MUSIC TOGETHER®

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MUSIC AND COMMUNITY

For many families, Music Together reaches beyond the weekly class, beyond the tape-playing in the car, and even beyond dancing and drumming in the living room. For many, its effects are also felt in the community at large.

Mahady Makrianes, a parent in Chester, Connecticut, who has been attending classes for two sessions now, says that exposure to Music Together opened her eyes to a part of life in Connecticut she barely even knew existed—but one which she was thrilled to discover and now calls her community.

Recently, when she took her children to a folk music concert, she found herself responding as never before. "For the first time, I felt very viscerally the power of music to unite people and to motivate people and to affect change," she said, explaining that she has never considered herself musical. "Physically, my feet were tapping. The way I felt when I was there was, 'Oh my God! The way I want the world to be is possible! There are other people out there who believe in communities and who sing and move together.' And I don't think I would have been so taken with it before Music Together, because music to me was too scary."

In her case, Makrianes said, the classes have done more than introduce her sixteen-month-old son and five-year-old daughter to the basic building blocks of music competence. They are teaching them "not to be afraid of music" and are consequently opening them up to a wider community which shares her family's values.

If early exposure to a community of music-makers can expand and enrich a child's environment, the musical community itself is enhanced when more children and their parents join it. It might sound obvious, but the more people making music informally, the more opportunities there are for non-professional, non-performance-oriented music-making. And that is "more than just an unintended side benefit of the program," explains Kenneth K. Guilmartin, Music Together's founder and director,"it is one of the primary goals."

"In America in the 21st century," he said, "there are very few venues or opportunities to make music in an informal, participatory way. When people come together to belt out 'Happy Birthday,' for example, nobody particularly cares whether it's sung terribly out of tune or beautifully in harmony—everybody just sings."

Music Together, however, creates lots of these opportunities. First, there are all the class times. Then, there's the music-making at home. And as a growing number of families go through the Music Together program, a broader musical community is forming, one which shares in common not only the Music Together songs but also the ways to break into singing and musical activity taught at Music Together. This can generate spontaneous Music Together moments—in the elevator, on the food store line, in the playground.

Guilmartin says that over and over again, he hears anecdotes about how Music Together unites people into a community. For instance, there are the cousins who live thousands of miles apart but who keep close by both taking Music Together classes. Old high school friends reconnect after twenty years when one parent sees the other's name in the Music Together newsletter.

As Normal, Illinois, center director Annelise McVoy puts it, "The main reason I teach Music Together is to foster community growth. I view the music classes and the materials as the basis from which to nurture a large 'family' in my area. Music Together provides exactly the right vehicle for me to do that. Improvisation, humor, playfulness, and fun are built right into the program."

Jessica Nevins, a Music Together center director in Chester, Connecticut, said that in her experience, parents are just as likely to join her class for the first time because they are searching for a community of people going through the same things as they are, both as parents and as individuals. An interest in exposing their young children to music is sometimes the by-product of a search for an appealing group of people sharing a worthwhile activity.

That was certainly true for her six years ago when, as a new mother, she first enrolled in a class in Brooklyn, New York. "I wanted to know people who were having babies at the same time as I was. I wanted to know the people whom my kids were going to grow up with. I had an unflinching desire to know every family around," she said. "The joke was that I was trying to make Brooklyn feel like a small town."

If the search for community draws parents through the door, it is Music Together's ability to "show them that all children are musical and that musical growth is something we can watch and nurture" that keeps them coming back, said Nevins, who had worked as a professional singer before beginning her new life as a parent.

The community-building aspect of Music Together has also helped Judy Woodson of Newport Beach, California, to orchestrate her own successful life-change. A globe-trotting hotel entertainer for the last ten years, Woodson was tiring of her peripatetic lifestyle. She was beginning to envy her sister Sally Woodson, director of West Side Music Together of Manhattan, for the community she had created through involvement in her neighborhood, her church, and her classes. "The word that came to my mind representing what she had that I wanted was 'community.'"

So two years ago, when Judy decided to settle down, she took the Music Together teacher training and opened a center in her West Coast home town. "I don't have kids, but this has allowed me to feel as if I am part of the community here," she said. Perhaps even more importantly, Judy's decision also brought her closer to her sister than she had been since their childhood, when the two of them were first developing their passions and talents for music-making.

Young children learn by watching and doing what their community of caregivers do. Once they have the skills, knowledge, and disposition to make music, they then need the opportunity to put their learning into practice. That's what Music Together does, Guilmartin explained. "By creating informal musical communities, we generate a lot of musical 'doing'— and lots of fun!"

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MUSIC TOGETHER

NEWS AND INFORMATION

YOUR EYES WILL CHANGE

All Music Together teachers trace their roots back to a training with either Ken Guilmartin or co-author Lili Levinowitz. There they joined the Music Together teaching community, along with others whose eyes were also changing. Now, as teachers and center directors, they benefit from ongoing support from the national center and their own mini-networks.

One exciting way for teachers to reconnect with colleagues is at Songs Workshops before each semester. Also, experienced teachers share expertise with each other in the advanced trainings of the Certification Program. Likewise, CMYC benefits from consistent and high-quality feedback from center directors and teachers. As successes are shared and concerns are aired, the teaching-learning community draws together to create a comprehensive vision.

Music Together offers an ever-increasing number of trainings throughout the country (over 25 projected for 2001), with plans to make advanced levels of certification training available nationwide.

NEW WEBSITE EXPANDED

The new Music Together website, only a year old, is constantly expanding and being updated, becoming a place for teachers and families to share their experiences of music-making and Music Together. Center directors nationwide are enjoying the privileges of an electronic email listserver where they exchange concerns, questions, and advice. The web and technology are helping us forge a larger virtual Music Together community.

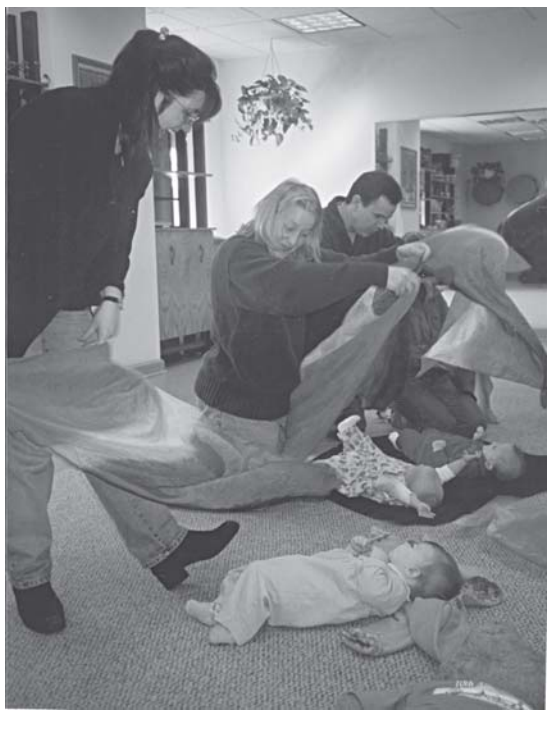
Currently the website offers a complete description of the Music Together vision and program and archives its many publications. You can now read any lead article from past national newsletters; and complete issues will appear this summer. The City Locator button on the homepage provides internet links to Music Together centers with their own sites. Also the website will facilitate trainings and songs workshops by offering complete details and directions for each workshop soon.

Come join us on-line for
The Joy of Family Music™!

FAMILIES WRITE US

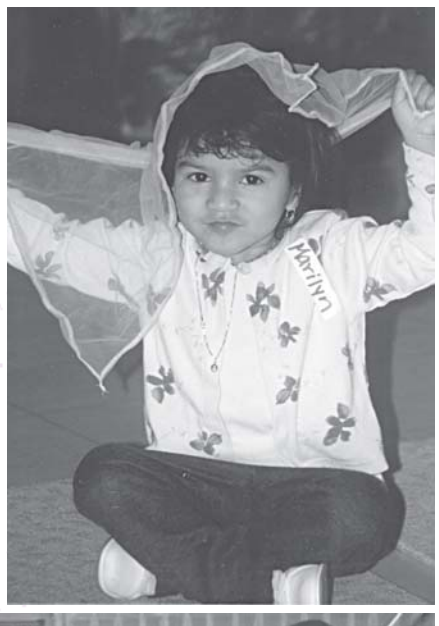
Music Together surfaced at a recent Passover Seder dinner. During a prayer moment, and following the example of family members who had been singing songs during the evening, two-and-a-half-year-old Rebekah Silver chose to sing "Everybody Loves Saturday Night" (from this winter's "Drum" collection)! Even though her dad and grandparents knew the music only from the recordings, the whole family joined right in and sang the song all the way through—animal noises and all!

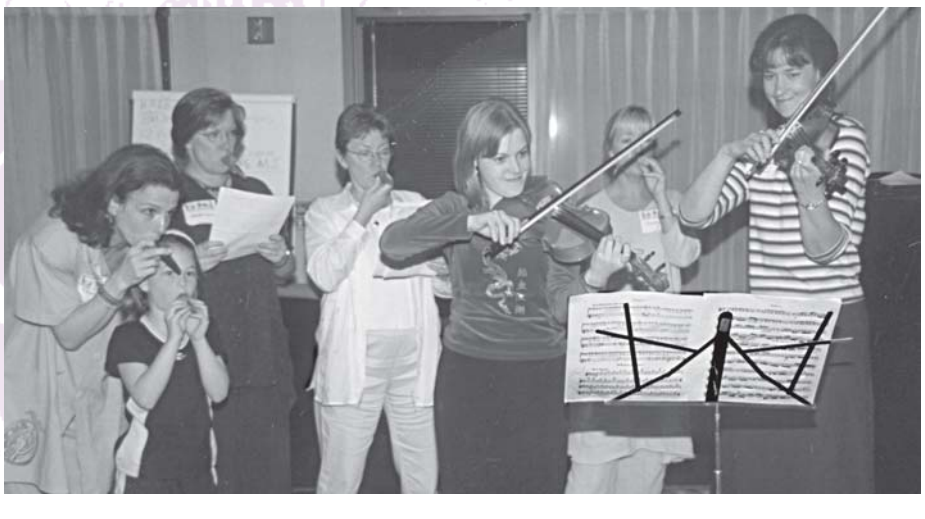
Center director Sharon Infante (Selden, NY) relates this story of adopting a six-year-old from a Russian orphanage: "During the first week back, I took my son to Music Together classes in my center every day. Hearing the music in the car and in class has helped him not only with learning English, but also with breaking down the orphanage life style. The music and classes have been more than pleasurable and educational: they have also been very therapeutic."



MAKING MUSIC TOGETHER

Music Together is as much about creating community as it is about making music. Photos counter-clockwise from top left: Four Music Together center directors from New Jersey improvise harmonies to a familiar lullaby—Leslie Lucas of Summit, Carol Berman of Clifton, Susan Darrow of Montclair, and Holly Denton of Verona. Parents and babies share a musical moment in a safe and joyful "community." Members of the teaching-learning community, including a mother-daughter pair, make music at last year's annual Music Together Directors' Weekend in Princeton, New Jersey. Marilyn dances with a scarf at Music Together's outreach program at the Puerto Rican Community Day Care Center in Trenton, New Jersey.





DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Parents, Teachers and Caregivers:

A sense of community comes from having things in common. Geography, genetics, language, religion, and family relationships are some of the big ones. And the arts have always served, often very powerfully, to express and expand the feelings of community these connections generate.

The arts also create their own communities of common experience. In fact, for better and worse, the power of today's electronic media can give artistic expression a reach that makes traditional bonds appear insignificant. For example, for many teenagers, music IS their community—period!

Music-making creates instant community, and Music Together helps families learn to weave simple, informal moments of music-making into the fabric of daily life (see the Fall/Winter 2000 newsletter on our website). In addition, Music Together families share a common song repertoire, as well as a collection of ways to "do" music—ways to be informally and actively involved in music-making and music-responding. This body of shared experience brings music into mind, into conversation, into relationship. It provides something to talk, laugh, and wonder about. It offers a region in which to relate.

With the help of Music Together recordings and songbooks, families quite naturally create a community of music-making at home; and more and more are expanding this community to include others. For example, children who have Music Together in common enjoy "playing music class." Many parents especially appreciate that this play does not rely on paraphernalia from the latest Hollywood "kiddie" movie.

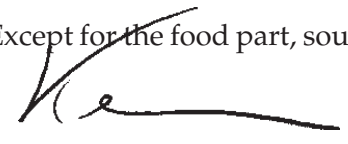
The Music Together approach greatly increases opportunities for music participation at home, because the song-forms and activities are based on improvisation and theme-and-variation techniques which are easily adapted for use in daily life. Parents are able to do this, because teachers are trained to value adults' participation in class, regardless of their musical ability.

Many parents report that Music Together enhances the more typical experiences available in the traditional music community. For example, their children may have longer-than-expected attention spans at concerts. Children might dance in the aisles or wander up on to the stage and join in the "play-along!" And parents find that they are more likely to join a drum circle, sing in a community chorus, or take guitar lessons again.

It was that great communitarian Margaret Mead, mentor to Jean Houston, who put forth the idea of the nontraditional *"teaching-learning"* community as the best way to foster personal and social transformation. Such a community generates learning by fostering involvement and participation, encouraging exploration and expression, and accepting "students" where they are. "Teachers" function more as guides, catalysts, and resources rather than as authorities who set standards and requirements. And everyone learns from everyone else.

Houston reports Mead as saying, "The world is going to change so fast that people and governments will not be prepared to be stewards of the change. What will save them [are] teaching-learning communities…in churches or businesses or even in families.…They could meet weekly and do [activities] that develop their capacities. There must be humor, laughter, music, games, and good food as well."[1]

Except for the food part, sounds like a Music Together class to me!



Kenneth K. Guilmartin
Founder/Director, Center for Music and Young Children

[1]Houston, Jean, *A Mythic Life: Learning to Live Our Greater Story* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 228. Also see *Jump Time: Shaping Your Future in a World of Radical Change* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), pp. 94–97.

CENTER NOTES

DAYCARE OUTREACH
The Center for Music and Young Children, Music Together's national laboratory school, has received the Community Partnership Award from the Puerto Rican Community Day Care Center, Trenton, New Jersey. CMYC provided them with the Music Together preschool program curriculum, first developed in 1989 in Union City, New Jersey, by Ken Guilmartin. CMYC is now in its second year of an outreach partnership with the Trenton Community Music School, with the aim of bringing Music Together to preschools in Trenton. Grants from several foundations fund this partnership and currently afford four schools the opportunity to participate in the program.

FAMILY SCHOLARSHIPS
Music Together center directors are proactive about building community. Center director Sarah Hansen (Ely, MN) describes her alliance with a local community organization: "I received a grant from a local Kiwanis club to go toward half scholarships for low-income families to be used during the next year. Kiwanis has an admirable focus on youth—they loved the Music Together presentation." Fiona Murray, Music Together of Union County, NJ, is offering "a summer music picnic inviting all current and past clients." The teachers gather together in a local park, charge $5 per family, and hold a big Music Together outdoor class/ bring-your-own-instruments jam session. Linda Thornton (Music Together of Croton-on-Hudson) organizes benefit concerts of everything from theatre troupes to string quartets in order to raise scholarship funds. Other centers establish a scholarship fund for families in need by giving the option to donate extra money directly on the registration form.

RESOURCES

Since the fall of 1999, Ken, Lili, and many others at CMYC have been in the process of creating three entirely new song collections and revising the six existing ones along the way by adding new songs and new arrangements. The eventual result will be nine unique collections, each with newly formatted songbooks full of activity ideas, graphics, and pictures. Families can now enjoy a new collection each semester for three years! Elementary school teachers are finding Music Together materials to be sophisticated enough for use in their classrooms. And "alumni" families with older children are also enjoying the new materials and having fun comparing new and old song arrangements.

Each revised collection has many new songs as well as updated arrangements, all representing a wide variety of tonalities, meters, instruments, and cultures. The richness and the diversity of the available materials means that there is something for everyone. Of course, children of all ages find the music delightful!

Why all the activity? The Music Together community is a constantly evolving circle of teaching and learning. We keep abreast of the latest early childhood research, always applying what we learn to the classroom, and likewise encouraging parents to "research" their own children's musical development at home. The new and revised song collections—at the heart of our program—include and build on this ongoing "journey." By providing the freshest and most appealing musical experiences possible, they help children to develop to their maximum potential.

ACTIVITIES

ON VACATION
When your family goes on vacation, bring your Music Together recordings, books, and instruments. Hours pass pleasantly when children and adults sing together in the car. Songs like "Ridin' in the Car," "Ride-O," and "Train to the City" are obvious choices for traveling music. Sing your favorite songs, and ask your children for theirs. When you arrive at your destination, bring the music in with you—CD or tape, instruments to play, and the songbook for pictures and actities. Singing in public—at the beach, on a hike, on a bike ride—you may meet other people who know the same songs. Although adults may be surprised to meet another member of our musical community by the songs they sing, children may find this normal, believing that everyone grows up singing Music Together songs. What a feeling it was one evening last summer for Music Together teacher and editor Catherine Judd Hirsch to hear from a poolside hotel balcony a mother's song wafting across from another balcony: *"Hello, everybody, it's time to take a shower. . . !"*

FAMILY REUNIONS
Bring your songs and instruments and share music with your extended family. Familiar songs like "She'll Be Comin' 'Round the Mountain," "Drummers Marching," and "Shoo, Fly, Don't Bother me," are familiar to many people. Songs without words, like "Biddy Biddy" or "Ride-O" can be learned easily by people of any age. If you're eating or making supper, try "All Around the Kitchen," or "No More Pie." Birthday parties, holidays, and family suppers are community events that can be celebrated and enhanced with musical play.