



Developed by the Center for Music and Young Children®

## *Music and Your Child*

**A GUIDE FOR PARENTS  
AND CAREGIVERS**

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Music and Your Child: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

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# MUSIC TOGETHER®

Music Together is a music and movement approach to early childhood music development for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and kindergarten children and their parents, teachers, and other primary caregivers. Originally offered to the public in 1987, it pioneered the concept of a research-based, developmentally appropriate early childhood music curriculum that strongly emphasizes and facilitates adult involvement.

The Music Together approach develops every child's birthright of basic music competence by encouraging the actual experiencing of music rather than the learning of concepts or information about music. It began as an educational project of the Center for Music and Young Children and is now being taught nationwide.

For further information about our program, teacher training, parent education, child-safe instruments, or national or international classes, please contact:

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**MUSIC**

**TOGETHER<sup>®</sup>**

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# Chapter 1

## **Music Is a Basic Life Skill**

We believe that music ability is as much a natural life skill as walking or talking and that all children can achieve basic competence in music, provided their early music environment is sufficiently rich. Basic music competence is defined as the ability to sing in tune, keep a beat, and participate with confidence and pleasure in the music of our culture, including instrumental study, if one so chooses.

## **Your Role Is Essential Regardless of Your Music Ability**

Young children learn most basic life skills from their parents and caregivers. Adults create, consciously and unconsciously, a loving and stimulating environment for learning to talk, move, think, and live with others. Through a process that seems magical, children figure out how to do these things mostly by watching, listening, and experimenting on their own.

For a movement or speech expert, formally teaching these skills to those who need such instruction can be a very complex task. Yet parents, grandparents, and primary caregivers take on the responsibility of *informally* teaching children these basic skills as a matter of course. We rarely give ourselves credit for achieving this incredible educational accomplishment!

It is just as appropriate for you, as a parent or caregiver, to nurture your child's music development as it is to support the development of other basic skills in your child's life. Music Together is designed to help you provide this nurture, regardless of your own music background or ability.

In fact, during the early years, it is extremely important that parents and caregivers be the ones who create this environment. Children are biologically "wired" to respond most to the model of those persons with whom they have a bond of attachment. No such bond exists between the child and the television or the stereo. Listening to recorded music has its place, but it is only one of many experiences a child needs in order to grow musically.

It is important that you (and your child's other caregivers, parents, grandparents):

- participate in class;
- attend the parent education program;
- play the recording often at home and/or in the car;
- read this guide;
- make observations and ask questions;
- have fun!

By doing so, you and your child will find that both the quantity and quality of music experiences in your lives will increase. This is especially true of spontaneous music experiences that occur during the normal routine of daily living. Your natural ability to create and sustain a rich music environment in your home will also increase, thus helping to ensure optimal development of your child's inborn music potential.

## **What Should I Expect of My Child?**

As you participate in class, listen to the recording together and try the activities at home. What kind of response should you expect? Some children are spontaneous singers and movers, others are careful and astute observers. In either case, after sufficient listening and observing time at home and in class, you may begin to notice your child singing or chanting parts of songs, sometimes with words, sometimes without. However, even when your child gives no response or seems uninterested in listening or participating, important unconscious learning is taking place.

Keep in mind the following points:

- Most children choose (wisely!) to observe more often than to participate actively in class. They are taking in information, which they will act on later at home.
- Most children become accustomed to the class routine and their classmates around the fifth or sixth week. At this point, their participation is likely to increase.
- Children are assimilating important music information whether or not they are outwardly participating. At home, this means it may be important to play the recording or sing the songs yourself even if your child seems to be unaware or uninterested, especially during the first few weeks of class.

Remember that you are the most important model and teacher for your child. Your most effective role is to participate and enjoy the class yourself, even though your child might choose to sit back and observe. If you are enjoying yourself, your child will soon wish to share that enjoyment with you.

We know it might be difficult to watch other children zealously participate in the group while your child does not. This is especially true if your child performs all of his class favorites as soon as you arrive home. Try to understand that he is very wisely “practicing” in private and will make his public “debut” when he feels more confident. Meanwhile, if you feel suddenly overwhelmed with frustration by the lack of your child’s participation in class, just count to three, relax, and participate yourself!

## **What Should I Expect of Myself?**

Some parents are somewhat disconcerted by the concept of being their child’s most important role model, especially when it comes to music! You may feel that you are not particularly musical—perhaps you even describe yourself as being “tone deaf.” You may be great at singing but feel unsure of yourself when dancing or trying to keep the beat. Whatever the level of your technical skill, remember the most important things you can model for your child are simply pleasure, interest, and the desire to participate in music activities.

Many adults feel deprived, confused, or inadequate about their ability in music, as if they have been denied something that should be effortless and natural. In fact, this is often the case. As your understanding of your child’s music development grows in the coming weeks, you may also come to understand that unfortunate circumstances in your own childhood music experience may be at the root of some of these feelings. More important, by participating with your child, you can begin to rediscover within yourself the natural human musicality that is everyone’s birthright.

## **An Important Note to Remember**

You have taken the opportunity of sharing in the development of your child's music ability by enrolling in this program. Many parents today are making similar choices for their preschool-aged children in other areas of learning. Moreover, many researchers and educators have become excited about the possibilities for learning during these years. Amidst all this energy and excitement, it is important to resist the tendency to overdo. Our program promotes anxiety-free learning. Our goal is simply to aid the natural learning process. We realize that sometimes it is more effective for a parent or teacher to recognize that learning is taking place, appreciate the experience, and then just get out of the child's way!

## **Hints for Music Together at Home**

Play your Music Together recording at home. If there is a player in the car, it's also great to play the recording while driving. Do not limit its use to the car, though: children are less able to move to the music while strapped in a car seat.

Many children will want specific songs repeated again and again. Replay the song for them right away: they crave the repetition because it is necessary for their development. Repetition is one way they "practice."

Another way children practice is through spontaneous, playful imitation of the songs and activities they experience in class. Of course, these imitations will probably not be "correct," but they will certainly be fun! The next chapter will discuss in detail your child's playful approach to learning music.

Some children may not immediately demonstrate interest in the recording. Right now, they may have different developmental needs and interests or simply have other current favorites. As they adjust to the class experience, they may express more enthusiasm. Just play the recording in the background, perhaps as they are playing or taking a bath. Their interest in both the class and the recording will grow with familiarity.

The recording provides a way of reinforcing and following up on the class experience of adults participating in *live* musical activities. The more you can continue this kind of participation at home by singing the songs or doing the chants and fingerplays yourself, the better it is, as long as you do it in the spirit of fun and enjoyment. Nothing sets a better model for your child than doing an activity you enjoy yourself.

Remember to use the songbook, even if you don't read music. Use it like a story book and read or sing the songs to your child, especially the ones with pictures. In time, you might suggest that your child draw his or her own pictures for the songs, especially for those that don't have one.

Notice the effects of your child's experience in class and note his listening habits with the recording at home during the week. Write down or remember any questions you might have about your child's responses and then ask your teacher and discuss with other parents in class.



# Chapter 2

## Children Teach Themselves through Play

Children can develop basic music competence (singing in tune and physically keeping beat) most easily during the birth-to-preschool years. This is also the time when they develop themselves and learn about their world primarily through the magical process of play.

The especially unique thing about play is that children are born experts in it. It is not necessary to teach them how to play. In fact, they use play to *teach themselves* the things they need to learn.

There are several important characteristics that qualify an activity as “play:”

- The activity is freely chosen.
- The child controls its flow and duration
- It is intrinsically rewarding or done for its own sake.
- The activity is relatively free of externally imposed rules (in contrast to games).
- It needs to be moderately challenging in order to sustain interest, but not so hard as to cause frustration.
- It thrives best when undertaken in a relaxed setting.
- Most important of all, the activity must be fun.

## Process versus Product

Although children frequently take great pride in the products of their play, the process or experience of play is the most important factor. First, pride in the product does not last long: the drawing masterpiece so intensely worked and reworked yesterday quickly becomes today’s lunch mat, unless it is immediately enshrined on the wall or refrigerator by the foresighted teacher or parent. Second, the main goal of play—simply having fun—does not require the presence of a product in the end.

## Characteristics of Music-play

The substance of play in very young children is usually made up of the environmental objects and experiences to which they have been exposed. In music play, the child teaches herself about the music of her culture by experimenting with the information she has gathered from her music environment. Her music play may take place simultaneously with motor or other forms of play, or it may take place alone. She may sing parts of familiar songs or create her own short songs; she may recite familiar chants or make up new ones about her play objects or experiences; and she may also experiment with different kinds of rhythmic movement.

If the environment is sufficiently rich throughout the primary music development years, there will be a continuous and even richer spiral of exposure to new musical elements, followed by playful experimentation with these elements. In fact, research has shown a direct correspondence between the quality, quantity, and diversity of musical stimulation and the extent to which a child’s developmental aptitude can be sustained or enhanced.

## **Informal Instruction**

You may recall that one characteristic of children's play is its relative freedom from externally imposed rules. In *Music Together*, we try not to impose too much structure on your child's music experience. Therefore, we use the technique of *informal instruction* to present the class activities.

A music activity is informal when it takes place in an environment where no expectations for achievement are placed upon the child. For example, consider how we teach songs and chants to your child. Rather than singing short sections and asking her to imitate what was just sung, we sing a song over and over in its entirety. She can then join the song when she feels like it and on any part she feels ready to try.

Furthermore, we do not expect to teach young children knowledge "about" music. After a great deal of experience making and listening to music without any formal demands put upon them, children are then ready to understand such concepts as high/low, loud/soft, singing in tune, and keeping an accurate beat. Once they have had an opportunity to make music their own through play, they will be able to sort out and accurately express the basic elements of pitch and rhythm.

Of course, "no expectations" does not mean "no encouragement"! We give as much encouragement as possible, short of making the child feeling pushed or overwhelmed by too much attention.

## **Instrument-play Time**

Most children eagerly anticipate the instrument-play period at the end of each class. Even the most reticent children lose their self-consciousness, perhaps because this class activity suits their learning style best. Although we use informal instruction techniques in *Music Together*, the children must still contend with the social pressure and implied structure of group participation. Very young children really learn best when given the chance to experiment and play on their own.

For the first thirty minutes or so of class, your child has been actively acquiring new information about music, even if she chooses to sit back and observe. Instrument play allows her to process the new information she has assimilated during class, to practice the old information, and to "test her hypotheses" about the making of music by interacting directly with an instrument—and with you—! So it is important for you to join in during instrument-play, even to make occasional suggestions, but not to be too directive, controlling, or overly focused on what your child is doing.

# Chapter 3

## Music Aptitude and Music Achievement

Just as all children are born with the potential to learn to speak and understand their native language, all children are born with the potential to learn to “speak” and understand their native music. This means that all children can learn to sing in tune and keep a beat with some kind of body movement such as tapping, clapping, or walking. These milestones can usually be achieved by age six or seven, if not earlier.

If a child can sing in tune and move rhythmically at an earlier age or with special ease and grace, we often think of him as talented or “musical.” Many children however, never achieve these skills at any age, or do so only with great difficulty. As a culture, we tend to make the mistake of judging these children to be inherently “unmusical.” Such a mistaken judgment is a result of not understanding the difference between music achievement and music aptitude.

*Music aptitude* is the inborn potential for music learning and growth. It is determined, so far as we know, biologically. *Music achievement* is what we actually are able to do with that potential, and it is determined environmentally. It is important to understand that singing songs in tune and keeping an accurate beat are *learned achievements*, as opposed to inborn talents. They indicate the child’s level of *achievement* in music, but they do not, in and of themselves, indicate his level of *music aptitude*.

We understand this very well in the case of language. We do not judge a child’s present aptitude or future achievement in language by the intelligibility of his earliest attempts to talk. Furthermore, we do not expect two-, three-, and four-year-olds to speak in coherent paragraphs with uniformly correct pronunciation and emphasis (sometimes a difficult proposition for adults!). We expect them to speak as children speak, in their language of the moment, filled with the energy and earnestness to communicate, however difficult and cumbersome the big adult words may seem in their mouths. When a baby or toddler is in the midst of this period of primary language development, we call his language “babbling,” and we consider it charming and appropriate—even, some would say, superior to our own language in expressiveness.

## Primary Music Development

It is harder for us to accept (much less encourage and enjoy) a child’s earliest efforts in singing. Remember that our modern western culture is used to the perfection of recorded voices. We tend to let the professionals do our singing for us. It will be easier to understand your child’s music growth if you realize he must also babble musically while going through a period of *primary music development*. In fact, many researchers have called this period the “music babble stage.”

If all children are born with the potential to learn to “speak” and understand their native music, why is it that so many children and many adults seem to be tone deaf or lacking in rhythmic coordination? Why is it that general music education has been largely unsuccessful in creating a musical public capable of tunefully singing the most basic repertoire of our culture’s music, such as holiday songs, the national anthem, “Happy Birthday to You,” and many other common or childhood songs?

It is because many older children and adults have not successfully completed their journey through primary music development. For these students, music education is largely remedial education. It therefore requires more effort from students, more skill from teachers, more understanding from parents, and more patience from everybody. Since most students, teachers, and parents do not see it as a situation of remedial education, it is no wonder that the effort to learn (or teach!) music for many people is fraught with frustration. Refuge is taken in the erroneous explanation that this or that child is simply “not musical.”

### **“Developmental” Music Aptitude: A State of Change**

It is much easier, more successful, and a lot more fun for all to nurture a child’s basic music aptitude when the window for learning is fully open. Researchers have identified this time as the period of *developmental music aptitude*. This means simply that the level of aptitude is in a state of change. It is therefore vulnerable to positive or negative influence through both instruction and environment.

The most typical negative influence on developmental music aptitude is simple neglect. Without sufficient stimulation, a child’s inborn potential for musical growth will actually atrophy. The most vulnerable time is before the age of five, corresponding in most children to their period of primary music development.

Music aptitude remains changeable (for better or worse) until approximately age nine. After age nine, environmental events will have little or no effect upon raising, lowering, or sustaining the level of music aptitude (although they can, of course, greatly affect the level of music *achievement*). That is, each individual child’s aptitude level seems to crystallize or become fixed. This means that, although one may continue to learn music the rest of his life, he is limited by the potential of this fixed level. Furthermore, it becomes very difficult for students past the age of nine to complete their journey through primary music development, if they have not already done so. Consequently, it is very difficult for these students to achieve in music at all, unless they are highly motivated and are in the hands of skilled teachers who understand the remedial nature of the situation.

### **An Analogy**

The challenges of good gardening correspond closely with both the potential and the limitations of the period of developmental music aptitude. A seed has all the potential to form an adult plant. Some of those seeds will grow into healthier or better adapted plants than others. Some varieties of seed will grow and mature faster than others. But all viable seeds of a particular species have the ability to generate an adult plant, which is identifiable as a member of the species.

Critical to the success of this growth, however, is the quality of the plant’s environment, as determined by soil conditions and weather. Sufficient moisture, nutrients, temperature, and light must be available without undue threats from other plants, insects, disease, or other hazards. Furthermore, the availability and proportion of these nutrients and conditions is most critical during the early stages of growth. If certain nutrients or conditions are not available then, the plant’s early growth will be minimized, and flowering or fruiting at maturity will be limited, even though the adult plant may be perfectly healthy.

A similar relationship exists between the “seed” of your child’s basic aptitude at birth and its subsequent development. Although the potential of the aptitude may be great, unless it is appropriately nurtured as a “seedling,” this potential will not be fully realized. Although short periods of inadequate conditions can be remedied, a general neglect in the critical early stage will result in diminished aptitude, which no amount of subsequent extra care can change.

### **Music Ability Depends on Both Nature and Nurture**

In summary, some children are born with high music aptitude, others with low; but most have at least an average aptitude. Similarly, some children are exposed to better music environments than others. The interaction of environmental influences (“nurture”) with the level of aptitude at birth (“nature”) creates what we call music ability: the ability to sing, dance, play an instrument, or listen to music in a meaningful way.

Until age five, when a child can be tested for music aptitude, we cannot know the relative importance of aptitude or environment to a child’s demonstrated ability. We do know however, that this ability is a product of both aptitude and environment, of both nature and nurture.

Because each child’s history is unique with regard to his inborn music potential as well as his music experiences at home and in school, the ages at which children complete primary music development vary. Some children complete it at an age as young as twenty-four months, even though it takes most children until the age of six or seven.

Little can be done about the biological factors that determine a young child’s music aptitude at birth, and, of course, no amount of subsequent music instruction can change this. Parents, caregivers, and teachers, however, can do a great deal to sustain the level of a child’s music aptitude by providing the richest musical environment possible.

### **Audiation Is the Basis of Music Aptitude**

What is this phenomenon called music aptitude and how can one measure it? The answers to these questions depend on the process of *audiation*. Audiation describes the experience of hearing music in our minds even when there is no external music present. It is our music intelligence at work. In its simplest form, audiation is analogous to creating images of objects or persons while our eyes are closed, or to thinking in words and sentences without actually speaking out loud. Considered comprehensively, the process of audiation is as multifaceted and complex as the process of nonmusical thought. Audiation is paramount in importance because it is basic to all types of music thinking. Without the ability to audiate, no musical growth can take place.

As in the case of language, each individual child develops the ability to audiate music by accumulating many receptive listening experiences, as well as many active music-making experiences. A constant spiral of exposure through listening followed by experimentation through musical play will create an excellent foundation on which to build a rich musical vocabulary. This will then help the musical thinking process of audiation to be as rich as possible.

When the audiation of a song or chant is accurate, then its outer expression is likely to be accurate. A child needs many chances to experiment—both consciously and unconsciously—with creating the outer reality and comparing it with his inner audiation of the music. By repeatedly listening to and comparing his musical expressions with yours, as well as with the performances on the recording, he is gradually building his ability to think musically.

# Chapter 4

## Characteristics of Children in Primary Music Development

Primary Music Development (PMD) is the most critical period in your child's musical growth because crucial structures for audiation—the process of musical thought—are developing at a very rapid rate during this time. These structures create the foundation for a lifetime of music experience that is similar in function and importance to the foundation of a home. The size and quality of the home is largely dependent upon the size and quality of its foundation. If the foundation is small, the house will be small; if the foundation is of poor quality, the house will not stand very long.

As previously discussed, we know that young children learn best in a stimulating, playful environment. So, despite the importance of PMD, we need to avoid being too goal-oriented about singing or keeping a beat “correctly.” Instead, we need to learn to appreciate the developmental stages of a child's growth towards these goals.

How, then, does a child making normal progress through PMD sound when she tries to sing a song? What parts of her singing really sound like the song and what parts don't, and are these differences consistent from song to song? What other ways does she respond? Does she dance or move in a rhythmic way, shake her crib or a stuffed toy, or bang her hand on the floor? Do her movements actually correspond with the music she is hearing or creating? Researchers in the psychology of music have identified a universal, predictable sequence of growth and change throughout the years of PMD that can be recognized by answering these questions. Understanding this sequence helps give us the same perspective on music development as we have on the linguistic, physical, or social development of our children.

We make references to age in the following discussion, but please note that developmental timetables of any kind are often meaningless when applied to individual children. This is especially true about music development, since it is so under-emphasized and misunderstood in our culture. Consequently, many children are under-stimulated or incorrectly taught during their infant, toddler, and preschool years when they are actually able to learn the most. PMD begins at birth and ends, not when a child has reached a particular age, but rather when he has developed *basic music competence*, the ability to sing in tune and keep a beat. Unfortunately, because of poor music environments, more and more children are unable to ever develop basic music competence.

Within this early stage of primary music development there are two dimensions: a tonal dimension, and a rhythm dimension. Let's take a closer look at each of them.

### Primary Tonal Development

Tonality relates most closely to the musical expression of our voices in song. When a succession of individual tones or notes are connected to each other, they form melody. These notes are also called “pitches,” a term which can also refer especially to the relative “highness” or “lowness” of the tones. (“High” notes are really tones vibrating at a faster frequency, while “low” notes are tones vibrating

at a slower frequency.) Incidentally, pitch is also an important musical element in speech, because the *inflection* or pitch contour of a statement can carry as much or more of the statement's meaning and expressiveness as the words themselves do.

During the first year of life, children are particularly sensitive to pitch duration and inflection. Babies will "coo" in slight descending patterns and will often change the coo in response to adult cooing. They tend to prefer cooing around a central pitch that varies from child to child. They also tend to cry around this pitch center. They can *briefly* intone a pitch or several pitches near each other that are related to music they are hearing, but they are not able to sustain this very long after the music stops.

Children continue this kind of singing/sounding during their second and into their third year, but they get better at it. They can sing more pitches and intone them longer. They still tend to prefer a personal pitch center, and they still are more likely to sing with a music stimulus than alone. But some children can continue on their own, and some children can sing the pitch center or resting tone belonging to music they have heard, even after it stops. Children usually sing with a consonant preceding the vowel sound on which they are intoning. They will sometimes sing along with the ending phrase of a song, or, less frequently, with the beginning phrase. Often the notes they sing will not fit the song, but those that do are likely to be the resting tone, or key center of the song—usually the last note sung.

From about age two or two-and-a-half to five, the biggest change is that children are more and more able to sing by themselves, rather than depending on a recording or someone else singing, too. They may do any of the previous expressions we have talked about. They are also much more likely to make up spontaneous songs on their own, or sing their own special version of a song they know. Their singing is still most accurate in ending or beginning phrases, but now they are also able to sing an approximation of the melodic contour all the way through a song. In other words, they might not get the notes right, but they know when to go "up" and when to go "down." Since most children have basic competence in speech by about age three, the words in songs have become much more recognizable; but, as we mentioned previously, they usually distract the child from the tonal elements of the song. Consequently, children in this group tend to perform songs *without* words more accurately than songs with words.

When your child can sing all or part of familiar, but not unfamiliar, songs in tune, she will be nearly out of primary tonal development. She will have *achieved basic tonal competence* when she can sing both familiar and unfamiliar songs in tune. For example, this has occurred when she can sing in tune the melody of a song she knows, such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb," as well as a song that is relatively new to her.

### **Primary Rhythm Development**

Just as tonality comes to expression through our voices, rhythm is expressed first through the movement of our bodies. Beginning with the primal rhythm of the heartbeat to the complexity of dancing feet and hands playing instruments, rhythm and movement form a powerful alliance for musical expression throughout our lives.

Researchers studying the development of language have observed the infant's ability to create and repeat choreographies of seemingly random movements that actually correspond to speech patterns



repeated by a primary caregiver. It is likely that similar correspondences occur in an infant's movement response to music which has become familiar through repetition. As babies get more obvious control over their movements, we begin to see "characteristic gestures" in response to hearing music: each child develops very individualized movements of mostly the arms or upper body, which are performed in groups of two-to-five motions. Older babies and toddlers are also likely to chant or intone on a syllable such as "bah" in groups of two to five syllables. Although a child can sometimes combine intoned sounds and characteristic gesture movements, they usually do not correspond rhythmically. Babies and most toddlers usually cannot continue these responses on their own, without the presence of the music stimulus that initiated these responses.

From about fifteen months of age through the third year, children are working on sustaining the short characteristic gesture longer and longer, until they can finally maintain a steady beat nonstop throughout an entire song. This ability to perform a "consistent tempo" is a major achievement which often goes unappreciated because, to our adult eye and ear, the child's tempo usually does not fit the song she is listening to! Like the personal -pitch center discussed in primary tonal development, children tend to have personal tempos that they prefer and that differ from one child to another. Most of their rhythmic movement during this period is likely to be in or near their personal tempo, although their expression of the ends of songs or phrases will be increasingly accurate.

Of course, as in tonal development, older toddlers and two-year-olds are apt to return at any time to their earlier rhythmic movement responses. When they are not "regressing" in this way, however, you are likely to notice that they can continue their movements much longer after the music stops and that they are much better at spontaneously singing or sounding and moving on their own. Their vocalizing, however, is still not likely to correspond with their movements in the way that would seem rhythmically correct to our adult perception. With no sense of metric accent or "downbeat," all the movements will seem of equal weight with none being particularly emphasized.

As in tonal development, from about age two-and-a-half to five, the major theme is increasing independence. Children become more and more skilled at performing on their own, as well as more and more accurate rhythmically. After the "consistent tempo" phase, children learn to coordinate upper body movements to the beat of a song in moderate-to-fast tempo for one or two phrases. They will probably be less accurate in coordinating the lower body and will find it difficult to relate to slow tempos. When they sing and move simultaneously, the sounds and movements are often coordinated or "on the beat"! They are often able to accurately sing the rhythm to the beginnings and endings of songs they know well, particularly when they know the words.

Your child will be nearly out of primary rhythm development when he can move to and sing in the correct rhythm parts or all of familiar (but not unfamiliar) songs. He will have achieved *basic rhythm competence* when his body movements consistently coincide with the beat of the music and when he can accurately sing the rhythm patterns of both familiar and unfamiliar songs.

### **Basic Music Competence**

When a child has achieved both basic tonal competence and basic rhythm competence, he has achieved basic music competence. Not only will he be able to sing and move in a rhythmically accurate way, the notes or pitches in his melody will also be accurate and in tune. It is important, however, to appreciate

that most children tend to be stronger either rhythmically or tonally. That is, your active, extroverted young mover who is a whiz rhythmically may need more time and experience to develop her tonal ability. Or, the child who sings like a songbird very early may need a lot of movement opportunity and perhaps assistance to learn to move accurately to the beat.

We believe that, with the right kind of environment, many children can achieve basic music competence as early as age three, the age that most children achieve basic language competence in our culture. However, most children in our language-oriented culture do not have such an environment, even if they are coming to Music Together classes! So children achieve basic music competence more typically between ages four and six, and many children who have not had early exposure need even longer. If a child has not achieved basic music competence by age eight or nine, it becomes much more difficult to do so.

### **What Is Most Important**

The most important thing to remember about both the rhythm and the tonal dimensions of primary music development is that this is a time for your child to learn by actively experimenting with the elements of music according to her own preferences and timetable. The child actually teaches herself throughout PMD by playing with and experimenting with what she has experienced. Our job as teachers and parents is to provide lots of rich and stimulating music experiences from which she can choose material to use in these musical experiments.

# Chapter 5

## Listening

It is easy to listen to music while you and your child play or work. Variety is important, because the more kinds of music a child is exposed to when young, the more opportunity for growth in his audiation. For the greatest variety, tune in to radio stations which feature contrasting styles of music. Recordings are excellent when you prefer to be more selective about your listening, and many adult recordings are also appropriate for your child's listening. In either case, plan to listen to many varieties of music, such as:

- classical music, Renaissance to 20th century;
- ethnic music from various cultures;
- avant-garde music;
- contemporary popular music;
- jazz;
- children's music.

Attendance at live concerts of any kind can be the most stimulating form of listening. Remember our discussion of the importance of your participation as a model for your child's growing interest and involvement in music activities. The same principle applies to experiencing others performing music, whether it is a formal concert of classical music or an informal amateur jam session. Of course, in a formal setting, you must accept the possibility of a tired, bored, or cranky child that you may need to take out of the concert hall for a rest. Being able to really see what's going on will help extend your child's attention span, as will previous frequent attendance at more informal gatherings, such as outdoor concerts, where children are free to move around and ask you questions.

In general, the more you and your child have become actively involved in music, the more your child's attention span and appetite for music will increase. Attend Music Together classes, sing along with the recording at home and in the car, listen to lots of recorded music, and attend concerts in the creative ways described above.

As you make your music-listening choices, keep the following in mind:

- Children need an opportunity to audiate just the tonal and rhythmic elements of music without the interference of language. Because language development receives so much emphasis in our culture, your child's heightened awareness of words may distract him from the music itself. That is why instrumental music and songs without words can be more beneficial for *tonal* development than songs with a lot of words or stories accompanied by instrumental music.
- Choose recordings that include frequent changes in timbre (instrumental color) and dynamics (loudness/softness). Such contrasts will hold your child's interest longer and more easily.
- Recordings that have an underlying rhythmic drive are especially appealing to young children.

- Remember that it is not necessary to have music in the background twenty-four hours a day. Listening to silence is important, too. Furthermore, it is during periods of silence that your child has the opportunity to exercise his developing powers of audiation and to remember, think about, and experiment with the music he has already heard.
- Most importantly, choose listening music which you, too, find enjoyable. Remember that you are modeling for your child a disposition to enjoy music. You can't do this very well if you chose to listen to music which is "good for you" but which you don't enjoy!

Although passive listening is beneficial to your child's music development, active participation while listening can increase his interest and make the experience even more beneficial. Children enjoy dancing to music, both alone and with grown-ups. They enjoy the challenge of imitating your dance steps and movements. Whether to live or recorded music, infants and non-mobile toddlers enjoy being bounced or just allowed to wiggle on their own. Try to make a variety of short, active, spontaneous listening experiences part of your daily life.

Let your child see the recorded music packaging or help her turn the dial on the radio. For example, at nap time or any other regularly scheduled time, play music you can listen to together, even if it is for only a few minutes at first. Provide your child with his own tape recorder when he is old enough to operate it. Eventually, when he is sufficiently independent, he will start to choose recordings or to define a preference for one type of music over another.

Young children's music preferences, however, are not reliable from one day to the next. It is still unknown why children choose a particular selection. Perhaps he liked the picture on the CD cover, or perhaps you expressed an interest in a particular recording or station. Or maybe it was just a random selection. As in planning a child's diet, it is important to respect his expressed listening preferences, but you would not want to rely on these to be the sum total of his listening options.

Just as in his other activities, your young child's attention span will be variable—usually short. Don't expect him to listen consciously to an entire musical selection. Remember, he will still be learning subconsciously when the music is playing in the background.

## **Singing**

Most people have the natural and often unconscious tendency to sing to themselves at some point during the day, regardless of their musical ability. Often this singing replays music they heard earlier on the radio, or it is triggered by work, speech, or movement rhythms. Sometimes a person recalls a known song because it circumstantially or emotionally fits the present events in his life.

In our culture, this kind of inner singing is a very private affair. Often it is not vocalized and takes place only in the mental process of audiation. In general, we are much less likely than other cultures to spontaneously sing out loud.

Perhaps because we are used to the perfection of recorded performances, we have a tendency to judge imperfect singing rather harshly. We then tend to turn this critical eye to our own singing efforts, causing many of us—even accomplished musicians—to prefer to remain silent in public.

Unfortunately, this creates a vicious circle in which the less we sing as a culture, the more difficult it becomes to achieve basic competence in singing. Like dance, sports, and manners, singing takes practice!

In the presence of a young child, however, inhibitions can easily disappear. To them, singing is just another part of their play. Moreover, young children are not music critics, and they will be eager to listen to any of your efforts.

Your child needs to hear you sing with or to him at home. It is less important how well you sing than it is to make the choice to sing. By your example, children will learn that music is a natural, enjoyable, and important part of daily living. Besides providing your child with important “data” for primary music development, you, his primary caregiver, are the only one who can give him the gift of a *positive disposition* for music.

Again, do not be concerned if you feel your singing is out of tune. Your child will also be listening to the singing of others and to recorded music, so he will be able to make comparisons and eventually compensate for any possible errors. Also, many parents find that their own singing and sense of musical confidence improves markedly after attending Music Together classes.

A good way to make sure that you sing to your child is to always do so at the same times each day. You may want to:

- Sing a lullaby at your child’s nap time or bedtime.
- Sing a short song or chant while you make dinner.

Then, once singing has become more spontaneous for you, try one or two of the following activities:

- Make up a song about something your child does.
- In the car, sing several songs without words.
- Choose five to ten minutes during your day and make music the activity (for example, play the recording and sing along).
- Involve more people in singing: teach a song to Daddy, Grandma, or a friend—and ask your child to help!

### **Accompaniments to Singing**

Did you notice that the instrumental accompaniments on our recordings do not contain the melody? That is because children (and adults, too) quickly learn to rely on a musical accompaniment that includes the melody in order to get them through a song. When this happens, they do not audiate or “think” their way through the song themselves.

When you sing solo to your child, you are providing an excellent example for him to imitate. When he is ready, he, too, will sing solo—probably when he thinks you’re not listening! Solo singing is necessary to complete the process which begins with listening: developing audiation.

# Chapter 6

## **Songs without Words**

What contributes most to the popularity of many children's recordings? Why are certain songs used at certain times in your child's preschool, religious school, or gym program? It could be that their words and subject matter are especially appealing or appropriate.

Music can be a powerful ally in learning nonmusical subjects because words gain meaning and energy when set to music. It is fun to sing songs about dinosaurs when children are learning about them, or to sing movement and dance songs with lyrics that describe the movements or dance. However, recent research in music learning indicates that words can distract children from the music, particularly the tonal elements of a song.

For instance, in toddlers, the rapid development of language is so powerful that it easily displaces other kinds of learning. In *Music Together* we sing many songs without words so that children will have the opportunity to concentrate fully on audiating the melody and the rhythm of the song.

Imagine a seesaw. Place music on one end and language on the other. The seesaw will not balance. In our culture, active music participation has become so de-emphasized for young children that language develops in disproportion to music. When singing songs, children who are strong in language seem to attend more to the words than to the music. Therefore, even though these children are engaging in a music activity, they are actually learning more about language than about music. Singing a song without words allows your child to attend to only the song's melody and rhythm, so that during the singing activity, the seesaw is more nearly balanced.

Songs without words allow even the child with limited language facility the opportunity to sing, using the simple "vocables" or nonsense syllables presented on the recording. Because children essentially teach themselves through play at this time in their music development, it is important that their experiments in expressing a song not be inhibited in any way. Songs without words allow for the free exploration of melody and rhythm, without the distraction imposed by attempts to process language at the same time.

## **Tonal and Rhythm Patterns**

How exciting it is for parents and caregivers to watch children achieve important developmental milestones such as walking and talking! It is equally gratifying for them to watch children attain music development milestones such as dancing and singing.

One of your child's most frequent responses to the music on the recording is a reaction to the tonal and/or rhythm patterns. We can only speculate as to why children react to these patterns. Perhaps children cannot meaningfully focus on longer passages of music and therefore cannot respond to those passages. Because the patterns are short, they act as a catalyst for inducing a special attentiveness and a meaningful response to the music. Furthermore, these patterns are performed on a syllable that fits

naturally into the speech patterns of even the youngest child. Perhaps since they have no language barrier to overcome when they sing these tonal or rhythm patterns, they can spontaneously respond to them with ease.

Experience with tonal- and rhythm-pattern interactions is extremely important to children for understanding the orderly arrangement or *syntax* of tones and rhythm inherent in the music of our culture. Syntax in music is analogous to syntax in language. Syntax in language is the orderly arrangement of the words in a sentence. We understand the syntax of our language when we say “the big blue ball” rather than “the blue big ball.”

When a very young child speaks single words, an adult or older sibling will interpret the meaning and respond with an extrapolated version of the communication. For example, a child says, “juice.” Mommy says, “Oh, are you thirsty? Would you like to drink some juice?” The child is hearing a *whole* sentence stimulated by her expression of an essential *part*. This type of verbal interaction is a powerful reinforcement and is of utmost importance if the child is to teach himself language.

Tonal and rhythm patterns are like those single words. They are the *parts of music*, the building blocks that a child can understand and use to make her own music. Similarly, when we sing entire songs or recite entire chants, we are creating the *whole* of music, the orderly arrangement of tones and rhythm. When a child performs a pattern or fragment of a song and we respond with our own patterns or by singing the rest of the song, we are providing an essential interaction that stimulates and enables children to continue the process of playful self-instruction that is so important during their primary music development.

# Chapter 7

## Chant

For children of all ages, chant is probably the most prevalent type of spontaneous music-making. Common characteristics of chant are:

- Rhythmic, usually repetitive, recitation of words or phrases;
- Songlike qualities, such as words or phrases sung on one, two, or three notes;
- Solo beginnings which then spread to the group.

Listen to groups of children engaged in active play. You may hear one child spontaneously create a chant (often with a teasing tone), such as, “*Johnny got a haircut.*” Soon the captivating rhythm of the chant and the drama of the event upon which the chant was created have infected the entire group, and all the children join in and chant, “*Johnny got a haircut.*” Chant is also the focus of organized rhythm games such as jump-rope and stone-passing. Even the nursery rhymes that we read to our children are poems created in the simple, rhythmic style of chant.

When you and your child chant or rhythmically recite a poem or nursery rhyme, you are engaging in an important activity for your child’s rhythm development. Since there is little or no melody in chant, your child can thoroughly experience the rhythmic elements without having to learn a melody as well.

Chants are easy to make up. Just recite a name or a short phrase so that it fits with a beat. Try making up some chants to accompany your daily activities. For example, during one of your walks or car rides, let movements, sounds, and sights inspire a chant, such as:

*Driving, driving, we are driving,  
Brrmm, brrmm, brrmm, brrmm!*

Encourage your child to make up a chant too. When you have created one, try sharing it with a friend or another family member.

Once you have the words and rhythm secure, it is a very short step to add melody to your chant—if one hasn’t already spontaneously appeared! First try “intoning” your chant by singing it on just one note. Then begin to explore moving to other notes, both above and below your original note. Before you know it, you’ll be creating your own song.

For some people it is easier to create their own song by picking a known melody, such as “Three Blind Mice,” and fitting new words to it. Whatever method you choose, these spontaneous musical creations will reinforce what you are modeling for your child: the disposition to be musical.



## Movement

Both contemporary research and the traditions of many cultures have demonstrated a profound connection in the young child between movement and learning. This is especially true with learning music, because rhythm itself is essentially movement. Rhythm as a subject of musical study can be thought of as the study of all aspects of the flow of music through time. We experience this as the flow of our movements through space. From the developmental perspective, children must experience rhythm in their bodies before they can successfully audiate rhythm in their minds.

Think of the body itself as a musical instrument capable of responding in many different ways for many different kinds of music. Real musical instruments, like tools, are simply extensions or amplifications of the body's wonderful ability to be musically expressive.

To activate this process at home, you might choose a time during the day for dancing. Put on a recording of instrumental music and dance with your child. Toddlers may want to be held at first, which is fine. Make crisp, defined movements to the beat as well as soft, liquid movements; or lightly tap or stroke your child's back, so that he can feel the underlying pulse of the music. If he will dance alone, model for him some different things to do with his body or verbally describe the arm and hand movements you are creating. It is best to focus on following his movements or enjoying your own, rather than instructing him to do specific movements.

The same is true with instruments: your child's first interactions with a drum or a triangle may include a lot of investigating and experimenting which could seem, to our adult understanding, inappropriate to the goal of playing the instrument. Allow this process to take place, just as you would for your child's investigation of a ball or a new toy. Resist the impulse to show them the "correct" movements by moving their arms and hands for them, and *model* the way to play an instrument by playing it and enjoying it *yourself*. As they complete their investigations and as their bodies and minds mature, they will be eager to be just like you and play it your way!

# Chapter 8

## Taking Stock of Your Child's Music Development

During the course of the semester, you and your child will be exposed to many new ideas about music-learning and to many new music experiences in your weekly classes. We hope this will give you not only an increased interest in music but also more actual music activity for you, your child, and your whole family.

After one semester, your child may still not sing in tune or want to play the violin! But you will have a better understanding of how music ability develops and therefore a better appreciation of your child's movement toward basic competence in music. In the course of ongoing semesters, you will learn more about the kinds of activity to appreciate and encourage in your child, in order to optimize his music achievement, whatever his given music aptitude may be.

As we discussed in the third and fourth chapters, your child will be in *primary music development (PMD)* until she has achieved *basic music competence*—the ability to sing entire songs in tune and to physically keep a beat. During this time, *informal instruction*, characterized by playful interaction in a stimulating music environment, best enables children to teach themselves basic competence in their native music, just as they teach themselves to speak and understand their native language.

Most of the children ages three and under will still be in at least one dimension (tonal or rhythm) of PMD. Many children do not complete PMD until first or second grade. Evidence suggests, however, that a music enrichment program like Music Together can help children develop at a rate comparable to that of their language development. More children in such programs may be able to complete PMD and achieve basic music competence between the ages of three and five. Although this kind of improvement may appear to be an acceleration, it is really just a return to normal rates of development, as exhibited in cultures encouraging active participation in music by all members of the culture.

In “musical” families, where one or more adults or siblings frequently engage in music activities, children often achieve basic music competence at a relatively early age. This early attainment is usually assumed to be due to genetically inherited aptitude. Contemporary educational research has found, however, that the genetic inheritance of intelligence is not predictable. What may actually be happening in the “musical” family is that its members are creating an enriched learning environment which is nurturing high music *achievement*, whatever the child's given music *aptitude*.

Not long ago, the musical family was not as unusual in our culture. Most families were involved in *creating* music of one kind or another, because they could not *consume* it from recordings and the media, as we do today. The enriched learning environment generated by these families generally nurtured a higher music achievement in their children than exists in ours today. We designed the Music Together experience to recreate such an environment and to help contemporary families recapture the joy and satisfaction of simply being musical.

## Options for Continuing Your Child's Growth in Music

The information in this guide, in combination with your experiences in class, should be providing you with both a broad sense of the stages of early childhood music development and a specific understanding of it in relation to your own child. Once you know where your child is developmentally, you can make an informed decision as to what to do in the upcoming months in order to continue encouraging her growth in music. Please! Do not hesitate to increase your understanding or clear up questions by discussing them with your teacher.

### For Children Still in Primary Music Development

At each point in his development, bear in mind the characteristics of how your child learns and understands music. This will inform decisions of how to nurture his future music growth. Remember that the structures for his future music thinking are still developing. That is, your child does not yet think musically like an older child who has completed PMD. This means that your child will continue to learn best through playful interaction with a music environment which places on him no expectations for specific achievements or performance.

One way to achieve this is to enroll in future Music Together classes. We have designed a three-year cyclical curriculum which so many parents and children find enjoyable and rewarding to complete. Each ten-week session of the three-year cycle is designed to support the nonlinear growth that is characteristic of primary music development.

This means that:

1. *The sessions are non-sequential.* You may enroll for any session regardless of previous enrollments.
2. *Your experience will be similar.* We offer similar kinds of songs, chants, echo patterns, and movement activities in each session, because we believe this balanced mix best supports your child's music growth.
3. *A new recording and songbook* with new songs and chants is featured each session throughout the three-year cycle.

An alternative choice is to continue to nurture your child's music growth yourself at home, by using the information from this *Music and Your Child* guide. This option can be especially successful if you or someone in your family is involved with music as a hobby or career.

*Whichever option you choose, remember that, like dance, sports, and manners, music takes practice.* One ten-week enrichment program is not the way your child learned to walk or talk! Maintaining an appropriate music environment throughout your child's early years ensures the best chance for his or her easy and enjoyable participation in music later in life.

## For Children Who Have Completed Primary Music Development

Some children in the class may appear to have completed PMD and achieved basic music competence. Your child has achieved this milestone only if she has finished *both* the rhythm and tonal dimensions comprising PMD. The structures for your child's music thinking are now similar to the structures of older children and adults (i.e. your child can synthesize music in the mind much as you do). This means that your child could make sense out of formal music instruction, such as instrument lessons, where there are specific expectations for achievement. A child who is still in PMD is unlikely to succeed with such lessons.

Be aware that basic music competence is only one of several kinds of readiness for formal music instruction. You should also evaluate your child's natural interest, attention span, fine motor dexterity, and social maturity. Furthermore, carefully consider your own available time and willingness to follow through. When deciding on the next step, remember that your child will still learn best through playful interaction with her music environment.

Keeping these points in mind, you have several options to choose from to optimize your child's music development. Enrolling in the next Music Together session will help solidify and sustain her progress. You and the teacher can plan how to keep her challenged by taking advantage of the individual attention your teacher can provide. This option would be especially suitable in the case of a child who has the music readiness for formal instruction but not the social, physical, or emotional readiness. It might also be suitable as an adjunct to lessons that do not include a group experience.

Another option is to use the information from this *Music and Your Child* guide to continue to nurture your child's music growth at home yourself until your child is really ready for instrument lessons and you have found a suitable teacher. Once again, this option can be especially successful if someone in your family is involved with music as a hobby or career.

If you choose to enroll your child in instrument lessons, look for a teacher who understands how music fits into child development. When seeking information on new programs and teachers, ask questions such as: Do you like teaching young children? How do you approach teaching them? Do you provide or recommend a group experience for the student, in addition to the private lesson? Are you playful in your approach? Do you incorporate singing, movement, and improvisation into the lesson? What do you expect of my child with regard to cooperation, attention, practice? What do you expect of me?

### In Summary

Much of what we have been saying can be summarized in two short phrases:

- *Participate in music actively and frequently.*
- *Have fun doing it!*

If you can use what you have learned and experienced in our class to make each day of your lives together a little more musical than they might have been otherwise, we will have succeeded in our goal.

## *The Authors*

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## *Center for Music and Young Children®*

The Center for Music and Young Children (CMYC®), developer of Music Together®, was founded in 1985. CMYC is committed to helping families, caregivers, and early childhood professionals rediscover the pleasure and educational value of informal musical experiences. Rather than emphasizing traditional music performances, CMYC encourages family participation in spontaneous musical activity occurring within the context of daily life. CMYC recognizes that all children are musical and that every child needs a stimulating, supportive music environment to achieve basic competence in the wonderful human capacity for music-making.

For further information about our program, teacher training, parent education, child-safe instruments, or classes, both national and international, please contact:

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