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A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, ONE OF MY ADVISEES CAME TO SEE ME IN TEARS. Anna wanted to major in art, but her father was adamantly opposed, insisting she be practical. Eventually, Anna crafted a compromise with a major in art and a minor in business. She also arranged an internship in the design studio of a London-based magazine. The good news is that Anna quickly found work after graduation as a designer for a book publishing company.

This same kind of tension made national news just a year ago when President Obama, in a speech focusing on the importance of job training programs to meet employer needs, promised that “folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree.” Although he went on to say, “Now nothing wrong with an art history degree – I love art history,” a few days later he handwrote an apology to an art history professor, explaining that he was “making a point about the jobs market, not the value of art history.” He added that art history “was one of my favorite subjects in high school, and it has helped me take a great deal of joy in my life that I might otherwise have missed.”

In this age of digital disruption, engineering wizardry and advanced manufacturing, it is not surprising that many continue to wonder: Is it useful for students to major in the arts? Are there really enough jobs for students majoring in the arts, literature and humanities? Should Berry continue to invest in the arts?

THE ART OF BEING PRACTICAL

Our lives are intertwined with digital technology: We carry it in our purses and pockets, and it regulates the cars and planes that carry us. It is integral to our electrical, communication and economic systems. It protects our identity, and puts it at risk. Digital technology keeps us healthy and will increasingly become part of our bodies.

Yet, when we think about our daily use of technology – iPods and iPhones, the Internet, Facebook, Instagram, digital television and so on – much of what we are attracted to involves the fusion of images, music, stories and relationships. The digital age has not displaced the arts; it has cast the arts in a leading role. Our senses are flooded with an astonishing array of sights and sounds as never before. We now take for granted scenes that conflate imagination and reality. Consider, for example, the computer-enhanced graphics that seamlessly integrate human actors and simulated creatures in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and many other movies.

There is a world of opportunity today for students whose interests and talents incline toward the creative arts. Students need to become proficient in their use of multimedia tools and discerning in how they analyze and evaluate what surrounds them daily. Majoring in the arts can be quite practical and useful.

I regularly counsel students, however, not to confuse their major with their career interests. Majors are important, and every graduate must develop depth and mastery in one of the disciplines. But most people have

a career trajectory that proceeds in unforeseen ways, often with no obvious connection to their college major. I encourage students to major in a field that arouses their curiosity, excites learning and encourages them to tackle problems analytically and creatively. These habits of mind and heart will serve them well on any path.

I also encourage students to consider how they can assemble a set of courses and experiences that will clarify their personal interests and strengths. It is the distinctiveness of these “packages” that defines individuals and makes them intriguing.

THE ART OF TELLING STORIES

This fall, Amelia Todd (12C) invited several of us to her latest performance – delivering an oral argument during the sentencing phase of a criminal trial in federal court. Amelia is finishing her law degree at Emory University, but at Berry she majored in management and music. She is an accomplished vocalist who performed with the Berry Jazz Ensemble, and as a sophomore, for fun, she played the role of Eliza Doolittle – Cockney accent and all – in Rome Little Theatre’s production of *My Fair Lady*.

What do music and theatre have to do with the law? Manhattan attorney Faith Gay (78A) was named one of the nation’s top female trial lawyers by the Law360 legal news service because of her ability to tell a story well. As they put it: “A good litigator can explain a client’s case, but a great litigator can tell a client’s story, connecting



Amelia Todd performing with the Berry College Jazz Ensemble; Tyler Hooper in *The Nerd*

with an audience by weaving the complexities through a narrative that makes listeners understand and, most importantly, agree.”

Gay traces her ability to tell a story to her grandparents and rural Southern roots, explaining: “We’d sit around with my grandparents and the rest of the family, just telling stories. You’d hear the same one 30 times, but each time it would sound better.”

And that storytelling provides the foundation for her success today.

“This job is theater,” she told Law360. “The idea of persuading people of your position, of human communication, the idea of letting someone see inside your head to see the way that you think – to me it’s one of the most beautiful things in the world.”

Martha Berry would agree because she knew that a compelling story stirs the heart and ignites action. Her stories inspired her students to reach higher and strive harder to overcome the circumstances into which they were born. Martha’s stories also inspired generous men and women to join her in creating opportunities for these deserving young people. And Martha used music and a bit of theatrics to bolster her story. When dignitaries arrived on campus, the students lined up to greet them, sometimes with candles, usually with folk songs of the era. Accompanied by a dulcimer and dressed in period costumes of the mid-1800s, the special Ballad Girls group spun and reeled flax and wool while performing revived songs and ballads of the Southern mountains.

THE ART OF THE HEART

Telling stories is an essentially human trait. All of history is a form of storytelling,

and young children want to hear stories again and again. The need and the ability to interpret the world through stories is inherent in our nature. Indeed, it is wired into our brains.

Music, dance, theatre, images, objects, poetry and literature are the instruments of storytelling, the expression of culture. These forms stretch back into the mist of ancient times and are shaped again with each new generation. They entertain us anew, but they are not just a diversion.

Art has the power to mesmerize and transfix. At its best, it bares our soul and probes our deepest longings. It allows us to ponder and express the stuff of life and death: love and regret, hopes and dreams, grief and loneliness. For this reason, the arts are integrally related to religious faith and practice. In Christian worship, believers are instructed to “sing and make music from your heart to the Lord ... speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs.” Much of the great music of the Western world emerged from this inspiration.

THE ART OF THE VENUE

In recent years, athletics at Berry has thrived as we have added and updated facilities that inspire and allow student-athletes to compete to the best of their ability. Valhalla is just the latest venue that provides Berry football, lacrosse, and track and field athletes a magnificent stage on which to perform and a welcoming arrangement for the viewing fans. The Cage Center and the playing fields at the Ford Complex provide comparable settings for other sports.

It is now time to do the same for Berry’s music and theatre departments. The student

artists in these programs – those who major in the arts and those who participate for the sheer joy of it – perform at a level of excellence that is comparable to our varsity athletes. Berry’s musical groups play to full houses. The jazz ensemble performances pulsate with energy, while the Berry Singers touch the strings of the heart. The orchestra unites many distinct voices into one as it delves into the music of several centuries.

Student actors also perform at levels that regularly receive regional and national attention. Most recently, freshman Tyler Hooper won acclaim for his portrayal of the title character in *The Nerd*, a show that set Berry audience records for a non-musical production. Tyler and four other students involved with the play were recommended to participate in the regional conference of the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival for their work as actors, stage managers and designers.

These students deserve stages worthy of their talents. And their audiences need venues that enhance the listening and viewing experience. Just as our previous athletic facilities (Ford and Richards gymnasiums) served the college well for many years, Ford Auditorium and Blackstone Hall are venerable locations and part of the heart and soul of Berry. At this point, however, both facilities require a lifecycle renovation. Once updated, they will have the same “wow factor” as Valhalla and the Cage Center. They will allow and inspire great performances for decades to come and reinvigorate our enduring commitment to an education of the head, heart and hands. **B**