**After reading the excerpt from the *Washington Post* article entitled “Pearls Before Breakfast…,” answer the following questions.**

1. **What did the National Symphony Orchestra director think would happen?**
2. **Why was Joshua Bell surprised at being ignored?**
3. **What made, Edna Souza, the lady who was shining shoes, recognize there was something different about this particular street musician?**
4. **Value attribution is our tendency to attribute the value, goodness, or authenticity of something to its context instead of the thing itself. It explains why we would not recognize a million dollar work of art if it was not in a world-class museum or why we would take a forgery to be authentic if it was placed in the largest and finest art museum.**

**So, how did context affect people’s perceptions in this experiment? Explain in 5-7 sentences, using examples and elaboration to back up your opinion.**

1. **Would this same lack of recognition and response happen if a popular, mainstream musician or band did this same experiment in the same place? Explain why or why not.**
2. **Who or what is the primary influence on your perception? (Not yourself!) Explain why you think that.**

*My example: The primary influence on my perception is my family. I grew up in a family who had high expectations. They taught me that I should do everything to the best of my ability because it not only reflects on me but also my family and ultimately God. They taught me that I should look at everything as an opportunity and that nothing is beneath me. I have a spouse now who feels the same way. So our actions are always based on what we think is the right thing to do and how it will reflect on us.*

**Excerpts from the Washington Post Article:**

**“Pearls Before Breakfast: Can one of the nation’s great musicians cut through the fog of a D.C. rush hour? Let’s find out.” By Gene Weingarten**

**April 8, 2007**

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/pearls-before-breakfast-can-one-of-the-nations-great-musicians-cut-through-the-fog-of-a-dc-rush-hour-lets-find-out/2014/09/23/8a6d46da-4331-11e4-b47c-f5889e061e5f_story.html>

HE EMERGED FROM THE METRO AT THE L’ENFANT PLAZA STATION AND POSITIONED HIMSELF AGAINST A WALL BESIDE A TRASH BASKET. By most measures, he was nondescript: a youngish white man in jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt and a Washington Nationals baseball cap. From a small case, he removed a violin. Placing the open case at his feet, he shrewdly threw in a few dollars and pocket change as seed money, swiveled it to face pedestrian traffic, and began to play.

It was 7:51 a.m. on Friday, January 12, the middle of the morning rush hour. In the next 43 minutes, as the violinist performed six classical pieces, 1,097 people passed by. Almost all of them were on the way to work, which meant, for almost all of them, a government job. L’Enfant Plaza is at the nucleus of federal Washington…

Each passerby had a quick choice to make, one familiar to commuters in any urban area where the occasional street performer is part of the cityscape: Do you stop and listen? Do you hurry past with a blend of guilt and irritation…? Do you throw in a buck, just to be polite? Does your decision change if he’s really bad? What if he’s really good?

On that Friday in January, those private questions would be answered in an unusually public way. No one knew it, but the fiddler standing against a bare wall outside the Metro in an indoor arcade at the top of the escalators was one of the finest classical musicians in the world, playing some of the most elegant music ever written on one of the most valuable violins ever made. His performance was arranged by The Washington Post as an experiment in context, perception and priorities -- as well as an unblinking assessment of public taste: In a [boring] setting at an inconvenient time, would beauty transcend?

So, what do you think happened?

Leonard Slatkin, music director of the National Symphony Orchestra, was asked the same question. What did he think would occur, hypothetically, if one of the world’s great violinists had performed incognito before a traveling rush-hour audience of 1,000-odd people?

“Let’s assume,” Slatkin said, “that he is not recognized and just taken for granted as a street musician . . . Still, I don’t think that if he’s really good, he’s going to go unnoticed. He’d get a larger audience in Europe . . . but, okay, out of 1,000 people, my guess is there might be 35 or 40 who will recognize the quality for what it is. Maybe 75 to 100 will stop and spend some time listening.”

So, a crowd would gather?

“Oh, yes.”

And how much will he make?

“About $150.”

Thanks, Maestro. As it happens, this is not hypothetical. It really happened.

A onetime child prodigy, at 39 Joshua Bell has arrived as an internationally acclaimed virtuoso. Three days before he appeared at the Metro station, Bell had filled the house at Boston’s stately Symphony Hall, where merely pretty good seats went for $100.

But on that Friday in January, Joshua Bell was just…competing for the attention of busy people on their way to work.

Bell always performs on the same instrument. It was handcrafted in 1713 by Antonio Stradivari during the Italian master’s “golden period,” toward the end of his career, when he had access to the finest spruce, maple and willow, and when his technique had been refined to perfection.

Bell bought it a few years ago. The price tag was reported to be about $3.5 million.

AS METRO STATIONS GO, L’ENFANT PLAZA IS MORE PLEBEIAN [common, lower class] THAN MOST. At the top of the escalators are a shoeshine stand and a busy kiosk that sells newspapers, lottery tickets and a wall-full of magazines.

On Friday, January 12, the people waiting in the lottery line looking for a long shot would get a lucky break -- a free, close-up ticket to a concert by one of the world’s most famous musicians -- but only if they were of a mind to take note.

Bell decided to begin with “Chaconne” from Johann Sebastian Bach… considered one of the most difficult violin pieces to master. Many try; few succeed. It’s exhaustingly long -- 14 minutes.

He played with acrobatic enthusiasm, his body leaning into the music and arching on tiptoes at the high notes. The sound was nearly symphonic, carrying to all parts of the homely arcade as the pedestrian traffic filed past.

Three minutes went by before something happened. Sixty-three people had already passed when, finally, there was a breakthrough of sorts. A middle-age man altered his gait for a split second, turning his head to notice that there seemed to be some guy playing music. Yes, the man kept walking, but it was something.

A half-minute later, Bell got his first donation. A woman threw in a buck and scooted off. It was not until six minutes into the performance that someone actually stood against a wall, and listened.

Things never got much better. In the three-quarters of an hour that Joshua Bell played, seven people stopped what they were doing to hang around and take in the performance, at least for a minute. Twenty-seven gave money, most of them on the run -- for a total of $32 and change. That leaves the 1,070 people who hurried by, oblivious, many only three feet away, few even turning to look.

Eventually [Bell] began to steal a sidelong glances.

“It was a strange feeling, that people were actually, ah . . .”

The word doesn’t come easily.

“. . . ignoring me.”

Bell is laughing. It’s at himself.

“At a music hall, I’ll get upset if someone coughs or if someone’s cellphone goes off. But here, my expectations quickly diminished. I started to appreciate any acknowledgment, even a slight glance up. I was oddly grateful when someone threw in a dollar instead of change.” This is from a man whose talents can command $1,000 a minute.

THERE ARE SIX MOMENTS IN THE VIDEO THAT BELL FINDS PARTICULARLY PAINFUL TO RELIVE: “The awkward times,” he calls them. It’s what happens right after each piece ends: nothing. The music stops. The same people who hadn’t noticed him playing don’t notice that he has finished. No applause, no acknowledgment. So Bell just saws out a small, nervous chord -- the embarrassed musician’s equivalent of, “Er, okay, moving right along . . .” -- and begins the next piece.

Watching the video weeks later, Bell finds himself mystified by one thing only. He understands why he’s not drawing a crowd, in the rush of a morning workday. But: “I’m surprised at the number of people who don’t pay attention at all, as if I’m invisible. Because, you know what? I’m makin’ a lot of noise!”

He is. You don’t need to know music at all to appreciate the simple fact that there’s a guy there, playing a violin that’s throwing out a whole bucket of sound; at times, Bell’s bowing is so intricate that you seem to be hearing two instruments playing in harmony. So those head-forward, quick-stepping passersby are a remarkable phenomenon.

Bell wonders whether their inattention may be deliberate: If you don’t take visible note of the musician, you don’t have to feel guilty about not forking over money; you’re not complicit in a rip-off.

It may be true, but no one gave that explanation. People just said they were busy, had other things on their mind. Some who were on cellphones spoke louder as they passed Bell, to compete with that infernal racket.

THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE WERE UPHOLSTERED. In the balcony, more or less. On that day, for $5, you’d get a lot more than just a nice shine on your shoes.

Only one person occupied one of those seats when Bell played. Terence Holmes is a consultant for the Department of Transportation, and he liked the music just fine, but it was really about a shoeshine: “My father told me never to wear a suit with your shoes not cleaned and shined.”

Holmes wears suits often, so he is up in that perch a lot, and he’s got a good relationship with the shoeshine lady. Holmes is a good tipper and a good talker, which is a skill that came in handy that day. The shoeshine lady was upset about something, and the music got her more upset. She complained, Holmes said, that the music was too loud, and he tried to calm her down.

Edna Souza is from Brazil. She’s been shining shoes at L’Enfant Plaza for six years, and she’s had her fill of street musicians there; when they play, she can’t hear her customers, and that’s bad for business. So she fights.

Souza points to the dividing line between the Metro property, at the top of the escalator, and the arcade, which is under control of the management company that runs the mall. Sometimes, Souza says, a musician will stand on the Metro side, sometimes on the mall side. Either way, she’s got him. On her speed dial, she has phone numbers for both the mall cops and the Metro cops. The musicians seldom last long.

What about Joshua Bell?

He was too loud, too, Souza says. Then she looks down at her rag, sniffs. She hates to say anything positive about these damned musicians, but: “He was pretty good, that guy. It was the first time I didn’t call the police.”

Souza was surprised to learn he was a famous musician, but not that people rushed blindly by him. That, she said, was predictable. “If something like this happened in Brazil, everyone would stand around to see. Not here.”

Souza nods sourly toward a spot near the top of the escalator: “Couple of years ago, a homeless guy died right there. He just lay down there and died. The police came, an ambulance came, and no one even stopped to see or slowed down to look.”

If we can’t take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best musicians on Earth play some of the best music ever written; if the surge of modern life so overpowers us that we are deaf and blind to something like that -- then what else are we missing?

THE CULTURAL HERO OF THE DAY ARRIVED AT L’ENFANT PLAZA PRETTY LATE, in the unprepossessing figure of one John Picarello, a smallish man with a baldish head.

Picarello hit the top of the escalator just after Bell began his final piece, a reprise of “Chaconne.” In the video, you see Picarello stop dead in his tracks, locate the source of the music, and then retreat to the other end of the arcade. He takes up a position past the shoeshine stand, across from that lottery line, and he will not budge for the next nine minutes.

Like all the passersby interviewed for this article, Picarello was stopped by a reporter after he left the building, and was asked for his phone number. Like everyone, he was told only that this was to be an article about commuting. When he was called later in the day, like everyone else, he was first asked if anything unusual had happened to him on his trip into work. Of the more than 40 people contacted, Picarello was the only one who immediately mentioned the violinist.

“There was a musician playing at the top of the escalator at L’Enfant Plaza.”

Haven’t you seen musicians there before?

“Not like this one.”

What do you mean?

“This was a superb violinist. I’ve never heard anyone of that caliber. He was technically proficient, with very good phrasing. He had a good fiddle, too, with a big, lush sound. I walked a distance away, to hear him. I didn’t want to be intrusive on his space.”

Really?

“Really. It was that kind of experience. It was a treat, just a brilliant, incredible way to start the day.”

Picarello knows classical music. He is a fan of Joshua Bell but didn’t recognize him; he hadn’t seen a recent photo, and besides, for most of the time Picarello was pretty far away. But he knew this was not a run-of-the-mill guy out there, performing. On the video, you can see Picarello look around him now and then, almost bewildered.

When he left, Picarello says, “I humbly threw in $5.” It was humble: You can actually see that on the video. Picarello walks up, barely looking at Bell, and tosses in the money. Then, as if embarrassed, he quickly walks away from the man he once wanted to be.

In preparing for this event, editors at The Post Magazine discussed how to deal with likely outcomes. The most widely held assumption was that there could well be a problem with crowd control: In a demographic as sophisticated as Washington, the thinking went, several people would surely recognize Bell. Nervous “what-if” scenarios abounded. As people gathered, what if others stopped just to see what the attraction was? Word would spread through the crowd. Cameras would flash. More people flock to the scene; rush-hour pedestrian traffic backs up; tempers flare; the National Guard is called; tear gas, rubber bullets, etc.

As it happens, exactly one person recognized Bell, and she didn’t arrive until near the very end. For Stacy Furukawa, a demographer at the Commerce Department, there was no doubt. She doesn’t know much about classical music, but she had been in the audience three weeks earlier, at Bell’s free concert at the Library of Congress. And here he was, the international virtuoso, sawing away, begging for money. She had no idea what the heck was going on, but whatever it was, she wasn’t about to miss it.

Furukawa positioned herself 10 feet away from Bell, front row, center. She had a huge grin on her face. Furukawa remained planted in that spot until the end.

“It was the most astonishing thing I’ve ever seen in Washington,” Furukawa says. “Joshua Bell was standing there playing at rush hour, and people were not stopping, and not even looking, and some were flipping quarters at him! Quarters! I wouldn’t do that to anybody. I was thinking, *Omigosh, what kind of a city do I live in that this could happen*?”

When it was over, Furukawa introduced herself to Bell, and tossed in a twenty. Not counting that -- it was tainted by recognition -- the final haul for his 43 minutes of playing was $32.17. Yes, some people gave pennies.

“Actually,” Bell said with a laugh, “that’s not so bad, considering. That’s 40 bucks an hour. I could make an okay living doing this, and I wouldn’t have to pay an agent.”