

Leaving the hubbub behind: UI junior finds peace in musical expression

By Lauren Pardun

I have extended myself far too thin. But I am not an overachiever.

It seems that most collegiate-level juniors extend themselves to their maximum. This appears to be the natural coping mechanism in this ghastly economy where not even four years of grueling studies will guarantee a stable job. It's almost become a mantra of the college student: the more I do now, the less I'll have to starve myself later.

During one week alone I manage:

- 14 semester hours of class time
- 6 hours of tutoring sessions
- A marketing internship
- A coaching position for a high school color guard
- At least 6 hours of homework per day to keep my grade point average
- Serving as Alumnae Chair on our music fraternity executive board
- And still expect to hold a position in the Iowa Honors Program

I admit that I am not the busiest student on campus, and that is frightening. Many of the pre-med students, for example, would look at my schedule and laugh in my face.

In a recent survey conducted by The Associated Press and mtvU, there was some good news: "Students reported an overall positive outlook on life. Sixty-four percent said they are somewhat or very happy with their lives." But there was also some bad news. Testing 2,253 undergraduate students from 40 different universities, "The survey concluded that school-related concerns are key factors in students'

stress levels...other primary sources of stress come from financial problems, relationship and family problems and extracurricular activities" and found that "two in five students said they felt stressed often, and one in five felt stressed all or most of the time."

Given all of this stress, there is one thing that I refuse to let go of in this bedlam: My music.

After a long day of school, work, and any other extraneous happenings that may occur, I'll admit, it is hard to drag myself to a long two-hour choir rehearsal where I am expected to be attentive with my back straight, folder up, and eyes on the conductor—all while making sure I am breathing correctly and singing the correct pitches. But there is something within the simplicity and beauty of music that makes me unaware of the million endeavors that go on outside that room.

I guess I am preaching to the choir when I say that music is beneficial to anyone's life (not just the over-extended college junior). Time Magazine has reported, "There is some indication that music can affect levels of various hormones, including cortisol (involved in arousal and stress), testosterone (aggression and arousal) and oxytocin (nurturing behavior) as well as trigger release of the natural opiates known as endorphins." Music is slowly becoming a part of the expanding medical field to help rehabilitate patients and persons with disabilities; from my own experiences I can certainly guess why.

It seems cliché to admit that singing is a part of my life that is so crucial I can't go a day without it—but it's very much true. I sing in the car, the shower (much to my roommates' dismay), the bus,

while alone (for that one second), and even while I write this narrative. Letting music flow from my ears, to my brain, and in to the air feels so natural and so calming.

Literally having been born singing (not an exaggeration,) I guess it was always going to be a part of me, but it has a different meaning for me now than when I started singing in earnest in the third-grade. During this tense time in my life, music is my release and that one solid note in my life. It is a gift to be able to make music for others to enjoy (not necessarily the shower singing) and it is a wonderful feeling to be able to be calm in the midst of this mayhem. I look around the Pentacrest, as I calmly hum the Tony Bennett tune "The Lady Is a Tramp," to see Red Bulls and Starbucks cups in the hands of frantic undergraduate students just looking for some time to sit and enjoy the beautiful day. But they are caught up in the need to over-achieve and have no place to feel calm.

So maybe I'm the lucky one to have found my niche so early in life, letting my music be heard by the world (at least my world).

In addition to being a Hancher marketing intern, Lauren Pardun is a junior undergraduate student in the journalism and mass communication program at the University of Iowa. She is pursuing a double minor in music and mass communication. When she is not sleeping off a nervous breakdown, she enjoys singing to strangers and visiting with family and friends who will admit that they, in fact, know her. ♦