. I understood that, but I didn't really see it. It was not really clicking for me. We would see lots of kids who'd tell us what their favorite song was, what their favorite part of the show was and even which t-shirt color they liked the best. I just kept walking away from it saying to myself, "I'm happy they liked us, but do they really get it? Do they really understand what we are trying to tell them?"

In the summer, I work at 4H Camp Owahta. It's a small camp in the middle of the woods, just outside of McGraw, NY. I first started working there around the same time I joined Vitamin L, in 2007. Since I was not able to make it to some of the summer rehearsals that year, I would practice by performing the songs I had learned at our campfire circles. The kids and the counselors all seemed to enjoy it, and would always comment afterwards by saying "Oh, isn't that one of those Vitamin L songs?" or "I learned that song when they came to my school!"

In 2010, I was the arts and crafts director at camp. One of my goals that summer was to add song learning to our arts and crafts curriculum, and the Vitamin L songs seemed like a perfect fit. They were simple and fun, and the fact that one of my staff members took the time to learn to play some of the guitar tabs made it even more exciting. It was incredible and the kids wanted more. We went from teaching one or two songs per week to two or three songs per day! They were learning the material quickly, and retaining it. I

figured there was only one way to go above and beyond the success we were already having that summer, and that was to bring Vitamin L to camp.

When Vitamin L pulled into the driveway, you would have thought the Beatles had just arrived. As chorus members made their way up to the recreation area to start playing with kids, campers easily were able to spot their brightly colored t-shirts, and quickly made their way over to meet the performers with wide smiles and lots of questions. The air was electric, and everybody, including the performers, was excited. This was going to be a special show.

The concert happened, and just like every other Vitamin L concert, the audience was singing and dancing and clapping their hands, not always in time mind you, but with great spirit and joy nonetheless. We finished and everybody was smiling. We said our goodbyes to Vitamin L and then I walked back to where my cabin of boys was sitting, and they wanted to talk about the concert.

At the end of every day, I sit with my cabin and we go around in a circle talking about what our favorite part of that particular day was. Vitamin L was a common highlight for everybody that evening. One of the boys said his favorite part of the day was the song "Walk a Mile." It seemed strange to me that one song was the best part of the day for him. Out of all of the activities and the concert as a whole, it was just that one song. Nothing else. So I asked him why. What was it about that three and a half minutes that made his day? I will never forget it. He then talked about the message of the song in a way that made me see that he really understood it and applied it to his life. He really got it. A 10-year-old boy understood the concept of empathy just by listening to a song. Being able to see the pay-off of what we worked on during those arts and crafts periods, and the response from the concert was, and still is, one of the most rewarding things I have ever been able to enjoy. It was inspiring.



Ever since then, I've made it a personal goal to reach the entire audience, and make them think about why we are up on stage singing and doing what we're doing. When we make that connection, that impact, it's just the beginning. Maybe that person will remember the concept of "Walk a Mile" when he/she is in a conflict with someone and make a better choice because of it. Maybe that person will share "Walk a Mile" with another group of people, and then two of those people will share it with two more groups, and so on. Jan and Janice Nigro and all of the Vitamin L singers are touching this world with love and creativity, and that is pretty cool.

My experiences with Vitamin L have helped me to follow my goals of becoming a music teacher. Education through music is inspiring. The Dalai Lama said "Peace and warm-heartedness can spread through the community just as ripples radiate out across the water when you drop a pebble into a pond." I have experienced this with Vitamin L and I look forward to continuing this ripple effect as a music teacher in the future.

-Geoff Peterson, Trumansburg, NY

*While pursuing his college studies, Geoff has been able to perform frequently with Vitamin L; sing as the soloist on "Martin's Heart" on the "Sing for Dr. King! Vitamin L Songs for a Beloved Community" recording; and perform, direct, and musical-direct several area productions at Cornell, Ithaca College and the Trumansburg Public School..*

**Please support our unique outreach, service, and leadership work by making a tax-deductible donation online at [vitaminL.org](http://vitaminL.org) or to:**

**The Vitamin L Project 105 King St. Ithaca, NY 14850**

**Thank You!**





Before a 1992 concert at the Hangar Theatre...Who do you recognize? Can you spot the chef and restaurant co-owner, the college professor, the lawyer, the dean of students, the mothers, the online editor, the actress, the songwriters, the graduate student, the lead singer, the jewelry designer and co-owner of a jewelry manufacturing company, the field ecologist, the dad?

***Sing for Dr. King! A Vitamin L Concert for a Beloved Community***  
***Celebrating 1,000 Concerts & the "Step Up! Speak Out!" Music Video Premiere!***  
*With Special Guests, The Dorothy Cotton Jubilee Singers*

Come join Vitamin L as we celebrate the milestone of 1,000 concerts!  
 Also come for the premiere of our music video, "Step Up! Speak Out!"

We'd love all our supporters of all ages and alumni and alumni families to attend this free community celebration!

*All of you helped Vitamin L get to this milestone!*

We will feature songs from Vitamin L's recording  
 "Sing for Dr. King! Vitamin L Songs for a Beloved Community."

Thank you for your support and participation over the last 24 plus years!  
***1,000 Concerts since 1989! Hurrah! Thank you all!***



**SAVE THE DATE!**

Free Community  
 Celebration!  
 Everyone's Invited!  
**Saturday November 2**  
 1:00 p.m. at the  
 State Theatre



**Current members and alumni sang at the Vitamin L Concert at the Ithaca Festival on 6/1/13**

Center for Transformative Action  
**The Vitamin L Project**  
Anabel Taylor Hall  
Cornell University  
Ithaca, NY 14853  
(607) 273-4175  
[vitaminlproject@hotmail.com](mailto:vitaminlproject@hotmail.com)

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Ithaca, NY 14850  
Permit No. 780

**Inspiring children since 1989!**

**for concert schedule  
and more info:  
[www.vitaminL.org](http://www.vitaminL.org)**

The Vitamin L Project is a Project of The Center for Transformative Action in Ithaca, New York



**Sing for Dr. King!  
A Vitamin L Concert  
for a Beloved Community!  
Celebrating 1,000 Concerts  
& premiering  
our new music video!  
FREE at the State Theatre  
Sat. Nov.2  
1:00 p.m.**

Vitamin L singing at the "Walk a Mile" fundraiser for Suicide Prevention at Eldridge Park, Elmira on 5/4/13