

The Kelly kids bring music, inspiration to the streets of Chicago

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Busking on the street corner are (from left) Laura, 14, Joseph, 20, Leah, 12, La Shone, 17, Jachin, 8, and Jacob, 18, as the Kelly family plays on the corner of Randolph Street and Michigan Avenue, where they are joined by Kaydence and Kennedy Williams who are in the music program with them, at Garfield Park, Chicago, Illinois, July 29, 2015. Nancy Stone/Chicago Tribune/TNS

CHICAGO, Ill. — The family of young musicians took the train to downtown Chicago. They carried their instruments on their backs.

They set up their small orchestra at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street. For two hours on a warm weekday evening, their music softly flowed through the busy streets.

Taking It To The Street

People stopped to listen or to snap a picture. Many were surprised by the sight of a group of young African-Americans playing a harp, a cello and four violins.

A bus driver stopped at a red light, and opened his door and leaned from his seat so he could hear better. A street beggar took a dollar bill and dropped it in an open violin case. From time to time, the young musicians broke from their intense concentration to smile at the onlookers.

The Kelly family plays music for money one or two days a week over the summer.

By the time they boarded the train back home, the group had collected \$240. The family, which has 15 kids, can really use the money.

Small Apartment, Big Sound

Eleven people cram into their three-bedroom, one-and-a-half bathroom apartment. The oldest six children are grown and out of the house.

Inside the Kellys' home, music fills the small rooms, drowning out the noise from their crime-filled neighborhood.

"When we make music, everything is OK," said La Shone Kelly, the mother of the family.

It was the father's idea to introduce music to his children, he said, so that they could experience the joy and self-control it can bring.

"I know that music is best learned at an early age," the father, Jonathan Kelly, said. "Then it becomes something you can do your whole life. When we get together and sing and play, we do it for ourselves. If others enjoy it, that's a good thing."

Sacrificing For Their Art

La Shone Kelly admits that she was worried when her husband suggested the children start taking music lessons. Her husband had recently lost his job, and the family did not have much money.

The Kellys spend about \$1,300 each month on music lessons and renting instruments, and have had to give up a lot to afford it.

The house is in need of repairs, and the walls could use a fresh coat of paint. They shop for clothes at used clothing stores, and they gave up their van that could hold 15 people and now must take two cars.

"The children understand that if we're going to shell out that kind of money, they have to take it seriously," La Shone Kelly said. "They have to practice."

Can Music Lift A Neighborhood?

The Garfield Park Fieldhouse is in a Chicago neighborhood that is poor and filled with crime. On the second floor, children as young as 3 years old are learning the art of the violin through the Chicago West Community Music Center. The Kellys take music lessons there also.

On Saturdays, music teachers come from across the city to teach violin, viola, cello, guitar and harp. The lessons cost \$100 a month, and most of the students, including the Kellys, receive scholarships to cover some costs. Parents must stay while their children are taking lessons.

La Shone and Jonathan Kelly have so many children they must stay there all day, but they say it has been worth it, because their children have developed a love for music.

Music Changes The Heart

Darlene Sandifer began the music program with her husband, Howard, a former musician and teacher. She said that music changes the heart and mind, and helps people find calm. Sandifer said she is convinced that if children from poor areas could take music lessons, they would not get into so much trouble. "These kids on the streets have a gift," she said. "They just need someone to channel them in the right direction."

The students gave a musical performance on the last day of summer camp. As Jonathan and LaShone Kelly cheered their children on, they said that all the money they spent was worth it.

Their father said they wanted the children to see that they have many choices in life.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following details belongs in a summary of the article?
- (A) Many were surprised by the sight of a group of young African-Americans playing a harp, a cello and four violins.
 - (B) They set up their small orchestra at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Randolph Street.
 - (C) It was the father's idea to introduce music to his children, he said, so that they could experience the joy and self-control it can bring.
 - (D) The students gave a musical performance on the last day of summer camp.
- 2 Which of the following answer choices BEST states the central ideas of the article?
- (A) The Kelly family works hard so the children can train and grow up to be professional musicians, following in their father's footsteps.
 - (B) The Kelly children have come to love music and work hard at it, and even perform on the streets to help support their family's needs.
 - (C) The Kelly children receive financial support from music and arts programs to be able to participate in lessons and concerts.
 - (D) La Shone Kelly worried about her children participating in music programs due to the financial troubles the family has had to go through.
- 3 According to the section "Sacrificing For Their Art," all of the following are sacrifices made by the Kelly family EXCEPT:
- (A) Jonathan Kelly left his job to support his children's musical instruction.
 - (B) The family no longer has a vehicle to hold all of the family members.
 - (C) The Kelly house has several problems that have not yet been fixed.
 - (D) The Kelly children do not get new additions to their wardrobes; they buy used items.
- 4 Why was La Shone Kelly concerned about her children learning to play musical instruments?
- (A) The family lives in a crime-filled neighborhood, so she was scared the children's expensive instruments would be stolen.
 - (B) She was worried that the music lessons and practice time would interfere with her children's schooling.
 - (C) She thought the children were too old to learn well, because music is best learned at an early age.
 - (D) She was worried about the cost of the music lessons and instruments negatively affecting the family.