

Winter, 1992

Art Songs for Young Children

Dear Colleagues,

Some of our finest authors have written stories and poems for very young children—literature that reaches the artist in both the child and the adult. Do we have a parallel resource of song literature for the very young child? We have a rich folk music heritage that deserves a place alongside nursery rhymes and fairy tales, but where are the art songs that parallel the poems of Walter de la Mare and the sensitive little stories of Beatrix Potter and Margaret Wise Brown? We have works of the masters for children's chorus, but where are the short, artistic little songs that enchant the preschooler and engage the artistry of the kindergartener and first grader?

The very young child is truly an artist. His sensitivity to beauty merits the finest of fine art. For generations, poets and story tellers have reached the very young with artistry. It is time that musicians do the same. Only recently have we begun to discover the potency of the young child's musicianship. The more we understand the musical needs of the young child, the more we can define what might be an art song for little children—one that captures the musical imagination of the young child and bathes him in fine art. Although the child may be too young to perform the song, he has the ability to absorb its every nuance.

We often think that songs for children need cute lyrics, gestures, or accompaniments to stimulate the child's musical imagination. The young child's attraction to such periphery does not begin to match his focused attention to tonality and meter, the magic that does capture the young child's musical imagination. Infants and toddlers, despite their intense interest and involvement in language, attend more to songs without words in dorian, phrygian, and mixolydian than they do to songs with words in major tonality. They are drawn to complex rhythms more than they are to those we assume to be appropriate for little children. The young child's musical imagination is a potential we have not begun to tap.

Recently children led me to greater understanding of the artistry of the young child. It became obvious that my three and four year old students were ready for another dimension. I had no idea what it could be. Their emerging musicianship was stunning, but they were too young for songs written for older children and too young for ensemble experience. Last year I had written a number of bug and animal songs in the various tonalities and meters for five and six year olds. Perhaps the three and four year old children needed something similar on their level. Songs for these children would have to be short, have very few words, and be in the audiation range. The children would need a variety of styles, employing as many tonalities and meters as possible. Each song would have to stand on its own as a song without accompaniment.

Occasionally, I look to children's stories and poems to feed me in writing my own texts for children. While paging through a book of children's poetry, I happened upon a Japanese haiku poem that compelled me by its imagery, its brevity, and its sheer beauty. Might this be a model for a text for the new songs? I began to play with the text in song. The words themselves were so musical that the song nearly wrote itself. I was so moved by the lovely expression of words, melody, and rhythm, that I knew the song would be appropriate for little artists. Might there be more haiku that could so easily become songs? I went to the library and found volumes of haiku. The more I browsed, the more mesmerized I became by the sensitive little poems whose beauty could be likened only to that of a child.

While playing with the haiku in song, I entered another world—that of poets and children—as each little poem celebrated nature, expressing the wonder of the moment and singing its own song. I will no longer look at a butterfly or a drop of rain as I had before. Whether or not my songs would serve the children, they nourished me.

Three to six year old children were spellbound by the haiku songs. They understood the texts better than I did, without any explanation. They received each expression in song as a precious gift. They were so compelled by any given song that I had to sing it repeatedly—with words, without words—never breaking the spell with talking. Within each song, the tonality, meter, and text were woven into a tapestry that became a magic carpet.

Three and four year old children listened intently to any one of the songs for as long as five or six minutes. Five and six year old children were more ready to become involved in the songs. We sang them, we danced them, we dramatized them, we worked with meter, tonality, and text, without breaking the spell with talking. Each of these short songs grew to an intense ten or twelve minute experience in the tonality and meter. Five and six year olds were singing in dorian, lydian, mixolydian, phrygian, aeolian, major and minor—unaccompanied—and singing and moving in usual, unusual, and shifting meters. The sensitivity with which the children made these little songs come alive was that of true artists.

Reading through the collection of "[Cherry Blossoms](#)," as the volume of songs came to be known, I learned more about the difference between our adult perceptions and that of the child artist. Singing each song and turning to the next page did not begin to capture my musical imagination. The songs were so short I hardly began to get into any given tonality. I couldn't appreciate why so many of the short songs needed shifting meters to be expressed. The words were not necessarily relevant to the young child. The impact of each song could not be felt in one hearing. I could not sense by reading through the collection just how much music was packed into each of those few measures. Had I not experienced the songs in that world of poets and children, I might have passed by such a volume and not even considered it as a resource for little children. I wouldn't have dreamed that such little kernels of art could grow into such rich, musical experiences for children.

Little children are closer to art than we are. They know that a song doesn't come alive in one hearing. They have to play with it, taste it, dance with it, live with it, take it to bed with

them. They know that the words speak to them through sound and imagery more than through literal meaning. They know that music speaks to them through tonality and meter. They know that the artistic combination of words, melody and rhythm nurtures their very being. Children know art.

To create a new genre of art songs for little children, we need not be master composers. We need to be students of music learning and apprentices to the real masters—the children.

Yours truly,

Mary Ellen Pinzino

THE FROG AND THE CHERRY PETAL

Haiku MARY ELLEN PINZINO

A pet - al light - ly dropped Up - on the mouth of Mis - ter Frog, And
now his song has stopped.

The musical notation is for a Haiku in 2/4 time with a tempo of 56. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of the poem, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are written below the notes.

NEVER IN A HURRY

Haiku MARY ELLEN PINZINO

Ah, the but - ter - fly! — E - ven when chased it nev - er seems In a hur - ry. —

The musical notation is for a Haiku in 2/2 time with a tempo of 56. It consists of one staff of music. The melody is written above the lyrics.

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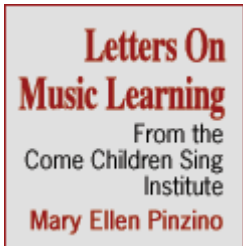
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Letters On Music Learning—reflections on music teaching and learning at the Come Children Sing Institute. Topics include movement, art songs for young children, a new tonal syllable system, music reading and writing, and classroom research on the development 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.

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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.comechildrening.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, and most recently in Indonesia for the East Asian Regional Council of Overseas Schools and the Jakarta International School.

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.