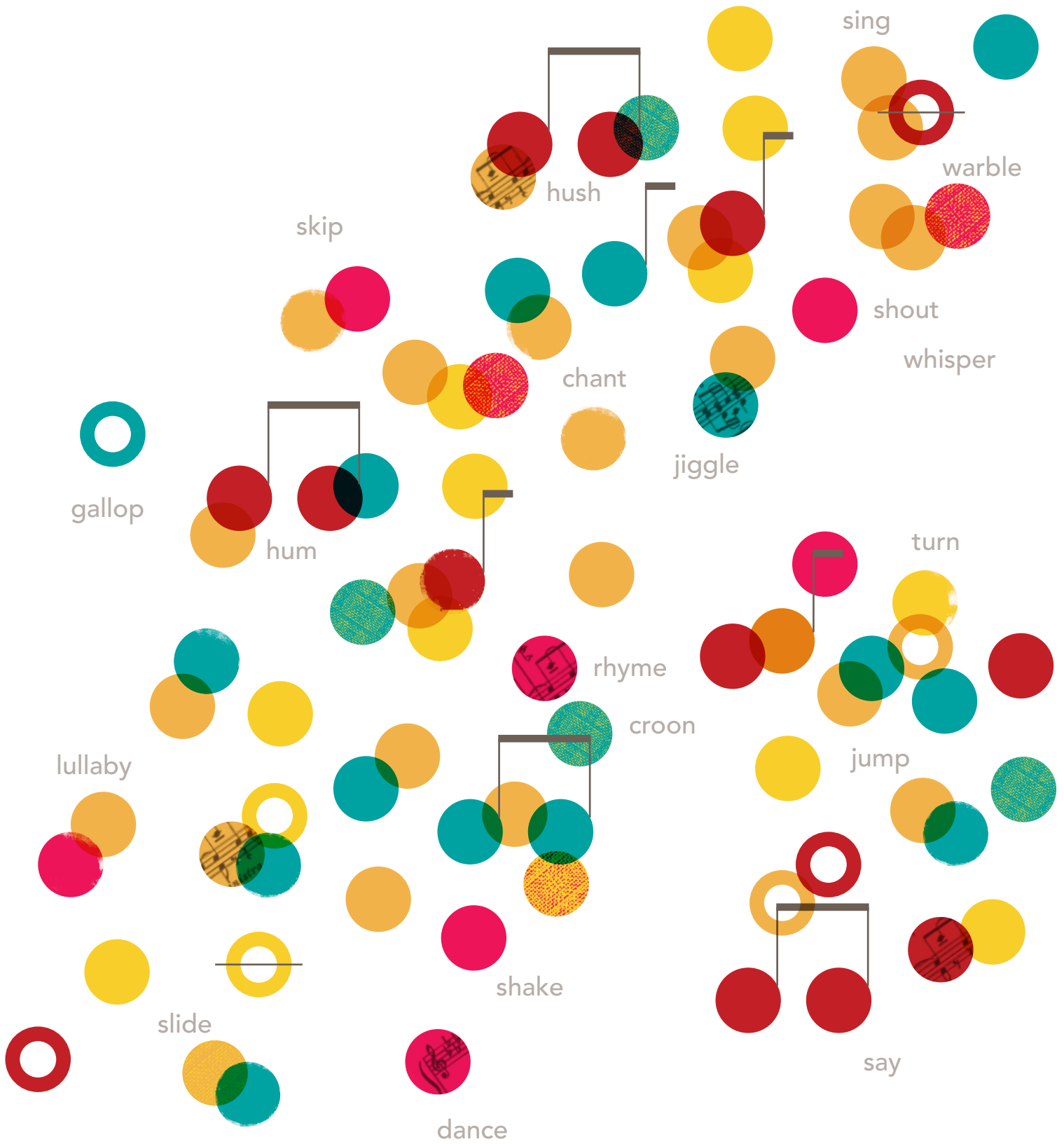




# why making music matters

**Singing, Playing, Moving,  
and Sharing in the Early Years**

Dennie Wolf, WolfBrown  
In partnership with  
Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute

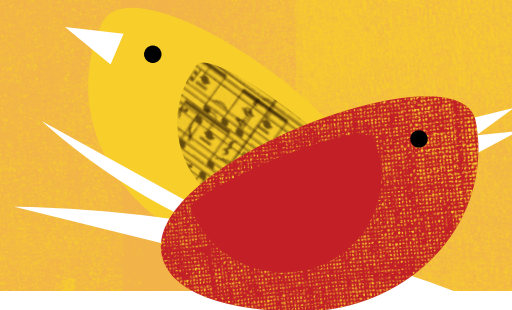


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# Why Does Music Matter?



## When you hear

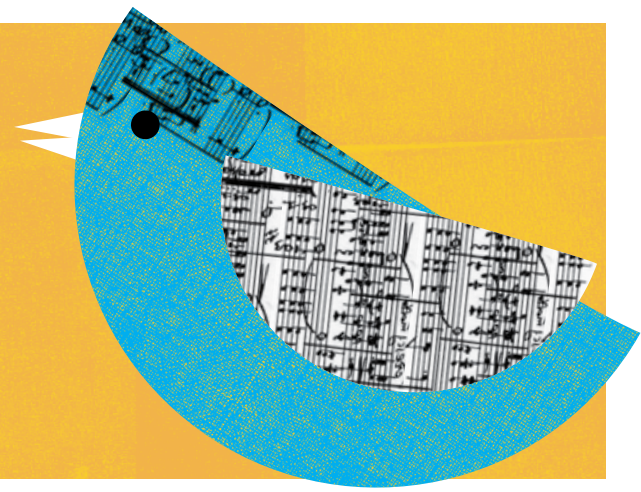
- \* A new mother singing to her baby at the laundromat, mixing the Spanish verses her grandmother sang to her and new ones she makes up on the spot
- \* A three year-old singing about whether skeletons and “ghostes” are scary or pretend
- \* Two four year-old girls getting to know each other by trading rhythms banged and tapped out on the metal poles in a playground
- \* A five year-old noodling on his dad’s high school bass guitar as part of their shared Saturday

you are hearing the “sound track” of early childhood and family development.

In this booklet, we think of music quite broadly: yes, singing and playing instruments, but also experimenting with words and sounds, playing games, and moving to music. In these pages we explore what basic research, early childhood programs, and family experiences have to say about the importance of informal musical activities in the lives of children and families. By sharing this information, we want to send these messages:

- \* **It is never too early to start singing, exploring sounds, dancing, and playing:** in their first 24 hours, babies are already listening and responding.
- \* **Music comes in many forms:** singing, word and sound play, dancing, instruments, and invented sounds. It can be formal or improvised.
- \* **Sound play and music are more than entertainment:** they can be life-long sources of delight, expression, being together, learning, and inventing.
- \* **Music is for everyone,** not just for natural or trained musicians.
- \* **When making music, everyone gains—**adults (parents, teachers, and musicians) just as much as children.

# Early Childhood: What's at Stake?



## Early childhood – the time from birth to five –

is a remarkable period in human development. Children's brains, bodies, and abilities grow more rapidly than at any other time.

**1 Building brains and bodies:** At 1 year, a baby's brain is 70% of adult size; at 3 years it is 85% of what it will be in adulthood and already crisscrossed by the connections that make for human thought and communication. Music, especially if you include tapping, clapping, bouncing, and dancing, is practically a gym for fine and large motor control.

**2 Becoming close:** In those same few years, young children form significant relationships with their families. Their smiling, walking, and talking thrill and reward their families' efforts and aspirations, sparking shared delight. That delight is fuel for future achievements.

**3 Communicating and imagining:** Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers acquire the sounds and words of whatever languages they hear regularly. They also figure out how numbers work, and how to draw and build. As early as their second year, children can imagine and invent: they can pretend, joke, tell stories, and make up songs.

**4 Sharing and managing feelings:** During their early years, children learn how to express and manage their feelings. They also figure out how to read other people's expressions and feelings, grasping how other people's emotions and minds work.

**5 Being with others:** In their first five years, young children figure out how to communicate and interact with others their age: talking and listening, arguing and persuading, turn-taking, playing games with rules, and pretending together.

**6 Belonging to a community:** In these earliest years, children learn the languages and accents they hear at home, they absorb the songs and stories of their community, and along with them, beliefs and values that guide their thinking and actions.

These same years also matter for parents, grandparents, and siblings. They are learning the give-and-take of caring for and responding to a much younger, but rapidly developing small human being. When caregivers make time to talk, play, and sing, they have the chance to:

**Experience fun and delight**

**Connect to their own creativity**

**Discover how able and inventive they can be as life partners.**

**Music is fundamentally about being, playing, and growing together.**



# Why Talk, Sing, and Play?

## There is nothing guaranteed about this burst of growth.

Poverty, neglect, danger, and lack of opportunities challenge children and families' ability to thrive<sup>1</sup>. Without health care, nutrition, and exercise, children grow more slowly. Without safety, they grow up fearful and wary. As a result, poor children arrive at the starting gate of kindergarten with widely different language, thinking, and social skills than their more advantaged peers. By age six, many well-to-do children flourish because they have had thousands of hours of privately purchased enrichment opportunities like camp, travel, and lessons that poor children rarely experience<sup>2</sup>. These early gaps predict later struggles to thrive in school and in life – as well as a terrible and inequitable waste of human promise and talent.

But it is increasingly clear that we can make a difference in who thrives – *if* we are willing to intervene and support young children and their families. This means maternal *and* infant nutrition and health, affordable housing for young families, and high quality early education that supports both parents and children as learners. In fact, early well-being and education programs are among the most cost effective social investments that governments and communities can make<sup>3</sup>.

Just like language, music is a shared, expressive, inventive, portable way to be together. If put to work, it can be a powerful force in the lives of young families (See Figure 1 on the following page).

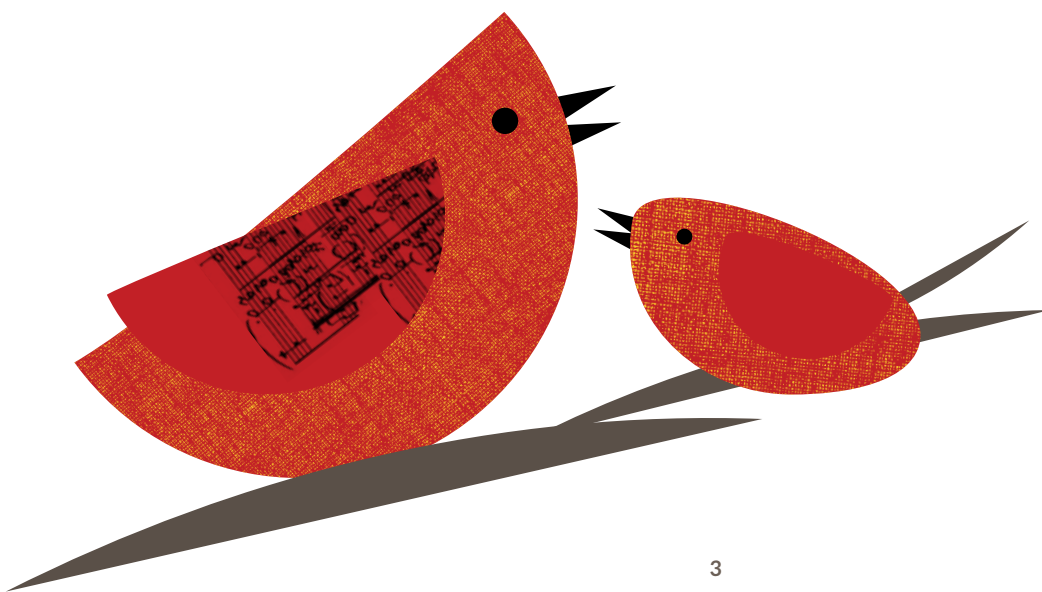


Figure 1:

# The Many Ways that Music Matters





# 1. Building Brains and Bodies

## Music engages the whole child.

**Think about it:** in a simple back-and-forth babbling game a baby has to listen, watch his partner, take a turn at the just the right moment – and maybe laugh and smile to keep his partner engaged. All this builds important connections across the many regions of his brain needed to carry out the complex actions and interactions humans require in order to thrive<sup>4</sup>.

When a toddler plays a singing and clapping game with her grandmother she uses her eyes, ears, and hands in quick back and forth turns, timed with her partner’s words and motions. As she claps, she uses the corpus callosum, a structure in her brain that connects the left and right sides. She is practicing the coordination required for many two-handed activities (e.g., catching, throwing, playing an instrument, and working with tools)<sup>5</sup>.

When a four-year-old invents a spur-of-the-moment rhythm game, stomping on the stairs, he has to put those same sensory and motor skills to work, but he adds the skills of inventing, remembering, and playing with patterns.

In short, between 0 and 5, children pass major milestones in the development of their brains and bodies. For infants and toddlers, even simple games, songs, and back-and-forth play build brain and body coordination. If as older children they begin an instrument, these kinds of changes continue<sup>6</sup>. So, just as exercise builds physical fitness, music can “tone” young brains and bodies<sup>7</sup>.

## What Research Shows

Making music is one of the most intense, multi-sensory, and physically involving activities in which young children engage. Even day-old infants breathe in different patterns depending on whether they are listening to Mozart or Stravinsky<sup>8</sup>.

Studies show that five-year-olds who receive only twelve weeks of music lessons develop their ability to listen closely and pick out sounds much more accurately than their peers who are not making music. Similarly, young children who play and practice keyboards develop much stronger abilities to tap out rhythms and to keep a steady beat<sup>9</sup>.

Investigating further, researchers who study how the brain develops with experience compared brain development in children who were enrolled in a 15-month program of half-hour weekly keyboard lessons with children who did not take music. As participating children gained the musical skills of listening, practicing, and playing, their brain structures grew in the same areas that are highly developed in skilled adult musicians.

Clearly young brains are “plastic” and music can stimulate that growth.

## Music at Work:

# Building Brains and Bodies

### Everyday Arts for Special

**Education (EASE)** is a joint project of the Urban Arts Partnership and District 75, New York City's special education district. It is a professional development program designed to introduce teachers to integrated, arts-based strategies that work in inclusive classrooms to improve all students' communication, socialization, academic, and artistic learning. In the game "Stop and Go," children of all ages and abilities can practice how to coordinate and control their movements while learning the fundamentals of musical composition.

#### The Basics:

1. The leader engages children in making a sound (tapping, stomping, clapping). Using hand-held signs, the leader directs children about when to start and stop.
2. The leader moves on to silent options like wiggling fingers and shrugging shoulders, taking into account children's physical abilities so that everyone can participate.
3. As children master the game, they take turns running the show, choosing sounds and motions, and leading the stop and go patterns.

#### Gaining Skills:

4. Teachers introduce a set of signs for different types of body percussion (like clapping or stomping). The signs are posted and the leader taps them to make a pattern of movements and sounds. The game becomes more complex, with children following and eventually leading what to do, when, and for how long.

#### Becoming Experts:

5. At this point, a class can move on to the basics of conducting and composing using patterns of symbols much as in reading and writing.
6. The leader composes and conducts using the sound cards and the Stop card, creating patterns (e.g., four claps in a row followed by Stop), which can be repeated.
7. The composing can become even more challenging through the introduction of two or more sounds as well as blank cards signaling silence. In a further extension the leader can introduce simple percussion or pitched instruments.

Jennifer Raine, Curriculum Designer at EASE, comments, "At one level the game is about the basics of listening closely, developing self-control, and building motor skills. At another level the game is about attending to a leader, staying alert, learning in an ensemble, and following directions." Musically, "Stop and Go" is also a "brain gym," teaching young children how to play with and create simple compositions: choosing sounds, patterns, and rhythms, remembering, and replaying them<sup>10</sup>.



## 2. Becoming Close: Forming Relationships

### Young children build some of the most important relationships in their lives as infants and toddlers.

If they are lucky enough to have caring and responsive caregivers, they develop a sense of security – feeling that they will be followed, cared for, and protected, even as they explore new activities, take risks, make mistakes, and recover<sup>11</sup>.

Music can support these intimate exchanges. Lullabies provide an excellent example: as parents soothe their children to sleep they share the sounds of their first languages, the intimate moment at the border of sleeping and waking, and the kinds of rocking and talking that calms a wakeful infant. In that moment, babies experience the lifelong skill of changing states: going from alert to relaxed, upset to calm.

In fact, there is increasing evidence that a responsive partner – father, mother, grandparent, older brother or sister – is “the best toy in the store.” If that person responds to a young child’s cues, the pair can jump start back-and-forth exchanges – anytime, anywhere. They can create a world of their own even in noisy, crowded, or confusing settings. On a rush hour subway, a mother comforts her young son who is frightened by the bumping, shoving crowd:

*Boy: That guy goed into me.*

*Mom: Goed? Mean bumped? He didn't mean it.*

*Boy: No, he goed into me.*

*Mom: (chanting) Goed, showed, flowed, toad.*

*Mom: Toad in the road.*

*Boy: No toad in our road. (beginning to laugh)*

*Mom: Or toad a la mode.*

### What Research Shows

Close relationships matter throughout children’s development. Those early relationships are richest when parents and children can do the tasks of everyday life and play freely together: chasing, pretending, drawing, or making music. In fact, the quality of those different ways of being together can set the stage for other relationships – like those with peers and teachers in school.

To investigate this, researchers observed four-year-olds and their mothers as they did tasks and as they played together. They examined how effectively the pair managed to work together, the emotions they expressed, and how well the pair handled the children’s desire to do things on their own. Mothers who worked and *played* effectively with their children, showed positive emotions, and managed their preschoolers’ push to do it “their way” had children whose teachers rated them as more socially successful in preschool with their peers<sup>12</sup>.

As in the subway example (see text below), spontaneous musical games can be more than entertainment. With her humor and chant, this mother teaches her son how to hold his own in a crowd, how to forgive a larger stranger, and how to use his imagination to go from fear to delight.

*Boy: A la mode?*

*Mom: Yeah, it means with ice cream. A good thing to know about in this life.*

*Boy: Toad a la mode.*

*Together (chanting rhythmically): Toad a la mode, toad a la mode.*

## 2. Becoming Close: Forming Relationships

Invented songs, recalled over time, are another example of being together through music. Inventing the words is like oral storytelling, where each person adds in. Remembering those words over time is like keeping a shared secret. At the same time, the song can always stay open to new words, verses, and musical play.

Hear a mother and her daughter remember and sing a song they made up together over many bed times. At the end you can listen in as the little girl expands on what they have done together, using new words to invent an ending before drifting toward sleep.



### A MOTHER-DAUGHTER SHARED SONG: COZY UP

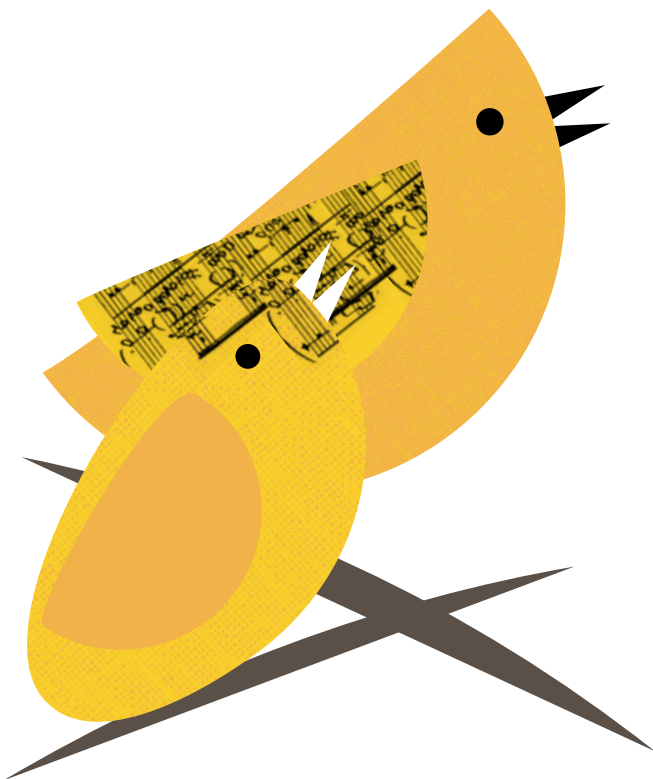
When it is springtime  
Cozy up to me.  
Meet me out by the daffodils  
Cozy up to me.  
The air is sweet; the air is warm.  
Cozy up, cozy up, cozy up to me.

Then it becomes summertime  
Cozy up to me.  
Meet me under the waterfall  
Cozy up to me.  
The air is fresh like strawberries.  
Cozy up, cozy up, cozy up to me.

Springtime is so beautiful  
Cozy up to me.  
Summertime is so beautiful  
Cozy up to me.  
You and I can touch the sky,  
Cozy up, cozy up, cozy up to me.

### A DAUGHTER'S INVENTION

When it outside is so beautiful  
When it is spring, is so beautiful  
We like that music  
And we like that weather  
Cause I don't know. . . (words too soft to hear)  
cozy up, cozy up, cozy up to me, to me, to me,  
to me, to me, to me, to me, to me, to me, to me,  
to me, to ME!





Music at Work:

# A Lullaby Project at Carnegie Hall

## Carnegie Hall's Lullaby Project

invites parents of young children living in stressful circumstances to explore how they can use music to express their hopes and dreams for their young children. In a first session, participants, working with project musicians, draw on personal journals, letters they have written to their babies, and their own musical memories to compose an original lullaby for one or more of their children. In a second session, parents work with performers, composers, and arrangers to refine and record their lullaby. In a third session, parents listen to performances of the whole suite of lullabies and reflect on what the process has meant for them and their children. Lullabies are stored in the website, *SoundCloud*, where they are available for parents to use and expand upon any time of the day or night. Even though this is a short intervention, parents are deeply affected. (For a full description of the project, and a short accompanying video go to: <http://www.carnegiehall.org/Lullaby>.)

Early results from the project demonstrate that creating and singing lullabies is as good for parents as it is for babies. As a result of taking part in the lullaby workshops, mothers and fathers experience a growing sense of their own creativity and well-being. Despite what may be very difficult circumstances, by the conclusion of the lullaby workshops, participating parents see themselves, their children, and their shared future with increased hope and sense of possibility<sup>13</sup>.

Here a mother, temporarily in a correctional facility, talks about how writing a lullaby gave her the opportunity to re-think who she is as a parent, what she wants for her sons, and the future she imagines for them together:

I imagine. I always think about the future. So I picture me being short, five five, and I picture one son being like six feet and the other one like five seven and I am just going to look at this one and this one with me between them, like mama knows best...It sums up, too. I want you always to respect your mommy no matter what comes your way. So I want both of my sons to respect me no matter what comes their way. I want them to respect not to hit women, to not disrespect women. Cause I went through a lot in my life in order to have them two. And now that God has blessed me with them two, I just want them to be respectful to all women and to their mom.

Even though she is separated from her boys, writing these words and melody let her stay close to them. Nothing is more vital for the long-term well-being of children and parents who experience the separation of incarceration<sup>14</sup>.



## DEMETRI, DAMONEE

1)

Dimitri, Damonee  
 Mommy  
 She's missing you and  
 Loving you  
 Demetri, Damonee  
 I love you

2)

Demetri, Damonee  
 I wish I could be home  
 With you  
 To hold you  
 And kiss you  
 To smell you, to touch you  
 To feel you

(Chorus)

Mommy loves you  
 Mommy loves you  
 Mommy loves you  
 Mommy loves you

3)

Demetri, Damonee  
 I wonder what you're doing  
 right now  
 Demetri, Damonee  
 Your Mommy is here to tell you

(Chorus)

Mommy loves you  
 Mommy loves you  
 Mommy loves you  
 Mommy loves you  
 Demetri, Damonee, I love you.

Demetri, Damonee

1) De metri Da monee I hope that you know that I wish I could be home wonder what you're doing

2) Mommy she misses you to hold you De metri: She loves you and kiss you Da monee De metri Damonee I to smell you, to touch you, to Mommy is here to

I love you  
 1. love you  
 2. feel you  
 3. tell you

Mom-my loves you Mom-my loves you De-

metri Damonee you're special De metri Damonee you're special De-

metri Damonee I love you Fade out C...

Hear this song being performed.





## 3. Communicating and Imagining

### Humans are wired to be sensitive to sound patterns.

Even unborn infants respond selectively to their mothers' voices. Babies can distinguish speech from music, and they can learn what rhythms to expect in Western and non-Western music through listening<sup>15</sup>. Even before babies speak, their babbling and sound play helps to develop the neural pathways necessary for listening and speaking<sup>16</sup>. Infants who hear language directed and responsive to them babble more and have larger vocabularies as toddlers<sup>17</sup>. Just like adult musicians, children with musical experiences develop acute sound processing skills. They can distinguish foreground from background sounds and distinguish between different sounds in ways that may be important to early reading<sup>18</sup>.

Both the quantity and the quality of language that a child hears affects how and what she learns to communicate. If all a child hears is "Don't do that; put on your coat; finish your milk," she is missing out on learning new vocabulary and on powerful ways to use words to express what she knows, feels, and imagines.

When they hear and see others singing as a part of daily life, young children quickly pick up the habit. Listen in and you will hear them making up informal songs and games as part of enjoying or making sense of the world.

### What Research Shows

A landmark study identified remarkable differences in the early vocabulary of young children. The average child on welfare heard 616 words per hour; the average working-class child heard twice that number; and children born into professional families heard over three times that many (2,153 words per hour)<sup>19</sup>.

A more recent study shows that this "word gap" appears as early as 18 months. In a lab, toddlers were shown images of two familiar objects on a screen and a recorded voice named the object and used the word in a sentence (*Look at the doggy*). Children growing up in poorer households responded more slowly and spent less time studying the correct pictures than their more advantaged peers<sup>20</sup>.

These early differences matter: having the words to express your plans and feelings makes it easier to play and work with others at home and in the wider world. Moreover, early vocabulary development predicts later reading skills and school success.

Songs, music, and the talk that surround them are ways to close these gaps in language development. These activities are often explorations in new words and different ways of expressing ideas and experiences. Instead of just "It's raining," a child sings, "It's raining, it's *pouring*." In place of "The bus has wheels" a song invites children to sing, "The wheels on the bus *go round and round*, round and round, all *through the town*."



Music at Work:

# Communicating and Imagining

**Take a look at this song** written by a young mother for her baby during a session of Carnegie Hall's Lullaby Project (see page 8). In it she shares how she draws strength from the stars that escaping slaves used to find their way to freedom. Through her lyrics she uses exactly the kind of language that helps young children learn to communicate and imagine: a rich vocabulary, images, and powerful ideas.

## A LULLABY: SHOOTING STARS

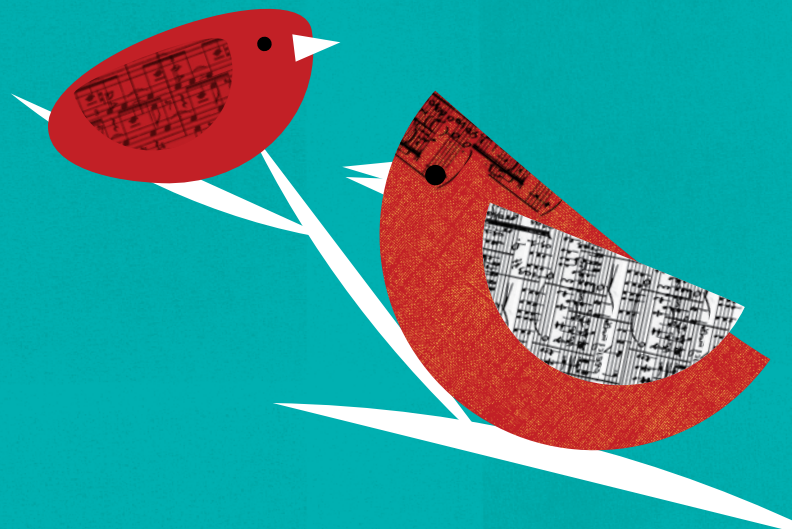
When I feel trapped,  
I look at the stars  
The symbol of freedom  
I want you to know, Nyaira, that there is a  
different life  
The sound of birds chirping  
Many ways around the negativity.

(Chorus)

You are teaching me the meaning of peace  
To choose the right over the wrong  
Welcoming you into my life  
Is like catching a shooting star  
That star will be shining in my heart forever.

(Repeat the Chorus)

Hear this song performed



# Shooting Stars

open with vamp on Bb  
and "shooting star" glisses in strings

8 When I feel trapped, I look at the stars, the sym - bol of  
gm Bb F/A F7

5 free - dom When I feel trapped, I look at the stars the sym - bol of  
Bb gm F gm

9 free - dom I want you to know, Ny - ai - ra, — that there is a dif - frent  
F Eb Bb/D Eb

13 life — the sound of birds chirp - ing ma - ny ways a - round the neg - a - ti - vi -  
F7 Bb F/A F7

17 ty — When I feel trapped, I look at the stars, the sym - bol of  
gm Bb F/A F7

21 free - dom When I feel trapped, I look at the stars the sym - bol of  
Bb gm F gm

25 free - dom You're teach - ing me the mean - ing of peace — to choose the right o - ver the  
F Eb Bb/D

29 wrong — Wel - com - ing you in - to my life — is like catch - ing a shoot - ing star That  
Eb F7 Bb

32 8 star will be shin - ing in my heart for - e - ver When I feel trapped, I  
F/A F7 gm Bb

35 look at the stars, the sym - bol of free - dom When I feel trapped, I  
F/A F7 Bb Bb

39 look at the stars the sym - bol of free - dom When I feel trapped, I  
F/A F7 Bb

43 look at the stars the sym - bol of free - dom



# 4. Sharing and Managing Feelings

## A major part of growing up is learning how to express and manage your emotions.

Positive emotions like pride, happiness, and interest can spur and sustain curiosity; negative emotions like fear and anger can be important warning signs. The human capacity to regulate emotions – to turn fear into curiosity or anger into discussion – makes it possible to handle the recovery from sadness, bounce back from disappointment, or to laugh only minutes after being scared by a strange noise<sup>21</sup>.

Many of children’s earliest games and chants are about this kind of management – they are about two people agreeing to explore suspense and release. (Think about “This little piggy” as it bursts into “WEEEEEE WEEEE all the way home!”) As these sound games speed up, the partners figure out the boundary between what is exciting and what is too much.

Branching out from this, young children learn to invent games, songs, and stories that help them harness their feelings<sup>22</sup>. When a three-year-old begins to make a racket at dinner, his father tells him to “Go play.” He scoots away to his toy corner, grabs a small mallet and toy safety glasses, and chases round and round singing:

*This is how we bang and clatter*

*This is how weeeee*

***Bang annn-nnd claaaa-teeerrrr.***

He rushes in circles, hammers, and sings – while still minding his dad.

Hear this three year-old’s lively performance of “Bang and Clatter” in his family’s kitchen.

## What Research Shows

Researchers observing at music and movement classes have documented how participating children get increasingly better at self-regulation. They speak to themselves, sing, and hum to help themselves perform the complex rhythms and patterns they are learning and to organize their behavior. Possibly, their experiences with concepts like stop/start, slowing down/speeding up, verses and choruses provide them with the motivation to direct and modulate their behavior<sup>23</sup>.

At the Kaleidoscope Preschool sponsored by Settlement Music School in Philadelphia, a Head Start center serving low-income families, the program includes familiar early learning activities enriched with a parallel arts integrated curriculum designed to support socio-emotional learning (see page 16). The array of materials and the freedom to play and improvise elicit interest, motivation, as well as other positive emotions.

When engaged in their arts activities, the children showed more positive emotions than during their other learning experiences. Children at Kaleidoscope showed higher levels of positive emotions than their comparison peers in other preschools. Moreover, across the school year, children at Kaleidoscope exhibited greater growth in their ability to regulate their emotions<sup>24</sup>.



[CLICK HERE TO PLAY](#)



## 4. Sharing and Managing Feelings

Children's own spontaneous songs and stories are ways of making sense of the day, including puzzling events and questions they have. As he draws a page of skeletons, a three year-old sings to himself, maybe as a way of figuring out just how safe or dangerous those boney guys are:

*Skeletons are bad.*

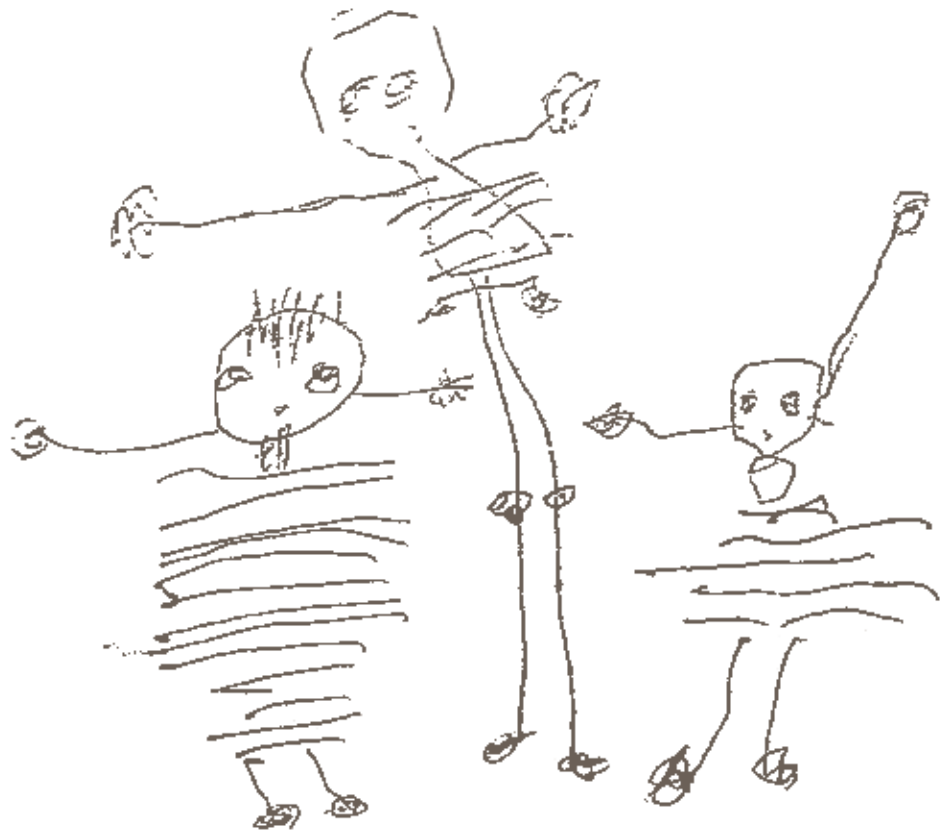
*They have fire eyes*

*And their hands have claws*

*But they can't come off*

*Cuz they are attached*

*So they don't ever get you.*



Music at Work:

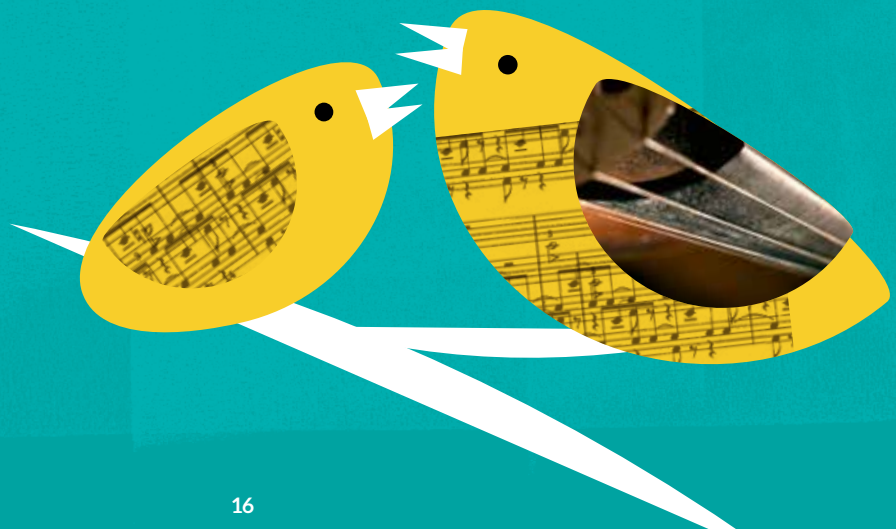
# Sharing and Managing Feelings

## When Settlement Music School

launched the Kaleidoscope program it was designed to promote school readiness through arts enrichment. For over twenty years, the program has featured a distinctive dual curriculum in early childhood domains such as early literacy, enlivened with daily music, creative movement, and visual arts classes taught by credentialed teaching artists.

For a theme like self-expression, children in a typical Head Start classroom might be asked to label facial expressions and to write journals. At Kaleidoscope,

children also explore this theme through their art classes. In their various arts classes, children participate in guided exploration of how to use sound, movement, and visual media to express, and change, their emotional state. For example, in music, children might use their voices and other instruments to reproduce sounds that humans and other animals make to express emotions. In dance, they might use creative movement to perform different emotions for their classmates to identify. In visual art, children might explore how different pieces of art make them feel. (Adapted from Brown & Sax, 2013).





# 5. Being with Others

## Music with its tempo and rhythm, verses and choruses, provides clear structures that help children learn

the rules and routines for being together: think about a young child waiting to shout out “Pop goes the weasel” or a kindergartener watching and listening as she plays a percussion piece with her class.

At home, music can be a way for siblings to get along and cooperate, each contributing what he or she brings. Here a three-year-old and her mother start singing a song she brought home from nursery school:

*(Together, patting in rhythm)*

*Oh, Mr. Sun, Sun, Mr. Golden Sun*

*Please shine down on me*

*(3 year-old repeats) Please shine down on me*

*(3 year-old improvises) Please shine doooooown on meee-eeee.*

*Oh, Mr. Sun, Sun, Mr. Golden Sun*

*Please shine down on me*

*These little children are asking you*

*(Mom) what comes next?*

*(6 year-old sister joins) Won't you please come out so we can play with you?*

*(6 year-old) You know what would really add something to it is if you snapped.*

*(Mom, bringing in 3 year-old) Oh, okay. Let's snap. Ready?*

*Mr. Sun (snap), Sun (snap) Mr. Golden Sun (snap)*

*Please shine down on me (snap, snap, snap)*

*(They laugh, and then continue to sing, adding more ideas for sounds.)*

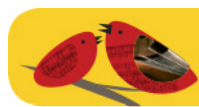
## What Research Shows

Music can help children to form a cohesive group, where differences are no obstacle to playing together.

Twelve children with moderate levels of retardation joined 15 peers in a preschool setting for an integrated early childhood music program. The children came together once weekly at the typical preschool for integrated music sessions. For 15 sessions a music therapist employed specific strategies to foster interaction such as turn taking, leading and following, and role-play.

Results showed that interaction among the children increased following the music therapy intervention. When surveyed, staff members who had participated all agreed that the program had facilitated peer interaction and had fostered acceptance of differences among the participating children<sup>26</sup>.

Hear this mom and her daughters perform “Mr. Sun”



[CLICK HERE TO PLAY](#)

These same musical opportunities can build or even restore social interactions in children with histories of trauma or conditions like autism. Teachers and therapists use improvisation, sound play, and instruments to respond to the sounds a child makes spontaneously. From there, they can work together, gradually creating a shared musical language through which to share experiences, tolerate a wider range of emotions, and enjoy the surprises and pleasures of two-way communication<sup>25</sup>.



# Music at Work: WeBop at Lincoln Center

**With its tradition of interactive improvisation,** jazz may be one of the world's greatest examples of "being together through music." Building on the work of Lori Custadero, who studies early musical development, the musicians at Jazz at Lincoln Center have developed WeBop, a family program that uses the fundamentals of jazz to combine musical learning with joint play. The sessions use the basics of jazz: rhythm play, improvisation, call-and-response, and solo turns to engage families in singing, playing, and inventing like the jazz greats. The program uses the practices, melodies, and performance traditions of jazz as a vehicle for self-expression, communication, and play through singing, movement, playing instruments, and storytelling. In sessions, WeBop students invent and play within a shared structure, in an improvisatory spirit, each contributing in their own way to create a unique ensemble. For instance, in a song that takes off from Latin Jazz, "Shakey Shake Shake," participants learn a basic verse then each takes a turn adding new lyrics and gestures. The song ends by speeding up with a great, each-one-does-his-own shake-a-thon, where everyone wiggles, stomps, rattles, and taps in one big burst of sound and activity.

*One, two, you know what to do*

*We are gonna shake, shake, shake  
Shakey shake shake  
Shake shake shake  
Shakey shake shake*

*We are gonna shake, shake, shake  
Shakey shake shake  
Shake, shake, shake  
Shakey shake shake  
Shake until we stop.*

*(Song continues with hop, spin, and then a free shake.)*

Hear this song and others from WeBop.



[CLICK HERE TO PLAY](#)

## 6. Belonging to a Community

### Currently in the U.S., one in four children has at least one immigrant parent<sup>27</sup>.

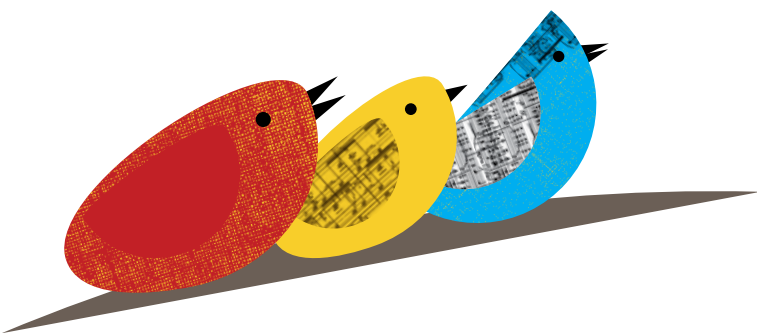
Early childhood care and preschools are a key intersection of immigration and education, since they are an immigrant family's first experience at the intersection of home, outside care, and education. It is in these settings that children learn some of their earliest lessons about who "belongs," who is "an outsider," and which languages are for learning and which can only be whispered<sup>28</sup>.

In this complex world, sound play and music can create a kind of third space where young children can knit together new identities that combine their first languages, traditions, and culture with contemporary, English-speaking, and U.S.-anchored identities. In this sense, music can provide the raw materials for an evolving sense of identity<sup>29</sup>.

When day-care and preschools feature the music of multiple cultures and homelands, they model an inclusive and connected world. Imagine going to your older brother's concert and hearing mariachi or bhangra music, right alongside Sesame Street or Sousa<sup>30</sup>.

### What Research Shows

When schools engage families in their children's education, schools become more equitable and culturally responsive to their communities with better outcomes for children. Mark Warren and his colleagues studied three remarkable school-community partnerships where this strategy is central. Although each partnership was unique, three principles were common: (1) an emphasis on relationship-building among parents and between parents and educators, (2) a focus on the leadership development of parents, and (3) an effort to bridge the gap in culture and power between parents and educators. At the heart of this work is a lesson: educators would benefit from understanding that communities bring different needs, aspirations, and desires to their children's education. Educators need the wisdom of community partners to develop parent leadership for initiatives that meet the interests, values, and capacities of a particular school community. In that work, the performing arts can play a major role by creating community events where children's accomplishments are at the center. As one parent said, "We are proud that this school is open for us. Doors [are] opened until 6 pm. They also support the dance, ballet, and guitar arts of the traditional Spanish culture."<sup>31</sup>





# Music at Work: Belonging to a Community

**In La Placentia, CA** the Even Start early education program serves families, along with their children. Many parents are recently arrived immigrants determined to become English speakers, citizens, and skilled advocates for their children. But their lives are often crowded and stressful as they juggle home duties, childcare, work, and learning a new culture. At their children's preschool, parents can enroll in supportive, but challenging, ESL programs that require on-site classes, plus on-line practice sessions.

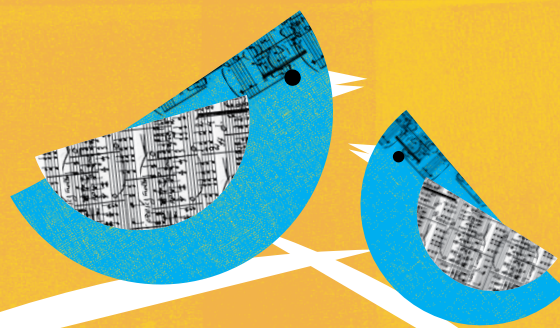
In partnership with Resounding Joy, a music therapy program, the center presented a program, *Sound Minds*, which combined language acquisition,

relationship building, and enjoyment. The emphasis was on singing and performing in playful and interactive ways that generated touching, laughing, and improvisation. Families took home strategies to create breaks in days and evenings filled with chores and schoolwork. In addition, the music workshops featured songs and games that drew on the home cultures of every participating family. Reflecting on the differences that shared music has made at home, one mother says, "We like to be together more. And I stop thinking about, 'Oh what am I going to do with them?' And now we enjoy playing and they ask me, 'Mom, come see, now. Come dance with us and just play.' And I think I can be more like them in that moment."<sup>32</sup>





# 7. Making Music/ Finding Joy



**Smiling, laughter, and positive emotions can play a powerful role in reconnecting to life and other people. Music can be a remarkable carrier for that kind of shared joy.**

Think about a group of four year-olds, who are all singing “Head, shoulders, knees, and toes,” as part of learning English in their pre-school program. Imagine them speeding up with each verse until it is no longer possible to keep pace. Soon they are touching their knees as they say “toes”, or patting their heads and saying “nose.” It’s hard not to laugh – especially if your teachers are bungling all that carefully taught vocabulary right along with the newest arrivals. Soon there is a community of very silly people who can’t tell their noses from their knees.

*Head, shoulders, knees, and toes,  
Knees and toes!  
Head, shoulders, knees and toes,  
Knees and toes!  
And mouth and eyes  
And ears and nose  
Head, shoulders, knees, and toes.  
Knees and toes!*

## What Research Shows

There is a growing understanding that as families and children come back from the losses of migration, natural disasters, or violence, the arts and culture can play a powerful role in their healing and restoration<sup>33</sup>. Cooking familiar foods, celebrating holidays, and performing beloved music and dances are ways to rediscover the possibilities of laughing and joking, and to re-experience positive emotions like delight, joy, and affection.

For example, in refugee camps for Khmer families fleeing persecution in Cambodia, Khmer aid workers helped families and children by teaching classes in their people’s language and history, ensuring performances of beloved music and dance, and keeping a calendar of holidays. In so doing, they honored grandparents and parents as the transmitters of heritage. They also signaled the possibility of a thriving culture, even under stress, providing bridges between the past and present<sup>34</sup>.

This kind of work reminds us to recognize and build on the cultural strengths of families and children<sup>35</sup>. For many, healing begins with the chance to rejoin others in celebrating the life they love and miss.

## 7. Making Music/Finding Joy

### Many children suffer trauma and extreme loss.

Migrant and refugee children lose family, their own health and well-being, as well as their homelands. So do children who experience disasters like earthquakes, storms, and fires. Other children experience loss through the separations of adoption and foster care. As part of these traumas, children lose the routines, the foods, the gatherings, and the celebrations that shaped their year and life cycle. As we help children to survive, grieve, and heal, we can't forget the restorative power of joy and the role that music plays (as well as dance, stories, drawing, and play) in restoring health, hope, and trust.

Rise2Shine is a preschool program serving fifty of the poorest children in Haiti. Jit Vaitha, Rise2Shine's founder, wanted to make music a part of the preschool:

*It's all from seeing the reaction in the children's faces. Compared to regular lesson plans, when music was introduced in the classroom, the children began to smile from ear to ear, with a gleam in their eye that we've never seen before; an involvement we've never seen before. Children cannot hide their emotions and passion, and music released in them a new stream of happiness and engagement. We knew then that this "frequency" must be accessed and used more, like a highway for transporting further teaching and curriculum.*

*Of course, without offering three meals a day, an oasis where they are safe, along with love and attention, music will fall upon deaf ears. In accordance, we consider the music program as a way to play with the light inside each child, after we've ensured it is shining strong. Of course, in the chaos and strains of living in*

*absolute poverty on the streets of Haiti, offering the children of Rise2Shine the opportunity to maximize their happiness and engagement is what every human being deserves, no matter what their income. Music is creativity, and creativity is what makes us all human; it is the final piece to the puzzle we didn't know was missing until singing and playing became such an important part of Rise2Shine.*

To hear and see the role of music in Rise2Shine watch and listen to their on-line videos of their work. You can hear teachers, parents, and children gathering strength from the hymns and traditional songs they sing together.





## Music at Work:

# Making Music/Finding Joy

**Several years ago**, a vocalist, Sarah Elizabeth Charles, whose father came from Haiti, volunteered to train Rise2Shine teachers in early childhood music, drawing on the rhythms and melodies of Haiti's traditional and communal musical culture as well as her own skills as a jazz vocalist. She built on Creole versions of French children's songs like "Meunier, tu dors" (a song about a miller who falls asleep, leaving his mill to run too slow, too fast, too crazily, etc.). She taught teachers how to use the pleasures of joking and singing together to teach the elements of music (loud, soft, fast, slow). They

sang together with the children, taking turns changing the lyrics (replacing too fast with too slow), inventing gestures to describe how the mill ran amok. They incorporated simple instruments (sticks, shakers, etc.) and asked children to take turns stepping into the center of the circle to invent a rhythm or motion to accompany the song. Finally, using the tradition of call and response, children modeled patterns for their friends and teachers to imitate. In this way, music time was also a lesson in finding and sharing joy.

MEUNIER TU DORS

The image shows a musical score for the song "MEUNIER TU DORS". It consists of five systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Meu - nier tu dors Ton moulin va trop vi - te Meu -  
- nier tu dors Ton moulin va trop fort. Ton moulin  
Ton moulin va trop vite Ton moulin ton moulin  
va trop fort Ton moulin ton moulin va trop  
vite Ton moulin ton moulin va trop fort.

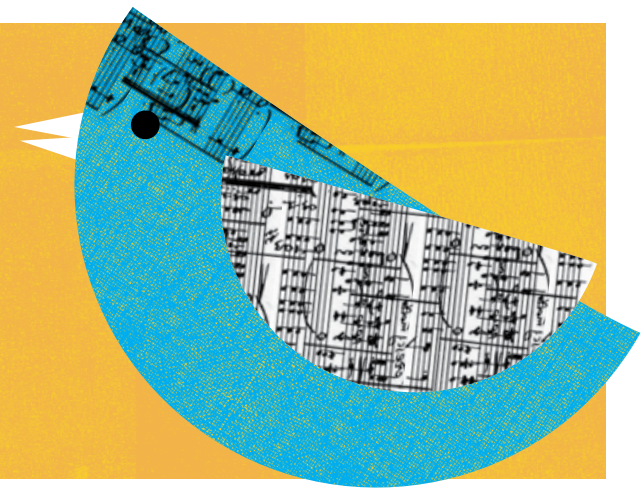
# Important Issues to Think About: Making Music Count

**Music can be a powerful force in the growth of young children and families. But for that to be true, researchers and music educators alike stress:**

- \* **Quality:** It matters that games, songs, and instruments are engaging, meaningful, and worth returning to time and time again. Songs with pleasing melodies and satisfying lyrics engage both children and adults time and time again. Wooden blocks and sticks make deeper, hollower, more satisfying sounds than their plastic equivalents. Quality motivates and rewards.
- \* **Responsiveness:** Music requires a tuned-in partner who is ready to respond to the cues and abilities of children. Rote music, played without variation or invention, turns into a chore, especially when adults always lead and children always have to follow. Let children improvise, change the words, or add a verse. Give them the chance to accompany and conduct.
- \* **Live music:** Playing a CD while children draw or nap provides background, not music engagement or education. Even “interactive” music games have limits – they offer just so many songs, or characters, or moves. Viewing and listening to music that never changes is more like listening to a clock tick. Learning from and with music takes hands-on and minds-on music-making to achieve significant impacts. As we learn more about the possible drawbacks of too much “screen time,” it is important to remember that music, like other forms of play, is all about variation, invention, and human interaction<sup>35</sup>.
- \* **Multi-modal participation:** Especially for young children, music comes alive, and engages more aspects of learning, when accompanied by gesture, dancing, and musical instruments. Engaging the whole child increases the impact of music on brain and motor development.
- \* **Inclusion:** Music has the power to forge community – *if* it is designed to do so. Thoughtfully structured music can welcome children of a wide range of abilities into a group. It can also welcome newcomers who are acquiring English, giving them a way to communicate and participate fully. The key is to think through the routines, the materials, and the social rules that will let everyone take part.
- \* **Invention:** Music is as much about improvisation and invention as getting all the pitches and rhythms correct. Be sure to make a place for spontaneous songs and for invented instruments.
- \* **Sustained engagement:** For music to contribute to children and family development, it can’t be “just for the holidays.” The impacts discussed throughout this essay come from programs that last anywhere from three sessions over several months to several years.



# So, What Can You Do?



## Early childhood is a period of explosive and promising growth.

But many children in the United States grow up with increasingly unequal opportunities to thrive. Music could help close this gap – *if* its advocates and practitioners step up to designing and advocating for:

- ✳ **Designing maternal and child health care that helps nurses, doctors, and other health care workers understand music as a strategy** for developing relationships, emotional health, and communication skills. Imagine lullaby writing as part of birth classes or well-baby visits.
- ✳ **Creating universal, high-quality preschool education.** Nearly two thirds of 3 to 5 year-olds are enrolled in pre-primary programs<sup>36</sup>. Communities across the United States are making major investments in early education. For example, this year New York City will offer free pre-K classes to 65,000 youngsters at nearly 2,000 sites throughout the city, guaranteeing a space available for every four-year-old who applies. President Obama set a bold goal: “If we make high-quality preschool available to every child, not only will we give our kids a safe place to learn and grow while their parents go to work; we’ll give them the start that they need to succeed in school, and earn higher wages, and form more stable families of their own. In fact, today, I’m setting a new goal: by the end of this decade, let’s enroll 6 million children in high-quality preschool.”<sup>37</sup>
- ✳ **Building high-quality music and art into early education:** This includes training teachers who are skilled and brave enough to lead singing, sound play, and simple composition – and committed enough to make those activities part of every day.
- ✳ **Asking branch libraries to feature music-making** for children and families with the same regularity that they sponsor story-time.
- ✳ **Building music education into the earliest grades:** Musical development can begin and flourish long before children can play a band or orchestra instrument. Their performances double as showcases for students’ creativity and growth and invitations for families to become involved.
- ✳ **Mounting community-wide campaigns:** This includes getting posters in buses, subways, and trains, and public service announcements that urge families to use music as a joyful and portable way to be together, to help their children develop, and to pass on language and traditions.

In addition to these broad initiatives, think about the many daily ways in which you can expand how music enriches the lives of children and families. What’s below is just a start.

## So, What Can You Do?

### As a parent or caregiver

- Sing and play daily as a part of being alive.
- Own the music: add your child's name, invent new verses, and change the words to reflect who you are and where you live.
- Take music with you: Use sound and singing as part of soothing and reassuring on the bus, the subway, and in the car.
- Ask older children in your home to sing and play with younger ones.
- Pass on the songs from your childhood. Get grandparents and elders to share the traditional songs they know.
- Check out music, along with books, from your library.
- Make household instruments from pots, pans, and cans and join in the band. Allow the noise.
- Turn off passive music and media, and bring on live, face-to-face conversation, singing, and playing.
- Watch bulletin boards or use the Internet from home or your local library to locate free live concerts in your neighborhood.
- Join up with neighbors or other families to go to a free concert in another neighborhood.

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### As an educator (childcare provider, teacher, librarian, nurse-practitioner, and others)

- Sing and play, no matter what. Even if you “are not a musician” you can lead using a drum, rhythm sticks, or clapping. Consider taking up a simple instrument like the ukulele.
- Encourage children to compose and notate their own music. Have them teach one another their invented songs.
- Make dance and movement part of physical education programs.
- Use shared musical activities as a setting for including children with different abilities.
- Use music, in place of raising your voice, to signal changes in classroom activity. Engage children in inventing songs and rhythms that can mark these shifts.
- Encourage parents to share their musical skills and heritage with their children. Invite them in to perform.
- Invite caregivers and younger siblings to watch or take part in music sessions at drop-off and pick-up times.
- Create simple listening stations in spaces where families often have to wait (reception rooms, offices, etc.).
- Mark special times and events with musical performances that bring educators, caregivers, and children together.



# So, What Can You Do?

## As a musician

- Offer to help the educators you know explore what they can do with music in their classrooms: spend a few hours helping them develop a repertoire of songs and games they can use.
  - Volunteer some time in your local school.
  - Donate old instruments to programs and schools that can use them.
  - Consider work with groups that play at local libraries and parks where families can access free live performances.
- 

## As a cultural organization, presenter, or performance space

- Host events designed to serve entire families (from babies on up) so that everyone can come.
  - Make those events active, not passive. This means including conversation, movement, and sing- or play-along moments.
  - Ensure there are take-aways: games and songs that families can learn, bring home, and keep enjoying.
  - Explore how your organization might offer musical learning opportunities for adults who work with young children.
- 

## As a decision-maker (an early education program director, a board member, a part of an agency that works with early childhood education)

- Advocate for music as a regular part of learning.
- Offer musical learning opportunities for your staff.
- Budget for books and recordings, as well as simple instruments (e.g., bells, woodblocks, etc.).
- Make time to observe music activities and classes: quality matters. Ask yourself: are they inventive, interactive, and engaging for all children?
- If you are not a musician and are still learning what makes for quality, ask a colleague or friend to come with you and help you to observe.
- Visit other programs that feature the arts and music for young children and their families. Learn about what they do. Think about what you could “bring home.”

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twist



hush

sing



warble

skip

run

chant

shout

whisper



gallop

hum

jiggle

turn

rhyme

croon

lullaby

jump

shake

slide

dance

twirl

oh

hop

