

## Nicki Denner Essay

"...It is difficult to get the news from poems  
yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there."  
---- William Carlos Williams

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I have spent years trying to reconcile my small role as a musician with the grander scheme of things, and in particular, with the poverty and suffering we see in the world today. Ever since college, when I spent a week in a homeless shelter with other students, I have been grappling with an overwhelming realization that hardship caused by poverty is like an ocean with no bottom - a seemingly intractable problem where music plays no role. I have struggled to find answers: Is there, in fact, a role for music to play in relieving some of the human suffering we see around us everyday? What can I do, as a musician, to help alleviate even a *small* portion of poverty in the world? And most importantly, when there are so many people in the world struggling for the bare necessities of food and shelter, am I selfish to devote myself to my music instead of helping the poor improve their condition?

As I have wrestled with these questions over the years, I have been comforted by Gandhi's words,

“Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it is most important that you do it.”

As a participant and contributor to the human race, I try to help my fellow citizens of the globe as much as possible. But I realize that my contribution - as a communicator - is best manifested through my music. I have accepted that making music, in fact, just being a musician, is my small way to contribute positively to those around me (and to making myself a better person). And as a piano teacher, I am also promoting the belief that creativity and art should be valued in a culture more than celebrity and material wealth.

So as we travel along our respective paths, we should continue the dialog that raises awareness of global poverty. I am grateful for the resources that enable me to communicate not only my love for music, but my concern for those in need. Indeed, listener, we are all lucky to be able to enjoy culture - music and art and poetry and dance - and must strive to eliminate poverty so that others may have the wherewithal to enjoy it as well.

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