

Music or meditation mark the many miles

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Happy Labor Day! As I sit at my computer crunching out this column, I listen to the strains of Miles Davis' muted trumpet.

I love music, from the power of Wagner and Beethoven to the pure strains of Mozart, from country music to rock 'n' roll of the '50s and early '60s. My music tastes are eclectic.

It is no wonder, then, when I became a "born-again" runner in my 40s that the third most important piece of equipment, after my shoes and watch, was an AM/FM jogging radio. I went through several of them over the decade or so I listened to the radio because they had hard use in the heat and the rain. My last jogging radio was an AM/FM waterproof, push-button digital model.

As Restoration playwright Congreve says, music does have charms to soothe, to comfort and to take us away from our busy and stressful lives. Music on the run can set a pace and get us going. I remember the "The Heart of Rock and Roll" by Huey Lewis and the News quickened my pace and elevated my heart rate. So did Madonna's "Vogue."

In fall training for the Houston Marathon after Sunday-morning church, I tuned in to the Cowboys or the Oilers. I usually

was finished with a 20-miler in time to see the last quarter on TV.

I remember the strains of the Bellamy Brothers' "Old Hippy" as I topped the Highway 36 bridge over the Brazos River and crossed the 1,000-mile marker. (I'm not an "Old Hippy," I'm an "Old Beatnik.")

In a Houston marathon, with about 10 miles to go, I remember the sounds of swirling water and Bobby Darin singing "Splish Splash." I knew the marathon frontrunners were in and I was tired, but Darin's song renewed my energy.

I have no idea where that AM/FM digital jogging radio is now. I abandoned music on the run about a decade ago for the beauty of the world around me and the spiritual experience that a quiet, tranquil run can bring.

The headphones came off in stages. First, I pulled them off along the beach. It seemed shameful to shut out the sound of the surf. The headphones shut me off from the world and inhibited quiet thinking and reflection.

Sounds, even sounds that have the power to soothe the savage breast, intrude on solitude and reflection. Running gives us the time to be alone with ourselves and to know ourselves better. Running helps us to work through crises, problems and tragedies.

On the run, I reflect on multitudinous personal and professional crises, problems and tragedies. At the death of my father in 1990 and my younger sister in 2003, running soothed

the hurt and gave me solace.

I am what I am, and runners who use headphones are what they are and may get the same serenity with the phones in their ears that I get without them. Runners, however, place themselves in harm's way if they close out the world in high traffic or hazardous areas.

"Music hath charms to sooth the savage breast," but if you choose to listen to music on your run, be careful and conscious of the dangerous world around you.

F o o t n o t e : Registration for Saturday's Relay Triathlon remains open online through Thursday at www.active.com and from 5 to 9 p.m. Friday at the Lake Jackson Recreation Center. There is no registration on race day.

Bill Shaw's column appears every other Monday in *The Facts*.