

Guide to... Music for three to eight-year-olds

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- The impact of music education on wider learning
- Activity ideas for early years & key stage 1
- Signposts to a range of music resources
- The importance of singing in music education
- Teaching mixed ability classes
- Music education for pupils with SEN

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GUIDE TO...

Music for three to eight-year-olds

Effective music education can have a wide range of positive benefits for our youngest pupils, including developing key cross-curricular skills. **Rhian Morgan** explains

As a young child Karen Karana Tse twice underwent surgery to remove a blockage preventing blood flow to her brain. Her far-sighted doctors recommended she take up music to bolster her brain against any problems the surgery may have caused. From this, her life-long love of music sprang, and seeing the impact, Ms Tse went on to study music and then set up her own company – String & Keyboard Musik Program – aimed at helping other children’s development too.

She explained: “The doctors were concerned that my illness would affect my brain development. Learning different musical instruments was a way to stimulate my brain development and to assist with the recovery.

“Since then, my diligent practice in musical instruments has given me the ability to tremendously improve my memory, hand-brain coordination, quick-thinking and language development.”

Ms Tse began with piano, finding that its non-synchronous use of both hands helped develop concentration and coordination, before moving on to play violin and harp.

She studied music therapy in Canada before moving back to Hong Kong and teaching for 10 years, during which time she saw that many younger learners had difficulty concentrating. Identifying strategies that would hold their attention led her to set up the String & Keyboard Musik Program in 2015.

She continued: “I have started various musical programmes and lessons with the firm belief that proper musical learning dramatically improves children’s brain development and can further enrich their lives.”

There is research to back up what Ms Tse believes. A study by the University of Montreal showed that musicians have a greater ability to make sense of multi-sensory information and react accordingly (Landry & Champoux, 2017). Music plays a role in brain development at any age but it is especially effective in early childhood when the brain is at its most elastic. Ultimately, music can help the brain’s development in a number of ways (Zhao & Kuhl, 2016; Ilari, 2002). It can:

- Expand the field of knowledge.
- Improve memory skills.
- Improve attention and our ability to focus.
- Increase coordination.
- Cultivate creativity.
- Encourage self-expression.
- Build self-esteem.
- Strengthen language skills.

Musical intelligence also helps to develop the following areas (Brain Balance, 2015; Kent State University, 2019; Paterson, 2016):

- Logical/mathematical intelligence.
- Linguistic intelligence.
- Spatial intelligence.
- Bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence.
- Interpersonal intelligence.
- Intrapersonal intelligence.

String & Keyboard’s programme uses bright colours to draw in young musicians and keep their attention. After the first two levels, students can progress onto regular instruments. It offers a collection of music programmes to help children’s brain development, with lessons tailor-made for aspiring musicians between the ages of two and eight. There is a range of supporting materials including videos, apps and workbooks (see the back page for information).

Regular music lessons

Elinor Bishop, is a peripatetic cello teacher



and teaches music at an inner London primary school.

She believes the benefits of daily music lessons are manifold: “The skills they learn in music go beyond ear-training and opening the children up to new repertoire. They learn the importance of listening to one another, team-work, concentrating, coordination and discipline. There’s plenty of new research around which has also shown the impact that regular music, in particular singing, has on executive function in primary-aged children.

“Self-worth and identity are particularly closely linked to music, and this can be an incredibly useful tool both for teaching music in itself and for helping children more generally. If you can link back what you are teaching to something the children already identify with, you’re much more likely to engage with the class, and they will feel a sense of ownership over what they are learning.”

The 20-year-old saxophonist and radio presenter Jess Gillam added: “One of the best ways to engage young children in music is to play to them and for them to experience live music. There’s nothing like it. I’ve had incredible responses when I’ve performed to children.

“Children have an intuitive reaction at a young age, but often music is not incorporated into the mainstream curriculum. It’s seen as an add-on in schools and is sidelined early on. It can enrich so many other parts of a child’s life, teaching them cooperation, resilience, determination, communication and interaction.”

Music and SEN

Carole Kendall, a teacher trainer, music advisor and practitioner, has strong feelings about the importance of music education, in particular for SEN children. She explained: “While everyone’s self-esteem improves from being involved in music, the benefits are multiplied a million times for children with additional needs.

“SEN pupils are often not SEN in music – I have many examples where a selective mute pupil has sung a solo, many examples where singing has helped disadvantaged pupils to find

their speaking voice – often this happens in Reception.

“Many vulnerable pupils need music as a form of expression where they do not have enough or the right words or the self-control in other situations. Only today, a boy in year 3 with behaviour issues lasted a full half-hour in a music session I was running ... and this is apparently unknown for him.”

“One of the best ways to engage young children in music is to play to them and for them to experience live music”

The fact that music is a practical subject with physical components and often has no targets can help some children who feel judged in other situations. Ms Kendall added: “Children who are having fun have open minds and will learn more. Taking part in music is a great leveller for SEN children.

“Every school and every government seems to have a different idea about what music education is. It isn’t giving every child an instrument for a year and teaching in a whole class situation – that’s box-ticking. Music education is about teaching skills and concepts to allow our students to appreciate, perform and compose music ... and apart from the satisfaction those skills bring, music also levels the playing field so that every single child – the SEN pupil, the gifted and talented and every one in between – can enjoy the lifelong benefits that music brings.”

Singing

Singing is particularly useful with early years and key stage 1 pupils. It is free, it does not require any special equipment or setting up time – and everyone has a voice! Ms Kendall’s experience from 30 years as a music advisor and workshop leader has shown her that singing has



a healthy impact on the body (as it is necessary to breathe correctly and stand up straight) and a positive effect on children who suffer with behavioural problems (see also Layton, 2009). Ms Kendall says that it also helps to develop:

- Intellect, character and self-discipline.
- Communication skills.
- Awareness, tolerance and social skills.
- Self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Team-work (across age, gender, etc).
- An awareness of diversity.
- Motor skills and co-ordination.
- Self-expression and language.
- Cognitive ability in maths.
- Listening skills.
- Both sides of the brain simultaneously.

The national curriculum

The Early Years Foundation Stage requires that education programmes involve a variety of music activities and experiences including song-singing and making music. Music should also be used to help children develop their imagination. At key stage 1 pupils should then be taught to:

- Use their voices expressively and creatively by singing songs and speaking chants and rhymes.
- Play tuned/untuned instruments musically.
- Listen with concentration and understanding to a range of high-quality live and recorded music.
- Experiment with, create, select and combine sounds using the inter-related dimensions of music.

This should then prepare pupils for key stage 2 when they will, among other aims:

- Play and perform (solo and ensemble).
- Improvise and compose music for a range of purposes.
- Use and understand staff and musical notations.
- Appreciate and understand a range of high-quality live and recorded music drawn from different traditions and from great composers and musicians.
- Develop an understanding of music history.

Music resources

There is a plethora of good material for teaching music at key stages 1 and 2, both as a curriculum subject and after-school. Much of it is accessible for non-specialist teachers.

- The BBC: Cross-curricular resources with music objectives explored in relation to popular topics and including a term's worth of music activity: <https://bbc.in/2mq53yR>
- The ISM Trust: An online, cross-curricular toolkit for primary teachers: <http://bit.ly/2kp8Hs1>
- The Tes: Sara Carroll has curated a Primary Music Top 20 of resources, including designing and making instruments and worksheets based on favourite music: <http://bit.ly/2lWemGs>
- HarrisonParrott: The classical music company has set up a foundation to support diversity and inclusivity in the arts: www.harrisonparrott.com/foundation

Resources, research & references

- *Musicians react faster and are better multisensory integrators*, Landry & Champoux, *Brain and Cognition*, Vol 111, 2017: <http://bit.ly/2koYYll>
- *Musical intervention enhances infants' neural processing of temporal structure in music and speech*, Zhao & Kuhl, *PNAS*, 2016: <http://bit.ly/2miuMsH>
- *Music and Babies*, Ilari, *Applications of Research in Music Education*, 2002: <http://bit.ly/2mlejnC>
- *Correlation between math and music ability*, Brain Balance Achievement Centers, 2015: <http://bit.ly/2mqDm91>
- *Why is it important to teach literacy through music in your classroom?* Kent State University: <http://bit.ly/2lVUVxw>
- *The importance of emotional intelligence for kids: How does music help?*, Jennifer Paterson, *Music Notes*, 2016: <http://bit.ly/2lYTw9g>
- *Does singing make you happy?* Layton, *HowStuffWorks.com*, 2009: <http://bit.ly/2nG4CAP>



Teaching mixed ability classes

Teacher trainer and music educator Carole Kendall talks to **Rhian Morgan** about working with mixed ability classes and offers some ideas for useful classroom activities

The concept of “mixed ability” has changed massively over the last 25 years, explained teacher Carole Kendall, who for the past 14 years has been a primary teacher trainer and practitioner and mentor for the Voices Foundation charity.

She continued: “Traditionally teachers have split their learning into distinct groups – working towards the expectations, achieving expectations and exceeding expectations. Within these boundaries there are huge differences in learning styles and no one style fits all in terms of how to learn and how to be encouraged into good learning.

“Some children need to be more active, others need visual stimulation but most of us are a combination of learning styles. All of us find aural learning the most difficult and this is especially true with music, where to have something written down actually inhibits our learning and aural discrimination, particularly in the early years and key stage 1 settings.”

Early years activities

- Speak in unison, use different types of voice to explore pupils’ vocal capabilities – for example, high and low, fast and slow, whispering and loud, or a “thinking” voice.
- Clap the rhythm, phrase by phrase.
- Walk, bounce, or tap in time to the pulse.
- Use puppets to encourage young children to join in with rhymes.
- Use simple, repetitive, rhyming and very short songs which involve clapping and working with a partner.
- Try songs that help with communication – sing your own name, respond to a greeting.
- Use pieces with a limited pitch range.
- Move to the pulse of steady 4/4 time – e.g. a march. Follow the lead of an adult

showing different actions in time to the pulse on different body parts. Children can increasingly lead this activity.

- With their eyes closed to enhance hearing, pupils listen to an adult sing and move around the room.
- Use music that is outside the experience of the children.

Years 1 and 2 activities

- As above, but gradually increase the scope of the songs, rhymes and listening.
- Add in simple percussion, perhaps rhythm sticks, to show the pulse/rhythm.
- Increase the complexity of singing games with more movement (spatial awareness).

Year 3 activities

- Add in longer songs.
- Use wider vocab, wider pitch range, more complex use of percussion instruments.
- Work in smaller groups to analyse musical structure – “same and different” in a known repertoire. Use simple songs to speak the rhythm and start to work on rhythm notation for crotchets, quavers and rests.
- Build a bank of known rhythms, aural and visual, direct from known simple songs.

Resources

- Voices Foundation: www.voices.org.uk
- National Youth Choir of Scotland – in particular the Singing Games and Rhymes series (Lucinda Geoghegan): <http://bit.ly/2kNvOfV>
- Bring the Noise is a BBC initiative to inspire four to seven-year-olds to discover music-making: www.bbc.co.uk/bringthenoise
- Curriculum-linked resources for young voices: www.musicmark.org.uk
- How to be a singing school, TeachPrimary, July 2017: <http://bit.ly/2kmWOTi>
- Top 10 tips for running a primary choir: <http://bit.ly/2kPcFdG>





The String & Keyboard Musik Program

Designed for children between the ages of two and eight, the String & Keyboard Musik Program is unusual in that it comes not only with full guidance for teachers but also with its own mini-size instruments which the programme's creator has specially designed for young students.

Registered in the UK with Music In Life in 2015 by founder Karen Karana Tse, who plays piano, harp and violin, the programme is offered at more than 100 schools in 52 education institutions across 11 countries including the USA, France, Germany and China – as well as two new UK venues in Liverpool and Manchester.

It offers a collection of music education programmes and lessons to help children's brain development through music learning, along with vividly coloured instrument to entice young musicians and help keep their attention, before they move, after two levels, to regular size instruments.

This clear route of advancement, Ms Tse believes, helps them feel a sense of accomplishment and minimises the frustration that pupils can feel early on.

"It's all about encouraging and maintaining an interest in music," she explained. "In so much of life there is such an emphasis on competition and certificates, but that's not what we are about here.

"I want to get children playing their violins because they want to, because they really enjoy it and not because mummy told them to."

Ms Tse believes that the programme's use of bright colours draws in young musicians and helps keep their attention.

She explained: "This ensures the best learning environment, giving students the opportunity to develop their skills and provide



them with knowledge and tools that will enrich them whatever their path in life."

For the youngest children, at an age where they cannot reliably recognise the alphabet, Tse has developed the Rainbow Bell system where they recognise colours rather than letters to train their musical skills to learn melodies.

There are also instrumental courses, in piano, violin and harp, for children from the age of two and a half, small group music therapy courses for children from one to five, and music theory and composition for children aged six and above.

Musicality, memory, passion, patience, co-ordination and expression, listening, creativity and confidence, fun and perseverance – these are the skills Ms Tse is convinced flow from music and her courses.

Further information

■ www.stringsandkeyboardmusik.com