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Singin' in the Aisles

My daughter and I sing in the supermarket. She considers this natural, being a Music Together child raised by a Music Together teacher. We've been singing every day since she

can remember, and now we're adding the pop songs playing in the supermarket to her considerable repertoire. "Oh listen!" I'll say, and then I teach her the chorus to "It's My Party and I'll Cry If I Want To" or "Yellow Polka Dot Bikini." Only once has this habit of ours offended her adolescent sensibility: it was that time we were over by the bratwurst singing "Crocodile Rock" and a man neither of us knew spontaneously began dancing with me. Emma fled to the cereal aisle.

Later, when she was speaking to me again, I decided to reveal to her the identity I'd kept secret all these years. I was not just her Mom, prone to instigating mortifying scenes; I was Guerilla Music Maker, dedicated to inspiring bits of musical whimsy in public places. She was pretty impressed, albeit grateful that I'd never found it necessary to wear tights and a cape. In fact, she too now saw this incident as a successful incursion. Really, what were the chances that this guy had awakened that morning planning to dance in the supermarket?

It's a relatively recent development in our culture for spontaneous public displays of music to be considered unusual. After all, there was a time when, in order to hear music, you had to make it yourself. At the turn of the century, most middle class families had pianos in their living rooms, and commonly gathered 'round to sing together. Men whistled walking down the street. Movie-goers enjoyed a "follow the bouncing ball" feature, singing along to a canned soundtrack while lyrics were displayed on the screen. Extended

families lived in close proximity, and children learned songs firsthand from parents and grandparents.

This personal, direct transmission of song has been all but lost in our culture, as have group musical experiences. "Not only are children not getting the opportunity to develop music skills in social settings, they're not getting the chance to make music at home with their primary caregivers," says Ken Guilmartin, Music Together founder/director and coauthor.

He points out that the field of early childhood music education is relatively new. "We never needed it before," he says, "but now, lacking both community and at-home support for music making, there's no context or model with which to stimulate children's musical growth. We're at a point in our cultural history where music in childhood is at risk."

It's difficult for parents to rescue their children musically if they themselves have had limited experience with live music making. It's a circular phenomenon: if a person hasn't grown up singing, it's likely she'll lack the confidence to join others in song; but joining a community of singers would be a surefire way to use and develop her singing voice.

A program like Music Together is therefore important for child and adult alike. When I first became a center director, I thought the parents signing up would be those who had enjoyed a rich musical childhood and knew firsthand the lasting joy this brings. To my surprise, a good percentage of adults were signing up precisely because they lacked music experience, and felt something fundamental was missing from their lives. They wanted to give their children something they'd never had, and they wanted help in doing that. Most of these parents received a bonus they hadn't

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Spring 2005

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

"Kenny doesn't sing anymore," said my great-grandmother to my grandma, probably when I was about four. "He used to sing all the time!" I uncovered this bit of history years later when I interviewed my grandma about my development as a singer—rather, the lack of it. Even though I had become an accomplished musician, I still couldn't "speak" it—I couldn't sing. What had happened to that little singing boy?

I do remember singing—loudly—when I was supposed to be napping; I always had a hard time napping when they wanted me to. Maybe I was two or three: "Home, home on the raaange..." Other than that single memory, my recollections of myself singing are all of the "you wouldn't want to be in the room at the same time" variety. I was definitely one of those required to mouth the words in the kindergarten holiday pageant. A few years later, inspired by Elvis and Bill Haley and the Comets, I wanted to learn guitar. But then I tried to replicate my step-father's four-note melody for tuning the guitar strings: "My dog has fleeeeeeaaas!" I wailed. A bit shocked, he countered, "Whassamatter, ya' tone deaf?"

If you laughed a little during the last paragraph, perhaps recognizing that all-too-familiar gap between human aspiration and ability, you know that it's especially common in our culture to feel that way about music. But at the time I was crushed. Gradually I learned to laugh, too—to make jokes about "my terrible voice" and, in secret envy, to joke and even sneer about the singing of others.

It's mysterious how life evolves. In a story far too long to tell here, I eventually learned how to play instruments, first the drums, and then the piano, neither of which I had to tune myself. Miraculously, it seems, I began composing music—jazz, blues, rock instrumentals—and one day, I discovered I was the musical director of a major theatrical production in New York. The soon-to-be-famous actors Sam Waterston and Christopher Walken were in the cast. The well known director asked me to arrange and orchestrate a few songs by a Broadway composer into the equivalent of a full-length film score—no problem. *But I was also expected to teach these people to sing the songs!* Somehow I managed to do the gig, but I was more frustrated than ever at the gap between my inner feeling for song and my outward ability to express it. It wasn't until I was flunking sight-singing at the conservatory and took up study with a special voice teacher that the reclamation of my singing began, a project that is deeply connected to the development of Music Together.

And what I have learned is this:

- There is no such thing as "tone deaf"—everyone can sing, just as everyone can talk;
- All too often, parents, teachers, music teachers, and children themselves conclude that "talent" is lacking, when it is actually poor environment and/or education;
- As a culture we are confused about the difference between performing music for an audience and participating in it for our own enjoyment and benefit. The musical equivalent of a game of catch (as opposed to competitive sports) is largely absent;
- If I could learn to sing, anybody can!

Decades later, I've composed opera and choral music, as well as Music Together songs, and have sung it all, even for audiences! But more important than what I can do is what *you* can do—go grab your kid and enjoy a little singing together!



Kenneth K. Guilmartin
Founder/Director, Music Together LLC



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expected: a growing ease with their own singing voice, which opened up new possibilities for making music both at home and in public.

Music Together supports this music discovery by providing a village context within which music can be learned and shared. The songs and chants are experienced communally in the classroom, with the recording providing an important link to making music at home. Not only that, but the same Music Together song collection is being used during the same semester at over 1000 loca-

tions worldwide. This common repertoire shared by a network of teachers and families gives rise to some wonderful encounters.

When I asked the teachers on the Music Together listserv about unexpected family interactions through shared Music Together songs, I received an extraordinary number of stories. I was told about musical encounters on airplanes, at train stations, on playgrounds, and in community pools, where strangers spontaneously began singing along as a parent sang a Music Together song to her child. There were stories about grandparents getting their own set of the current collection's materials so they could share the songs over the phone with their grandchildren—sometimes with several grandchildren in different states. There was even one boy who insisted the family sing "Hello" to each and every person at the Thanksgiving table before starting their feast.

The longest-distance story came from Andrea Nye, director of Music Together of Hong Kong. Her friend Lynn traveled to England for her grandmother's 100th birthday. Her brother and his wife made the trip from the US with their 15-month-old baby, whom Lynn had never met. As she entered her grandmother's house, she heard her sister-in-law upstairs singing the "Hello Song" to the baby. She walked into the room singing right along. It gave Lynn instant rapport with her niece, and provided a bond for two women who hadn't had much chance to get to know each other. "Although we still live on other sides of the world," she said, "it made us feel very close."

How is it that sharing a simple song makes us feel close? If you think about it, we are literally in tempo and in tune with each other when we share a music experience. We listen to each other, attend to nuances of emotion, and back each other up. I think people are hungry for that kind of interaction in our increasingly splintered world.

When I think of these stories of strangers spontaneously blending together in song, I have great hopes of getting everyone in my supermarket boogying down the aisles with their carts. Perhaps my daughter will embrace her heritage—nay, destiny—as a Guerilla Music Maker, now that we've gotten that one guy dancing. Judging by the smiles we get as we bop along together, it can't be long before others are joined to the cause.

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

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 in Music Together classes are sometimes startled when their teacher invites them to sing like a squeaky mouse, swoop their voices up into a siren, or make animal sounds. In fact, all these apparently silly activities are designed to help develop the singing voice. These sounds wake up the higher voice and expand the vocal range.

Many adults have difficulty finding their singing voices, partly because they use a limited range even in their speaking voices. It's become common in our culture to speak with little expression or dynamics, even in a near-monotone.

Music Together song collections are crafted so families can hear and experiment with a wide range of sounds. The songs are not limited to a few major keys, as is much of children's music. Instead, we use a variety of tonalities, such as minor, aeolian, dorian, and mixolydian. If you're currently thinking, "mixo-*what?*" well, that's okay. These tonalities provide a large music vocabulary of sounds: it's not necessary to know the "grammar" of music theory in order to experience and enjoy them.

Children, whose brains busily sort and categorize everything they experience, process the similarities and differences among these

tonalities and gradually gain an understanding of how the music of our culture is organized. They may not be able to articulate it, but they can hear it, feel it, and sing it.

One way the teacher helps facilitate this mental organization is by singing all the songs in class in the same keys used on the recording. This consistency between the recording and the classroom experience is a tremendous help for the child. When she's ready to start singing herself, she'll have a mental sound image for each song. And because the songs are pitched within in the range that most children begin to sing, she'll be able to match that mental sound when she vocalizes.

Some adults, even teachers sometimes, may find the keys slightly high at first. But with classroom experience and vocal play, their singing range does expand over time. So this semester, when your teacher asks you to howl like "The Sad Little Puppy," take a deep breath and howl away. Strange as it seems, you're actually practicing your singing.

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.



All around the Kitchen

What can you do at home to support your child's vocal development? Sing! Whether or not you feel you're a good tonal model (see "Call & Response" on this page), you can still set an example for making music a part of daily life. Sing while you're changing your child's diaper, helping her dress, or cooking her lunch. As children acquire language, they often make up spontaneous songs about their activities, and you can help support that tendency by singing along and making up songs, too.

An easy way to do this is to put a personal slant on songs from class. "Dancing with Teddy," from this spring's Maracas Song Collection, can become "Dancing with Lauren," or Jack, or even the family dog Pookie. Similarly, you can insert your child's name into the song "Jumpin' Josie," and sing verses like "everyone takin' a bath now, Lilli," "everyone gettin' their shoes on, Henry," "everyone eatin' their broccoli, Daniel," etc.

A song like "Train to the City" offers endless possibilities for invention. Sing about places the train could go, such as the playground or the beach. Or turn the train into a car, a tractor, or a hot air bal-

loon, and sing about where they go. You could even wind up singing about animals: "this dinosaur is stompin' around now," "this big lion is really roarin'," etc. You don't need to worry about making up brilliant verses that rhyme and scan properly. It's a safe bet that any child under the pre-adolescent stage will be delighted by all your inventions, the sillier the better. Moreover, your child will get the message that there's no "wrong" way to play with music.

Another way to play is to get out some pots, plastic bowls, and wooden spoons and create a kitchen orchestra. Bundt pans make wonderful gongs, and tightly sealed containers filled with rice or dried pasta are excellent shakers. The kitchen—already a warm, nurturing place in the home—is a natural place to share some spontaneous family music making. Wherever you choose to play, it's nice to know that having musical fun not only helps your child's music development, but his general development as well.

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.

My teacher really makes me feel comfortable singing in class, even though I know I'm not always in tune. But what if my child follows my example instead of the teacher's? Will she learn to sing in tune even if I can't?



It's so important that you're singing even though you're unsure of your ability; your example will give your child the disposition to become a music maker, too. Over time, he can learn to be tonally accurate even if you're not, since he will naturally incline toward the predominant tunings he hears in the culture around him. This is why listening to the CD and being in class are so helpful. "Singing together not only strengthens what children are learning at home," says Dr. Lili Levinowitz, Music Together Director of Research and co-author, "but also normalizes any idiosyncrasies which might otherwise develop."

It's similar to the way children of immigrants unconsciously compare the language sounds of their parents with those of the surrounding culture. Even if the parents speak English with a foreign accent, their children instinctively adapt to what they hear in the neighborhood or on TV. They grow up speaking like a Southerner, a Mid-westerner, or a kid from the Bronx.

The ability to adapt doesn't end with childhood. Many Music Together parents have discovered their singing voices by participating in class over several semesters. They're able to practice singing and to explore their voices in a way they haven't done before, and to do so in a playful, anxiety-free environment. So please don't think you "can't" sing in tune; it's possible that you're *not yet* singing in tune, and that you and your child will develop this skill together.



Outreach

For many Music Together center directors, part of the pleasure in the work comes from feeling so integral a part of their community. Some become inspired to broaden that community, reaching out to groups who might not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in a Music Together class. Jodi Hirth, director of Music Together of the Treasure Coast in Stuart FL, has formed a special class for the Jensen Beach Elementary School, which is the seat of a countywide program for autistic children.

The class, funded through grant money received by the Florida Arts and Dance Company, includes twenty autistic children ranging in age from three-and-a-half to seven years old. Once a week, they come by bus to Jodi's center for class, along with several teachers and aides. "Their facial expressions change when they walk in the door," she says. Although there is a wide range of affect among the children, many are actively



participating and expressing themselves musically. "The music unlocks something inside," Jodi says, "and the children start coming out of their idiosyncrasies."

"These children are making connections in the classroom now that they would not normally be making were it not for the music program," says Michelle Liebowitz, a special education teacher at Jensen Beach Elementary. Recently, one boy who is particularly withdrawn began to approach Jodi during a chant. She softened her voice, he came closer, and—suddenly, for the first time—he looked directly into her eyes and began swaying in time to the chant.

Jodi is thrilled with the growth she sees in her special class, but she also believes autistic children can flourish in a regular Music Together class, too. "It's about feeling the music," she says, "whether they have special needs or not."

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