



# Play Along™

Music Together's Newsletter for Families

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## Children As Natural Researchers

Back when my daughter had just turned three and had been in Music Together class for a few semesters, she came running to me one day and said, "Listen! 'Ba-ba, ba-ba, ba-ba, ba.'"

That's 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star!' Can you hear that? Can you hear that?" I was almost as excited as she was. Emma had heard not just the melody of a song, but its underlying rhythmic structure as well. She was so thunderstruck by this discovery that she created a game. We took turns tapping out songs on each other's backs and then tried to guess what they were. She was surprisingly accurate at tapping out the patterns of songs she knew and was readily able to identify most of the songs I tapped back.

Was my daughter a super-gifted musical genius? Well, as her mother I still think that's a distinct possibility. But as a Music Together teacher, having seen so many children have a similar rush of understanding, I know that Emma's "ta-da!" moment had a lot to do with music class. My guess is that her insight about the rhythmic structure of songs stemmed from the spoken rhythm patterns that are part of the Music Together program. They were one of her favorite activities in class, and she enjoyed saying them along with the recording as well. Somehow, by playing with these building blocks of rhythm, she had learned there were ways of "stacking" them to help create a song.

Learning can seem like such a mystery in children. The child moves through the world simply absorbing tastes, smells, sights, and sounds—and winds up walking and talking. How does a child learn first to understand language and then to speak it? How does he learn to hear music and then express it?

Children's brains seem to be wired with a biological imperative to be playful yet relentless researchers. They have a passionate

busyness, and their lives are a series of experiments in figuring out how the world works. Although we adults might not consider putting baked beans up your nose or scissoring out chunks of your hair to be valid research, the curious child does these things in an earnest spirit of inquiry.

"We are not born being able to sing in tune or move to the beat," says Lili Levinowitz, Music Together program coauthor and Director of Research, "just as we are not born speaking our language. But we are born with the qualitative processes in our brain to do that. In order to figure out the language or to figure out music, you have to be exposed to it. Then, through a spiral of exposure and opportunity to experiment, we figure out how to talk or how to sing in tune or move to a beat. It's an organic process; once we are exposed, we teach ourselves."

One of the groundbreaking studies in how children learn music was conducted by Gladys Evelyn Moorehead and Donald Pond at the Pillsbury Foundation School. For several years they observed children ages one-and-a-half to six who were offered an opportunity for unlimited music expression. Simple instruments such as drums, gongs, marimbas, maracas, and sand blocks were freely available, to be explored by the children at will. No set music time existed at the school: music play simply became a natural part of the flow of the children's daily activities.

In fact, Moorhead and Pond found no clear demarcation between musical and nonmusical experience for children. Speech seemed to move into chant and then into song and back to speech in a fluid continuum; a movement might segue into a rhythmic stamp or march; an instrument might be played with and then tossed aside to resume a movement.

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## Dear Parents and Caregivers,

What does it mean when we say that Music Together is a “research-based” program? In addition to employing the research of others, we do three types of research on an ongoing basis: basic research, action research, and applied research. (For definitions, examples, and more information, visit [www.musictogether.com](http://www.musictogether.com) and see About Us/R&D). These four sources continually inform our creative work on program content, varied applications of the program, and teacher training.

Although “research” is typically seen as a rigorous discipline framed in statistics, it really means any study or inquiry. The questioning curiosity of a young child, always wanting to know how, or why—or why not!—is research in its purest state. It’s an attitude of mind that expresses itself in physical reality through observation and experimentation—better known as “play” in children. As with children’s play, a research attitude leads to experiments that are fundamentally creative, unlocking the door to discovery and wonder.

You limit the creative potential of research—and devalue your common sense—if you always rely on it to “prove” something, to be the sole authority. Since no research is definitive, we maintain a research attitude about the research! In our spirit of ongoing inquiry, we are always wondering what’s new and wanting to try this or test that. Yet this expansion of our knowledge base is tempered by what seems natural, what feels right, what actually works in the field with real teachers, real parents, real children. The result is that Music Together is not a fixed program but rather an evolving and dynamic one.

For both of us, research played a key role at the beginning of Music Together. Synthesizing research from early childhood as well as music education helped Ken understand and verify what he always knew in his heart: everyone truly is musical and can express this ability easily if the right things happen in the first years of life. Lili was a newly trained Ph.D. researcher when her son was born—suddenly she held the first longitudinal study in her arms! And, as she met other new mothers, she discovered that most of them didn’t sing lullabies to their children. She resolved to apply her training in research to discover why this was so and what could be done about it.

Actually, this research attitude permeates everything we do at Music Together. We train teachers to let their teaching be informed more by their observations and experiments than by their expectations of what the classroom reality “should” be. Likewise, although most adult participants may begin with traditional expectations about behavior and “progress,” pretty soon they are participating in a much more developmentally appropriate way. Not only are they modeling having musical fun themselves, but they are appreciatively observing their child’s musical adventures and assisting in his experiments.

In the end, research is essentially opinion based on interpretations of facts. We continually receive and respond to such information, contributing our own discoveries and interpretations of facts, along with our opinions about them. And the consensus we keep coming up with is that music is so fundamental to our humanness that everybody ought to have the chance to make it *in ways that work for them*. We know that, if the model and opportunity is available throughout early childhood, children will quite easily develop the basic skills they need to participate freely and with pleasure in the music of our culture—with their families, in school, at parties and sports events, and in lessons, if they so choose. Not sure you agree? Well, go check the research literature!

Kenneth K. Guilmartin  
Founder/Director, Music Together LLC

Lili M. Levinowitz, Ph.D., Rowan University Professor of Music Education and CMYC Director of Research

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It was clear that children did not learn in the same way as adults do. They were completely involved in discovering how to move through the world, and they cycled among moments of experience, imitation, repetition, and variation. What appeared to be random movement from activity to activity—“just play”—was a learning process as focused and intricate as that of any adult trying systematically to learn tennis.

Music Together tries to catalyze this same kind of learning in its parent-child classes and through its innovative “Bringing the Music Home” preschool program. All the components of the Music Together program—the classroom activities, tonal patterns, rhythm patterns, and movement sequences, as well as the recording and the songbook—have been conceived and configured to support rhythmic and tonal discovery through musical play. “We have a developmental point of view about music-learning in children,” says Kenneth K. Guilmartin, Music Together founder/director and coauthor. “Since all children are musical, they will naturally explore and express this aptitude when provided the right environment. The reason Music Together looks and feels so different is that it’s not really out of traditional music education, which in our culture has been so dominated by the goal of performing and by the ‘music lessons’ which prepare you to perform. We come more from the early child-

hood tradition—discovering the variety of ways children learn and express music, and figuring out how best to support that growth.”



One way in which parents can support music learning is to provide a rich enough environment for that “spiral of exposure and experimentation” to take place. Just as children may have different levels of vocabulary based on the language use of adults around them, their ability to think and play musically depends greatly on their environment. “A child needs enough musical ‘fodder’ to experiment, to compare and contrast sounds and learn to decode the

music of his culture,” says Lili. “This is why we offer such a rich mix of tonalities and meters in our song collections. It’s like providing a literacy base for music.”

In essence, Music Together offers a buffet table with everything the child needs to develop music competence spread out before him, to try out and taste as he wishes. Once the child is brought to that table, his natural inclination to explore and investigate will take over, and learning will occur naturally, joyfully, inevitably. It’s a lovely meeting place for fellow researchers: the teachers and grown-ups who create the experience, and those who toddle through and validate it.

—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.

[www.musictogether.com](http://www.musictogether.com) • (800) 728-2692

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# ■ ■ Parent & Teacher ■ ■

Music Together attracts a diverse group of people who train to be teachers. While all have a love of music and are drawn to children, their backgrounds vary. Some are musicians or dancers; some are trained educators or music therapists; and some are Music Together moms and dads who simply love the program. What they all have in common after the training is the secure base—a research base—which supports their work in the classroom.

In a three-day training, they learn much more than how to present song activities and prepare lesson plans. They learn about children's music development and how to support music learning in a developmentally appropriate way. Perhaps most importantly, they learn to think of themselves as researchers, too, and to have an open, curious, and flexible attitude about what works in class.



Music Together central), this willingness to change in the face of evidence, brings out the best in Music Together teachers. People who have taught for ten years or more still feel fresh, because they're still exploring and deepening their understanding.

In this way, the network of Music Together teachers has become part of the research base itself, forming a teaching-learning community which actively circulates information. Through an online listserv, teachers discuss issues which have come up for them with their classes. The same query might be answered by a person trained in child development, a music therapist, a teacher who encountered a similar situation, and a mom who dealt with it in her own child. What a wealth of information!

It is a unique strength of the Music Together program that the research attitude begins with the program's co-authors and extends throughout its entire culture. It keeps the program vibrant, and it makes for some very interested and interesting teachers.

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](http://www.musictogether.com).

This is essential, for teachers will soon encounter mysteries such as the activity which works brilliantly with the 9 AM class, yet flops in the 10 AM. They'll learn how important it is to discover the personality of each class and how to gauge whether and where to adjust the day's lesson plan. The research attitude encouraged by the "Mothership" (as teachers affectionately call

## Me, You, and We

Many parents, whether they realize it or not, instinctively have what might be called a research attitude about their children. Listen to a group of new mothers and you'd think you're at a symposium: they argue the merits of sharing a family bed, they offer theories on which foods cause colic and whether a little quality TV is really okay; they treat more experienced mothers like keynote speakers with doctorates in teething studies. They inquire, discuss, and debate—and learn a lot in the process.

What would it mean to have a research attitude toward your child's experiences with Music Together? You could simply observe how she is, rather than worry about acculturated ideas of how she "should" be in a music class. Does she rush right in and participate? Does she prefer to observe? These clues to her temperament can tell you a lot about your child's learning style.

You can experiment at home, and perhaps even replicate the results of university researchers. Try singing to your baby with greatly exaggerated mouth movements. Do you find that he focuses on your mouth or perhaps even starts moving his? Watch to see if your toddler seems to make movements at home which she may have

seen in class. Is she just flexing her fingers, or is she really playing "Open and Shut Them?" Children process things differently than adults do, so we often see a response well after the initial stimulus.

With an older child, do a study on whether your own singing behavior impacts his. When you sing more often around the house, perhaps making up verses to Music Together songs, do you hear more spontaneous song from your child? For any age, experiment with the suggested activities in the songbook, and see which excite your child's imagination the most.

Your growing child is a natural scientist, curious about and ready to experiment with everything she encounters. Recapture some of that spirit of inquiry, and you'll notice little things you may otherwise have missed in your child's music development. Forget the lab coat: just open your senses as you play musically with your child. You'll be surprised by how much fun research can be.

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](mailto:storeorders@musictogether.com); fax to (609) 924-8457; or visit [www.musictogether.com](http://www.musictogether.com).

**I've heard that research has shown a connection between music training and excellence in math. Will enrolling in music class enhance my child's ability to do well in school?**



Various studies have indeed shown music to be a support for other kinds of learning. Some research has shown a causal link between music training and spatial reasoning in young children, while other studies have found a strong association between music instruction and reading ability.

Music is a uniquely integrative experience, which coordinates our mind/body/spirit in a way few other endeavors do. Our hearing, vision, voice, body, and breath all become involved, and our emotions are given expression. In these ways, music learning clearly supports all learning, as well as connecting us to the musicians and other people with whom we share the music experience.

However, even though music can be a powerful learning medium, we at Music Together strongly believe that music is a way of knowing in itself and is valuable for its own sake. The composer Aaron Copland once said, "You may be sitting in a room reading [a] book. Imagine one note struck on the piano. Immediately that one note is enough to change the atmosphere in the room—proving that the sound element in music is a powerful and mysterious agent."

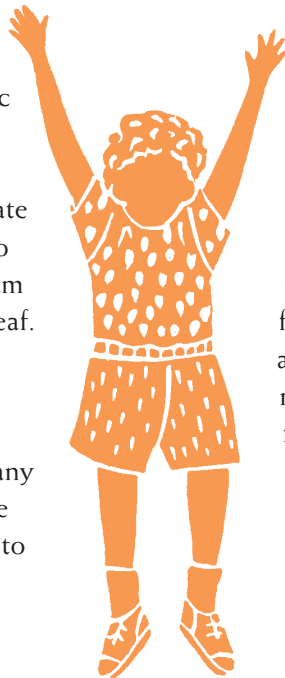
It is quite possible that music will help your child succeed in school. But the joy of music—its true benefit—is both more basic and more profound: it will help your child experience more fully what it means to be human.



# Outreach

A Music Together application which may at first glance seem surprising is the work which Linda Criscitello, director of Music Together of Vienna, VA, is doing with the Northern Virginia Resource Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Fairfax County Public Schools. Through one of only sixteen state grants awarded by the Rehabilitation Services Incentive Fund to support innovative ideas, she brings the Music Together program to a class of children ranging from moderately to profoundly deaf.

Linda wears a small mike hooked into an amplification system wired into the room, which can be directly accessed by the children's hearing aids. "Other than that, the class is similar to any other Music Together class I teach," says Linda. "It has made me realize what a strong visual and rhythmic component we bring to our teaching. The children can follow my movements and rock and bounce to the beat."



Many aspects of Music Together are well suited to helping deaf and hard-of-hearing children develop their auditory skills. Sound awareness can be enhanced by using movements that go along with the music, as well as by a technique known as "sound on-sound off." Tonal patterns, for instance, allow space to experience a contrast between hearing and not hearing, and Linda has found that some children actually return the tone. Linda also sees tremendous benefit for the parents, some of whom may be struggling to understand what hearing loss means for their child. "Some parents may feel sad or think they don't know what to do or how to be with a child who's 'different'," she says. "In class, they are elated. They sing and dance with their children and interact with them so joyously. Suddenly, their child isn't so different anymore."

## 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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