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Music Together's Newsletter for Families

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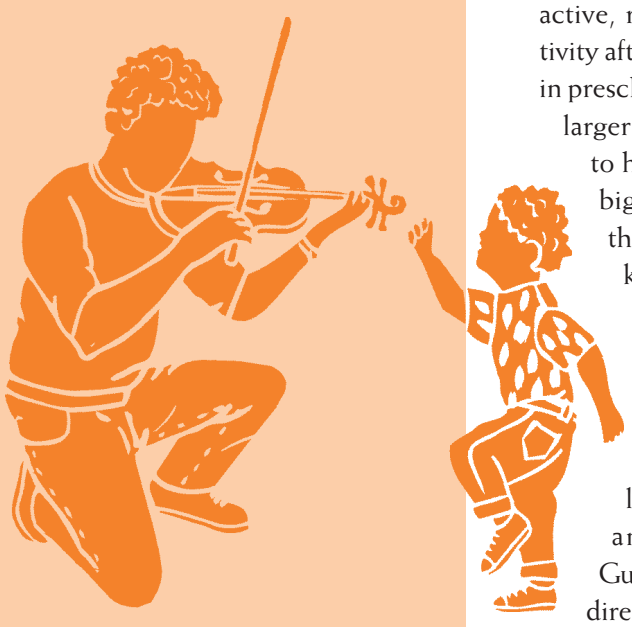

Music Learning Beyond Two-and-a-Half

When I was the director of a large Music Together center in Brooklyn, NY, I could reliably predict certain changes in my enrollment each fall: most of my two-and-a-half and three-year-olds would disappear from the program. In our neighborhood, virtually every child of that age began preschool, and the common wisdom among parents was that their children could now receive music enrichment at school.

This frustrated me, because I knew how much those children could still benefit from the comprehensive Music Together experience. However, even the best preschools often don't have the resources and the trained staff to offer the kind of music education program that children need to achieve basic music skills. In my daughter's preschool, for example—which had a wonderful program staffed by outstanding teachers—the music offering was typical of many schools: a woman came in with a guitar once a week to sing songs, affording little opportunity to move, no instruments to play, and no follow-through during the week.

Even after she started preschool, my daughter loved continuing her Music Together classes. I could sense her relief at having an active, relatively unstructured learning activity after a morning spent trying to be good in preschool. And as she was sorting out the larger world she now inhabited, it helped to have a place where she could be the big kid. An only child, she reveled in the attention she got from the younger kids in class and often had a one year old on her lap by lullaby time.

"The mixed-age format of a parent/child class allows older children to interact on many different levels with both younger children and adults," says Kenneth K. Guilmartin, Music Together founder/director and co-author. "Developmentally, they have a greater interest in social connections, and now they can take on a more active role in the music-making community."

While parents sometimes think the older child is too old to continue in a mixed-age class, or has already gleaned all he can from the program and should move on to other forms of enrichment, teachers have no doubt about the value of continuity. It's a magical time where the child's developmental stage meshes with his bank of experience in class and many new abilities begin to emerge. "We know that this age group [ages three to five] likes to feel important and worthwhile," says Julie Capuano, director of Music Together of Monroe/Newton in Connecticut. "They are so capable and able to do and explore ostinatos, rounds, rhythm and tonal patterns. And they take on a teaching role more and more as the younger ones follow their example."

Interestingly, the experienced Music Together child tends to stand out in the preschool as well. Over and again I heard from parents of my now-departed preschoolers that their teacher had commented on what they believed to be the child's uncommon musicality. However, I knew that they were no more inherently musical than the other kids at school. The only difference was that "my" kids had had the benefit of a developmentally appropriate music learning experience at an age when their brains were primed for it.

So what happens to the child who hasn't had a pre-preschool music education? The full development of their music ability is at risk, because they're not likely to receive meaningful music enrichment in school. According to research done by Lili Levinowitz, Ph.D., co-author of the Music Together program and Professor at Rowan University, only 16% of elementary school children—at best—can find their singing voices. What's striking about

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Fall 2004

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

At almost age two-and-a-half, my daughter Lauren joined the burgeoning ranks of children attending preschool. Typical of other baby boomers, her mother and I had high expectations for this new adventure: not only would Lauren enjoy it and learn a lot—we wanted to enjoy it and learn a lot, too. We wanted to be *involved!*

One of the things we especially liked about the parent coop we had chosen for Lauren was their commitment to music: recognizing its developmental importance, they combined weekly music classes with daily integration into the classroom curriculum. And once a week the whole school, from the nursery to the sixth graders, got together for an assembly and sing-along.

I remember how I would anticipate Lauren's return from school. When the carpool dropped her off after her morning at school, I'd fairly jump from my work at the piano to greet her. I wanted to know how the day had gone, wanted to see what was left in the lunch box, all that—*but I also wondered what had happened in music*.

"Daddy, daddy, we did a new song!" "Wow," I'd say, matching her enthusiasm, "how does it go?" What would follow usually contained a few identifiable bits of melody, but mostly it sounded like a meandering drone, accompanied by wide-eyed gestures and jumps. I'd make some guesses, trying to recreate the melody, and she'd correct me, repeating her unintelligible singing/droning/jumping thing. I could see she was frustrated—everyone at school could sing the song, and she thought she had just taught it to me! Instead of singing together, we would settle for *talking about* what had happened in music.

I now understand that, at age two-and-a-half (and without the benefit of 6 or 7 semesters of Music Together class from birth!), Lauren's ability to express a song was far less than her ability to experience or understand it. Today I would recognize her expression as being at levels of tonal and rhythmic development that were actually really good for her age. But I didn't have that perspective at the time.

Luckily, as the parent with the flexible free-lance schedule, I was often at the school helping out, and I could find out from her teacher how the song went. But most parents don't get to do this because their child's life becomes divided between two parallel but separate caretaking environments, home and school.

At the same time, the tradition of a repertoire of "songs everybody knows" has become as dormant as singing and dancing around the house. It's rare that both preschool teacher and parent know the same song well enough to recognize it when the child they care for and love attempts to recreate it. ("Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" comes to mind, as well as "Baa, Baa Black Sheep" and the alphabet song—three songs, but all with the same melody—not much music there.) Without a shared repertoire in common, most parents simply can't know what really goes on in preschool music.

The Music Together Preschool program model changes this. By "bringing the music home"™ in the form of recordings and songbooks, by giving parents some experience of the music and movement activities at special school events, and by inviting them to attend music class when possible, we create a musical bridge between both of the child's "homes." It's much better music education, and a lot more fun!

Kenneth K. Guilmartin
Founder/Director, Music Together LLC

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her study is that the percentage of children who could reliably sing in tune varied very little among the first through sixth grades, which tells us that simply growing up will not help the child develop the ability to sing. Just like reading, doing math, or playing soccer, singing is a learned skill; but, unlike these other skills, it is often not supported in our schools.

To answer this need for quality music education in the early years, Music Together provides its program to preschools. Music Together specialists come into the school for weekly classes, and, just as in parent/child classes, every child receives songbooks and recordings. The specialist gets the preschool teachers actively involved in music making, increasing their confidence and skills. This creates a situation where children are learning music in a natural, unforced way, and making music becomes a regular part of school life. Kids sing in the classroom, in the playground, and during transition times such as clean-up.

Music Together preschools are also discovering that a shared repertoire of songs is building better school community among children, teachers, and parents. One of the pilot programs has been in a number of the Milwaukee Public Schools' Head Start classrooms. They're finding that the children are going home and getting their parents involved in making music with them—and the parents are coming to school for more music. "Every two weeks, the teachers have a music circle in class and all parents are invited. Ninety percent of the parents regularly show up!" says Barry Applewhite, MPS music curriculum specialist. "After all, it's kind of hard to turn down your toddler."

Inspiring parents in this way is vital, because ultimately they are the key to their child's music education. If more preschools could offer an excellent music program which directly involves parents and helps them understand its intrinsic value, more parents might begin to question the lack of music education in elementary schools. If no music is offered before middle school, how will the student have developed an interest in playing in the school band? How will he have learned to keep accurate rhythm or even to recognize whether he is playing in tune? These are skills best fostered at a very young age, while the brain is laying down the neural pathways to decode the music of our culture. The process that is natural and almost effortless for a child from infancy through kindergarten becomes remedial for a fifth or sixth grader.

The good news is that we can give strong, continuing support to the growing child's music development through mixed-age Music Together classes and through its preschool program. Making music is not a boon granted to a privileged few. It is our birthright, at peril because we increasingly consume music passively. We no longer consider it natural even to walk down the street whistling, much less gather with friends around a piano or guitar. We're at risk of losing a natural, joyful part of being human. By continuing to offer the growing child rich musical experiences in our community and family lives, we can develop not only their music skills but their love of music as well.

—Susan Pujdak Hoffman, Certified Music Together Trainer and 'PlayAlong' Editor

For more information about bringing Music Together into your preschool, contact the Preschool Department at preschoolinfo@musictogether.com or (800) 728-2692 x399.

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

People may talk about the Terrible Twos, but some of us would contend that the Threes are Terribler. Our child now has the vocabulary to openly defy us, the strength of will to really dig in her heels, a new inventiveness for truly spectacular tantrums—and has stopped napping. Many parents lucky enough to get through Three relatively unscathed are often blindsided by the discovery that Four equals Two plus Two. It's a developmental phase, requiring patience and delicacy of response from a parent who may not be feeling so tender in the moment.

The three- or four-year-old, struggling so hard for independence, tries to keep order in his life by appointing himself the authority and by accepting the authority of almost any adult who is not his parent. Music Together class is a place where both these tendencies can be utilized, even embraced, and the older child can blossom.

In a parent-child mixed-age class, the older child gets to be the big kid, regardless of her place in the family at home. The teacher can help reinforce and celebrate this by offering the child special responsibilities or musical challenges.

Since the older child can often repeat rhythm patterns with great accuracy, many teachers offer them a special pattern of their own, either to repeat publicly or to whisper to their parent. The child might help distribute instruments; dim the lights for lullaby time; or dance with a younger child. And, of course, this is the age where the child is full of ideas for song variations: new animals to sing about; different places for the train to go; different ways to move our bodies or click our sticks.

This is also a wonderful age to focus on songbook use. Parents should consider using the book more often at home and encouraging their child to bring it to class as well. By singing along as he looks at the page, the child is strengthening his pre-literacy in both music and language. Parents and teachers can work together to utilize the unique talents (and challenges) of the older child. And maybe—for forty-five minutes at least—the parent can hang the power struggle at the door, along with the coats.

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.

Bringing the Music Home™

The image of learning music at our parent's knee is a powerful and pleasant one, and it plays an important part in how Music Together has been imagined from the start. The program was designed for adult participation, and classes are full of ideas for parents on how to make up verses to songs, to relax and improvise, and to get down with their child and literally play music. We know that this non-formal interaction with loved ones is the best learning model for young children. By inspiring parents to make music at home with their kids, we're not only fostering a joyful activity but strengthening music development as well.

So how do we keep families involved when the child is getting Music Together in her preschool? One way is through the materials. At a preschool with Music Together, each child receives songbooks and recordings, just like in parent-child classes. Teachers often use the songbook in class to jump-start dramatic play or music discussion: what's happening in this picture? What kind of instrument is this? Can you hear it in the song?

But what really delights parents—and if you've ever gotten a one-word reply to the question "What'd you do at school today?" you can appreciate this—is that the child comes home so eager to share with them what happened in music. They find themselves happily following their child's lead, learning new songs and looking at the songbook for ideas to try at home.

In a sense, with older children, Music Together in preschool reverses the generational flow of Music Together parent-child classes. The initiators are now the newly independent—and, let's face it, often bossy—three- and four-year-olds who are "bringing the music home"™ to teach their parents. "The kids like the Music Together songs and they take the music home and teach it to their families," says Miss Laqueesha, the assistant teacher in one of the Milwaukee Public Schools' Head Start classrooms. "If someone at home doesn't get the song at first, the child says, 'No, it goes like this, like we do at school!'"

And while that might be slightly more directive than the usual Music Together custom, at least the music is still passing from generation to generation.

Child-safe and creative instruments are available at 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 storeorders@musictogether.com; fax to (609) 924-8457; or visit www.musictogether.com.

I'm confused. I signed my child up for a music class, but the teacher says that I have to sing and dance too! I feel like my dancing is only so-so and my singing voice is pretty dreadful. Why is my participation important?

Call and Response

Children learn by imitating their loved ones. Whether or not you think of yourself as being musical, you are your child's most important role model for becoming a music maker. According to her *temperament,* she may be an observer in class or an enthusiastic participant. But the *disposition* to enjoy music will come from her perception of whether you are enjoying class yourself. If you think of how an adult may unwittingly pass on, say, a fear of dogs to a very young child just by being nervous around them, you can get a sense of how our tendencies might influence our child.

According to Lilian Katz, a preeminent early childhood education researcher whose work[1] influenced the Music Together program, children learn skills, knowledge, and dispositions from the adults around them. While the teacher can pass on music skills and learning to your child, it is you and all the loved ones with whom he has a primary bond who will influence his disposition for music.

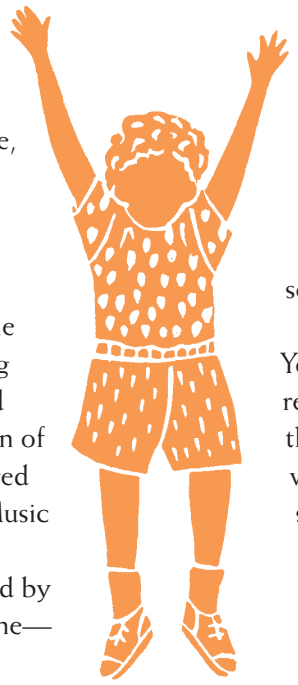
And your participation is vital to the class as a whole, too. You're helping every child in class get the benefit of a whole family community experience where adults and children are enjoying themselves while singing and moving. So have fun—and you'll be doing the best thing to support your child's music development.

[1]Katz, L. & M.E.Hoffman (1985), "Recent Research on Young Children: Implications for Teaching and Development Implications for Music Education" in *The Young Child and Music: Contemporary Principles in Child Development and Music Education*, J.Boswell, ed.

Outreach for UNICEF

Music Together has initiated several outreach projects over the years, bringing the program to Head Start schools, teenage moms, and victims of domestic violence, to name a few. This holiday season we offer everyone a way to get involved in our newest project, to benefit UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund).

In 1986, Kenneth K. Guilmartin composed a song for the Montclair Cooperative School, where he was developing what was to become Music Together. Originally entitled "Solstice Song," it was written for the school's celebration of the fortieth anniversary of UNICEF. The song, rearranged and retitled "May All Children," appeared in the 2002 Music Together *Sticks Song Collection* in memory of the events of September 11, 2001. Thousands of families were touched by its simple, heartfelt wish that our children—that everyone—should live in peace.



In an effort to keep world peace and children's well-being foremost in our minds, Mr. Guilmartin is making "May All Children" available on a special website and is donating his royalties to the United States Fund for UNICEF. It is his hope that those who work with children or with music in any capacity, whether in schools, church groups, or choruses, will use this song and sing out its wish for the world.

You are invited to download the music at www.musictogether.com, registering performances to track the many ways the song reaches thousands of families around the world. The download is free, but we encourage a donation based on music publishing industry standards, 100% of which goes to UNICEF.

As we approach this holiday season, the many Music Together center directors and teachers the world over wish you "…peaceful minds, peaceful hearts, peace on earth."

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.

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