

Copyright (c) 2020 Baptist Press. Reprinted from Baptist Press (www.baptistpress.com), news service of the Southern Baptist Convention. The original story can be found at <http://www.bpnews.net/54545/concerts-bring-new-orleans-neighbors-together>

Concerts bring New Orleans neighbors together

by Marilyn Stewart, posted Friday, March 27, 2020 (one month ago)

NEW ORLEANS (BP) -- For years, New Orleans music teacher Stephanie Screen has used her violin to comfort those in hospital beds and nursing homes and in moments of grief.

But when COVID-19 forced a city-wide quarantine in New Orleans, Screen wondered what she could do to help.

"I'll just go sit on the lawn with my violin and see what happens," Screen decided.

The mini-concert drew neighbors out of their homes to listen -- at a safe six-foot distance apart -- including one neighbor, age 65, who brought out his banjo to play with her.

Screen decided to make it a nightly event.

By the fourth night, more than 50 neighbors had gathered outside as international friends on four continents watched by social media. Another neighbor, a man Screen had not met previously, walked up with his guitar and joined in.

Screen plays everything from hymns to pop to jazz and classics as the audience makes requests.

A staple of the nightly program is a crowd pleaser -- toddlers in the crowd chime in to sing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" or "Baby Shark."

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, music is providing a point of contact with her neighbors, many of whom she is meeting for the first time.

"My whole life, I have loved that when things are difficult, if you have a violin, you can do something for people," Screen explained. "This particular experience has been wonderful."

'Ask Jesus to show you how'

The idea of the mini-concert and its success is the Lord's only, Screen insisted.

"I'm not clever enough to think of these things," Screen said.

When people tell her they think they are not talented as she is, Screen tells them, "Everybody has a talent. You just need to ask Jesus to show you how to use it."

As an 18-year-old, Screen had struggled to decide between a call to children's ministry and a call to music. Then, she realized she could do both.

Growing up in the New Orleans area put her in contact with New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary professors and others, who gave her opportunities to share her music in church, beginning at age 7, and showed her how to teach others.

Trained in piano pedagogy, with both a bachelor's and a master's degree, Screen encourages her 40 private music students to use this time during the COVID-19 shutdown to "share their music," as well.

Even while social distancing, Screen's students have begun practicing music together online. They've also used social media to practice and perform for others.

"This is an amazing opportunity," Screen said. "They have a chance right now to use their music to brighten other people's lives."

Music teacher, disciple maker



New Orleans music teacher Stephanie Screen has been providing nightly concerts for her neighbors -- who all keep a safe distance from one another -- during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NOBTS photo

Screen, who is single, shares her home with another woman. Together they host community groups for their Southern Baptist churches -- First Baptist Kenner and Canal Street Baptist -- and an Alpha group, a setting that invites non-believers to explore the Gospel.

Screen prays the nightly concert will open doors for the Gospel.

"My hope, when all of this is done, is that people will know our house and know it's a place of love and a place of grace ... a place where they can sense the Holy Spirit even if they don't know what they are sensing," Screen said.

For the 12 years Screen has lived in her quiet New Orleans neighborhood, she has prayed for her neighbors. Getting to know her neighbors had proved difficult with her busy work schedule.

But now when Screen steps outside, her neighbors wave and speak.

Screen sees a connection between teaching children music and discipleship. A music teacher, Screen pointed out, may know a child for years and holds an influential position in the child's life.

Music teachers are needed these days, Screen said. She hopes to see more believers become excellent music teachers who will use the opportunity to disciple children in the faith.

"It's important that we do what we do for the glory of God, and that we do it really well," Screen said. "If you can teach really well -- if you can do this at a very high level -- and if you can disciple students through their entire childhood, it is just a magical combination."

Marilyn Stewart is the assistant director of communications at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College.