

The Big Strum Theory talk at East Los Angeles College March 14, 2019

Review by Nadia Swerdlow Associate Professor of English at ELAC

Frank Simes mesmerized my advanced college English students from beginning to end of his presentation. They described his talk as inspiring both personally and intellectually and all have since expressed hope he would come back to our campus.

More importantly they felt he connected with them, their deepest questions about who they are, what they will be, and their thoughts about their place in the world. Many reported that Simes brought into focus their own creative drives that they either gave up to concentrate on school, work, family responsibilities, or which they felt they could not live up to due to their own self-criticism. Some of my students have reported that they have or are going to go back to their creative love of music, art, or other creative activities, realizing through experiencing Simes own admission of how it was music and creativity that saved him from those moments in our lives where we question our worth and our existence. One student stood up, having heard Frank in my classes last semester, and she very joyfully announced that because of that experience, she herself has gone back to playing piano and it has made all the difference in her life.

Simes seamlessly wove the science and the cosmological connections of music, humanity and the universe, through his topic, "My Conversation with the Universe," throughout his personal stories, his recounting of professional trials and tribulations, and through his expressions of his belief that only through authenticity can we fully actualize. His attributing his success in the music world to his commitment to always be authentic and true to oneself is a message many students wanted and needed to hear. As college students, they are torn between being what they believe the world wants them to be, sometimes at great cost to their core selves, and being themselves, having faith that their authentic self is good enough, and is not only that, the key to opening doors to fulfillment. Simes' stories gave life to this truism that many of us at any age need to hear.

His theories of how music is part of our makeup and we are part of the universe were entirely new to most students, but they expressed great interest in pursuing this comprehensive worldview. Students found his view of music explained their own responses to music and some expressed that they were listening to music differently now, seeing that it is more than relaxation, or something to kill time. It is part of who they are and some said part of their souls.

Simes' talk included the concepts of intention, and that living with intention also confirmed that the combination of authenticity and intention is the key to fulfillment professionally and personally. They gained through his complex worldview, punctuated by his music and by his personal stories, a sense of their own place in the world while at the same time, students expressed feeling there is hope that they too can fulfill their dreams through intention, through being themselves and authentic.

He had a deep and powerful impact on my students, and also allowed his kindness and vulnerability to meet them halfway, meeting with them after the talk and listening to their sharing of their own theories of self and the world. They felt deeply touched by his generosity of spirit, his genuineness and his obvious kind and caring nature that he projected from the start of the talk through the question and answer and through the reception afterwards. It is rare that

someone of his stature invited such interaction and also seemed to be as rewarded by it as were the students and faculty.

My students have since repeated regularly his concepts as stores as we continue readings on the meaning of art in society, in the world and in our own being. A popular point Simes made struck them and some have expressed how they view each day differently since. That was one of the Universe's answers to his question, "What is the meaning of life?" The Universe answered, "Creativity is the meaning of life." To help students and faculty see that each day is not just assignments to complete, courses to check off on the way to a distant goal, that teaching is not just lesson plans and endless grading. All of our roles in life must be saturated with the belief that creativity, as well as kindness, genuineness, reflection and the sensitivity to art and music as it is woven throughout each day, allows each of us to see each moment as the opportunity for creativity. The glimpse Simes gave students and faculty alike into the connectedness of all things helped them see that all their studies are connected, that all their choices are part of a greater whole, that they are part of a greater whole, and that through creativity the parts become personal and alive with possibility, is life changing. With Simes' stress on kindness as yet another key ingredient in this combination of energy, forces and intention, all of us felt empowered with a new sense of self and possibility.

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