



EARLY CHILDHOOD MUSIC CLASSES

Program Philosophy:

Music is learned in much the same way that a language is learned. Children need to hear extensive amounts of language and experiment with language before they actually learn to speak and eventually read and write language. In the same way, children need to hear a wide variety of music and experiment with music before they can sing, move to, and eventually read and create music that resembles music as adults know it.

Early childhood classes offered through the Community Music Program at MSU are designed to create a rich music environment for the child to interact with in whatever way she or he feels most comfortable. Some children will be active participants, while others will prefer to watch and absorb. Although the classes will differ according to the age level and readiness of the children, all classes will include singing and chanting for the children in a wide variety of tonalities and meters. Many of the songs that we perform in class will be without words, because children tend to focus on words rather than upon musical content. We will also provide lots of opportunity for age-appropriate movement, with a focus on guiding children to move in a sustained, continuous, relaxed way. Children will be exposed to a vocabulary of tonal and rhythm patterns, which they may or may not perform in class or later at home. In addition, there will also be a limited amount of exploration of simple percussion instruments. "Correct" responses will not be required of children; rather, children will be given the opportunity to explore their musical environment in the same way that they were given the opportunity to explore their language environment.

Parent's Role:

Parents should participate in class. Sit with your child in the circle and serve as a good example for your child. If the teacher moves to a song in a certain way, imitate their movement. As you get to know some of the songs, feel free to sing along. It's important not to force your child to participate or do what the teacher does. There will be some children who wander around during class. You can gently encourage your child to join the group, but please do not force them. Wandering is fine. The teacher will not intervene unless the child is harming others or is interfering in learning.

Food, drink, or personal toys are not allowed in class as this tends to distract the other children. You may keep these items in a bag for use outside of the room before or after class.

The teacher will make a tape for you so that you may play the tapes during the week. In this way, the children will have an opportunity to experience the environment that we create in class in a limited way at home. Your child will learn more as a result. If you can sing the songs or perform the chants that we do during class, please do so during the week. Create as rich a musical environment as possible for your child at home.

Over, please



Frequently Asked Questions

Why do you do so many songs and chants without words?

When songs or chants are presented with text, the children tend to focus on the text rather than on the musical content of the song or chant. Children need words in order to survive easily in their environment and get what they want. The rewards for musical production are much less tangible. Therefore, words tend to be compelling, especially when children are in the midst of the most potent part of the language-learning process. The texts, in such a case, inhibit music learning.

The songs and chants that you perform seem so difficult. I have trouble learning them. Aren't they too difficult for a young child?

The songs that we teach are difficult for adults because they are in unusual tonalities and meters. We, as adults, have spent much of our lives listening to major tonality and duple meter; as a result, we have lots of major, duple baggage that we carry with us wherever we go. That baggage makes it difficult for us to learn songs that are not major, duple. Children, on the other hand, do not have the same baggage that we do. They will find the songs and chants in unusual meters and tonalities as easy as many of the songs and chants in major duple. Learning songs in unusual tonalities and meters will eventually help them understand the more frequently-used tonalities and meters better and in greater depth.

Why don't you use more instruments?

At this point in a child's music education, extensive use of instruments is not appropriate. Children have not developed the fine motor coordination to play many of the instruments accurately. Also, children seem to respond to the elements of music more quickly when they are presented by the human voice. We include some playing of instruments because young children need an opportunity to explore timbre. We also include them occasionally because exploring the instruments is fun.

I am really worried that my child is not participating in class. What should I do?

Relax!!! Your child will participate when he or she is ready. In the meantime, know that there are some children who learn best from watching and silently absorbing what we do in class. Observing rather than participating is perfectly normal and is not indicative of a child's interest or talent. We do not judge children on the basis of how they perform for us in class. Some of the students who quietly sit or even wander around the room seeming to not pay attention, will wind up achieving at very high levels. Forcing a child to participate will do more harm than good, because the child will grow to resent music rather than enjoy it.

Why don't the children sing with you?

They are not developmentally ready. Until children are musically ready, they will not be able to coordinate their singing with that of an adult. We sing for the children and then hope that they will experiment with what they have heard at their own pace and in their own time. As the children mature musically, they will perform with us, but this does not typically happen until about age five.