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4. THE MUSICAL CULTURES OF CHILDREN

Music is important to children, and there are few who do not revel in it. They welcome opportunities to think and act musically, and they do so with exuberance. The music is in them, too, manifesting itself both audibly and visibly in the pitches and rhythms of their play, in the songs they sing, and in the ways that they step, sway, bounce, and "groove" to it. Children express and entertain themselves, and communicate and socialize through the musical sounds they make or that surround them in their homes, neighborhoods, and schools. They are drawn to music, for as they explore, experiment with, and respond to it, music is the refuge in which they find fulfillment and safe harbor away from the worries of their young lives. While all the arts provide children with outlets for expression, the power of music as both aural phenomenon and a stimulus of kinesthetic activity functions for them—on request—as much as a veil of protection from, as well as a bridge for interactions with, others. As they take in other performances or make their own musical sounds, children are often transformed by the density and intensity of patterns that are logically ordered and expressed from the heart (and soul). For children, music is a natural inclination, and it often appears to be as essential to their well-being as it is for them to be warm, fed, and well-rested.

School is one of the places in which children acquire music. They learn songs and gain other musical knowledge from their music teachers, their classroom teachers, and from other children. These songs sometimes enhance their learning of language, or mathematical concepts, or appropriate social behaviors, and they may be accompanied by "action," be it signifying gestures, dance, or games. Music is accessible to children beyond the classroom, too, so that many learn music as it is provided to them by their parents, siblings, and extended family members and by the social and religious communities of their family's involvement. It is also mediated to them in a large variety of ways: radio, TV, recordings, videotapes and films, CD-Roms, and other late-breaking technological avenues. Thus the acquisition of musical repertoire and a set of techniques for making and responding to this music are available to children formally and informally, both in school and "on the outside."

The purpose of these pages is to consider the roles which music plays in children's lives, and the manner by which the various folkways, technologies, and institutional settings help them to perpetuate and preserve particular musical expressions and experiences. Children's membership in various social and cultural units will be explored, and the inevitable influences which those units have upon children's musical ideas, values, and behaviors will likewise be considered. An understanding of the content and processes of children's play (and in particular their musical play) will give rise to a discussion of the use and function of music in their lives, and will bring focus to some of the salient musical and textual features of their playful musical "lore." How

children are musically enculturated and formally educated in and through music will comprise the greater extent of this chapter, which will close with the interface of their formal and informal experiences in coming to know music.

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL UNITS AND CULTURAL GROUPINGS

Children's societies are a blend of progressive and conservative patterns of behavior, fantasy and innovation, and routine and ritual. At times they invent expressive behavior all their own in clever and original ways, while at other times they embrace behaviors they have heard or seen before through mimicry (if not outright mockery) of their perceptions of it. They dress up like their heroes of the media, shoot toy laser guns like space warriors, and lip-sync to the songs of their favorite recording stars. More often than not, children are likely to settle for the center of the spectrum, developing variants on language, stories, games, and songs that they have already experienced. They "tamper" with what they have witnessed but also adhere to its essence, ascertaining that it remains substantially the same as they had first perceived it. They create parodies of songs and new "editions" of stories, and are known for their ability to shape language to a dialect and vocabulary all their own. Children are prone to playing with the components of music in order to make them fit their expressive needs, yet they are also anchored to the values and practices of the adults who raise them.

Children constitute their own over-arching, all-encompassing folk group (Dundes, 1965; Sutton-Smith, 1995), in that they share common traditions in language, values, and behavioral patterns. They are thus a "big" culture, united by experiences of their brief lives and the knowledge they have acquired and stored within them. In their early phases of learning, as children's acquisition of conceptual knowledge is rapidly developing, this knowledge is still in various formative stages. Their world view is not the same as that of adults or adolescents who have had longer life experiences, and while their perceptions are colored by their sociocultural surroundings, children share with each other similar extents of knowledge, as well as play preferences and interests that are associated with their similar intellectual and physical development.

But children's culture is large, multifarious, and decidedly pluralistic. Thus, it is possible for children to be members of more than a single folk group, belonging as they do to a family sibling group, a neighborhood, a preschool play group, a class within a school, a soccer team, a girl scout troupe, a youth choir, a gang. Children belong to big and little cultural groups, overlapping one to the next and learning the lore of each.

Among the traits that are most likely to break the larger culture into sub-cultures (or "little" cultures), age and stage of intellectual, social, and emotional growth are prominent. Jean Piaget (1951) divided childhood into four stages of intellectual development from infancy through age twelve, from sensorimotor learning to the immediate application of abstract reasoning to the knowledge they acquire. Likewise, Jerome Bruner noted three age-based phases of learning (1966). Gregory Bateson (1978) discussed the manner in which learners proceed through early, middle, and mature phases of cultural acquisition, and Catherine Ellis (1986) further moved these phases into a framework that is pertinent to the development of children's musical

selves: from their musical enculturation, to their conscious commitment to practice, to their musical mastery. Children's culture can also be divided by types of care and schooling provided to them: nursery or daycare, preschool, elementary school (and middle or junior high and high school); they are further distinguished by primary (kindergarten through grade two or three) and intermediate (grades three through six) grades, and even more so by individual grade levels. Distinctive children's groups are also based upon factors such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and ability level.

It may thus be difficult to conceive of a single children's culture, and to "lump" children as one musical culture. Like snowflakes, each one is unique and not easily homogenized into a single entity. Perhaps, as Mark Slobin (1993) suggested, big music cultures (like "children's culture") are best conceived in smaller units (p. 11). His claim that people live at the interaction of three cultures suits children well. They can be conceived of as members of the "super-culture" (the large and overarching category, "children"), several "sub-cultures" (embedded units, e.g., preschoolers or fourth-graders, girls or boys, African American or Chicano children), and "intercultures" (unities resulting from shared experiences and widespread influences that cut across the sub-cultures, such as players of various ball games, collectors of dolls and action figures, or listeners of mass-mediated popular music) (p. 12). To this can be added each child's idioculture, or culture of the self, to which Charles Keil has given considerable thought (1994). Children have their idiosyncratic thoughts and behaviors, and can take their place as members of multiple cultures, each with its own musical affiliations.

All children start out in the nuclear culture of their family, and then graduate to others (Slobin, 1993, p. 55). Their musical knowledge spins out from this primary source in ever-widening concentric circles first within and then beyond the family. These circles are the result of developmental changes, so that with increasing age they graduate from one progressive layer of age-culture to the next. Children's first live musical experiences are often lullabies sung to them by their parents, particularly their mothers, during infancy and throughout their first year as "lap babies" (Whiting & Edwards, 1988, p. 5). While these lullabies may vary in pitch and rhythmic information from one family to the next, their soft and slow dynamic qualities nonetheless are universally intended to lull little ones to sleep. Remarkably, some of this early music is remembered and recalled even into adulthood, so integrated is it within the young and impressionable minds of infants.

With toddlerhood comes the play songs of the "knee children," which continue to be sung through their later preschool years as "yard children" (Whiting & Edwards, 1988, p. 198). These songs are sung as children play in yards and parks, on swings and in sandboxes (and certainly indoors as well). Play songs and rhythmic chants are not always consciously rendered, but nonetheless trickle out of children in seemingly spontaneous ways as they playfully engage themselves with toys, other objects, and other children. Their musical content is taken from songs they have heard, some of it beamed out to them from their TVs and car radios. Yard children rarely play in silence, but talk, make sounds, and often sing to themselves and others with whom they play.

A shift to the next age-based musical culture occurs as children enter school. At five, six, and beyond, they may still hear lullabies at bedtime, and they will probably continue to semi-consciously sing as they play or work on their projects. Yet when they graduate to the level of "school children," they enter into the realm of singing games, clapping chants, and regular and purposeful rhythms. These musical genres depend upon the interaction of children with other children, in patterns of socialization that were previously unimportant to them. In partners, clusters, and circles and line formations, with or without props (jumpprope, balls, scarves, and sticks), most girls and more than a few boys learn and preserve traditional and contemporary melodies, rhythms, and choreographed forms given them by other children. As in the cases of lap babies and the knee and the yard children, the particulars of music and text may vary from one cultural subset (i.e., neighborhood, religious or ethnic group) to the next, but the engagement of children in these musical genres is a natural result of their entry into this age-based culture.

A particularly intriguing facet of children's cultures is the manner in which their songs can be distinguished by the ethnicity of their singers. Carol Merrill-Mirsky (1988) observed that Euro-American and Asian children were likely to sing pitched melodies while at play, while African-American children performed more non-pitched rhythmic chants. She described African-American children's singing games as more numerous, more syncopated, and more likely to make use of formulaic introductions than those of Euro-American, Asian, or Latino children. She found not only musical but also gestural distinctions among the songs belonging to children of the four broad ethnic-cultures. Others have corroborated these findings, including Campbell (1991), Harwood (1987), and Marsh (1995).

Meanwhile, as children become embedded in the living musical cultures of their families, neighborhoods, and schoolyards, the mediated mass music rains on them as well. It blares at them in the background of their favorite TV shows, and through the jingles that advertise the toys, food, and drink they hope to have. It undergirds or outwardly carries the messages and morals of the videos they watch. The mediated popular music appears as ambient sound or as a provocative experience, and neither children nor their families need to produce it (i.e., to perform it) to "have" it within their ears. But while children may readily receive the media's music already packaged for their passive consumption, they also continue to want to actively participate in it as they hear it. From Barney songs to the music of Clint Black or Pearl Jam, children will sing, move, and groove to mediated, commercial music. They are receiving and working through the musical grammar and idiomatic expressions of popular music, the orally-transmitted urban folk music of their time.

Just as popular music constitutes a musical intercultural that is widely shared by children across many sub-cultures, so does the phenomenon called "school music" provide them with a common repertoire. The music which teachers select for their lessons and programs varies from teacher to teacher, of course, but there are also standard sources to which teachers refer in planning lessons. There may even be a common *canon* of songs and musical works which teachers embrace, passing this music among themselves at workshops and professional meetings. For over a century, patriotic songs like "America," "America, the Beautiful," and "The Star-Spangled

Banner" have been appearing in school textbooks, programs and assemblies; added to this are favorites like "This Land is Your Land," "This is My Country," and the more contemporary "God Bless the U.S.A.". While Stephen Foster songs are rarely sung anymore, basal series textbooks like *The Music Connection* (Silver Burdett & Ginn, 1995) and *Share the Music* (Macmillan, 1995) offer a varied fare of traditional and composed songs for singing and listening. Under the rubric of "multicultural music" songs like "Sakura" from Japan, "Kye Kye Kule" from Ghana, "Las Mananitas" from Mexico, and "Sorida" from Zimbabwe recently have been added to old standbys like "Clementine," "Shenandoah" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Recent development in state-mandated policy for cultural pluralism has governed selections that now rest securely under the umbrella of "school music," a repertoire that many children in American schools may share.

Children of all ages constitute the larger superculture—the big culture of children—and are grouped together and said to be recipients and processors of similar musical knowledge through similar experiences. Yet it is absurd for us to conceive of children as a single musical culture extending from infancy through pubescence, all united by the same experiences. The concept of children fitting into multiple cultural units is far more logical. Indeed, the microcultures and micromusics defined by Mark Slobin suit the many musical realities of children, for their musical worlds are indeed many-splendored, a true conglomerate of styles and influences far too complex to pin down or generalize.

HOW CHILDREN USE MUSIC

For young children, musical meaning is deeply related to function. "Good music," we say, should be the stuff of children's experience; "good for what?," they want to know. Children use music in its every guise and function, and find that as they think and do music, they are buoyed by it, comforted in it, reflective through it, and exuberant as a result of their expressions with it. In my own research on children's musical values (Campbell, 1998), their uses of music ranged from the playful to the serious, and from the solitary to the social. These uses or functions fit categories raised by Merriam (1964), Gaston (1968), and Kaemmer (1993); I use Merriam's list as an organizer here. In interesting ways, these functions overlap one another, so that it is entirely possible for a child to find aesthetic fulfillment as he physically responds to music he hears or is making. Importantly, music contributes in positive ways to children's lives, and many recognize—even in their youth and inexperience—that they could not live without it.

Emotional Expression

Music's power to express raw emotions is not lost on children. I learned about this use of music from ten-year-old Alan, who explained that one of his chief reasons for singing atop a tree stump far removed from everyone (and everything) was that it was a means of releasing his emotions, expressing his feelings, and exploring his musical thoughts without interference. With no one within earshot, his wailing may have been

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