

Eng 50 AoW 5: “Street Symphony, a Classical Music Nonprofit Inspired by ‘The Soloist,’ has a St. Louis Connection”

NAME _____

Directions: Print this form and the article that follows. Read the article first and then fill out this form. Staple it to the article and turn both in. You will need a highlighter, a pen, a stapler, and a dictionary.

1. Read the article carefully and **annotate** the story by writing on it. Highlight key passages; write in the margins to show evidence of a close reading, your reactions, or your confusion. (2 pts.)

2. Introduce this article by author and “Title” and explain in your own words what it is about. (2 pts.)

3. In your own words, explain what the connection is between Nathaniel Ayers, Street Symphony, and St. Louis. (2 pts.)

4. In your own words, explain Vijay Gupta’s connection to Skid Row. (2 pts.)

5. Based on this story, do you agree or disagree that Steve Lopez was correct in believing music was a type of therapy for Nathaniel Ayers? Why or why not? (2 pts.)

Your points _____ / 10 = _____

Street Symphony, a classical music nonprofit inspired by 'The Soloist,' has a St. Louis connection

By Kelly Moffitt

Nathaniel Ayers may not yet be a household name in classical music, but you surely know who he is. The prodigy's story was depicted in the 2009 film "The Soloist" by actor Jamie Foxx. It was *Los Angeles Times* columnist Steve Lopez who discovered Ayers in 2005 and originally wrote a book about him, by the same title.

Lopez joined *St. Louis on the Air* on Monday to discuss his friendship with Ayers and how that is connected to St. Louis and a classical music non-profit in Los Angeles which seeks to help people like Ayers who are experiencing homelessness.

Street Symphony, a classical music nonprofit inspired by 'The Soloist,' has a local connection in St. Louis Symphony's Adam Crane, who helped to found it.

When Lopez stumbled upon Ayers, who was homeless at the time, he heard him playing violin and thought it was of high quality. He approached him thinking it would be a good column for his paper. What he found was a Juilliard-educated classical musician who fell by the wayside after he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, hearing voices during his rehearsals.

Ayers had spent many years on the street by the time Lopez met him. Violin was the music that soothed him and he had an affection for Beethoven, whose statue he practiced across from every day. After getting to know him better, Lopez wanted to do whatever he could to help improve his life.

"When I found out he had been a legitimate musician, I was trying to figure out ways to help him," Lopez said. "I thought maybe I could bring him back into the fraternity of musicians. Like a lot of people suffering from mental illness, he became isolated and marginalized. When he was on the streets, he was alone. I thought maybe there'd be some therapy in music for him."

That's where the St. Louis connection comes in: In 2005, Adam Crane, now the vice president for external affairs at the



Nathaniel Ayers, Adam Crane and Steve Lopez.

St. Louis Symphony, was the PR Director at the L.A. Philharmonic. Lopez reached out to Crane, hoping he'd ease the path for Ayers to come to a rehearsal.

Crane consented. Ayers was excited but nervous.

"I remember him saying he couldn't go to a concert: 'People shouldn't have to pay good money for the music of the gods, and have to sit next to a bum like me,'" Lopez said. "I remember telling him: 'You're not a bum. You're a man. You're an artist. You're a soul. You're somebody's brother, somebody's son, you're my friend.'"

Ayers visited the Philharmonic and became a regular visitor. That's when Vijay Gupta, a violinist with the Philharmonic, met Ayers.

"We immediately recognized this man as someone who had the talent and capacity to be on stage with us," said Gupta, who was recently in St. Louis for a speaking engagement at Washington University.

Ayers, a gifted double bass player, asked if he could study violin with Gupta. It was through

these lessons that Gupta realized that music could help more people in Ayers' situation, suffering from mental illness and homeless.

So, in 2011, Gupta and Crane founded the Street Symphony, and took classical music to Skid Row, a part of L.A. where some 50,000 homeless people reside.

One of their major events was a sing-a-long performance of Handel's "Messiah." Now, the group is expanding outreach to correctional facilities in Los Angeles. In St. Louis, Crane is working with the St. Louis Symphony's Maureen Byrne to add correctional facilities to community outreach efforts here.

"The people we've met on Skid Row are some of the most brave, courageous, resilient people we've ever met," Gupta said. "Something brilliant and beautiful happens when we tell their stories with music."

As for Ayers, Lopez said he still sees him about once a week. He now lives in a mental health recovery center in Long Beach, where he plays music for almost 10 hours a day