

# 7th Floor Music Heals

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*The bottom line of art* is subjective expression: by the artist, whether in song or on canvas; by the spectator as he relates to that art within the context of how it expresses or interprets his own particular feelings or emotions. Art being subjective, the response it elicits does not necessarily reflect the emotions of the artist; artist and observer may each experience something totally different. But there are times when the expression and the perception of a piece of art catalyze a profound empathy between the artist and the spectator.

This doesn't happen very often, but it did last night (August 4) at a performance of *Soundtrack to Life* at the South Bend Center for the Homeless. I went not knowing quite what to expect: I was told it was not a public performance, but that members of the local mental health and arts communities were being invited, and it was open to residents of the Center. This is not a "review" of that performance, since I am not qualified to act as critic. What I want to express is my awe: of the performers, who also wrote the opera, and their backgrounds; of the complete professionalism of the performance; and of the profound reaction of the audience. Art does heal!

The performance group "7th Floor" began with the meeting of two people on the 7th floor of LaPorte Hospital. Each had experienced depression and contemplated suicide. Through this shared experience, they found that they could express deeply-held feelings in a positive manner through music. As new members joined the band, they brought with them a unique blend of talent and motivation.

The head of the group, also a saxophonist with the Elwood Splinters Blues Band, said that their "dream" was the creation of this rock opera, and that "the dream has kept them going, has kept them alive." They mean the opera, and the performance, to be the story of depression and hope; of struggle and recovery. In experiencing the performance, the band's hope is that audiences will have the "audacity to dream of a better life; to accept who they are, let go, and be who they want to be."

Through music that was at times heart-wrenching, at times reflective, at times searching, and at times uplifting, the struggle from depression to hope was depicted in terms the audience could identify with — and they did! The symbiosis between audience and performers was unmistakable.

In our haste to decry public funding of the arts, to keep harping on a few grants that may or may not have funded "tasteless" or "obscene" art, we seem to ignore the very positive impact the arts can have, not only on our lives and our communities, but on the individual and collective healing process with which we all must struggle at some point in our lives. Last night's performance was proof positive that art heals, both through expression and through observation. It affirmed that both making art and experiencing art can catalyze healing in ways that more traditional "therapy" ignores. It reminded me that, in spite of decreased funding, in spite of communities and governments which think art is "fluff," or just a "quality of life" issue, there are people whose very lives are mended, and affirmed, through artistic expression.

