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## Discovering the Joys of Family Music

Back when I was pregnant, my husband used to sing a lullaby to my belly every night. We knew the baby inside could hear, and it felt special to share a nightly ritual with this

miraculous being we hadn't met, yet already loved. How wonderful, how inexpressibly sweet it was, to lie there each night as my husband leaned over my swollen belly and sang ... the theme song to "Gilligan's Island."

I couldn't fault him. In fact, I thought this bouncy ditty was preferable to many he might have chosen from his guitar-playing days: hard rock, aching folk tunes of lost love, or angst-ridden protest songs.

As it turns out, my husband is atypical in having any kind of repertoire at all. Research done out of the University of Toronto by Sandra Trehub shows that the average North American family knows only 3–5 songs to sing to their children. (This doesn't count those songs you can kind of sing along with on the radio—the standard was entire songs a person could sing on his own without accompaniment.) These few songs a person knows often include that sturdy classic, "Ninety-nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall." Even if you could settle a baby to sleep by the time you got to, say, seventeen bottles of beer on the wall, you'd have to wonder if this were the best you could offer the coming generation.

"Part of our aim in creating the Music Together curriculum," says Lili Levinowitz, Director of Research and program co-author, "was to return the lullaby to families and to return singing to the community. Parents are definitely benefitting. In a single semester, they learn five times the number of songs most people would know, and as they continue, they and their children gain a wide repertoire."

What kinds of songs make up a good repertoire? Back in 1986, when Lili joined Kenneth K. Guilmartin, coauthor and founder/director of Music Together, to first create the program, they looked for playful, developmentally appropriate songs which also had solid musical/educational reasons for being included. One of their prime considerations was to choose songs that would expand and enrich a child's ability to *audiate*.

Audiation, in its simplest terms, is the ability to hear music when it is not physically present. At a deeper level, it is the beginning of musical understanding. It is what enables a person to "think" music and to create it. The wider our exposure is to different types of music, the richer our audiation vocabulary becomes. Beethoven could audiate and compose Symphony No. 9 while deaf, because all his previous music experience gave him access to mental sounds he could then imagine in new ways.

Whether or not our children will be Beethovens, it remains true that we cannot audiate sounds outside our experience: if we haven't heard it, there's no musical memory for our brain to access. When Ken and Lili surveyed songs and chants to include in their fledgling Music Together program, they had to reach beyond material traditionally included in children's curricula, which tended to cluster within a narrow range of musical experience. They not only wrote new songs and searched down little known folk tunes, but also sent Ken, a composer, into the recording studio to adapt and arrange the material in a way which would reflect the richness of the music of our culture.

They wanted to include those musical "nutrients" which make up a healthy music diet and allow a child's tonal and rhythmic competence

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## Dear Parents and Caregivers,

One of my favorite Music Together stories is the one about the dad, an attorney, whose favorite track on this spring's Music Together Triangle Song Collection was the doo-wop arrangement of "Allee Galloo." This family, like many, usually drove everywhere with the Music Together CD on. Every time "Allee Galloo" played, Dad would go a little crazy, gleefully encouraged by the children, while Mom rolled her eyes.

Such was the case on this warm spring day as the car pulled up to a stoplight, windows wide open, audio on full blast, and our attorney dad, ready for court in his dark suit, bounced around in his seat as he sang at the top of his lungs: "...ga-looga, ga-looga, ga-looga-loo—wheee!!!" As the stoplight was about to change, he noticed that pedestrians and other drivers appeared to be staring. That's when he realized he was all alone in the car.

One of the most precious things about being a parent is the re-enchancement of the world that takes place, as—through your child's eyes—you see it once again as new. Being with your child gives you permission to escape momentarily from preoccupation with adult responsibility and sophistication and reconnect with the enthusiasm and wonder of your own youth. Sometimes this enthusiasm spills over beyond our time with children and then, in the eyes of our adult peers, we may feel exposed—caught, as it were, with our wonder-pants down.

When I became a dad in my 30s, I was busy composing music for off-Broadway and regional theatre and experimenting with new forms of opera. Before that, I was writing dissonant chamber music at the conservatory, and even earlier, in my band period, I had worn a pony tail and played the blues. So it took me a while to come to terms with my new-found enthusiasm for "Mary Had a Little Lamb." With relief I discovered that my daughter Lauren delighted in "our" music, too. Her mother and I would pick her up to dance to "Eleanor Rigby," Lauren's favorite on the Beatles' "Rubber Soul" album. And at two she actually sat, wide awake, through a whole evening of a Brecht play, watching me conduct the music I'd composed for the production.

Little did I realize how these experiences were preparing me for my work in creating the Music Together song collections. In our little family we had found ways to bridge the divide between "adult" music and "kiddie" music—we did *family* music! Years later, Music Together co-author Lili Levinowitz and I attempted to follow suit, while also wanting to avoid the feeling of "educational" music. We wanted families to experience music that had all the richness and nuance of the stage and concert hall, yet was appealing and accessible to the whole family. Judging from your enthusiastic response, we've succeeded.

Remember that, regardless of your musical ability, the only way children acquire the disposition to be a music-maker is through your example. So go ahead, enjoy the music—as an adult!—and put the Music Together CD on when the kids aren't there. Then pick up your child and dance to your favorite string quartet or jazz standard. How about a hip-hop "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep"? And if you catch anybody staring at you, ask them to dance!



Kenneth K. Guilmartin  
Founder/Director, Music Together LLC

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to grow. Among these are tonalities ranging beyond the simple major that pervades much of children's music, such as phrygian, lydian, mixolydian, and dorian. It's not necessary to understand these tonalities intellectually; just experiencing them expands a child's musical base and mental repertoire of sounds. (These tonalities, for those of you who are curious, are made up of different "recipes" of half steps and whole steps which create different-sounding scales; each one a new dish, if you will, with a flavor all its own.)

Musical nutrients are also found in so-called "unusual" meters,

which fall outside the Western norm of 4/4 time or 3/4 waltz time but which are frequently used in other cultures. Depending on the context, these meters can produce a certain sense of drive in a musical piece, or an unexpected rhythmic lilt. Different styles of music such as jazz, blues, and world music are represented as well. Music Together songs range from the exuberant to the lyrical, from simple renderings to richly layered sound experiences. These music selections appeal to children and to the adults who will be making music with them.

"Our great strength is that we don't do 'kiddie music'; we do music," says Ken. "The truth is that parents and caregivers are the real role models; they're our best ally in their children's music development. We need to make sure they're having fun, so we can utilize the power of that modeling. One of the ways we draw adults in is by having a good mix of songs that is rich in tonalities and meters. We have great CDs that people like listening to and can sing along with. After a while, they find themselves singing on their own and generating informal music activities at home."

This was certainly true of my experience as a Music Together mom, and later, as a Music Together teacher. My ability to share music with my daughter grew into an ability to *make* music with her, to be musically playful in and out of class. Always, however, our favorite time remained the nightly lullaby, a ritual that didn't fall away until recently, when she turned thirteen.

There's a timeless quality to singing goodnight to a child—it's an activity for the ages. Which may explain why one night when she was about eight years old, even though she knew that I was a Music Together teacher, even though she knew all the songbooks and recordings, Emma murmured sleepily, "I bet you know all these lullabies 'cause Grandma sang them to you." I was startled, and almost corrected her, but then thought that perhaps she had instinctively touched the heart of Music Together: helping families reclaim their ability to pass music down to the next generation.

I thought of Emma someday telling my grandchildren that I had taught her these lullabies which, in turn, I'd learned from my mother before me—and it somehow seemed just the way it should be. With a mental nod to Ken and Lili, I smiled at my daughter and answered, "Yes."

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

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### 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 ■ ■

Ken Guilmartin wasn't kidding when he put the word "Together" in his music program's name. Music Together was created to inspire family music making; in pursuit of the "Together" we've had parents actively participate with their children in the classroom, we've sent songbooks and recordings home to support music making in daily life, and we've created a "family" of singers on the recordings to model the concept.

"Together" also encompasses the larger community: every child, parent, teacher, and preschool teacher who's been involved

with Music Together over the past nineteen years. We look to this community of music makers for their feedback and suggestions, and this conversation helps keep the curriculum vibrant and ever new.

Every semester since its inception, Music Together has invited parents to fill out evaluation forms. We ask about their favorite songs and chants, and their least favorite, too; we ask about their children's preferences, their classroom experience, and their response to the recordings. Teachers are also polled about the songs in each collection. Which did they like best? Which songs re-



ally worked in the classroom? Did our suggested activities "sing" or fall flat?

Yes, these evaluations are read! Over the years, songs have come and gone, song collections have been painstakingly revised, and new ones have been created. While this process has been primarily guided by Ken's

and Lili's creative and educational vision, the feedback from the community has always been taken into account.

Happily, we've mostly been cheered on in our work. Parents and teachers are

overwhelmingly enthusiastic about their Music Together experience. Today Music Together offers nine different song collections, each one the result of careful review and revision, each one balanced for tonality, meter, musical styles, and activities. Don't think we're bragging when we say these collections are pretty darn good—who are we to argue with what our parents and teachers say?

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).

## I'm Gonna Play Today

You're in Music Together class, and your teacher is chanting a clever new verse she's invented for "Rhythms and Rhymes." Now she's looking around the circle, offering to make up a verse right on the spot with some willing parent. The guy on your left—obviously a Type A personality—jumps at the chance, and the teacher asks him a few questions: do you have a pet at home, what's his name, does he do tricks? Then she chants, "I have a dog whose name is Rover, but I can't get him to sit or roll over." She adds helpfully, "You see how easy that is?" Well, sorta.

Parents are often a little mystified about making up variations to songs. Sometimes it's straightforward, as with the song "Dance With Me," in the spring semester's Triangle song collection. The words "dancing, dancing, dance with me" can be endlessly transformed by substituting other action words, like "twirling, twirling, twirl with me," or "stomping, stomping, stomp with me."

Some substitutions involve longer phrases, which are thematically linked, but they're still essentially uncomplicated. To the tune of "I'm Gonna Play Today," for example, you can sing, "Puttin' on my shirt, and I don't care, puttin'

on my pants, and I don't care, puttin' on my shoes, and I don't care, I'm gettin' dressed today."

The potential for verses like that to elicit cooperation from the most recalcitrant child has not gone unnoticed by preschool teachers. Teachers using the Music Together Preschool program use song invention for everything from dramatic play to clean-up time, and music-making becomes seamlessly woven into the school day. When adults play this way, children will, too, and their natural tendency for spontaneous song is supported.

So how do you create a verse from scratch, as in "Rhythms and Rhymes?" Think of elements of your child's daily life—what he eats, his favorite toys—mentally feel the rhythm of the chant, take a deep breath, and go! What does it matter if your verse is less than perfect? Your two-year-old isn't likely to say, "Honestly, Dad! That's the dumbest verse I ever heard! It doesn't even rhyme!" After all, the verse will be about *him*. He'll think you're awfully clever, and will be delighted you want to play.

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 enjoy participating in music class, but occasionally the teacher gets really silly, and I'm not always comfortable with that. Is this something that's necessary for my child's music development?**

## Call and Response



There are good reasons for different kinds of silliness in a Music Together class. Whinnying like a horse or meowing like a cat may seem silly to an adult, but making these sounds can help adults and children explore their upper vocal register and expand their vocal range. And while it may not be musically necessary to put your hands to your head like rabbit ears when you sing "Mr. Rabbit," it's undeniably funny to see a room full of adults hopping like bunnies—and children respect and enjoy grownups who can be silly. It also helps break the ice among adults.

Children are serious about their silly. It energizes their experience and makes things fun. Silliness drives children's play, and play is the way they learn. Music Together, therefore, encourages its teachers to be playful and enter the world of the child, but trains them to refrain from being theatrically over-the-top. Children are quick to spot phony enthusiasm. The best teachers are those who are having real fun themselves in a way children can recognize as genuine.

We want parents, too, to have genuine fun. While we sometimes encourage stepping a little outside the comfort zone, we don't want anyone to feel put on the spot. Try following the teacher's lead but in a way that reflects your own authentic silliness. Use your child, too, as a guide. The teacher may set a tone which allows silliness to flourish, but it's really your own giggling child who will inspire you—and likely heighten your silliness, too. !

# Outreach

In this mobile, restless culture, it's no longer common for children to grow up near their grandparents. Noticing this, Annie Flynn, director of All Valley Music Together in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, was inspired to create a musical connection between her families and the residents of the assisted living unit at Heritage Park Care Center in Carbondale, Colorado.

Every Friday, a Music Together class of ten children and their caregivers meets right there at the center, joined by a group of seniors, some with walkers or wheelchairs, who are mostly in their 80s and early 90s. "We've all gotten to know each other quite well," says Annie. "In a sense, we've adopted each other. Arriving children go for hugs, greeting 'grandmas' and 'grandpas,' and parents carry their babies to them."



The seniors participate according to their abilities. Many join in swaying, clapping, tapping, and using shaker eggs, rhythm sticks, or scarves. The children spontaneously interact with the "grandparents" during class, approaching them during activities or helping to hand them instruments. Annie is thrilled by this response.

"In the beginning, I thought music class would be an absorbing activity for the seniors to watch," she says. "As it turned out, they are eager to participate and love to sing and move. I get perceptive comments from them about the process of the class. Music Together class is of significant consequence in the life of the center and in the lives of the people who come every week." Parents are clearly pleased, too, to give their children the chance to interact with an older generation: there's been a waiting list for the class each semester.

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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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