



Cultivating a Precious Gem Called “Engagement”

What do SHJO, Gerardo Parra and the Baby Shark theme, and the concepts of collaboration and teamwork have in common?

Have you had a reason to ask yourself recently, “**What am I thankful for?**”

Hopefully you can reflect on *many things*... Your family, friends, health, success, and happiness may instantly come to mind.

How about the privilege of membership in a “musical team” – valuable enrichment provided by both your school program (in which all of our pre-college students should participate) and our community group – the **South Hills Junior Orchestra**.

One does not have to look far to confirm the benefits of music education and fulfillment of personal creative self-expression. Numerous articles and statistics point to the rewards of “making music” and regular collaboration in a performing ensemble:

- “20 Important Benefits of Music in Our Schools” <https://nafme.org/20-important-benefits-of-music-in-our-schools/>
- “The Necessity of Music Education” by Antonio J. García <https://www.garciamusic.com/educator/articles/necessity.music.ed.html>
- “Music Lessons: The Importance of Music Education for Children” by Leah Lefler <https://wehavekids.com/education/Music-Lessons-The-Importance-of-Music-Education-for-Children>

I even tried my hand in “wrapping my arms” around a definition of this “calling” (one that I have spent my entire life sharing) in a blog-post which features an interview of me by SHJO musician Sam D’Addieco: <https://paulfox.blog/2019/06/16/the-importance-of-music-education/>.

I do feel thankful! I feel grateful to be granted this opportunity of conducting SHJO and interacting, teaching, and learning alongside our gifted and enthusiastic instrumentalists! These experiences and memories are “priceless” and “fragile,” just like a rare jewel or crystal. I complain for more members (we’re small and turnout has not always been good), but I am also reminded of a comment from my own inspirational HS orchestra and string teacher, Mr. Eugene Reichenfeld, who was often heard to say: **“Our orchestra may be small, but it is precious – just like a diamond!”** I say, we must *cultivate* the future of this special musical experience!

Don’t take it for granted! This unique “mosaic of members and music, where all musicians learn, grow, and lead” will only continue if YOU commit consistent time, focus, attendance, and practice. Success relies on your full *engagement* to SHJO. We need the players, booster officers, parents, and other adult volunteers to **join forces!**

The other day, I watched on CBS This Morning an interview of World Series Champion Washington National’s star outfielder **Gerardo Parra** (<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/gerardo-parra-on-how-baby-shark-became-the-nationals-anthem/>) who is credited for helping to turn things around for the team. Although he may be remembered more for giving the Nationals a new anthem, “Baby Shark,” (chosen by his baby daughter), Parra discussed why he was concerned that the other players on the team did not seem “engaged” and stay afterwards in the clubhouse:

- **Parra:** “Wow, what a team we have,” and referring to the regular season, “But, even after we won, no one was there to celebrate in the clubhouse.”
- **Anthony Mason:** “A lot of people credited you for turning around the team culture.”
- **Parra:** “It’s more important for my team that we start in the clubhouse... we *dance* in the clubhouse.”
- **Gayle King:** “But you started that hurrah. You said everybody used to leave and then you said no, everybody, let’s stay! One person came, then one person came, and another person came...”
- **Parra:** “Everybody like family. We’re one team, not 25 men.”

When he joined the team in May, Washington was a team with a losing record of 33-38 and 8½ games out of first place in the National League East. Parra himself was mired in a 0-for-22 slump. That’s when he chose “Baby Shark” and got his team *motivated!* In their last 100 games, the Nationals won 75. Sure, they have amazingly gifted and hardworking players, but what was the cornerstone of their victory? Their teamwork, “power of collaboration,” empathy for each other, and unified sense of purpose! This is just what the doctor ordered for the 37th season of SHJO!

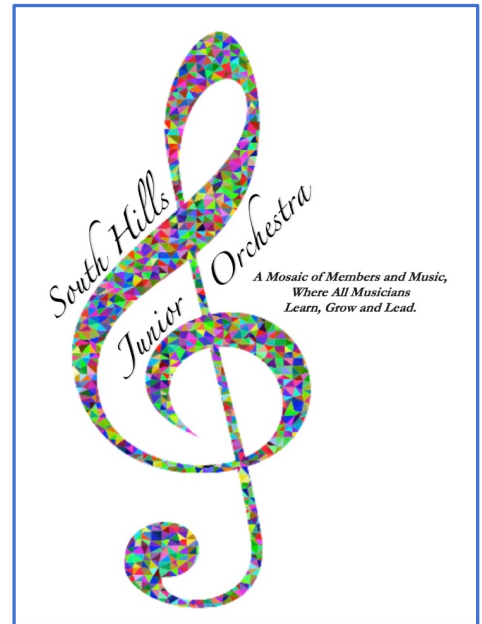
We need to develop *more* teamwork, collaboration, and engagement, too!

Thanks, kudos, and bravos go to all of you for caring, giving, and sharing SHJO, and especially uniting together as a *team*. What matters to me the most? As I told Sam, I truly cherish those “ah-ha” moments of realization we see in our musicians’ eyes when they “get it” and reach a new pinnacle of success or mastery of their artistry! I love observing many peers-helping-peers, multi-generational teamwork, partnerships of musical leaders and followers in the ensemble, and numerous “random acts of kindness” every Saturday morning. SHJO remains the single most motivating and meaningful event of my week!

Let’s all celebrate a Happy Thanksgiving!

Paul K. Fox, Artistic Director

www.shjo.org



The mission of South Hills Junior Orchestra, which rehearses and performs at the Upper St. Clair High School in Pittsburgh, PA, is to support and nurture local school band and orchestra programs, to develop knowledge, understanding, performance skills, and an appreciation of music, to increase an individual member’s self-esteem and self-motivation, and to continue to advance a life-long study of music. Members of the Orchestra learn, grow, and achieve positions of leadership to serve their fellow members.

