I am a guitar player. I am one of many who can say they have discovered a love for something that most others would proclaim to be nothing but a piece of wood. For the past ten years of my life I have learned, and continue to explore the relationship a musician feels when playing a guitar. An emotional connection is generated when an individual physically connects with their instrument whether they play by themselves, for an audience, or with other musicians. My inspiration to learn how to play the guitar comes from my father, and despite our differences in terms of style, our feelings about playing the instrument are the same. All can agree that even when playing for an audience, the emotions felt and expressed by the musician are spread to those listening. By interviewing musicians, exploring quotes from famous musicians, and researching archival images of musicians found on the website of the Library of Congress American Memory Collection (LoCAMP), I was able to show that my family is not alone in sharing the passion and emotional connection that a person can experience when playing a guitar.

My Inspiration

For me, I am most at peace when I am alone with my guitar. It is my escape, and it is a part of me. When I pick up the instrument to play, the strings become an extension of my fingers and my soul. My emotions pour out of my fingers, and the strings translate my feelings into something that is real and audible. Sometimes, I don’t even know what I’m feeling until I pick up a guitar. Playing solo offers an almost out-of-body experience, because sometimes, I don’t even notice what my physical body is doing. I lose myself to both sound and my surroundings as I enter a meditative state from the vibrating and vibrations of the strings. I located images in the LoCAMP that capture candid shots of musicians as they play, seen to be experiencing passions similar to mine.

Revealing the Timeless Emotional Connection Between Musician and Guitar

By: Alex Condoluci
Faculty Advisor: Debra Kolodczak, Ph. D.
Department of Communication
Funded by the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities

Introduction

My father is my principal inspiration in learning how to play the guitar. Throughout my childhood, I was lucky enough to be surrounded by music and his collection of guitars. One day, when I was about 11 years old, I decided to pick up a guitar, and the rest is history. For this project, I asked my father to reveal his inspiration and express his feelings when he plays in order to bridge the generation gap and begin to demonstrate that there is a shared inexplicable affection for what the guitar creates for its player.

Playing Alone

For me, I am most at peace when I am alone with my guitar. It is my escape, and it is a part of me. When I pick up the instrument to play, the strings become an extension of my fingers and my soul. My emotions pour out of my fingers, and the strings translate my feelings into something that is real and audible. Sometimes, I don’t even know what I’m feeling until I pick up a guitar. Playing solo offers an almost out-of-body experience, because sometimes, I don’t even notice what my physical body is doing. I lose myself to both sound and my surroundings as I enter a meditative state from the vibrating and vibrations of the strings. I located images in the LoCAMP that capture candid shots of musicians as they play, seen to be experiencing passions similar to mine.

Statements by Legendary Guitarists

By interviewing musicians, exploring quotes from famous musicians, and researching archival images of musicians found on the website of the Library of Congress American Memory Collection (LoCAMP), I was able to show that my family is not alone in sharing the passion and emotional connection that a person can experience when playing a guitar.

Playing with Others

When researching this aspect of the project, it was self-evident to ask my friend, Ron Geffen, for his perspective. Ron has played in countless bands, and has plenty of first-hand experience as to what a guitarist feels when playing in harmony with other musicians. I also located images archival images from Ron’s testimony.

My guitar is not a thing. It is an extension of myself. If it were a man, it would be my father.
—Iron Jeff

We are all one. We are all a part of the whole. The whole is a part of us. We are all connected. We are all one.
—Sting

I feel my body forward slightly to support the guitar against your chest, for the poetry of the guitar is not a thing. It is an extension of your body.
—Dean Evenson

Playing with others gives me a sense of freedom, which was new and exciting.
—Eric Clapton

I'm home on a break, I lock myself in my room and play guitar. After two or three hours, I start feeling like I'm coming to a realization: It's a feeling the people experience...
—Eric Clapton

Playing for an Audience

For this project, I chose to interview my friend, Fai Lune, to obtain insight into what a musician feels when playing for an audience. In harmony with Fai’s statement, I located archival images that support the notion that the emotions felt by the guitarist are not exclusively experienced, but also conveyed to those who listen.

Playing with Others

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Conclusion

By exploring whether or not my family is unique in sharing the passion and emotional connection when playing a guitar, I was able to appreciate the universal and timeless gratification that musicians have for their instrument. Researching the archival photographs of guitarists allows me to see the emotions we guitar players share. By applying digital effects to emphasize key aspects of those photos, I can highlight a sense of a musician feels. By bringing together the reflections of my contemporaries, key statements by legendary guitarists, and a selection of digitally enhanced archival photos, one can better understand the timeless emotional connection between musician and guitar.

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