

By MaryLou Roberts

# Eleven Great Reasons Group Class is More Than Worth the Effort

1. Playing as part of a group imitates a real performance. Children learn to play with others around, listening and feeling more at ease with the idea of sharing music with others. Later in life, the skill of performing or talking in front of a group will be more natural.
2. Playing in group increases flexibility, because students are asked to play at a wide range of speeds or different dynamics than they do just by themselves. Learning to work in a group and consider ideas other than one's own creates a better world.
3. Playing in group reinforces a steady pulse—more importantly, not stopping for a mistake. This strengthens review pieces, so that the students are better prepared with greater skills to move on to higher levels. Learning how good it feels to be prepared will motivate students to be prepared in other subjects.
4. Playing in group creates community. Children are encouraged when they see another child doing well and know they can also do the same thing. It's hard for a child to believe they can do it when they mainly see adults playing well. Children learn from their role models—the other kids. A mother I know wanted her daughter to learn Italian. The mother spoke some, but her daughter was resistant. When she took her to a class where other children were learning Italian, she joined right in without hesitation.
5. Any memory slips are covered by the other players with no embarrassment. Mistakes are taken in stride. Students exercise their ability to play on after a mistake and not get tripped up. An occasional mistake is not the end of the world.
6. Group playing widens the music and brings different sounds, feelings and expressions than playing alone. There is more than one way to play, or think, or write.
7. Playing in group makes it more fun to review. Children don't often play the review pieces enough, but for a group concert, they will review and be more interested in doing a good job. As adults, we know how much easier it is to exercise with someone else or a group than alone.
8. Playing games in a group setting renews and refreshes the music, and it becomes more alive and more relevant to them. Often children think they are playing loud enough or soft enough. Through group playing, they learn by example just how loud or soft to play.
9. Children learn in group to happily follow a leader and still be themselves. Following without feeling a loss of identity helps students be strong enough to learn from others and give the leader respect.
10. Children hear the next pieces that the others are playing and feel more motivated to practice. When children arrive at group class, they hear where they have been and where they are headed. This gives them pride in their accomplishments and momentum to go even further.
11. We foster a cooperative spirit in group class. We are all there encouraging each other, helping each person to learn. Learning is enhanced by an environment that is not threatening or too competitive. ☞



Photo by Art Montzka



**MaryLou Roberts** teaches classical guitar for the Ann Arbor Suzuki Institute, and has been coordinator since 1992. She has been an active SAA teacher trainer since 2006 and ESA teacher trainer since 2011, conducting training courses in the United States, Central and South America, Australia, and Ireland. MaryLou is currently serving on the SAA Board of Directors, and as the chair of the ISA Guitar Committee. She received a bachelor's degree in guitar performance from the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music, studying

with John Holmquist and Gilbert Biberian, and her master's degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she received the Valedictory Award and was elected a member of Pi Kappa Lambda. MaryLou practices tai chi daily, and enjoys going for walks with her husband, Brian, and being a mom to her three children.