

## Music: the Great Unifier

**“That’s why people listen to music or look at paintings. To get in touch with that wholeness.” – Corita Kent**

Last week my husband and I had the good fortune of being present at a concert at the LBJ Library, *Music America: Songs that Shaped Us*. The performers included Ruthie Foster, Alejandro Escoveda, Lyle Lovett, Jimmy Dale Gilmore and Jimmy Vaughan and his Tilt-a -Whirl Band. With a line-up like that how could you go wrong? I knew the concert would sell out so I registered and got my tickets as soon as I saw the email. And I was right. I expected the concert to be tremendously enjoyable, but it was much more than that. I had expected to be entertained, but I had not expected a spiritual experience. I had not expected transformation.

In the week before the performance I received several emails from the LBJ Library advising that the concert was sold out and that we should plan to arrive early. The concert was at 6:30 but we were advised that the doors opened at 5:30 and that we should plan to be there then. We were all good rule obeyers and dutifully arrived early. The doors, however, did not open at 5:30. So lots of people were squashed together waiting in the small foyer of the LBJ Auditorium.

While we were waiting in line, my husband, who sometimes suffers from ocular migraines, told me that he had one; I immediately said, “Let’s go home.” He assured me that he didn’t want to leave but just needed to sit down for a few minutes. I told the woman at the door of the auditorium about my husband’s condition and asked if he could just slip in and sit down for a few minutes. She said “No.” I was taken aback by this and ultimately prevailed upon her to bring him a folding chair since she wouldn’t let him in. He sat in the back of the foyer on his folding chair while I stood in line.. I kept popping out of the line to look back at him and check to see if he was ok. He assured me that he was.

In the meantime, I had been chatting with a couple in line next to me. They looked to be at least 30 years younger than I. As we got closer to the closed auditorium doors the fellow said to me, “Isn’t it your generation who wouldn’t take no for an answer and would have probably demonstrated if you weren’t let in?” He said this with a twinkle in his eyes. I laughed and said , “That’s right. We probably would have just walked right on in!”

When the doors finally opened I gestured to my husband to join us. The man I had been talking with held out his arm to make room for my husband. He said, “Don’t worry, no one is getting in before this gentleman!” I was impressed by his consideration and kindness (while at the same time wondering if I really do look like an old hippie. . .)

This gentleman's thoughtfulness and friendliness made me feel seen and connected, and this feeling became stronger as the evening went on. Part of this was the charisma of the entertainers, but it was their music that worked the magic of connection. Having already felt connected to the good people in line with me, I noticed that this feeling of connection became stronger throughout the night. It strengthened with Ruthie Foster's soulful rendition of "Oh Susanna," and intensified with Lyle Lovett's "If I Had a Boat." Alejandro did a great rendition of Dylan's "The Times They Are A Changin".

The chorus of "If I had a Boat" includes the words, "And we could all together//go out on the ocean.. ." Yes, certainly I felt that we were "all together." The music had unified us. Superficial things that could be barriers—such as the labels we often put on each other—had dropped away or never had the chance to rise in the first place. But this feeling of unity was palpable and only intensified when Jimmy Dale Gilmour led us all in a rousing rendition of "This Land Is Your Land." At that moment I was reminded of the words of Thomas Merton on the corner of Fourth and Walnut: " I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness of spurious self-isolation in a special world. . ."