

# STEPPING NOTES

MUSIC SCHOOL FOR THE 2s to 8s

## Advice Sheet for Parents: **SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING YOUR CHILD'S MUSICALITY**

In Stepping Notes your children are building their musical competence from the foundations up: first, musicality (internal, body-based, subconscious understanding of the elements of music - pulse, rhythm, melody, harmony, phrasing etc.); then, musicianship (conscious understanding of these elements through symbol - note-names, hand-signals, written notation etc.); finally, translating these now-conscious elements into instrumental sounds. All these first steps are not a *preparation* for musicianship; they are the *heart* of musicianship. The better you understand these processes, the more you will be able to support your children's musical development with confidence. The more you personally involve yourself with them, the more your children will recognise music as an essential part of life. Therefore, **you, the Stepping Notes parents, are always enthusiastically invited to join in your children's class frequently**, whatever their age.

Also, the more you can informally extend the Stepping Notes experience into everyday life, the better your children's chances of rapidly internalising what they are learning. Singing together and moving to music are the foundation of all musical experience. If you want your children to grow up musical, *you* must sing, and *you* must move to music. If *you* don't, your children won't, and all the music lessons in the world will go to waste! This need not be done in a didactic manner: it can be as simple as singing together when you are out for a walk, or listening to music in the car.

Here are some other things you can do, not directly related to Stepping Notes, but of immense benefit to developing your children's musicality:

### **listen to good music**

There is no reason why young children cannot love listening to fine music. But they need your help and encouragement to find it, and it helps to present it to them in a meaningful way, and in bite-size chunks. Here are some suggestions to get you started: -

- Listen together to Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. It includes narration, so will require no introduction on your part. An excellent introduction to instrumental sounds.
- For more studious types, Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is also fascinating.
- Other brilliantly evocative pieces, in order of ease of listening: Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals*, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Holst's *The Planets*. These contain no narration, so follow the sleeve notes with your children, explaining the animal, scene or character described by each movement.
- Get the DVD of the Disney *Sleeping Beauty*. The music is all from Tchaikovsky's ballet, so by the time your children have watched it a few times they'll know all the tunes. Then get a recording of the ballet music (excerpts first, later the complete ballet) and talk through the story from the sleeve notes. Then, when they are completely familiar with the music, go and see the full ballet.
- Get the Disney *Fantasia* DVD. Then get the music on CD: Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice* (for the Mickey Mouse bit), Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (for the dinosaurs), Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony (for the centaurs etc.), Mussorgsky's *Night on Bare Mountain*, Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor etc. Having seen the video, your children will love to hear the music on its own.
- Ditto for Disney *Fantasia 2000*: Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto (for the tin soldier), Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* (for the city scene), Stravinsky's *Firebird* (for the green fairy girl), Respighi's *Pines of Rome* (for the whales), Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

- Get the DVD of the Royal Ballet *Tales of Beatrix Potter* (music by Lanchbery, choreography by Ashton). The kids will love the stories, especially if you have already read them some Beatrix Potter, and the choreography is an excellent expression of the relationship between music and movement.

- Other videos: Many of the Barbie movies (if you can stand them!) have classical soundtracks, e.g.: *Barbie and the Twelve Dancing Princesses* uses Mendelssohn's "Italian" Symphony, the Barbie *Nutcracker* movie uses the original music by Tchaikovsky. (Then go and see the ballet!)

All this is a completely painless way to help your children to love classical music. By the time they are familiar with all the above, it will be easy for you to gradually introduce them to other child-friendly pieces of concert music, ballets and operas. Check what's on at the big London concert halls (the Royal Festival Hall is very easy to get to, and if you sit in the choir stalls, very cheap). Also, the Royal Opera House Covent Garden or English National Opera. Select carefully what you are going to see, well in advance. Then listen to the CD a few times with your children, telling them the story as you listen, and by the time you go to the performance they will already be aficionados and will know the music better than most of the rest of the audience!

All the above will of course, *inter alia*, help your children develop a good ear for instrumental timbres, and explore for themselves what instruments they would really like to learn to play. That way you can be sure that when your children eventually do decide to start instrumental lessons they is making informed and intelligent choices.

Do not be tempted to listen to synthesised "specially for children" recordings of the classics. The reason classical music is so special is because it is played live, by real musicians, expressing with their hearts, through real acoustic instruments, some of the most profound and uplifting mysteries of life, humanity and our relationship with the immanent. Watered-down versions of this merely patronise our children.

Another enjoyable pastime which will benefit your children's musicality is watching some of the classic musicals on television. One specific recommendation: the "Doe a deer" sequence from *The Sound of Music* is one of the most glorious condensations of all that is good in music pedagogy: "When you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything" could be the Stepping Notes motto!

### **let your children explore instruments on their own**

With the musical foundations laid by Stepping Notes, your children can learn a lot just from exploring the notes on a simple melodic instrument, and learning by trial and error how to reproduce on that instrument the melodies they can already sing. A simple diatonic metallophone is the most obvious instrument: the best-sounding ones are the ones I use for Stepping Notes, which I can order for you if you like. Alternatively, buy a cheap old (acoustic) piano and leave it accessible in your house for your children to explore: they can teach themselves so much long before they need to start lessons. I do not recommend electronic keyboards: a real piano makes a far richer and more satisfying sound, and will be far better at helping the children to develop a good finger technique.

Please feel free to ring me at any time if you need any further advice.

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