

Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, What a Musical Child You Are!

By Mary Ellen Pinzino

(Exceptional Parent Magazine 2009)

Children are born with innate musical talent. This precious gift has to be nurtured in the earliest years of life, or it will wither rather than bloom. Developmental delays and disabilities do not necessarily affect the young child's potential to learn music. Parents of young children with special needs know the power of music to facilitate growth and development. There is a difference, however, between music for learning and learning music.

Children with special needs benefit in so many ways from music, and they are so attracted to music that it is easy to lose sight of the process of musical growth and development. Greater understanding of the process of music learning can help parents learn to meet their child's musical needs, whatever their own musical background, and whatever the developmental level of their child.

Learning music is much like learning language. The prime difference is in the language itself. The young child's thinking mind processes words. The young child's musical mind processes music. A little child's imagination can be captured by words. The little child's musical imagination—another innate potential that is a powerful force from birth, is not captured by words. Its native language is music.

Our rich heritage of children's songs and nursery rhymes nurtures the very essence of childhood and should always be part of growing with music, but the beloved songs and rhymes stimulate language development more than music development. The focus of the delightful songs and rhymes is the words, which speak to the thinking mind rather than the musical mind. The mother-tongue of the musical mind is rhythm and tonal—without words. Rhythm, alone, is most accessible to the young child and provides the foundation for all music learning.

Nursery rhymes present a layer of words on top of rhythm, making it more difficult for a child to comprehend the rhythm. Traditional songs layer melody on top of rhythm and words, making it even harder for the young child to understand the rhythm. Additional layers of accompaniments and video images make it still more difficult for the young child to access the rhythm. Favorite children's songs and nursery rhymes charm, entertain, capture the imagination, and compel a child learning language, but it is songs and chants without words that capture the musical imagination and engage the young child's musical talent.

It may be easier to learn many things when words are set to music, but it is not easier to learn music. Words to songs limit developing musicianship. Song words suggesting motions can also limit movement, which is essential to music learning. The young child's innate musical talent knows that musical movement is related to rhythm and to tonal rather than to words.

The difficulty of children's songs is generally also a function of the words. The young child is musically ready for far more sophisticated rhythms and melodies than most songs for children

provide. Music learning requires that rhythm and tonal increase in difficulty throughout early childhood and beyond. Once a child has a foundation in rhythm and in tonal, the little musician brings a whole new level of musical understanding to songs with words. Little children devour art songs written for tender ages—songs with words that transport the young child’s musical imagination to new horizons.

Parents of children with special needs may wonder how they could possibly stretch themselves further to do activities for music learning in addition to other developmental activities their child needs. “Parenting Music” offers a whole new arena for parent-child interaction—new ways to relate, new dimensions for play, and new opportunities for a child to succeed. Loving participation in a child’s musical growth can stimulate and sustain developing musical response and prepare a child for a lifetime of music.

Parents can learn to play with rhythm and tonal just as they play with words, so that their child can thrive musically, whatever the parents’ musical background and whatever the child’s developmental level. Parents are always surprised when they witness their infant, baby or toddler’s focused attention to rhythm and to tonal, the intensity of their gaze, and how long they tune in. Parents of children with and without special needs never cease to be amazed at how much their child is attracted to unadorned rhythm and to tonal, and how attentively their little one responds. With a little guidance, parents’ wonderful creativity and intuitive sense of their child can propel music learning.

Rhythm and tonal activities make a delightful addition to day-to-day activities, offering many “aural toys” for a child to explore, to chew on, to dance with, and to grow on. These developmental “toys” speak the native language of the young child’s musical mind and take the child’s musical imagination on one journey after another. Parents can play with their children with these “aural toys” at the changing table, in the rocking chair, inside, outside, and in the car, use them to amuse, settle, entertain, or distract their child, and use them for therapy, all while playfully developing their child’s musical talent. Parents can carry the “aural toys” with them anywhere without having to find room for them in the diaper bag or pick them up off the floor. With a little guidance, parents can inspire their child’s ongoing, developing musicianship as they do language.

The young child’s innate musical talent is ready to absorb, respond, and deliver. Disabilities may inhibit the vocal or physical expression of a child’s musical gifts, but they do not necessarily diminish those gifts. The power of the young child’s natural musical talent often bypasses special needs, allowing a child to develop musically regardless of limitations. Every young child has special musical needs that deserve “early intervention.”

[Hear sample rhythm and tonal activities and listen to the audio presentation, “Parenting Music,” at www.comechildrening.com.]

*To request permission to reproduce any part of this article in any form, write:
mepinzino@comechildrening.com*

Additional Resources by Mary Ellen Pinzino

www.comechildrening.com

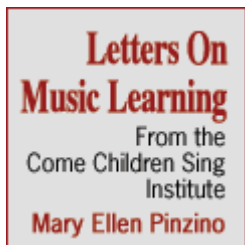


SONG LIBRARY—More than 500 new songs for children of all ages—preschool, elementary, children’s chorus. See notation, hear songs, print copies. Many songs in various tonalities and meters, including art songs for young children, songs for choral performance, and songs and chants without words. Developed at the Come Children Sing Institute, composed by Mary Ellen Pinzino. CD-ROM

www.comechildrening.com/public_pages/songlibrary.php

"The Come Children Sing Institute SONG LIBRARY is a welcome new and rich source of songs and chants suitable for teaching music to children of early childhood age as well as to elementary school students. The songs and chants were developed and researched by the author in the actual teaching of young children. I recommend them as excellent supplementary materials for use in the classroom."

Edwin E. Gordon



Letters On Music Learning—reflections on music teaching and learning at the Come Children Sing Institute. Topics include movement, art songs for young children, a new tonal syllable system, music reading and writing, and classroom research on the development of tonal and rhythm audiation in relation to the work of Edwin Gordon. Written by Mary Ellen Pinzino. E-Book—128 pages. Printable PDF file.

<https://www.comechildrening.com/catalog/index.php>



Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for Infants, Babies and Toddlers—Early childhood music classes for parent and child in their own home, on their own schedule—includes MP3 files, activities, parent tips, and a resource for busy parents about early childhood music learning. Curriculum developed at the Come Children Sing Institute. Classes taught by Mary Ellen Pinzino.

www.comechildrening.com



Gift Certificates—Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for Infants, Babies and Toddlers—Gift Certificates for early childhood music classes for parent and child in their own home, on their own schedule—includes MP3 files, activities, parent tips, and a resource for busy parents about early childhood music learning. Curriculum developed at the Come Children Sing Institute. Classes taught by Mary Ellen Pinzino.

<https://www.comechildrening.com/catalog/index.php>

Articles by Mary Ellen Pinzino

“Awakening Artistry in the Choral Rehearsal.” Article addressing the use of movement in the choral rehearsal, spanning children through college singers. (International Choral Bulletin, 2006.)

www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php

“A Conversation with Edwin Gordon.” Interview with Edwin Gordon, discussing various aspects of his work. (Musicstaff.com, 1998.)

www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php

“Audiation In Flight.” Article addressing movement with song in the elementary school context. (Michigan GIML, 2005.)

www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php

“Feed the Meter.” Article addressing the importance of meter in choral performance. (Southwest Division ACDA, 2006.)

www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php

Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for Infants, Babies and Toddlers. Includes extensive writing for parents about early childhood music development.

<https://www.comechildrensing.com/catalog/index.php>

Selected Articles from “Letters On Music Learning,”

E-Book addressing music teaching and learning at the Come Children Sing Institute

“Audiation—Another Way of Knowing”

https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php

“Ode to Movement”

https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php

“Art Songs for Young Children”

https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php

“Song Writing”

https://www.comechildrensing.com/public_pages/forteachers.php



Mary Ellen Pinzino is the Founder/Director of the Come Children Sing Institute, a center for research and development in music learning since 1984. She is the composer of the Come Children Sing Institute SONG LIBRARY, a CD-ROM resource of more than 500 new songs for preschool, elementary school and children's chorus, and creator of the Come Children Sing Institute music curriculum for children from birth through thirteen. She is the developer of Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes for infants, babies and toddlers, and leads the production of *Come Children, Sing!*, the television program for preschool music.

Mary Ellen has taught all ages from birth through graduate students, teaching preschool classes and conducting the children's choruses at the Come Children Sing Institute, and directing the Institute's teacher training program. She has also taught elementary school music, high school choral music, graduate school music education courses, and served as conductor of the Women's Choral Ensemble at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She authored 14 issues of *Letters On Music Learning* for music teachers, now compiled as an E-Book, has written additional articles for national and international publications, and writes extensively for parents about early childhood music learning for Come Children, Sing! Online Music Classes.

Mary Ellen's comprehensive work with infants, toddlers and preschoolers, her research on the process of music learning and music literacy, her work with children's choirs and the application of movement in the choral rehearsal with singers of all ages, her many compositions for children, and her unique applications of technology to music learning have put her on the cutting edge in the field of music education. She is in demand as a clinician, presenting nationally and internationally for music educators' organizations, including the International Society for Music Education, the Music Educators National Conference, the American Orff-Schulwerk Association, the Organization of American Kodaly Educators, the American Choral Directors Association, Suzuki Institutes, and the Gordon Institute for Music Learning. She has also presented in Portugal at the University of Lisbon, in Indonesia for the East Asia Regional Council of Overseas Schools and the Jakarta International School, and most recently for the International Music Education Conference in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Mary Ellen received bachelor's and master's degrees in music education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and studied extensively with Edwin Gordon. She can be reached at mepinzino@comechildrening.com.