

UNDERAGE PAGE



Ra Ra Ra

• The annual American Cheer Power Small Gym Championship will be at 9:30 a.m. Saturday at the Bell County Expo Center.
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GENERATION

CONNECTING WITH FAMILY THROUGH MUSIC



BY ALISON SIMERLY
BELTON HIGH SCHOOL

Human beings communicate in a host of complex ways. Of all the forms of communication, music's unique approach to connecting people seems to effortlessly unite generations, faiths and cultures. Over the years, music has been both evolutionary and revolutionary, evoking the same timeless emotions. That being said, I find that music is one of the best topics for one of those back-porch, at-the-kitchen-table or sitting-on-the-couch conversations with family members of any age. Although your dad's musical taste might not be as up-to-date as your's, there's no reason you can't exchange listening advice with one another. You might be surprised when you realize his favorite bands are the ones that influenced your favorites, and the discussions you might have about this discovery could be far more meaningful than the short "How was school?" conversations I know are common in my family and many others. That daily chat is often a dead end, but there are decades and decades of music to cover, so you might want to pull up a chair and prepare for an actual talk with your dad. I find that sharing music with my dad has become an invaluable outlet of discussion

and quality time. You might wonder what else you could talk about. How are you approaching young adulthood and how are your parents settling into middle age? Are you both considering dyeing your hair, but for far different reasons? Luckily, I don't have to depend on topics like leg shaving and boy problems because I know that those are often better left unsaid. I can just say, "Hey, dad, this band I've been listening to is really channeling Led Zeppelin," and I know that he'll be far more likely to contribute to the conversation. I realize my dad hasn't always been the same age, but it's still hard to picture him in teenage situations in which I find myself. Nevertheless, I know he blasted music in cars with his friends, listened to a good, weepy album when he was suffering from seemingly chronic teenage self-pity, and belted out the ageless "We Are the Champions" with his team before a game. Within my relatively short lifespan I've experienced a mountain of bonding experiences through music with my extended family as well. I distinctly remember driving through the orange groves of central Florida, listening to the same Ray Charles track over and over, my grandfather smiling kindly and dutifully pressing the repeat button as I predictably requested the same song, "Hit the Road, Jack." For a fiery 3-year-old with a halo of crazy curls, "Hit the Road, Jack!" proved to be a tirelessly useful phrase. A love of music has been prevalent in all the generations of my family. My dad's mother possessed a beautiful voice and natural musical ability that she lent to gospel

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music and the piano, and my mom's family was into Appalachian folk music. One of my mom's fondest childhood memories was sitting on the front porch at her granny's on a Sunday afternoon, surrounded by neighbors playing mountain music-infused church hymns with fiddles, harmonicas and auto-harps. With a sweet Virginian twang, her granny sang the song, "Somewhere between Your Heart and Mine," forever changing my mom's impression of her. Hearing her sing about love lost aided in my mom's realization that there was more to her granny than a kindly old woman who loved her and made big old Sunday dinners. My mom gained a deeper understanding of one of her dearest family members. My maternal grandmother loved music as well, and chose The Beatles' "Hey Jude" to be played at her funeral. No one in the small, rural congregation in Patrick County, Va., anticipated Paul McCartney's screaming vocal solo at the height of the song. I guess my grandma wasn't planning on going gently into that good night. A number of years before my grandma's death, my grandpa was returning from his third tour in Vietnam. He came home to find his eldest son, my Uncle Skip, a full-fledged hippie, complete with a long, auburn ponytail and a painted bus called "The Jitney." Despite the clash of cultures the family experienced, the words and music of The Rolling Stones and The Beatles lessened some of the tension, as my uncle and grandpa found much-needed common ground through their love of music.

At birth, my uncle gifted me a stereo and a pile of Beatles albums, and it was all downhill from there. I developed an undying, through-sickness-and-in-health, till-death-do-us-part love for music, and for me there's even more to all those classic albums than the music. I can hear a song and experience a particular moment in my family's history. I remember Ray Charles' voice belting out of the speakers in my grandpa's Cadillac, the smell of orange blossoms, and the blurs of orange and green as we drove through the groves. I can feel my dad's teenage fanaticism of The Who, and see my uncle and his flower-power friends jamming in "The Jitney," and see my grandpa rolling his wheelchair up to the front row of a Nashville arena, inches from Mick Jagger. I realize my feelings about music are not unique, and understand that, as humans, we all have similar emotional reactions to things like music. But I consider the personal memories attached to the cross-generational music I listen to invaluable. I can only hope others have experienced the same bonds through music that I have, and I know that one day I'll sing "Blackbird" to my children, as my dad did for me, and I'll begin the cycle of musical relationships all over again.



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