



MY WHITE RIBBON SAYS

End domestic violence now

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It is a privilege to serve as the Honorary Chair for the 2006 Vera House White Ribbon Campaign. All of us here already realize the importance of putting an end to domestic violence. You can read the sobering statistics and understand how domestic violence, even if we are not directly involved in it, still affects us directly and indirectly. It is important for us to get the message to others. Today I will speak about how great music and great art in general can elevate us to prodigious heights and can help us to make enlightened choices.

I have the wonderful honor of helping to recreate with an orchestra the power of music, and speaking from my own professional and personal perspective, my profound belief is that exceptional music and outstanding art give us pause to evaluate ourselves and inspire us to become better than we are. The great works of art, visual and auditory, have, through their creators, provided a sense of truth. Truth that is found in timeless works of art go beyond the bounds of explanation. Music has the power to transcend the intellect and to reach deep down inside of us, into the cracks and crevices of our souls to find the places that nothing else can reach.

That emotional response is something that we need, that our society needs. We need to be reminded that there is something in a great work of art that is larger than we are. When that realization dawns on us, it becomes virtually impossible to allow an aggressive or selfish thought to intercede, and it is there that we find humility and tranquility. Nietzsche said that one must continue to strive to become what one is. If one believes that we have a fundamentally good nature, it is up to us to develop ourselves in the most positive way to bring order to our own lives. When order is achieved individually, it can then be achieved with the greater society at large.

Vladimir Lenin, the leader who preceded Josef Stalin, was a great lover of classical music, especially the music of Beethoven. He would listen to the piano sonatas for hours at a time. At one point he concluded that "Listening to too much Beethoven kept one from becoming an effective leader, because it made one not want to hit someone on the head." This quote reveals volumes not only about Lenin's brutal form of dictatorial leadership, but also, perhaps unwittingly so, indicates the power music has to civilize us. If Lenin could consciously realize that ennobling music made him deeply sensitive, then perhaps exposure to and participation in attempting to absorb great works of art is precisely what we need to help us live in greater harmony.

The Syracuse Symphony Orchestra is partnering with Vera House for a Mozart Celebration, with concerts celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of one of the greatest composers who ever lived. Mozart's timeless music is thought to have a constructive influence on flexible minds because, while it is immediately absorbed by the listener as sublime and perfect because of his exacting sense of proportion and sheer sonic beauty, the music is complex when analyzed on multiple levels. The Syracuse Symphony has for many years played the music of Mozart and many other brilliant composers in educational concerts for children in an effort to get young people to explore their own imaginations, and, perhaps to inspire them to play music themselves. When children play music, alone or with other young people, they develop a sense of achievement and perceive a relationship between hard work and reward, and therefore develop a sense of self-esteem. Such a sense of self-worth is critical to helping to bring an end to domestic violence.

Bringing an end to domestic violence begins with each person becoming deeply self-aware. Cruelty and aggression often happen when one thinks no one is watching. It is therefore of great importance to make every individual a watcher of himself. When we delve deeply into profound experiences, like wondrous and timeless art, we are reminded that there is a world much larger than ourselves, and it has the dual effect of temporarily allowing us to leave this world to a better place, and - simultaneously it brings us deeper within ourselves. It is in this reflection that we can self-observe and see our thoughts and actions. Experiences with great art can in this way bring a civilizing influence on ourselves, and therefore with the greater community.

Thank you again for inviting me to be the Honorary Chair for the White Ribbon Campaign. I personally have a vested interest in helping to make Syracuse and Central New York a better place for my family - my wife, Katarina, and our three daughters. To that end, I thank all of you for your outstanding work and cooperation to continue to build this wonderful city.