



Children’s Chorus of Maryland & School of Music

Learn how to nurture your child’s natural musical abilities in this series of articles for families & teachers.



Article 8

Why Music? A Parent’s View

By Andrea Burgoyne

We want so many things for our children—opportunity and purpose; education and success; fulfillment and happiness. We pour ourselves into giving them the best we can. Sometimes our days—and theirs—can come to feel like a treadmill, running from activity to activity, enrichment to enrichment. How do we choose the things that will have the most benefit for them, both now and for a lifetime?

MUSIC AND THE MIND

Most parents know the value of sports—especially team sports, which foster collaboration, determination, commitment, good sportsmanship, and excellence. But did you ever think about music that way? Music is a team sport too. A child who sings or plays music in a group learns a similar skill-set to an athlete—collaboration, self-discipline and commitment, mastery of the body, and pursuit of high standards. Moreover, music stimulates creativity, gives access to beauty, and awakens joy. This list reflects so many of the things we most hope for, for our children.


“If you cannot teach me to fly, teach me to sing.” – James Barrie

Music also has profound benefits for the brain. Collaborative music-making, such as singing in a choir or playing with a band, requires something extraordinary—the musician must listen and produce sound at the same time. There are few other endeavors that require such high-level processing of simultaneous input and output. Generally we take turns, listening then speaking, but in music we do both at once. Not only that, but singing engages both the verbal and the mathematical regions of the brain, while also triggering physical involvement—that urge to tap a foot or clap to the beat or hop up and dance. Even infants will wiggle and rock in time to music before they can stand or walk. Watch your child as he responds to music, and you will see how fully the mind, the body, and the spirit are enlivened and engaged.

MUSIC AND THE SPIRIT

There are so many other desirable attributes that can be strengthened by music—memory, attentiveness to detail, patience and focus—the list is long. But just as important are music’s emotional and psychological benefits.

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	<p>National Endowment for the Arts arts.gov</p>	<p>This project is supported in part by a Challenge America Grant award from the National Endowment for the Arts to Children’s Chorus of Maryland & School of Music. To find out more about how NEA grants impact individuals and communities, visit www.arts.gov.</p>
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Why Music? A Parent's Perspective

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"Music expresses that which cannot be put into words, and that which cannot remain silent" – Victor Hugo

Ask any parent and they will tell you – no one gets through the middle school years without some turmoil. But just as rocking and singing comforted your infant and lulled her to sleep, the child who has access to music—especially who has the opportunity to make music of their own—has a powerful tool to help them contend with life's turbulence, as well as a path for constructive engagement with peers. Whether they use it for self-expression or relaxation, distraction or focus, simple pleasure or a way to process emotion, music can be both a source of happiness and a refuge in a storm. Said one young singer, "Every year I've spent [in chorus], I've gotten shivers from my arms to my toes and in that moment I know that I am completely and undeniably happy."

Both of my children sang in a chorus. The music was beautiful, and the memories are precious. But just as treasured are the life skills they were developing as they sang: To commit to giving their best even when it was hard, showing up even when something else tempted them; to appreciate other cultures and traditions, and value the gift of diversity; to be reliable and pull their weight. They discovered the power of music in times of sadness or despair—that they could sing even when their spirits were sagging—and that singing often lifted their heart. They learned to tolerate moments of failure, and to get up and try again and rejoice in their triumphs. And they learned that there was a spark inside of them that could do great things, and give joy to others. We all need the lessons that music can teach.

MUSIC FOR A LIFETIME

Relatively few of us are still playing field hockey or soccer in our 40's. But a high percentage of those who engaged in group-music-making as children remain involved throughout their lives. Research conducted at George Washington University in the early 2000s demonstrated a relationship between singing in a chorus and the physical and mental health of a population of older adults. The seniors in the chorus showed improvements in health, fewer doctor visits, less depression, less need for medication and fewer falls, compared to the non-singing control group.

Increasingly, music is being used in therapies for older people, particularly in the treatment of Alzheimer's, dementia and depression. Among the benefits cited are better memory recall, better non-pharmacological pain management, and positive changes in emotional states.

There are studies that suggest connections between singing and social engagement, music and immune response, and even singing and disease mitigation. When we choose activities for our children, we're probably not thinking much beyond those college applications. But music is a choice that can pay off all their lives.

MUSIC DISCOVERY AND PLAY

The idea of music study can be daunting—it can involve a good bit of time, effort and cost. But long before you decide to invest in formal study, there are so many ways to infuse a young child's life with music exploration. Earlier articles in this series have explored playful music making, but here are a few more suggestions: Everything in the environment has the potential to make a sound—shake it, tap it, drag it, roll it, scrunch it, blow into it, pop it. Make instruments out of found materials and recyclables in your home. Challenge your child to find the music in everyday things. (And check out the links on the next page for inspiration!)

A wonderful tradition in our family is "Family Music Night". Get the gang together and make noise! If you have an instrument, play it. If you don't have one, play whatever makes a sound—wooden blocks, a dried gourd (maracas!), a particularly resonant coffee can. If you have nothing to play, then sing, dance, make mouth noises! Even the littlest family member can participate, and while the music may be unrefined, the videos are priceless!

Nature walks are lovely times to listen as well as look. The quiet of the woodland is really a cacophony of insects, birds, trees creaking in the wind, branches snapping underfoot, leaves rustling, and creatures scurrying. Walk quietly with your child through nature while recording the woodland chorus on a cellphone or other recording device. She will be surprised at how un-silent the silence was! Can she identify those sounds? Imitate them? Sing along with them? Use them to make sound effects or to simulate a beat box? On another day, do the same on a walk through the city, and listen to the different natural music of that environment.

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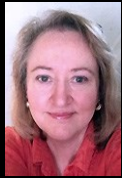
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"I've always thought people would find a lot more pleasure in their routines if they burst into song at significant moments." –John Barrowman

Make up silly songs in the car or during bath time. Teach your kids a "clean up song" and see if they can get the toys put away before it's over. Incorporate family music-making into your holiday celebrations—it doesn't have to be good, just enthusiastic! Exploring sound and creativity leads to music. And music can lead you anywhere.

"If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. ... I get most joy in life out of music." – Albert Einstein

Neither of my kids made music their career—but that was never the point. When they played a sport, or studied for a final, or entered a competition, or dug deep for their best efforts, or opened their hearts to someone very different from themselves—they were drawing on the things they had learned in that childhood chorus. Music does so much to refine and develop the mind, the heart, the will and the spirit. Whether a person becomes a brain surgeon or an auto mechanic, a cook or a veterinarian, a carpenter or a pilot—I believe that they will do it better, because music was part of their lives.



Andrea Burgoyne is in her 22nd year of involvement with Children's Chorus of Maryland (CCM), beginning as a parent, volunteer, and board member, and currently serving as Executive Director. She received her BA in music with a concentration in Vocal Performance from Towson University, and worked as a performer and teacher of voice, piano, early instruments and music theory for more than 30 years before joining the CCM Staff.

Further Reading & Viewing

Spectacular Homemade Musical Instruments

www.howweelearn.com/spectacular-homemade-musical-instruments

Choir Singing Boosts Your Mental Health

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/10496056/Choir-singing-boosts-your-mental-health.html>

From Trash to Triumph - The Recycled Orchestra

www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2016/09/14/493794763/from-trash-to-triumph-the-recycled-orchestra

Sounds from the Dumpster

www.hometowndumpsterrental.com/blog/sounds-from-the-dumpster-artist-turns-trash-into-ear-pleasing-musical-instruments

Keeping Body and Soul in Tune

www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/aug/26/healthandwellbeing.fitness

Singing and the Brain

www.chorusamerica.org/advocacy-research/singing-and-brain

Parent Resources

We hope these family-friendly resources provide ideas that encourage your child's musical abilities. All the articles in this series are written by the Children's Chorus of Maryland's music faculty and supported through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. For more information about music programs at Children's Chorus of Maryland, call us at 410-494-1480 or email ccm@ccmsings.org.



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Children's Chorus of Maryland & School of Music *Nurturing Voices, Minds & Hearts for over 40 Years*

Under the direction of Artistic Director Susan Bialek, our music Conservatory program features highly qualified teachers, small classes, and in-depth vocal enrichment to provide children with a complete musical education and choral experience. Children as young as 5 ½ are encouraged to audition for one of the Conservatory's three choirs. Classes and rehearsals are offered twice weekly from September to May at CCM's facility near Towson, and performances are held each semester. We welcome families whose children attend public, private and parochial schools as well as those who are homeschooled. Scholarships are available. In addition to our Conservatory, CCM offers a summer camp, and music and play classes for 4 to 6 year olds. For more information, visit www.ccmsings.org, call 410-494-1480 or email ccm@ccmsings.org

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