MUSIC TOGETHER®
THE JOY OF FAMILY MUSIC™

Play Along™

Music Together's Newsletter for Families

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Teaching the Way Children Learn

During my first Music Together class, the teacher had a relatively easy time getting us adults to behave in proper music class fashion: we sat nicely in the circle, paid attention, and did our best to sing and move just like the teacher. Meanwhile, our various-aged children were crawling across the circle, toddling outside it, gleefully using a handy windowsill to pull themselves up to standing, hopping energetically, or just sitting and watching. There was even one child—alas, my very own—who ran in circles for the entire 45 minutes. (I was mortified.) Yet the teacher seemed blissfully oblivious to the fact that her class was falling apart. How could she be so sanguine about the fact that the children were not paying attention or learning anything?

Actually, a lot of learning was taking place. Even my running daughter inexplicably learned all the songs while seeming to pay no attention at all. I was seeing first-hand that very young children have a different way of learning than adults. They learn instinctively and constantly, absorbing the world almost through their very pores: they learn through immersion in their environment, through every interaction with adults and older children, through imitation and play.

Consider how adults so freely and unthinkingly help their child learn to speak. They tend to mirror back to baby the babbling sounds she makes—"aaaah," "ba-ba-ba-ba," etc.—and gradually help provide meaning for these sounds: "She just said "Ma-ma!" Both parent and child become engrossed in this game, reflecting their pleasure and delight back and forth to each other.

Just as this relaxed and playful give-and-take between a parent and his babbling child eventually leads to mastery of one's native language, so will musical play lead to the ability to sing in tune and with accurate rhythm. The hallmark of Music Together is this insight: that by using the same type of reinforcement and parent interaction that is so conducive to learning language, we can naturally, easily, impart the music of our culture to the growing child. This commitment to informal, naturally evolving music growth is known as "developmentally appropriate practice." This approach is child-centered; that is, we work from the ways very young children actually learn.

As Kenneth K. Guilmartin, founder/director of the Center for Music and Young Children says, "Early in my teaching career, I realized the most effective approach for working with the very young is to be *goal-supportive* rather than goal-directed. Music Together teachers learn to reinforce spontaneous behaviors that we know support development, but they don't directly instruct or require these behaviors from the children." This is an incredibly freeing, dynamic kind of teaching which has the teacher constantly observing and using what is happening in the moment, rather than having a pre-conceived goal for that day's class. For example, a teacher may notice the way a child is tapping rhythm sticks and integrate that into the song: "Let's all tap like Jake today!" Or, hearing a baby intoning "aaaah" during a song, she may lead the entire class in singing a verse on that syllable. By reflecting back to the child, we are validating her behavior and including her in a community of learners.

Another dimension to developmentally appropriate practice is understanding that very young children are gloriously unselfconscious about being just who they are. This means we can expect a full spectrum of music responses and behaviors in class, due

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Fall 2003

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

My first lesson in what might be called developmentally appropriate practice for adults came years before the development of Music Together, when my daughter was ready for preschool. After much research and discussion, we had finally chosen the preschool we wanted, and the big day had come to visit it with Lauren (now age 25!). Although her mother, a school social worker, and I, a composer and whatever-I-had-to-do-to-survive freelancer, happily considered ourselves apart from the "young urban professional" ethos of the time, we were probably oozing plenty of yuppie-style behavior that morning. We had chosen a decidedly "alternative" school, of course, but we really wanted this very special school to accept our daughter. And it seemed that our whole work/childcare/and-everything-else schedule depended on this outcome. Perhaps what we were experiencing was typical of parents everywhere, a kind of A-word list of parenting feelings, attitudes, and behaviors: Anticipation of our child's next step in life; Ambition for her Acceptance and Approval; and, of course, Anxiety for a successful outcome, a brilliant preschool career!

As we began our visit, Lauren's mother and I swept into the classroom greeting the director with eagerness and enthusiasm. Then we noticed our normally confident and extroverted 2.5-year-old shyly hanging back at the doorway, a cloud of doubt—even disapproval—on her brow, her body language indicating she'd rather be anywhere else. But before our dismay could turn into action, Mrs. Freeman smiled warmly at us and said, "That's a real sign of intelligence, hanging back like that, taking the time to assess the new situation." And then, gliding across the space that separated them and speaking in a totally natural, comfortable, and matter-of-fact, friendly manner, she said to my daughter, "Lauren, you can take this puzzle and bring it over there where there are lot of other interesting ones to look at while I talk to your mom and dad."

Mrs. Freeman not only understood children, she understood that any child comes with adults attached. And she was able to quickly assess the developmental state of both child and parents and deal with both in the moment. What she had said to us was not just a flattering remark about our child. It was an accurate observation, combined with a plausible interpretation that expanded our understanding. It enabled us to get out of our preconceived expectations for ourselves and Lauren and into a friendlier reality where there was room for us all to grow.

In Music Together, we try to facilitate a similar shift in awareness, away from the typical image of music class as lessons that lead to a performance, to a more developmental orientation where musical expression is natural and available to everyone on their own terms. We try to be catalysts in creating an environment, both in class and at home, where children can learn in their own way and in their own time from the model of the adults who love them.

Lauren—and her parents—did get accepted by the Montclair Cooperative School, where, both as a parent and eventually as a teacher, I was to learn many more lessons in the coming years about early childhood education. Above all, I learned how important parent involvement is, and how much a teacher can do to help make that happen.

Kenneth K. Guilmartin
Founder/Director, Music Together LLC

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to biological imperatives, such as the need to crawl or walk, and children's free expression of their varied temperaments.

Because children usually do not conform to an adult's idea of what "participation" should look like, part of the teacher's goal becomes helping the parent learn to see their child's actual level of engagement and music development. (This is particularly true in a music class, where images of formal lessons, steady progress, and an "end product," like a properly learned song or a recital, abound.) The crawling child, for example, may suddenly begin to rock back and forth on all fours clearly in response to the music. The toddler may look back at Mommy, see her doing small movements to accompany the song, and attempt to imitate her. The running child—who we would call a "kinesthetic learner"—may actually be running in time to the music. And the shy child, motionless on Daddy's lap, may be so focused that his eyes never leave the teacher and he absorbs everything. This type of learner is often the "sleeper," like the immobile little boy from class who came over once for a play-date. Upon discovering my daughter's basket of instruments—and her pitch-pipe!—he led us all in Music Together activities in a spot-on imitation of our teacher, carefully getting his starting note before each song.

Music Together teachers are trained to look for these and other responses to help them gauge the childrens' musical reactions to and involvement in the activities. We've seen again and again that the apparently unengaged child is actually intensely in the present moment, absorbing everything around her.

And we know that learning is occuring because we can see over time that behaviors gradually change and develop: the infant who simply eats his drum mallet will eventually wave it in the air; another semester he may begin to show "bursts" of rhythm, pulsing the mallet three or four times in a row before putting it back in his mouth; over time he will develop a steady pulse; and one day he'll be hitting that drum steadily, right on the beat!

How does this happen? The secret is that music ability is innate in all of us and, given the proper support, will flower as naturally and inevitably as learning to walk or talk. This is why it is so important for the adults to participate fully in class: they are creating the kind of immersive, immediate experience that children respond to and learn from. For millennia, music has been passed from generation to generation in group settings—as adults gathered crops, cooked together, celebrated milestones, or just hung out on the porch, and their children crawled or darted about, absorbing it all. Music Together didn't really invent developmentally appropriate practice; we're just giving families the chance to rediscover what our ancestors knew all along.

—Susan Pujdak Hoffman, CMYC Teacher Trainer

Ongoing Research and Development at CMYC®

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.

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Parent & Teacher

Parents and teachers alike are often amazed to discover what's really happening in the bouncing, crawling, running, or stock-still child in a Music Together class. Over the course of a three-day training in early childhood music education, we help future teachers—and by extension, the parents they'll meet—begin to see the learning expressed in children's behaviors via live demonstration classes and videotape.

On the first day, after a morning lecture on how children learn, the demonstration class offers trainees an opportunity to see how the Music Together program supports and nurtures children's natural potential in an easy playful way. The second day begins with an overview of the stages of a child's rhythm and tonal development, from cooing and reflexive movements all the way to singing in tune and keeping an accurate beat. The participants are often noticeably excited after this day's demonstration class, because they're beginning to see the meaning behind the behaviors they observe. With children of different ages and stages in the same class, they can see various behaviors that fall within the full developmental arc of music learning.

The last day begins with a videotape of two children engaged in a variety of music activities. This allows the trainer to pause frequently and really hone in on what may have been a fleeting movement or sound. Trainees learn that in order to make any assessment of where a child is on her journey toward basic music competence, they must take a whole series of mental "snapshots" of her music behaviors over time.

Learning to see the learning taking place in children is one of the most energizing and satisfying aspects of the teacher training. A similar eye-opening happens for many parents in the program: as the semester progresses, they begin to see what's really happening beneath the surface busyness of their own child's behavior—and that vision soon expands to include other children in class. This sense of community and shared delight in the children's development is one of the true joys of the Music Together experience for teacher and parent alike.

For more information on teaching Music Together, please feel free to call us at (800) 728-2692 x329 or visit us online at www.musictogether.com.

Playin' in the Kitchen

Have you looked at your songbook lately? While it's easy to pop the recording in the CD player, it's possible that in the busyness of your daily life, you haven't found time to sit and browse through your songbook—what a treasure awaits you. Music Together designed the book so the woodcut illustrations will delight your child, while the at-home suggestions at the bottom of each page will excite your imagination. We want to make it possible for you and your child to enjoy looking through the book *together*, as you would any story book.

But we hope you'll be inspired to do more than just look! The book is designed to guide and support your own musical expression, which in turn will enhance your child's. Some adults may believe they have no facility or "talent" for music—and may be surprised at how easy and doable the songbook suggestions are.

For example, the songbook for the fall "FIDDLE" collection suggests singing "A Ram Sam Sam" as an "I'm going to catch you!" game with your child. Or using "I've Got the Rhythm in My Head" while you move around and play rhythms on all the "instruments" in the room—on the door, on the table, on the sink, etc. The upcoming winter collection, "DRUM," has the song "Playin' in the Kitchen," which expands on this idea of "found" instruments, encouraging you to get out the pots and pans (or just the plastic bowls, if you're worried about the din) and play along.

Another easy way to make music at home is to make small substitutions in songs you already know. The DRUM Song Collection features "Clap Your Hands," which includes verses such as "tap your feet" and "walk around." Simply insert any activity your child enjoys—"roll the ball," "pet the dog," "play with blocks"—to create your own personal song. Aside from being fun, this kind of music-play may have unexpected benefits: singing "wipe, wipe, wipe your face" or "let's put on your shoes" tends to make these everyday tasks altogether more agreeable.

Spontaneous, family-centered music-making is powerfully bonding as well as enjoyable. Your own voice—no matter what your opinion of it may be—is the single most important and comforting sound in your child's life. Make the most of it.

Child-safe and creative instruments are available through Music Together LLC. For a brochure or to place an order, you may contact us in any of the following ways: call (800) 728-2692 x345 between 9 AM and 4 PM EST; email pmiller@musictogether.com; fax (609) 924-8457; or visit www.musictogether.com.

My son and I have been in Music Together for four semesters, and he's always been very engaged and participatory in class. This semester, I noticed that he participated less. He's almost three: do you think he's becoming bored or uninterested in class?

Call and Response

This is a very common developmental phase which doesn't necessarily indicate lack of interest. Your biggest clue lies in what's happening *at home:* if he's asking for the recording, singing the songs, or inventing his own spontaneous little tunes, then he's still connecting with class and absorbing a lot from it.

The younger child is busy receiving music information in class, and his brain is organizing it quite unconsciously (and unselfconsciously!). He's happy to wiggle, jump, sing, or chant without any notion or concern about whether he is doing things "correctly." The older child is beginning to see more and has new abilities for and interest in social connection; he may be attending more to the community aspect of class.

Also, being on the cusp of basic music competence (the ability to sing in tune and with accurate rhythm), he may begin to discriminate more and notice the ways his musical expression does not quite match that of the adults. He may feel less inclined to put himself in the spotlight in class, preferring to step back a little and simply observe. Then, safely at home, he may experiment with all the sounds and ideas he experienced in class, instinctively playing with and refining his ability to match pitch or keep rhythm.

Actually, this may be a crucial time to keep your child in class! It will help him integrate his musical and his social development. We sometimes focus on one aspect of our child's growth without fully realizing that for the child everything is interconnected. He may just be "putting it all together." Think of some musical growth you've noticed in your son and share this with him. Offering affirmation at this delicate developmental stage could really help him.

Outreach

As Music Together has grown over the years, we have increasingly looked for ways to reach out to families who otherwise might not know about or be able to afford the program. This outreach has been deeply satisfying on many levels, especially because it has been so well received. Among many such efforts is our work with a group of shelters under the auspices of the Kentucky Domestic Violence Association based in Frankfort, Kentucky. Eight shelters throughout the state have Music Together programs for each mother and child in their care.

According to Chris Kubale, project manager, "Music Together is an excellent program for both children and their mothers. When mothers are in trauma, their parenting skills sometimes suffer. They've been in a bad situation, are scared, and often have no resources. Music Together gives the mothers a chance to have fun with their children. Meanwhile, the Music Together teacher can model appropriate parent/child interaction and very subtly teach them parenting skills."

Why is Music Together so committed to outreach? Because we know that the richness and depth of the shared music experience has a unique impact on parenting skills and family bonding. And with visionary coordinators like Chris, we can work together in some small way to make a difference in family life and in the happiness and development of young children.

Music Together® is...

a research-based, developmentally appropriate music and movement program for infant, toddler, preschool, and kindergarten children with their parents, teachers, and other primary caregivers. A curriculum pioneer since 1987.

Visit us online for...

- Child-safe musical instruments
- Music Together classes near you
- Teacher training information
- Research, articles, stories

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