



# Play Along™

Music Together's Newsletter for Families

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## Who Needs a Music Program Anyway?

When Music Together was introduced in 1987, parents welcomed it as simply a great idea. How could you not love making music with your child? Music Together was

fun—and it was also a well-thought-out, research-based, educationally sound approach to music-learning. The program grew quickly, with licensed Music Together centers opening all across the country. Soon, other music programs for young children popped up as well—as did dance, art, movement, and swimming programs. The age of early childhood enrichment had arrived!

By the mid-to-late '90s, it became increasingly difficult for a parent to tell which programs had a solid educational foundation, which were mere entertainment, and which were just—aw, shucks—cute (like the cooking class where my three-year-old daughter learned to make a milkshake). Nowadays, enrichment programs for the very young have proliferated to the point that a backlash has begun to gather. Articles critical of the "super-kid syndrome" have started to appear, as well as some articles that criticize early childhood programs indiscriminately, without differentiating among them. Good, bad, or indifferent, why have any of them? After all, why does a four-month-old need a music class?

It's hard to fault a beleaguered parent for wondering this. If "all children are musical," as the Music Together philosophy puts it, won't a growing child begin to sing at some point, whether or not he joins a class? The answer is a resounding "maybe." Music expression in humans develops in ways similar to language expression. Children may be born with an innate ability to learn the language of their culture, but the language does not arise

spontaneously. It is a learned, complex skill which requires certain stimulation in order to develop. Although the child effectively teaches himself to speak, he can do so only within a language environment.

So it is with music. A child requires a rich music environment in order to fully realize his potential music intelligence. Some would argue that there could hardly be a richer—well, certainly no denser—music environment than today's culture. Music is ubiquitous: it's in doctors' offices, shopping malls, and elevators; it's on car stereos, boom boxes, and iPods. However, for most people, this remains a passive "downloading" experience, which has critical limitations for learning.

True, most of us come to "know" enough about music to develop a real enjoyment of it. Consciously or not, we understand a lot about song structures, rhythm, and melody—enough so that the mainstream music of our culture "makes sense" to us as we listen to it. Our inclination to express ourselves musically is limited, however, and we don't question why this may be so. To whatever extent we may feel awkward dancing or may sing a little out of tune, well, we figure we just weren't blessed with talent.

"Talent" is a mythical concept. People think of it as a magical gift; but it is, in fact, the expression of potential that has been developed into expertise through dedication, drive, and diligent practice. The unfortunate belief that only the "talented" can make music has turned music-making into a spectator sport—one so rarified that, unlike basketball or football, we don't even try to get a neighborhood pick-up game going. We may not all have the drive to attain a unique excellence, but we all have an innate musicality. We are born with the potential to sing in

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Fall 2007

## Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Last June, only a few months before our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary at Music Together, I attended another anniversary event, my 40<sup>th</sup> (!) reunion at Swarthmore College. For me, the two events are connected in personally moving ways that also provide insight on the experience of music in our culture.

Attending school reunions can be a tricky affair. Ambivalence abounds, and you may discover that your best friends chose—perhaps wisely?—to stay home. The flood of memories is mixed, reflecting the turmoil of highs and lows characteristic of late adolescents trying to become adults. But perhaps you're most aware of change: the campus is different, the times are different, your classmates look REALLY different, and your perspective on the arc of your personal growth heightens the contrast between then and now.

At Swarthmore many of my personal highs and lows were musical ones. The campus was full of the '60s revolution in popular music and was famous for hosting an annual folk festival which inspired lounge and lawn music-making all year long. Although eventually I played keyboards in campus rock bands, and even began to compose, I was strictly an instrumentalist: I couldn't sing a note. I suffered in the few music courses I took because I couldn't read music well, either. "Tone deaf" and illiterate, I often despaired in the presence of so much exciting music-making because I couldn't fully participate myself. So, lurking among the other watchers and listeners in the lounges and on the lawns, I'd clap with great enthusiasm while quietly monotoning a few choruses of "Blowin' in the Wind."

What a difference 40 years makes! Now I was on stage, about to sing the Mozart Requiem with the alumni chorus and orchestra assembled that weekend. What a journey it had been, from "tone deaf" to composer, music educator, publisher—and now, singer!—all inextricably linked with the Music Together vision and experience. After the applause, feeling grateful for having been "in concert" through the instant community that music creates, I saw someone approaching me from the audience. She was smiling warmly although I didn't recognize her. She then introduced herself as a member of the class of '97—and a Music Together teacher!

She shared with me how much Music Together had meant to her in cobbling together a professional life in music—performing, teaching lessons, and growing her own Music Together center. She was pleased about our mutual connection to Swarthmore, and I shared my discovery that some of my classmates had children or grandchildren in Music Together. Then she described her own reunion experience. Many of her 30-something classmates had young children in tow. She overheard a mother and child singing "Sailing Song" as they rocked to-and-fro, so naturally she joined them. The child was amazed that this stranger knew the same song! This happened over and over as she played piper to her classmates and their children, discovering that many of them knew Music Together songs.

It was moving to both of us to experience this larger music-making community, extending across the generations and far beyond local time and place. The alumni coming together to sing Mozart and old rock 'n' roll are singing the "Hello Song," too. What a privilege it has been to be a part of the growing community of families and teachers that is Music Together, and how excited I am for what we will create in the next 20 years!



Kenneth K. Guilmartin  
Founder/Director, Music Together LLC



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tune, move with rhythmic accuracy, and express ourselves joyously through musical means. Humans have been doing it for millennia.

Of course, none of us can recall what life was like before recorded music, back in the days when, to hear music, one had to make it. Therefore, we cannot really measure or understand the extent to which we've lost our musical birthright. At Music Together, however, we've had direct experience with the average person's true capacity for self-expression through music. We see young

children blossom musically when placed in an environment designed to stimulate, nurture, and enhance active music expression. The artful combination of guided activities and improvisation, small- and large-movement processes, and instrument play—all using a rich mix of musical styles with varied tonalities and meters—brings forth in children an array of music behaviors that parents find astonishing. Our work with hundreds of thousands of families over the years has shown us that, given an appropriate music environment, these marvelous behaviors are actually the norm: infants really can coo in the tonality of the song their parents are singing; toddlers and twos can improvise their own songs; and many threes and fours start to sing in tune.

Skeptics—and we know they're out there—may still wonder why an actual program is necessary. If all the child needs is an active rather than passive exposure to music, can't a loving parent just sing to him at home? The fact is that many parents lack confidence in themselves as musical role models. They appreciate and even rely upon the support they get from the Music Together recording, songbook, and classroom experience. Parents who are already musicians learn to "play" music with their children rather than taking an instructional approach. And, for all families, Music Together provides something not easily found in our culture today: a community of music-makers.

It is within this music-making community that true magic begins to happen. The "why" of Music Together can be seen in any classroom, as young children and their loved ones sing and dance and laugh together. Humans have always made music, in part because of the unique bond it forges among them. They have always made music, too, as a simple celebration of what it means to be human.

John Blacking, an ethnomusicologist who believed that music-making is a fundamental and defining attribute of the human species, put it well when he said, "The function of music is to enhance in some way the quality of individual experience and human relationships." Music Together does just that, by providing a life-enhancing experience for young children and the adults who love them.

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

### 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.

[www.musictogether.com](http://www.musictogether.com) • (800) 728-2692



# ■ ■ Parent & Teacher ■ ■

Music Together teachers come from many different backgrounds, often related to the arts or education. They may be trained musicians, dancers, actors, singers, preschool teachers, or music therapists. Many, however, come from another field altogether, one known for its rigorous on-the-job training: parenting.

Music Together parents are among our best teachers. The experience of learning to be music-makers with their own children gives them a unique

understanding of—and love for—the program. While many parent-teachers have sung in a chorus or played an instrument at some point in their lives, some have sung only in the shower until discovering Music Together. What they all have to offer, however, is a delight in music-making, a love of children, and a point of connection with other adults in the program.

Those qualities—as well as the ability to be a music-making role model by singing in tune and moving in a rhythmically accurate way—are sufficient for any parent to come and take the Music Together teacher training. During this three-day workshop, participants learn about children's music development and how they can nurture its



growth. They are also taught classroom basics: how to lead tonal and rhythm patterns, conduct small- and large-movement activities, prepare lesson plans, and offer meaningful parent education to the adult caregivers in their classes.

Music Together is known for developing excellent teachers. Those who pass the training and become registered Music Together teachers receive a level of ongoing support unparalleled in the field of early

childhood music education. Teacher support includes a newsletter, online teacher listserve, skills workshops, songs workshops, and advanced certification trainings.

Many mothers with preschool-age children find it especially appealing to have meaningful part-time work with flexible hours. If you're looking for a job that pays you to sing and dance, offers a perfect balance of work and family, and comes with hugs at the "Goodbye" song, consider signing up for a Music Together teacher training.

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).

## Bringing Harmony Home™

Of the many testimonials we receive from parents, among the most heartfelt are those thanking us for transforming family car trips. Music Together CDs—and the singing they inspire—have magically eased the way for cranky babies, impatient toddlers, bored schoolkids, and parents dealing with traffic and tailgaters. We're proud that our CDs can provide this sanity-preserving service. However, we like to encourage families to use the CD at home as well as in the car—and so we give them two recordings each semester.

Listening to the recording frequently offers your child the repetition he needs to process the musical elements and begin to "decode" them.

The rich mix of tonalities and meters offers a musical breadth designed to deepen his innate understanding of music over time. Although we always encourage active family music-making at home, it's also okay to sometimes use the recording as a simple listening experience. Need to make a phone call, cook dinner, or balance the checkbook? Try putting your child "in front of the CD" with a few toys for a guilt-free alternative to television. (If you try this for short periods of time, we recommend starting the CD at different places to make sure you cycle through all the songs.)

You might also consider getting your child her own inexpensive CD player. Children learn to manipulate media devices at surprisingly early ages these days, and they love feeling grown-up enough to push a CD player's buttons by themselves. They may even begin to incorporate the music into their play. As Music Together mom Stephanie Hesselroth tells us, "My two oldest girls have CD players in their rooms and play the songs regularly, singing to each other and their dolls."

Tiffany Starbuck shares the recording with visitors. "We bring out the CD and sing and dance with kids at our playdates," she says, "and the parents who are not familiar with Music Together are just amazed by how much fun we all have." Whether used for just listening, for singing along, for dancing along, or for getting out some instruments and playing along, a Music Together CD can be a catalyst for many levels of music enjoyment—and learning. Let the music begin!

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) 466-9123; or visit [www.musictogether.com](http://www.musictogether.com).

**I can see that mixed-age classes might be great for families with two or more children, but I have only one child. Wouldn't he do better in a class with children all his own age?**



Mixed-age classes benefit all children, because they have little opportunity these days for cross-age interaction. The average size of the American family has steadily decreased, while geographic spread makes it less likely that children spend significant time with various-aged cousins. Increasingly, young children are limited to same-age playdates and preschools. Yet according to early childhood education researcher Lilian Katz, "it's not natural for young children to spend large proportions of time in same-age litters."<sup>1</sup> Katz and others have written persuasively that the mixed-age setting has intellectual and social benefits for both younger and older children.

Older children learn empathy and an awareness of others—social skills that can last a lifetime. Those with poor impulse-control tend to do better when they have the opportunity to be role models for younger children. They also develop leadership qualities: even those children who may be shy in same-age groups often emerge as leaders in mixed-age settings. Younger children learn by imitating the older ones; and, when in mixed-age groups, they often show more complex behaviors earlier than usual.

Another benefit for all children in mixed-age classes is that adult caregivers are less likely to compare children or expect them to reflect some arbitrary "norm" for a given age. For all these reasons, the mixed-age setting has been a hallmark of the Music Together program for twenty years. Children can develop musically at their own pace in a natural, family-style setting.

<sup>1</sup> Katz, L.G. (1998). The benefits of the mix. *Child Care Information Exchange*, 11, 46–49.

# Did You Know?

You're probably familiar with the term "motherese," used to describe the higher-pitched, lilting tone of voice most of us (even dads) use when talking to infants. Those who study infant behavior use the more formal term, "infant-directed (ID) speech," and they have found that infants clearly prefer the rich intonations of ID speech to more neutral forms of adult speech. What infants most prefer, however, according to a study by Takayuki Nakata and Sandra Trehub, is infant-directed singing.

Mothers singing to their infants sound warmer and more emotionally expressive than if they are randomly singing for their own pleasure. Babies can differentiate between the two styles when hearing tapes of their mother singing, highly preferring the infant-directed song. They prefer the recorded singing, in fact, over recordings of infant-directed speech. The researchers theorize that singing moderates infant arousal levels, and that the regular pulse in music



may serve as a "synchronization device" which coordinates emotion between mother and child.

When infants hear their fathers sing, they prefer it if the men raise their pitch slightly (as adults commonly do with infant-directed speech). However, even if the men sing in deep voices, infants remain highly drawn to the sound of their father's voice.

Singing to your baby, therefore, may be the best way not only to soothe him but to enhance his responsiveness and foster emotional bonds. As Nakata and Trehub point out, while practical communication may be best accomplished through language, "emotional communion may be achieved more readily by music."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nakata, T., and Trehub, S. (2004). Infants' responsiveness to maternal speech and singing. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 27, 455-464.

## 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.

## Visit us online for...

- Music Together® Family Favorites® CD
- Child-safe musical instruments
- Music Together classes near you
- Teacher training information
- Research, articles, stories

## Upcoming Collections...

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## GREAT NEWS!



It's OUR Birthday—  
but We're Giving YOU the Gift!

Purchase our Parents' Choice Silver Honor Award-winning CD, Music Together® Family Favorites® — and receive a **FREE** copy of our very first family music photo calendar for 2008. Celebrate 20 years of Music Together with this inspiring full-color calendar featuring a favorite Music Together thought and photo every month. Use promo code **FCN1** at [musictogether.com/FamilyFavorites](http://musictogether.com/FamilyFavorites) — and enjoy!

See the Anniversary supplement to this newsletter for more information.