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The Power of Song: Music as a Tool for Building Empathy in a Democracy

Music has played a formative role in preparing me to be an active member of a diverse democracy. From singing in choir to seeing live musicals, music has provided me with a means of connection, communication, and cultural appreciation. These experiences have taught me essential lessons in collaboration, empathy, and understanding that are crucial in participating in our multifaceted society. Music transcends barriers, whether they are cultural, social, or political, and has shown me how shared experiences can unite people from all walks of life to engage meaningfully with one another in the democratic process.

Participating in choir throughout my childhood was my first meaningful introduction to the power of collective action. The choir was a space where individual voices were united to create something greater than the sum of their parts. I was taught early on that each voice, no matter how quiet, contributed to the whole, and that harmony was achieved through cooperation. This lesson in unity is something that has stayed with me throughout my life and informs how I engage with my community today. In choir, we were constantly learning how to listen to each other, adjust our own voices, and work together toward a shared goal. This concept of collaboration is vital in a democracy, where different individuals and groups must come together, often with varying opinions and interests, to achieve common goals. My experiences in choir helped me understand that democracy is not just about having a voice; it's about working together with others to create something harmonious, even when differences exist.

Furthermore, singing in a group teaches valuable skills in communication. In order for a choir to sound cohesive, everyone must listen, adapt, and respond to one another. This is an essential skill in a democracy, where civil discourse and the ability to engage with people who hold differing views are key to building a healthy society. In choir, I learned that communication is not just about speaking or being heard; it's also about listening and responding with thoughtfulness and respect. These principles of active listening and collaboration are just as critical in political dialogue, where individuals from diverse backgrounds must communicate effectively to navigate the challenges of a complex society. Whether in personal relationships or larger democratic processes, music has taught me that understanding and empathy are the foundation for positive interaction.

In addition, one of the most formative moments in my understanding of how music connects us all came during a trip to London in 2024, when I had the opportunity to see *Moulin Rouge* at the Piccadilly Theatre. The experience was eye-opening and transformative, not only because of the mesmerizing performances but also because it highlighted the unifying power of music and theater. *Moulin Rouge* is a production that combines global influences, offering an eclectic mix of music, dance, and storytelling. It was a vivid reminder of how art transcends borders and how cultural exchange can bring people together. Watching *Moulin Rouge* in London underscored the importance of engaging with art from other cultures, as it broadens our understanding of the world and fosters connections between diverse people.

The universal themes of love, passion, and sacrifice in *Moulin Rouge* resonated with the audience in a way that proved art and music are powerful tools for building empathy. People of different nationalities and backgrounds shared the same emotional reactions to the performance, a reminder that, despite our differences, we all experience the same human emotions and

struggles. This shared experience highlighted the idea that music and the arts can bridge cultural divides. They serve as a medium through which we can appreciate different perspectives, confront complex ideas, and forge deeper connections. This realization has deepened my interest in international relations and the idea that cultural exchange is essential to fostering understanding between nations.

Ultimately, music has shaped my understanding of democracy by teaching me the value of collaboration, empathy, and communication. Through singing in choir and experiencing live musicals, I have come to see how the arts can unite us across differences and foster deeper understanding. Music has not only been a way for me to express myself but also a way to engage with the world around me in a meaningful way. As I continue to learn and grow, I carry with me the lessons music has taught me about the importance of inclusivity, respect, and collaboration in building a diverse, thriving democracy.