

Joshua Bell Plays a \$3,000,000 Violin ... and almost nobody notices



In a Washington, DC Metro Station, Joshua Bell, one of the world's greatest violinists, played a beautiful, intricate, moving piece on a violin worth over 3 million dollars. During the 43 minutes he played, **1,097 people walked by. Only seven stopped to listen**, and even those seven paused for only a few minutes. Three days before, Joshua Bell had played the same music to a sold-out audience in Boston where the seats averaged \$100 each. His minimum fee for playing a public concert was \$75,000.

This is a true story, a social experiment organized by journalist Gene Weingarten in 2007. For more about this, see his Washington Post article, [Pearls Before Breakfast](#), and [Judy Woodruff's newscast](#), both of which have video clips of the performance that day. Here is a summary of Bell's 43-minute "concert":

After about 3 minutes, a middle-aged man noticed that there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds, and then he hurried on to meet his schedule. **At 4 minutes**, the violinist received his first dollar. A woman threw money in the hat and, without stopping, continued to walk. **At 6 minutes**, a young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and started to walk again. **At 10 minutes**, a 3-year old boy stopped, but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The kid stopped to look at the violinist again, but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head the whole time. This action was repeated by several other children, but every parent - without exception - forced their children to move on quickly. **After 43 minutes, he finished playing and silence took over. No one noticed and no one applauded.**

To be fair, the "concert" was conducted during rush hour in one of the busiest metros in the world. That so few people stopped was not a demonstration of the cluelessness of these commuters, but how the busyness of our daily life can sometimes prevent us from noticing the beautiful and miraculous world all around us. Every moment of every day, if we truly look, there is something extraordinary to pay attention to: the stunning earrings worn by the grocery clerk, a child's unself-conscious laugh, the color of the sky, or the miracle of our own breath. **How many amazingly beautiful things do we miss in a day, simply because of the pace of our lives and the intense focus on getting to the next thing?**

This is not to say that we should stand in place, slack-jawed, in such awe of the beauty around us that we make ourselves late to work or forget to pick up our kids after school. It does suggest that IF we stop to pay attention, even for a moment, there is always something amazing happening. We don't have to wait for Joshua Bell to play a concert in the metro.

*"There are only two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a miracle."
- Einstein*