



# MUSIC TOGETHER®

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## SEPTEMBER 11 & THE HEALING POWER OF MUSIC

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, Alyson Cohn chose not to chant the “fire truck” verse of the “Rocketship” chant during her Music Together classes. In her community just across the Hudson River from NYC, it was a rare day when somebody didn’t burst out crying, attend a memorial service, or hear about a neighbor or friend touched by the tragedy. Local fire departments had spent much of the fall racing to help, first with the rescue and then with the recovery efforts at the World Trade Center.

“I love the song, but I’ve come to conclusion that we don’t need to hear any more sirens now, especially here,” she said.

Instead, as director of Music Together of Northern New Jersey, Cohn wants to maximize the joy that singing and playing music together can produce. “You are the most open to joy when you are singing. You can let the rest of the world go for a little while,” she explained. “This is just a small little thing—lovely and sweet and loving—that we can do to keep our sanity when grief and worry have become overwhelming.”

In addition, singing in a community of young children seems to magnify music’s restorative powers. “In spite of everything, you can’t help but be joyful when playing with your baby,” Cohn says.

Or, as a father in one of Jane Smolen’s Boulder, Colorado, classes puts it: “It’s hard to feel bad when you’re dancing with scarves.”

Perhaps it’s the contrast. On a day as terrible and terror-filled as September 11<sup>th</sup>, most parents felt impelled to go home and hug their children a little closer. “And here we are, not only hugging our children a little bit closer, but doing something to celebrate life with them—by being musical with them,” Cohn said, speculating about why people across all cultures and since time immemorial have turned to music to help them grieve for losses, to heal wounds, to aid with coping, to wish for peace and resolution, and, ultimately, to celebrate the continuation of life despite death.

“Music and music-making become even more important in a time of stress, but ‘why’ is a mystery,” said Kenneth K. Guilmartin, founder and director of Music Together and the Center for Music and Young Children in Princeton, New Jersey. Perhaps it’s because of contrasts, like those mentioned by Cohn. “In times of stress, in times of loss, the sweet things in life become sweeter, and the deep things in life

become deeper, and then rise up into immediate awareness,” Guilmartin says.

Music, moreover, carries emotions. When people need something bigger than speech to convey their feelings, they often turn to music to find a way to express it. Making music clearly helps people let go of sadness, grief, and even anger. Think of



religious hymns or chants, or the “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*.

“The first time I listened to something beautiful after September 11<sup>th</sup>, I was instantly in tears,” said center director Shelley Jorgensen of Forest Grove, Oregon. “I think it was because of the contrast: there’s this horror and hatred, and then, there’s this beauty that we’re capable of.”

But just as importantly as helping people express their emotions, music has the power to help evoke them. Before she begins the lullaby in her Music Together classes, Jorgensen said she has been making a short introduction—almost a prayer for peace—aimed at helping her families think about the universality and peacefulness of family music as they listen: “Let’s appreciate this gift and hope that more people in the world can experience peace of singing to your child ... knowing that millions don’t have this opportunity.” Music Together, she says, is more than a way to educate young children about the basic vocabulary of music—how to sing in tune and in rhythm. It is also about enriching life and building community.

In spite of the fact that September 11<sup>th</sup> has changed everything for most of us, the music goes on. While many Music Together teachers struggled with

whether they should cancel their first classes, the ones who forged ahead with them said they have been thanked again and again by parents seeking routine, normalcy, and a means of protecting their young children from the horror.

“It’s a link to what life was like when life was normal,” said Linda Young, mother of five-year-old Cary in Ewing, New Jersey, who started taking Music Together classes when her son was fourteen months old. She also said that the same is true with playing Music Together tapes in the car while driving. In addition to providing a respite from the constant barrage of bad news on the radio, “putting on the tapes feels like being with an old friend.”

While the emotional content of music works to restore spirits, many contend that music can be used even more therapeutically, and even to heal. Music therapists work with stroke victims and can reach otherwise unresponsive elderly people suffering from dementia. Playing music can ease the pain of childbirth. Exercising to music can push people to go further and faster. African and Native American healers exploit rhythmic drumming and dancing in their treatments.

People in many traditions chant during meditation to calm and center themselves. Parents sing their child’s favorite song to help the child cope during a painful medical treatment.

“I believe there are healing qualities in the vibrations we create when we’re singing,” said center director Jane Smolens. People all around the world have certainly experienced this while singing, both solo and as part of a chorus. Whether these vibrations cause the body to release the natural endorphins that induce feelings of well-being, whether they just make the blood circulate more vigorously, or whether they operate through some other yet-to-be-understood physiological or psychological mechanism, there is no doubt that making music—particularly as part of a community—can help us cope with extraordinary events.

For six families in Alyson Cohn’s Music Together classes, September 11<sup>th</sup> has meant having to convert the extraordinary to the ordinary. Each of these families lost a parent when the World Trade Towers collapsed. And all have returned to classes this session. “Maybe it’s what’s keeping them going,” Cohn said, “trying to do something normal and positive with their children—finding a little light in the darkness they feel.”



# MUSIC TOGETHER

## NEWS AND INFORMATION

### TEACHERS RESPOND

Around the country, the Music Together teaching community felt the reverberations of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Many struggled with the same question: was it appropriate to continue life as normal, i.e., to offer classes in the immediate aftermath?

Those who did so found themselves providing a much-appreciated refuge for families anxious to escape the barrage of bad news. "I've been working even harder since then to knit people together using music as the means to foster a greater sense of community," explained center director Annelies McVoy, Bloomington, IL. Annelies supplemented her curriculum with the traditional round "Dona Nobis Pacem" ("Give Us Peace"), while others added "If I Had a Hammer" and other peace songs.

Also, the online forums for teachers and directors served as outlets for the fears and doubts which at first plagued our teaching community. But increasingly this fall, music proved a consolation and assumed even greater importance in their lives.

### NATIONAL MT RESPONDS

On the Tuesday we will all remember, Music Together staff in Princeton tried to contact center directors in Manhattan and Washington, DC, to see if they were safe. We soon learned of losses to registered families and evacuations of several center directors from their homes or studios. The center directors' email list became a central means of communication, spreading news of safety, tragedy, and ways to handle classes during the next few days.

An online forum for Music Together teachers had been in the planning stages, but immediately became first priority. It was established and working by the weekend, with a letter from founder/director Ken Guilmartin addressing the tragedy and offering thoughts on music as a source of community comfort and healing. The national organization has also supported scholarships for affected families in New York, New Jersey, and Washington, by waiving the fees normally paid for materials and support services.

### FAMILIES RESPOND

"Thank you for having this program. It nourishes the human spirit. For me it is essential to be able to participate in nourishing programs that allow me to remain centered and peaceful so that I can emanate this outward during these unsettling times. Peace is contagious." —sent in by center director Melinda Burgard, Warwick, NY

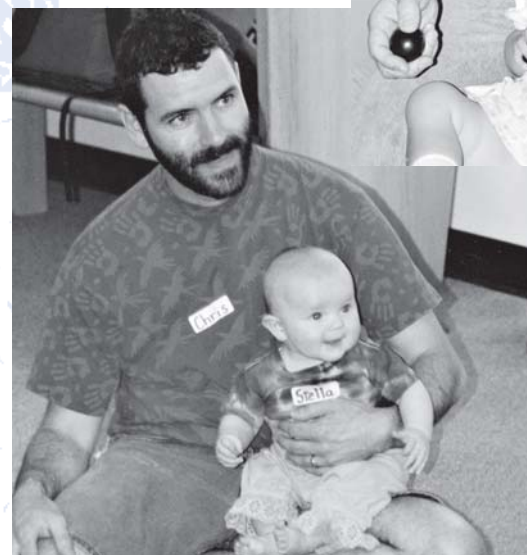
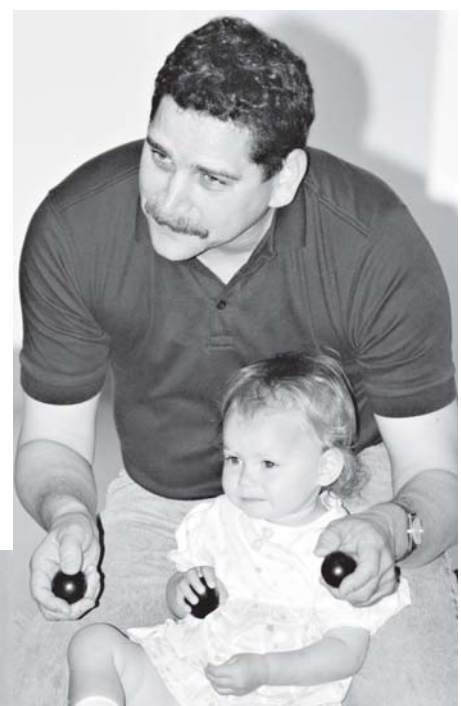
"This helped me so much, just to see all these children and families coming together, and singing here ... it gives me hope and reminds me of all the life to come." —overheard by Christopher Carbone, Newport County, RI, in the building where he holds his classes

And told to Manhattan center director Erica Mason, in response to her school's outgoing message addressing the tragedy: "It warmed my heart to hear how you expressed yourself and the value of what you do. Thank you for that and for your continued devotion to your good work and our precious children."

### DANCE TO YOUR DADDY

*"Dance to Your Daddy" has been one of the most enjoyed songs of the brand new "Flutes" song collection this fall. But it could not be sung in many classes in the New York and Washington areas: too many fathers had been lost in the September 11 attack.*

*In wartime, when violence affects the lives of many men, it is good to remember how wonderful it is when they dance and sing with their children.*



# DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Parents, Teachers and Caregivers:

The articles in this newsletter provide a portrait of the community of Music Together families, teachers, and center directors and their response to the events of September 11. In our community, music creates the primary bond; it is also the healing balm to which we have turned at this momentous time.

Our work with children, families, and music is a joyful, life-affirming presence, all the more necessary in times like these. Making music, especially with movement, is a healing and “wholing” activity. It lifts our spirits, clears our minds, and refreshes our bodies. It helps us bring our different parts and systems into synchronized, harmonic alignment. It feels good. It can be beautiful. It’s fun. It’s human. It’s not violent. Music-making creates instant community, thereby celebrating our uniquely human capacities for creative expression. It helps us touch each other, in harmony, at the point where we are one.

The NY Philharmonic is about to perform the Brahms Requiem for a September 11 memorial concert. Thousands have gathered in the concert hall, the dignitaries have spoken, the musicians are at the ready, and millions watch the broadcast—the tragic events in everyone’s mind. But it isn’t until the opening chords that feelings well up, that eyes fill with tears, and that musicians and audience experience a normally improbable oneness—a oneness that further embraces those who died, their terror and suffering, and the beauty of their lives, now lost, and our lives, still living—all sharing the beautiful and terrible oneness of being American in this moment. What is it in music that can do that?

As a young composer working in music theatre, I learned that a good time for a song or an aria is when the dramatic or emotional energy builds to such a level that the confines of spoken language seem inadequate. Conversely, we often rely on music to help us access or turn on our emotional energies, to “put us in the mood” for romance, parties, dancing, or the holidays, or to alter a negative mood we can’t otherwise shake. Music expands time by slowing down the flow of thought and action. Simultaneously, the alchemy of melody and rhythm heightens our emotional energy, filling up the expanded time. Music creates a larger container for thought, action, and feeling—it gives us the time, space, and energy to perceive and feel in ways that may simply be too much for our normal awareness. It helps us love, celebrate, grieve, and pray. It expands our capacity to be human.

Would that we could include in our classes such families as those of the men who created the violence of that September morning; would that those families could include ours in their singing and dancing. This is an image that I hold, and I pray that it may be true someday.

May the blessings of music and a peaceful heart be with you always.



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

# CENTER NOTES

In the days and weeks following September 11<sup>th</sup>, Music Together center directors took action. In Manhattan, center directors Deanna DeCampos and Sally Woodson spearheaded an effort to contact local emergency relief centers with an offer of a year of free classes to families of victims. “I could have worked in a soup kitchen or a relief shelter, but this seemed like the most significant way I could help,” Deanna explained. Her mission was motivated by a desire to assist the healing process with a gentle but powerful tool: community music-making.

In addition to holding classes with a renewed sense of personal and organizational purpose, many directors contributed to various emergency relief funds and involved their registered families in the process. Alyson Cohn of northern New Jersey donated a portion of every family registration to the Red Cross fund. Susan Hoffman in Brooklyn, New York, wrote at the bottom of her confirmation letters: “As you know, our local Fire Engine Company lost twelve men in the World Trade Center collapse. I’m committing a part of your tuition to the families of the firefighters and others in our community who have suffered a loss. Also, I encourage you to keep singing to your children, and embrace the healing power of song.”

Following their example, center directors Barbi Beyer (RI), Annelies McVoy (IL), Susan Boddie (NY), Lisa Orinn (NJ), and others began channeling funds from their registration fees to charities. Center directors and staff from the national Music Together organization also came to the assistance of displaced Music Together colleagues who had lived or taught near Ground Zero.

# RESOURCES

Personal tragedies and global tragedies often cause us to pause and consider basic questions, basic loves, and basic fears. Children can sense—and often take on—the urgency, confusion, nervousness, or fear in adults and then respond emotionally themselves. They don’t understand global tragedy, but they can still feel it. The model of how a parent deals with his or her emotions makes a difference, and children may need help in dealing with their own feelings.

While poetry, essays, and positive verbal expressions might help us through difficult times, music can touch us even more deeply and intensely, allowing us to experience feelings, to let them go, and to be comforted. For example, television personality Fred Rogers shares a memory from his preschool days: “When I was angry as a child, my family encouraged me to play out my feelings on the piano. That’s when I discovered the real power of music. I’d begin by banging random notes—anything (like a punch). The longer I played, though, the calmer my music became, the calmer I became, too.”<sup>1</sup>

The current Music Together “Sticks” Song Collection includes music that energizes and releases feelings, as well as music that soothes. Create “comfort rituals” for times of stress by choosing from among your child’s favorite songs and adding appropriate movements, such as rocking or stroking. The “Sticks” collection has a new lullaby entitled “May All Children” which commemorates September 11<sup>th</sup> and which may be comforting to all.

<sup>1</sup>Rogers, Fred, *Making Music*, Family Communications, Inc., 1994 ([www.misterrogers.org](http://www.misterrogers.org)).

# MAKING MUSIC

“Everyday life” holds a different meaning for many of us after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Research and field experience have established the benefits to children of early exposure to music; and sometimes Music Together helps children to grow in ways that seem like magic. But in these difficult times, as many families discover the healing community +in their classes, the everyday value of Music Together becomes even clearer.

This is something center director Lizz Hodgkin (Santa Cruz, CA) and her son Daniel have known and experienced for years. Daniel has Downs Syndrome, so “everyday life” has always posed unusual challenges for them. A friend gave them a Music Together tape and songbook when he was a baby, and immediately they began to discover music’s potential to heal and grow:

Daniel, now seven-and-a-half years old, is the most musical child! And what a gift music has been to him. He . . . is behind his peers in every way—except in music, where he excels! That is where he’s the best, where he’s the star. What a gift to give a child!

Making music together is something that brings Daniel and me great joy. And because of his limited vocabulary and speech, music is one of the best ways in which we communicate. What a gift to us!

Daniel is expressive, joyous, and enthusiastic in his music-making. He has incredible confidence in front of others and loves to sing and dance for an audience. When he makes music, it delights all those around him. What a gift to others!

I’m so thankful that I learned from Music Together how to create the rich musical environment wherein my child has thrived. Thank you forever and ever for this precious, lasting gift.