



# Play Along™

Music Together's Newsletter for Families



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## Movement and Music: Together

Years ago, although I was happily attending a Music Together class and had even trained to become a teacher, I embraced the belief of so many first time parents—that there is no such

thing as too much enrichment for one's child. So I enrolled my daughter in a second music program as well. In this program, the children either sat in a circle and sang simple melodies or got up and moved rhythmically to piano music. My two-and-a-half-year-old often stood during the sit 'n' sing parts and moved quite energetically, despite the teacher's baleful glances and my urgent whispers. When her energy level escalated enough to propel her around the circle, the frustrated teacher was sometimes reduced to tackling her.

O, Reader, as the parent of this child, I fully sympathized with the teacher's predicament; but as a Music Together veteran, I was unused to the idea of her having to sit during a music experience. With missionary zeal, I approached the head of the program and offered to share a few song ideas. He welcomed me and followed my lead as we tapped our feet and chanted "There's a Cobbler," made precipitous turns and honked our imaginary horns as we went "Ridin' in the Car," and tapped our knees and noses as we sang "Biddy Biddy." But when I encouraged him to put on his bunny ears and become "John the Rabbit" with me, he blurted out, "Do all your songs have these . . . movements that go with them?"

From his perspective, movement was a distraction to learning a song; it was important that a child sit in the circle and pay attention. My Music Together training, however, had taught me that music and movement go together. Certainly my daughter's immediate response to music was to move rhythmically. But, I couldn't help wondering, did she have to be so rhythmic? At the time, I thought she was too young or maybe even too

stubborn to follow the protocol of this class, but now I understand she was instinctively sticking with a behavior guaranteed to foster her music development. Her full-body boogie, which felt like a problem for the adults around her, was helping her develop rhythm competence through experiencing and expressing music physically.

Movement is a vital developmental tool for children. It seems natural to us that an infant moves his limbs, turns his head, and flexes his tiny fingers, but we don't often consider that this is the process by which the child develops his ability to coordinate his mind and body. The very act of moving stimulates his muscles and his neural pathways, helping both to develop the capacity to communicate with each other. Just as a person with a leg in a cast will find those muscles slightly atrophied when the cast comes off, so would an immobilized child be hindered in reaching her full capacity for movement. In other words, the child's increasing mastery of his body's movements comes not just from physical growth, but from the stimulation provided by the movement/mind feedback loop.

This kinesthetic feedback mechanism is also essential to developing rhythmic competence in music. "Movement is an experiential pathway to cognition for children," says Kenneth K. Guilmartin, Music Together founder/director and co-author. "In order to 'decode' the music rhythms of our culture, the child needs to explore them freely in her body." Rhythm, when expressed in movement, becomes a conduit for the flow of information between the eye, ear, body, mind, and emotions, and greatly enhances the ability to understand and to love music. Therefore, we generally don't require children to sit still in a Music Together class (although each teacher judges her class's tolerance for over-exuberant behavior and sets

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## Dear Parents and Caregivers,

When we describe Music Together as a music and movement approach, it's not that movement is a nifty thing to add to music or vice versa. It's that they are inextricably connected by our fundamental human nature, the ways we perceive and express. This is because without movement at some level, there is no life. From the scuff-slap of skipping children to the rap-rap-rap of a dribbled basketball, from supermarket scanners chirping at labels whizzing by to the procession of seasons and planets, we live a life of rhythmic change through movement.

Music as we know it arises principally from two fundamental domains: tonal (pitch/melody) and rhythm. Rhythm cannot exist without movement—think of a heartbeat. Moreover, children learn by doing, and to do is to move. As we mature, we increasingly replace concrete doing with imagined activity and abstract thought. Yet this thought is grounded in those earlier concrete explorations and discoveries. Even during intense intellectual effort, our internal process is often one of imagining the pieces *moving* into place.

In Music Together we use movement to “study” musical rhythm. Any singing or sounding in class can be accompanied by a movement analog, and vice versa. According to the Dalcroze tradition of Eurhythmics,<sup>1</sup> the study of rhythm includes everything pertaining to the flow of music through time. For example, accent, phrase, articulation, and tempo are rhythm “subjects” that can be learned through movement like the more typical subjects of beat and pattern. As you participate in class, notice that strong accents in the music are expressed with correspondingly strong movements; that changes in movement flow or patterns occur in relation to the phrase structure of a melody; that short, staccato or smooth, legato movements accompany staccato or legato singing or instrument play; and that the changing tempo or speed of your teacher's movements correspond to changes in the tempo of the music.

In this way, we provide your children with developmentally appropriate experiences which create the potential for awareness. When they are older, this potential can be triggered into cognitive understanding in a more typical, direct-instruction “music lesson.” Without these earlier experiences, such understanding is much harder to achieve.

One of my favorite moments in my babies class is when the parents lay the babies on their backs to watch as we gallop around them, singing, “See the pony galloping, galloping...” It's fascinating—and funny—to watch the babies, wide-eyed, excited, perhaps a bit anxious, as they try to track their special grownup's movement, struggling to move those heads that are so big in proportion to their bodies. A second look, beyond the facial animation, reveals arms and legs jerking and flailing. It seems haphazard, but the difference between those moments and moments at rest, when Mom or Dad is within physical reach, is unmistakably one of intent: the babies are wanting and trying to do what they see the adults doing. Jerking legs and flailing arms are the first steps in learning to walk or run; what appears to be random, impulsive movement is the scribble stage of keeping perfect beat. Put it all together and you've got a kid who, years later, can play basketball *and* the piano if he wants to, regardless of so-called “talent.” His body already knows beat, pattern, timing, meter, tempo, phrase, accent, legato, and staccato; it already knows how music flows through time—and he already knows how to move expressively through the rhythms of life.



Kenneth K. Guilmartin  
Founder/Director, Music Together LLC

<sup>1</sup>Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), a Swiss composer and educator, is renowned for his Eurhythmics, a pedagogy using movement and kinesthetic awareness to teach musical skills and understanding, which has been a key influence in many instructional approaches for older children such as Orff, Kodaly, and Suzuki, as well as the experiential approach of Music Together.

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appropriate guidelines). We know this would actually interfere with their ability to express increasingly sophisticated responses to music stimuli. Children are learning on an elemental, physical level, literally getting the music “into their bodies.”

They teach themselves through a level of repetition we adults would likely find exhausting. (Do we endlessly practice a golf swing or yoga position as cheerfully and singlemindedly as a child attempts to stand?) For a child, movement is sheer fun, whether skillfully or clumsily executed, and she wants to try it again and again and again. It is nature's wonderful economy to ensure that what is best for the child is what he so naturally wishes to do.

How is it, then, that some children have no trouble sitting still when experiencing music? It can be a matter of temperament or of development whether they choose to move in class. The child with the more visual learning style may be focused on tracking the rhythmic movements of others in the class, storing it in his music memory for later exploration and play at home. Older children, on the cusp of basic music competence, may suddenly move less because they are increasingly able to audiate, that is, to hear and understand music in their mind when it's not physically present. More and more, they notice the ways that their tonal and rhythmic expression doesn't quite match what they hear both in their mind and from the adults around them, and they become interested in attending more closely in class.



However, even if we're not moving, we're really not quite still either, according to Dr. Lili Levinowitz, co-author of Music Together and Director of Research. “While one audiates, the body is moving at the micro-muscular level. That is, electrical impulses are sent to the muscles. The pathways for the micro-muscular movement are formed in early childhood, so movement is absolutely essential to the development of rhythmic audiation.”

In other words, the act of moving itself provides the information a child needs for rhythm learning, and this movement becomes imprinted in our muscles and neural pathways. As the child's movements become more refined and precise over time, they become distilled at the micro-muscular level, where we always experience movement whenever we experience music. Music and movement really do go together in a most elemental way.

My child and I didn't stay in the local music program, but in subsequent years, when I was the director of a large Music Together center, I regularly sent my older graduates there. I could see they had a level of readiness, both musically and developmentally, to sit and pay attention. And my daughter? She still sways and bobs and taps when she learns a song, but she stands admirably still when she sings in the school chorus.

—Susan Pujdak Hoffman, Certified Music Together Trainer and 'PlayAlong' Editor

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### Ongoing Research and Development at CMYC®

The Center for Music and Young Children® (CMYC), developer of Music Together, was founded in 1985. CMYC is committed to helping families, caregivers, and early childhood professionals rediscover the pleasure and educational value of informal musical experiences. Rather than emphasizing traditional music performances, CMYC encourages family participation in spontaneous musical activity occurring within the context of daily life. CMYC recognizes that all children are musical and that every child needs a stimulating, supportive music environment to achieve basic competence in the wonderful human capacity for music-making.

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# ■ ■ Parent & Teacher ■ ■

Just as many of us believe we can't sing if we don't sound digitally remastered, many of us think we can't dance if we don't know a mambo from the cha-cha. "I have two left feet," a person says regretfully and sits on the sidelines watching others do the Chicken Dance at a wedding. This colloquialism reflects our belief that there is some physical impediment which keeps us from moving easily, rhythmically, and with enjoyment.

Emily Taylor, a recent teacher trainee in Richmond, Virginia, spoke of a friend who told her with great conviction that he was "rhythmically dysfunctional." "What struck me," she said, "is that he said this as if it were an actual medical condition for which he'd received a diagnosis. Yet while he was telling me about it, he was walking and rhythmically patting his baby at the same time."



In fact, anyone who can walk smoothly and evenly—the vast majority of us—is already moving rhythmically and can do so to music as well. Somehow, as happens so often with music expression, the formal notion of what constitutes a good performance hinders our ability to enjoy our natural birthright: singing and moving to the music of our culture with ease and pleasure.

We can all fall prey to this sense of inhibition. Adults in a Music Together class may at first feel slightly awkward when they discover they're supposed to stand up and move. And new teachers who may never have felt confident on the dance floor may be self-conscious about leading a circle dance or a large-movement scarf activity—because now they *know* everyone's watching!

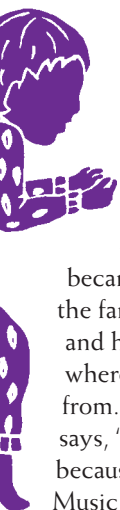
Luckily, all Music Together classes come with young children. They are so gloriously imperfect in their movements, and yet they move freely, energetically, and joyfully. Watching them, we might consider that the word "amateur," often derided in our culture, comes from the Latin for lover or devotee. Looking like a professional dancer seems irrelevant when we see how much fun these frankly amateur music-makers are having. And, as many a parent has discovered

when taking the plunge and dancing with their child, we actually have one left foot and one right—and they were designed to work very well together.

For more information on teaching Music Together, please feel free to call us at (800) 728-2692 x329 or visit us online at [www.musictogether.com](http://www.musictogether.com).

## Sneakin' 'Round the Room

How can you help your child rhythmically at home? Simply by moving and dancing together, you can give him a wonderful sensory experience which also develops his sense of coordination. If you think about it, it requires an impressive interplay between eye, ear, body, and mind to bounce, to twirl, to jump, or to move in any of the ten thousand ways children do. But we don't always think about how this kinesthetic experience increases our musicality as well.



Although born into a family not considered to be particularly "musical," Jessica Nevins, a Music Together center director in Chester, Connecticut, became an accomplished opera singer. While the family could tell she had her father's eyes and her mother's nose, no one could guess where her wonderful musicality had sprung from. "At my Music Together training," she says, "I had the sudden realization that it was because my father always danced with me. Music for me was motion first, whirling through space and feeling joyful while dancing in my father's arms."

You can also give your child an experience of rhythm through what Music Together teachers

call small movement. When singing to your infant, gently tap him on the head, on his arms, or on his tummy to give him a physical expression of the beat. On a very unconscious, brain-wiring level, he will associate this tactile stimulation with the music he's hearing.

Similarly, with a toddler who's experimenting with an egg shaker or a drum, just patting the steady rhythm on her back can help her internalize the beat and organize it in her body. Then, as she grows, you may see her own movements become more steady and rhythmic in response to this tapping, even if they don't coincide with the exact rhythm of the music she's hearing.

This steady pulse is the underlying structure and flow of musical expression, which is why we so often tap it out in Music Together class as we sing. By offering it to your child visually, tactilely, or with a full body experience like dancing, you give strong support to her rhythm development.

Child-safe and creative instruments are available at Music Together LLC. For a brochure or to place an order, you may contact us in any of the following ways: call (800) 728-2692 (x345) between 9 AM and 4 PM EST; email [storeorders@musictogether.com](mailto:storeorders@musictogether.com); fax to (609) 924-8457; or visit [www.musictogether.com](http://www.musictogether.com).

**My son is very active in class and moves around the room a lot. It's cute when he jumps up to dance, but it bothers me that he runs sometimes and doesn't seem to pay attention. How can I help him focus better in class?**



## Call and Response

Ironically, movement may be the very medium through which your son "pays attention." We all know the pleasure of feeling ourselves move through space, and some of us utilize this kinesthetic sense as our primary learning pathway. Your son may be a kinesthetic learner, and need to feel the music with his body in order to process it.

Music Together teachers are fascinated to notice how often this type of learner is moving right on the beat, even while apparently unengaged with the class. While it seems counter-intuitive to us adults, that seemingly restless movement is in fact the way that he focuses, and he is quite tuned in to the music around him.

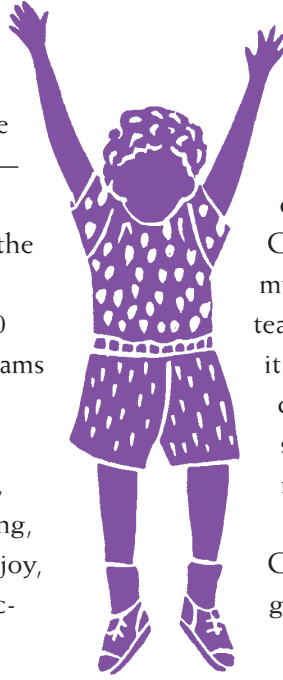
The movement-oriented child will also be stimulated just by the spaciousness of the classroom, and will naturally want to move through it. Generally, we don't require children to stay in their "spot" in a Music Together class, but it can really help if their grown-up does. By staying in the circle and continuing to participate, you provide your wanderer with a home base where he can check in from time to time. Seeing that you prefer singing with the teacher to chasing after him may pique his interest and draw him back to the group—at least until some other lively song sends him dancing off.



# Preschool Outreach

The Center for Music and Young Children works with four outreach preschool programs—two in Trenton, NJ, one in Princeton, NJ, and one in Milwaukee, WI. Each provides the full Music Together program for children and their families—weekly classes, parent events, materials for home music making, and support for classroom teachers. The Music for the Very Young program, initiated by the Trenton Community Music School in 1999, is the oldest and largest, now with 80 classroom teachers serving over 600 children. All four programs together serve close to 900 children and their families.

Music serves a special function in the lives of these children, many of whom are developmentally delayed. Singing, moving, listening, and playing instruments give them experiences of joy, energy, and focus which they, in turn, bring to other interactions at school. Teachers tell us again and again that their attendance is highest on Music Together days, because all the



children want to be in class. Why does music engage them so? Why do they love it, and why is it so important to them? Music provides ample opportunities for cognitive, social, and emotional development, and children can be competent in music and movement at a very young age.

Children with developmental delays in language can succeed in music and through one success move toward another. Classroom teachers value music for the self-confidence and social interaction it provides, and for the path to learning it can offer to at-risk children. They also appreciate the cooperation a well-placed song can inspire; for example, "Clean-up time, everybody help now," to the tune of "Old Brass Wagon."

CMYC is grateful to the teachers and directors of these programs, especially to Ronnie Ragen of the Trenton Community Music School, for contributing to our understanding of how to serve young children and their families through music.

## Music Together® is...

a research-based, developmentally appropriate music and movement program for infant, toddler, preschool, and kindergarten children with their parents, teachers, and other primary caregivers. A curriculum pioneer since 1987.

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