

Raising a Music Lover

Kids Thrive to Rhythms of Head and Heart

by Randy Kambic



A resounding chorus of research shows that the traditional three R's of essential early education should also encompass an M for music. Playing instruments prior to and during school years can put children on a tuneful path to lifelong benefits.

Helpful Resources

A 2015 study by the National Association for Music Education (nafme.org) shows that youngsters harboring an early appreciation for music tend to have larger vocabularies and more advanced reading skills than their peers. The research also revealed that schools with music

programs have an estimated 90.2 percent graduation rate and 93.9 percent attendance rate compared to others averaging 72.9 and 84.9 percent, respectively.

A recent study by the Children's Music Workshop (ChildrensMusicWorkshop.com), which provides instructional programming for more than 25 Los Angeles-area public and private schools, cites a host of additional benefits. These highlight music education's role in developing the part of the brain that processes language; improving spatial intelligence; thinking creatively; gaining empathy for people of other cultures; encouraging self-expression and teamwork through

playing as a group; and achieving higher grades both in high school and on standardized tests.

Higher institutes of learning are equally involved. Boston's Berklee College of Music (Berklee.edu) offers majors in making it as a music professional, performance music and music therapy, plus postgraduate degrees. Its annual five-week summer performance program in "Beantown" furthers the skills of 1,000 U.S. and international children 12 years old and up. In addition to musical skills, "We see improvement in young people's confidence and persona," says Oisin McAuley, director of summer programs. "It's a truly formative experience."

In addition, The Berklee City Music online program serves high schools nationwide, assisted by alumni in some cities. It also awards scholarships for participation in the summer performance activities in Boston.

The nonprofit Young Americans (YoungAmericans.org) organization, launched in 1992, operates its own college of performing arts in Corona, California, that fosters artistic, intellectual and personal growth for those working toward becoming performers or arts educators. Its International Music Outreach Tours have brought workshops to K through 12th grade students in nearly all 50 American states and 15 countries in Europe and Asia.

Starting Out

"Don't force children to play music. It's better when they want to do it on their own. Having instruments around the house can make it easier," suggests Dayna Martin, a life coach and author of *Radical Unschooling: A Revolution Has Begun*, near North Conway, New Hampshire. Learning music can also decrease math phobia, similar to the way in which children that love to cook and follow recipes learn math, she points out, because math and music are undeniably interconnected.

As part of a self-taught passion for medieval history, her 17-year-old son



INSTRUMENTAL FINDS

Here are some of the organizations that collect and provide musical instruments for youngsters.

- Mr. Holland’s Opus Foundation, MHOpus.org
- Hungry for Music, HungryForMusic.org
- Fender Music Foundation, FenderMusicFoundation.org
- Music for Minors Foundation, Music4Minors.org
- VH1 Save the Music Foundation, VH1SaveTheMusic.org

Devin is building a replica of a Viking-era log house on the family’s property and has made several stringed instruments steeped in the historical period using mathematical principles. “When children apply math to further their interest in music, it makes more sense to them than when it’s some problems in a workbook, and they pick it up

more readily, which instills a lifelong appreciation of mathematics as an essential tool,” she observes.

Jamie Blumenthal, a board-certified music therapist and owner of Family Music Therapy Connection: North Bay Music Therapy Services (*NorthBayMusicTherapy.com*), in Santa Rosa, California, works predominantly with special

needs children. “Autistic children love music, and playing wind instruments like flutes and whistles helps work the muscles around the mouth, assisting with speech development,” she says.

Singing, keyboards and percussion instruments are other tools she uses. “Many parents want their child to become accustomed to social settings. Because their child loves music, they’ll often seek a group music forum,” notes Blumenthal.

Family Music Time (*FamilyMusicTime.com*), in Fort Myers, Florida, is one of 2,500 affiliated centers nationwide and in 40 countries that follows music CDs provided by Princeton, New Jersey-based Music Together (*MusicTogether.com*). Drumming and singing sessions with parents and children up to 5 years old help them gain a music appetite and early group music-making experience, according to Director LouAnne Dunfee. At her studio, local professional musicians also conduct private lessons in piano, guitar and trumpet for children ages 6 and up.

Children playing instruments can mean much more than just music to our ears.

Randy Kambic is a freelance writer and editor based in Estero, FL, and regular contributor to Natural Awakenings.

Be open-minded enough not to label innovations in genres as junk; whatever kids are drawn to should be fine.

– Dayna Martin
