



Two years ago, my eldest children (boy-girl twins) graduated high school. I remember standing in the lobby outside the auditorium after their last high school concert, waiting for them to join my husband and me. I had kept it together pretty well through the concert, letting at most half a dozen tears fall as I thought about all the recitals, lessons, pool parties, science fairs and other growing-up experiences that were now behind us.

On the wall outside the auditorium hung a framed portrait of the senior class. I studied it as I waited for my two performers to emerge.

Here's a kid my son played soccer with, back in third grade. This six-foot-plus beanpole over here used to ride his bike with training wheels down our driveway. Looking at 500 kids about to head off to their destinies, I felt the usual mix of pride, joy and sadness at the end of an era - but mostly pride. A father stood next to me, also surveying the faces of the graduating seniors.

"One of these kids yours?" asked the dad. "Two of them," I said, "this guy up here and this girl, down on the first row." "What are they going to do in college?" he asked. "They're both going to study music," I said. "Oh, no!" exclaimed the dad as he turned and walked away -

"More starving artists!"

How do parents across the country watch their children grow into talented musicians, see the kids' love of and gift for music, beam at countless concerts and marching-band performances, then suddenly balk when the kid says "I want to study music."?

How sad it is that we would cultivate a kid's musical flame for years, and then say to the kid at the critical moment, "Of course, your love of music is only for fun. You should study something practical in college - something safe, that will translate into a **real career**."

I went to conservatory after high school to sing opera. If my parents were worried I was on the road to starvation, they didn't give any sign. Maybe after my five older siblings, my parents had figured out that the best way to raise a musical kid is to let the kid find her own path. I didn't starve, and ended up in a combination HR/musical career that has more than met my financial and artistic needs. Yet every year at this time, parents call me in a panic.

"My kid wants to major in music!" they say. "Is it irresponsible of me to let him do it?"

It would be irresponsible of you, I tell them, to talk a kid into a practical career path that isn't his passion, just as it would be less than loving to talk a kid into a loveless marriage.

We are brainwashed; we believe that analytical and quantitative skills are the tickets to financial security, that people can't prosper doing what they love and that employers -- Big Companies, to be exact - will determine the course of a young person's life more than the young person him- or herself will. We would be horrified to think that our child ended up unhappy in love, trading security for passion.

Yet we tell our kids "Don't do what you love, honey. Don't major in music. Find something safer."



What sort of message is that to send a kid? "You're not good enough to pursue your first love?" Why instill self-esteem and the ability to get up again after a blow if our ultimate legacy to a kid is "Take the safe route?" Musical kids thrive in the real world, and who could be surprised? They have already surmounted some of the toughest challenges a kid can face.

Musical kids get called band nerds, geeks and Poindexters. Yet musical kids know about sitting on the bus in every kind of weather at five in the morning, practicing for hours, and feeling the sting of a flubbed audition or a hairs-breadth missed solo. They deal with those bumps in the road every day.

Musical kids are smarter than most. They could major in anything - yet they choose music. If the kid decides to switch to biochemistry in mid-stream, I promise you, the kid will not fail. Music kids outscore all other majors in grad-school entrance exams. Why not let a kid with options pursue his musical dreams as far as that journey will take him? There's no downside.

Parents worry that kids won't be hardy enough for the real world, and then perversely try to shelter them from the real world's blows by shuffling the kid into 'practical' college majors. Musical kids already know how to work keyholes, try things to see whether they work, and land on their feet.

My twenty-year-old trombonist has dozens of veteran jazz players' cell numbers in his phone because he plays with those guys several times a week in clubs around town, a year before he's old enough to drink legally. That's pluck and improvisation, real-world-style.



How do we equip a kid to make it in the post-employment world by insisting the kid choose a major that prepares him only for the very sort of big-company IT, Finance and Marketing jobs that offer no chance to grapple with the gig economy musicians operate in every day? That's not safety - it's just the opposite. Full-time, long-term employment is going away. How does a kid who's never learned to jump on opportunities, deal with bumps in the road and scare up a Friday night gig ever learn those new-millennium career skills?

Kids will thrive in the adult world to the exact degree that they get to encounter situations where the course is not clear, and where their survival muscles can grow. What better place to grow those muscles than on the path, pursuing their passion for music?

If the kid decides to trade in his horn or fiddle for a job at Oracle one day, I guarantee you that Oracle will hire him.

My daughter, the 20-year-old opera singer, has held a series of part-time jobs during her first two years of college. "My brain is split in half," she tells me, "after working at these entry-level jobs the past two years."

"How's that?" I ask her. "Well," she says, "on the one hand I'm horrified by the brainlessness of my managers in the retail stores and restaurants where I've been working. On the other hand, I don't worry that my vocal performance degree will keep me from earning a living. If you can think, if you can talk to people and if you can solve problems in the moment, Mom, I can already see that you're going to do fine."

She launched a music-theory coaching business this summer. Entrepreneurship and music go hand in hand, as there are virtually no full-time W-2 careers for musical performers-- yet another reason to let a musical kid follow his passion.

Let the kid study music, already! The universe will not fail the kid. Imagine what your talented child will discover when his parents tell him "Of course we trust you to follow your heart, sweetheart. Isn't that what we raised you to do?"

