

Teaching your children music, even if you're not musical

□ There is a wealth of information and resources available at Burnaby Public Library

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Teaching young children music appreciation skills and the rudiments of music does not have to mean expensive lessons, driving around, or trendy classes. There are wonderful and fun ways to introduce musical concepts to very young children even if you are not musical.

Have a look at your music collection. Don't spend a lot of money on buying music but review your collection. What is missing? Do you have children's music, classical, baroque? What about popular, folk, jazz, traditional or world beat. If you don't have a good collection go to the library and experiment. Borrow all kinds of music to expand your family's musical appetite. Borrow anything, open new musical worlds for your family, if you do not like a selection, return it. There is a large collection of fabulous Canadian artists that have tapes, CD's and videos available at the Burnaby Public Library. If the selection at your branch is poor, ask about inter-branch or inter-library loans.

When listening to music with your children, talk about the music. Ask questions that make them listen carefully; 'Is it a fast or slow song?' 'Do you think this is happy or sad music?'

'Is sad music fast or slow?' 'Is happy music fast or slow?' My daughter explained once to me that a slow piece we were listening to wasn't a sad song but a dream dance. Watch how your child moves to the music, you may find that your child knows more about the piece of music than they can express in words. Don't forget to wiggle, dance and have some fun too.

Help your children keep time with the music. You can gently bounce them on your knee or pat them on the back to the beat of the song. You can play this game anytime whether you have music playing or not, any rhyme or song you know will work. Sing the same song at different tempos, fast, slow or medium. Ask them to choose the tempo and play the game again.

Sing songs that they are learning but let them sing the last word of the verse, line or phrase. You may be surprised at just how developed those little ears are as they complete the musical phrase at the right pitch.

Now sing the same song in a different key (slightly higher or lower) and let them sing the last word or musical phrase in the correct pitch again. Sing high, sing low, have fun with it, your toddler will love this game. Try whistling instead of singing, see if they can guess the song and sing the words for you.

Play pitch games, make your voice go up..up...up...and then let it go doooooown. Pretend your voice is on the elevator, stairs, ladder, an airplane or helicopter going up, up, up. Then let them go down the water slide, the banister, or on a sleigh ride down a hill with their voices going down, down, and down even further still.

One wonderful book about techniques for teaching children about music is *Your Baby Needs Music* by Barbara Cass-Beggs (Douglas & McIntyre, 1978). This book also has an accompanying cassette. Many books and kits (book with cassettes) are available most branches of the library. One kit worth borrowing is *Marvelous Musical Adventures: For Developing Early Musicianship* by Chris Patella and Eileen Oddo (a Musical Munchkins publication). It is organized into sections with songs that develop listening skills for beat, rhythm, pitch, movement, and instrument playing.

Other books that offer ideas for musical activities include: *Hand Rhymes* collected by Marc Brown, sections of *Baby Games: The Joyful Guide to Child's Play From Birth to Three Years* by Elaine Martin (Stoddart), and *Folk Rhymes From Around the World* edited by Evelyn Neaman (Pacific Educational Press).

If you have any affinity for languages, or even if you do not, my favorite selection for kids is the *Teach Me Tapes* Inc., a series of kits by Judy

Mahoney. These tapes are accompanied by books and are available in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Italian, German, Japanese and Hebrew. Many of the selections are familiar standards sung in the different languages while the remainder are songs that are unique to the cultures of the language of that kit. The focus is on basic vocabulary including days of the week, alphabet, numbers, and body parts. The more popular languages (French, Spanish and German) offer *Teach Me More* and *Teach Me Even More* kits. These kits include songs with advanced vocabulary as it takes the children on a journey through the months and the seasons of the year. Your children will amaze you at how much foreign vocabulary they pick up. Even if they do not remember or learn the languages, by mimicking the sounds of foreign languages they use different muscles and increase their ability to learn different languages at later developmental stages.

Kids Make Music is a fabulous video that is about a half hour long and full of songs that the teacher, Lynn Kleiner sings with the children while they all play percussion instruments. This video, produced by Bogner Entertainment, has an added bonus of three lectures; Lynn Kleiner lectures on *Methods for Beat & Pitch* (some are described above), Dr. Frances Rauscher Ph.D. *Research Psychologist lectures on Music and Intelligence,*

and Dr. Cecilia Riddell Ph.D. *Music Educator lectures on the Benefits of Music & Parent Participation.*

Playing percussion instruments is an integral part of learning about music. Kids love playing percussion. Making musical instruments with your children can provide hours of rainy day fun as you embark on your age appropriate projects. We have maracas made out of film containers, paper mached and painted, jingle bells out of bells from a hobby store stuck to plastic circles, drum sticks, shakers out of empty plastic jars (child proof pill containers work well) filled with beans, rice or pepper corns for different sounds, 'guitars' made out of boxes and elastics, and listening tubes made out of flexible hoses. The possibilities are endless. Imagine what can you do with a bunch of spare keys, a stick and some dental floss.

Even if you are not musical you can teach your children many of the rudiments of music simply by participating in musical activities with your children. Yes, of course it is fun to listen to children's music or video concerts, but nothing is better for your child's musical development than live music whether it is a first class concert or recital, a street musician, or a 'tone deaf' parent singing a song that is retrieved by pushing back cobwebs from days gone by, while tapping out the beat.