



This brochure was prepared by the American Music Conference in consultation with Frank R. Wilson, M.D., associate clinical professor of neurology at the University of California School of Medicine in San Francisco, and Franz L. Roehmann, Ph.D., professor of music at the University of Colorado, Denver. Dr. Wilson and Dr. Roehmann were co-directors of the 1987 Music and Child Development Conference held in Denver under the sponsorship of The Biology of Music Making, Inc. The conference brought together educators, behavioral scientists and medical doctors to present and review research concerning the effects of music on children and their overall development.

The reports presented at that conference will be published in book form by MMB Music, St. Louis, Missouri; excerpts from papers and speeches presented are contained in this brochure.

The Positive Effects Of Music On Children

It goes without saying: You want the best for your children throughout life, but especially during the formative years. So, you try to involve them in as many enjoyable, constructive activities as possible—Little League, dance, swimming classes and music lessons.

While all these activities will contribute to a child's physical, intellectual and social development, scientists and educators are beginning to realize that early, positive musical experience is uniquely important for children.

Children take to music naturally. Musical sounds are among the first stimuli an infant responds to, and toddlers instinctively weave music into their activities. Children everywhere bring music into their games, their interactions with other children and adults, and employ it as an inner companion to their exploration of the world around them.

Musical activities provide children with important experiences that can help them develop physical coordination, timing, memory, visual,

aural and language skills. When they work to increase their command of music and exercise musical skills in the company of others, they gain important experience with self-paced learning, mental concentration and a heightened personal and social awareness.

Music and Emotional Connections and Transitions

The importance of musical activities in the lives of children, especially in terms of their contact with the adult world, is now being emphasized by child development specialists.

Peter F. Ostwald, M.D., professor of psychiatry at the University of California in San Francisco, has found that infants respond to the musical qualities of their mothers' voices. Mothers in every culture use lullabies; the mother's song is her personal signature telling her child it is safe to sleep.¹ An infant's early experience with songs sung by loving parents intensifies and helps stabilize its emotional connection to the parents. Ostwald points out that young children employ nursery songs to reduce the anxiety of separation from parents, even when they begin actively to seek independence; music remains a vital link to the parents and the security their presence provided. Early shared musical activities support and enrich the bonding between parent and child which can last a lifetime.

A close examination of the ways children learn shows that they often construct their understanding of the world, of adults, and of other children around musical games. Dr. Jon-Roar Bjørkvold, professor of musicology at the University of Oslo, Norway, points out that children have their own "child culture" and their song games function as an essential part of their communications and contact with others.²

Music also helps children define and clarify their own feelings, says Dr. Bjørkvold; solitary play is almost always accompanied by tunes, fragments of songs and rhythmic sounds.



Advancing Musical Skills: Aptitude and Achievement

Every human has musical aptitude—the inborn capacity to respond to musical sound and to control bodily movement in order to create music. What we call “talent” has more to do with achievement (and social acceptance) than with potential. Although aptitude varies among individuals, all children have the ability to achieve musically and will be greatly influenced by the timing and quality of their early experiences.

Research indicates that regardless of the level of musical aptitude a child is born with, he or she must have favorable early informal and formal experiences with music to maintain that level of potential.

A striking recent finding reported by Edwin E. Gordon, Ph.D., Carl E. Seashore Professor of Research in Music Education at Temple University in Philadelphia, is that properly timed and sequenced early experiences with music can actually raise the child’s musical aptitude.³

By age nine a child’s overall musical aptitude becomes stabilized. That isn’t to say that after age nine a person can’t successfully be taught music. But it does mean, says Dr. Gordon, that a child of age five profits far more from appropriate informal and formal music instruction than does a six-year-old, more at six than age seven, and more at age seven than at age eight.

Preschool Years: The Optimal Learning and Growing Years

Educators have come to realize that the preschool years are the optimal learning time for developing musical abilities. Preschoolers love to play and aren’t afraid of making mistakes. It hasn’t been long since they’ve discovered the excitement of walking and talking, and they are perfectly adapted at that age to learning through repetition and practice.

According to Sally J. Rogers, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, giving young

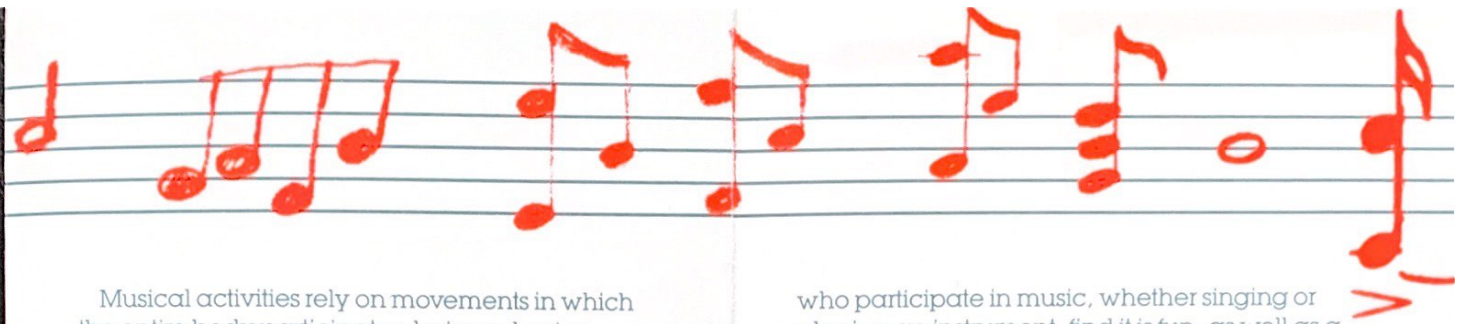
children the chance to experience a variety of musical activities—singing, dancing and movement, playing a musical instrument—can aid and assist them in learning language skills, independence and control of their “small world.”⁴

Near the ages of two and three, says Dr. Rogers, a child’s main interpersonal needs focus on acquiring independence and control. At this age the child is intensely aware of his or her small size and limited capabilities and will benefit greatly from learning new skills. Anything a child does, or is exposed to, that leads to gaining control over something enhances the child’s sense of size and his integration into the world. Successful teaching of the two- and three-year-old works best within the child’s own framework, emphasizing independent mastery while downplaying requirements for cooperation with the adult.

Four- and five-year-olds have a strong desire to be like, and to please, their parents, says Professor Rogers. Joining the parent and teacher in musical activities is much more appealing to a child of this age, and levels of cooperation are reached that were previously unattainable. She adds that although children of four or five seem quite competent linguistically, with good memory and motor skills and a clear desire to please, it’s important to remember how emotionally immature they still are and how much parental support and involvement they continue to need.

Peers are very important to children—“kids learn from kids”—and the social elements of group activities become strong motivations as children get older. Therefore, participation in a group music study program or activity can be a delightful and valuable experience for preschoolers. As they reach kindergarten age, they can generally learn, almost without effort, the basics of rhythm and timing through singing, marching and drumming on various percussion instruments.

Children in the early elementary school grades increasingly enjoy being part of a group. The group can provide them reassurance, the opportunity to learn from others, and expose them to a mildly competitive atmosphere that can encourage learning and practice.



Musical activities rely on movements in which the entire body participates, but emphasize development of precise control of the smaller muscles of the arms and hands and those controlling breathing and voice. Because of this total body movement, few other activities in which we engage are as well-suited as musical practice for building accuracy, speed, timing, smoothness and coordination of muscle control.

Instrumental music study also offers sequential, paced learning in which small victories or advances in ability lead to a sense of accomplishment. The music student learns that by repetition and step-by-step progress, goals are achievable.

The mental disciplines learned through musical play and study (memory skills, concentration, symbol recognition) are just as exacting as those underlying reading, mathematics and other areas of study the child will undertake throughout life. The child who has worked to improve his or her own musical skills understands that achievement is built on sustained personal effort and is its own reward.

Music: An Investment In Your Child's Future

Beyond these benefits, however, can a child's educational experience be complete without music or some form of arts education?

Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do, a handbook published by The College Board, states that:

"Preparation in the arts will be valuable to college entrants whatever their intended field of study. The actual practice of arts can engage the imagination, foster flexible ways of thinking, develop disciplined effort, and build self-confidence."

So you see, involving your child in musical activities at an early age is really a kind of investment in his or her future.

Most people who study music don't go on to become professionals. But for many of them, music-making becomes a lifelong activity. Adults

who participate in music, whether singing or playing an instrument, find it is fun, as well as a relaxing way to relieve work-related and day-to-day stress.

A Concluding Comment by Dr. Wilson

A child's musical life should not be deadly serious; there is plenty of time to prepare for a musical career if that becomes a goal. Just as there are many of us who enjoy jogging for fun and have no intention of competing in the Olympics, your child should be encouraged to experience what music affords, based on his or her own instincts and interests.

And you needn't worry that musical play is a waste of time. One of the most impressive themes repeated at the Denver Music and Child Development Conference was that music has a powerful influence on children's healthy development from the moment of birth (and possibly even sooner than that!) anytime it naturally engages the child's interest and attention.

My personal experience with music—my own, my own children's, and other adults' and children's—has convinced me that music-making is one of the great joys of life.

If I had a wish for all those who read this brochure, it would be that you and your children will have the opportunity to experience that joy together.

Frank R. Wilson, M.D.

Suggested Reading

Jon-Roar Björkvold, *Man Is Musical: Universals of Child Culture in the U.S., Norway and the Soviet Union*, in press
John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man? (The John Danz Lecture Series)*, University of Washington Press (Seattle), 1973

Elliot W. Eisner, *Cognition and Curriculum: A Basis for Deciding What to Teach*, Longman, Inc., 1982