

Harvesting Sound and Reaping the Health Benefits

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It's something you have to hear to believe.

Frost area farmer Blake Weber, 43, is a fourth-generation farmer who has a side hobby that has helped him calm the trying stressors of farming. Weber uses a multitude of soothing instruments to create relaxing, meditative sounds.

The Blue Earth Area graduate lives in Spirit Lake, Iowa, with his wife Megan and eight-year-old daughter, Kaity. When he's not in Spirit Lake with his family, or out at the Frost farm helping his dad, Barry Weber, you can find Weber in his sound studio located in Elmore.

In Elmore, Weber has a small house filled with beautiful, intricate instruments and sound equipment to create incredibly mellow soundscapes that help him and those who enjoy his music with decompressing, relaxation, and relieving stress.

Some of the instruments he uses are hand pans, Native American flutes, kalimbas, rav-vasts or singing bowls, and a multitude of synthesizers to create his unique tones and rhythms.

"Tonal therapy is actually something lots of cultures use," he says. "You use resonant frequencies that can affect the cell structures of your body. Certain tones, called binaural tones, have been used with Buddhist monks for hundreds of years. The singing bowls I use were hand-hammered in Nepal."

Weber also has a tongue drum, which is like an inverted steel drum, that was hand-cut in Russia.



Staff photo by Katie Mullaly

"Meditation is the consequence of music. You have no choice but to stay in that moment."

— Blake Weber

Local farmer Blake Weber sits in his music studio where he experiments with sounds to reduce stress and anxiety. Weber uses a number of instruments including sound bowls, hand drums, synthesizers and more.

Some of the work he has been able to do outside of benefiting himself and his friends and family include playing for Beers and Yoga classes at Lake Okoboji in Iowa, helping with a guided meditation seminar, and has recently been commissioned to create soundtracking for a student film.

For Weber, music is not just about self-expression, but it has also helped him physically with symptoms of stress in his life.

"I started really getting into, and experimenting with, tonal sound a few years ago. We have high blood pressure in our family, and I was not exempt from that. I had high blood pressure," he shares. "Not anymore. My heart rate has gone down from 80 beats per minute to about 60 beats per minute. I track my heart rate and using music to relieve stress and express my feelings has been beneficial."

Weber has no formal

musical training. He says his love of music started when he was just four years old, when he sat at his Grandpa Wayne's organ and just started tinkering with keys and pedals.

"When I was a little older, I found my mom's acoustic guitar and started fiddling with that," he shares. "In high school, I saved up my bean walking money to purchase an electric bass and my friends started a band. I really

liked just meeting with my friends and practicing music."

Around 2010, Weber came back to his family farm to help out full-time with his dad after leaving a job that left him unsatisfied.

"I mean, technically I've been working on the farm since I was eight years old," he says. "But I've been helping my dad begin his retirement from farming back in 2010. That's when farming was

pretty good."

Recently, the stressors of farming have become all but too evident to himself and his farming friends across the community.

"A lot of us guys are out there just trimming fat to stay above water. And some guys can barely do that. People are using less fertilizer, using less seed, just to try and stay afloat. It's a pretty stressful time to be a farmer, and music has really helped me to control that stress and express my frustrations," he says. "It's something that has worked for me. Music is important because it is one of the best ways humans can communicate emotions without hurting one another, either with words or with actions. Through this journey, how I live has changed – it has made me appreciate life more."

During the winter, Weber's down time in farming, he likes to head to Elmore and experiment with different sounds, different tones, and soundscapes. There's no real rhyme or reason as to how he goes about his music, he just experiments and enjoys the process.

"Meditation is a consequence of music," he says. "You have no choice but to stay in that moment. Kaity really likes playing with music, too. And I think it's incredibly important for kids to play with music, experiment with sound, and find what they like. There are so many physical and mental benefits to playing music."

He hopes his fellow farmers can potentially benefit from the therapeutic component of sound, as well.

"It's whatever kind of music you like," he says. "It doesn't have to be soundscapes, it can be a country western song, but just sit down and enjoy it."

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