

SOOO, BETCHA WANT TO KNOW WHAT GOES ON IN THE INTERMEDIATE SESSIONS!!!

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The Intermediate Sessions address the foundational component of FOG: “encouragement of musical development,” accomplished, of course, in the context of “non-competitive fellowship.” Led by FOG founder **Bernadette Serrano**, with frequent support and accompaniment from another FOG founder, **Jack Metzger**, the sessions observe the popular protocol of inviting each participant, in turn, to name a piece that she/he would like to play (no pressure there). A big debate ensues to establish the LOWEST common denominator in terms of tempo, and the lowest bidder wins – neat, huh! Where else can you get that kind of deal?!

We put fingers and bows to strings and start out, cranking the speed up with successive renditions, stretching to reach “club speed,” until the point where clarity is unapologetically lost. In some cases we make good progress, in other cases, we just move on with the pledge to tackle those at home. Along the way, we chit-chat about technique, explore improvisation and special effects that add interest to the piece (e.g. grace notes, double stops, how to fake it and look really cool when you really can’t maintain the tempo and need your colleagues to carry the tune – all those useful points). In our more accomplished moments, we add harmony passages (thirds, fifths, whatever, tossed in for good measure and beautiful sound, you’d be amazed – we frequently are!).

There are, of course, many other benefits of fiddling away in the *Intermediate Sessions*, ones that often go unnoticed and unappreciated, but bear emphasizing. In late January, **Marcia Parkes-Bonehurst**, University of Rochester Eastman School of Music, communicated with *New Horizons Orchestra* members that she has been reviewing articles in the professional literature re: the benefits of playing a musical instrument. Particularly for “older” players (age range not specified), she identified the following:

Playing an instrument:

- 1.) **“Makes one more flexible, especially in the fingers, arms, shoulders, and back.”** [FOG pushes to the limit here; no pain, no gain.]
- 2.) **“Improves a person’s brain functions (the “Mozart Effect”), especially in the areas of memory and concentration.”** [No question on this one— where does this piece end? More to the point, how do you start it?]
- 3.) **“Staves off senility.”** [This doesn’t apply if you can still tune your instrument, or just get it out of the case.]
- 4.) **“Provides health benefits to those suffering from arthritis.”** [There’s even an open string drone option if your fingers need a rest; and then, of course, there’s just observing the “rests” although there are not many of those in FOG’s repertoire.]
- 5.) **“Reduces stress because it allows one to focus on the music and nothing else.”** [Forget, of course, the possibility that it’s the music score that’s causing the stress.]
- 6.) **“Improves hand-eye-ear coordination.”** [Right on, what did you say again, which measure are we starting on this time? Whoops! Wait until I find the piece!]
- 7.) **“Enhances a person’s mental health; people who play in musical groups report lower levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness.”** [Goes without saying given the wonderful FOG camaraderie.]
- 8.) **“Increases energy levels.”** [Well, this is obvious.]

There are other benefits that the *Intermediate Session* also offers to FOG members that have yet to be extensively tapped. Herein lies real potential to enhance the FOG purposes. I’d call it: promotion of “intergenerational playing.” Assuming some basic string instrument playing capability, how about bringing along your parents, your children, your grandchildren, the folks up the street, to give “Old-Tyme Fiddling Music” a try? There’s nothing more fun on a lazy Sunday afternoon than producing some bouncy good tunes! We all celebrate our progress in learning, appreciating that even the best of the very best (yep, that includes Bernadette and Jack, as well), are still learning!

Hope to see you next session!