

Christa's Experience with Music as a tool for Intercultural Exploration.

Adele and I met when she was looking for an accompanist for her Young Voices children ensemble. Shortly after we began working together, we began thinking about other ways we might combine our areas of mutual interest and hatched the idea for the Summer Music and Language Camp. Through this camp, children ages 7 to 12 were exposed to music from several different cultural traditions and basic expressions in a language other than their language of origin. They also did crafts, played games and cooked foods from different cultures. At the end of the week of summer camp, they performed the songs in several languages, performed skits in one of new languages, and shared the crafts and food they had cooked with their families. This experiment in introducing children on Bainbridge Island to global intercultural learning proved to work quite well and was offered for a week or two each summer for almost a decade thereafter. The Music and Language Camp also served as a source of inspiration for Adele and me, as we came back together as founding members of GIC. We had experienced together the power and potential of these combinations of experiences and were eager to revisit how we could introduce this to our adult friends through GIC.

My experiences of learning and then later teaching French intersected quite naturally with my love of music. Some of the most meaningful experiences I had while studying abroad in France revolved around music. One day as I was boarding the bus between my homestay and the campus in Rennes, France, I met a middle-aged woman who was eager to practice her English. As we settled into our seats and began visiting, we discovered a common interest in music. When she learned how much I missed playing the piano, she invited me to come regularly to her home to practice and she became a surrogate grandmother to me. As we became more acquainted, she in turn invited me to join her choir that was working on a complex German piece. As I settled into the alto section, nervous about my capacity to understand the French director and pronounce the German words, my capacity to read the musical notes on the page eased me through the first rehearsal. As the rehearsals progressed, I became friends with the Alto sitting next to me; Helene and I began helping each other. I was able to help her with reading the musical notes and she was able to help me with pronouncing the German and staying on track with the Director when I did not understand all of his instructions. I will never forget the evening when we stood amongst the members of this mass choir along with a full orchestra in the Rennes Cathedral. The walls of the cathedral resonated with the glorious music that our individual voices and instruments were co-creating together across difference.

The story does not end with that magical performance. Afterwards, Helene learned that my current homestay would be ending and she invited me to come share her apartment instead; I was delighted and accepted the invitation. Through creating music together across our differences we had developed an intercultural bridge, through sharing an apartment we strengthened that bridge. We crossed it every day as we settled in together for breakfast. We included others as we ventured out to visit with her family in the rural areas of Bretagne and as she introduced me to Anne-Marie, a colleague at work, who helped me draft my papers in French and invited me to visit with her family in the Bordeaux region of France. With each of these immersion experiences, my French speaking skills and my intercultural learning about things French was deepened. These amazing experiences all came to me through the gift of music which proved to be an invaluable tool, a bridge for intercultural growth and learning.