

MUSIC MATTERS



For generation upon generation, all over the world, songs and lullabies have been sung to babies and children to soothe them and help them to sleep soundly. Certain benefits are obvious—relaxation, and strengthening the relationship between parent and child—but is there something more happening?

Studies have shown that fine music can have a positive impact on brain development, cognitive awareness and memory, in effect giving children a mental boost, particularly when listened to from birth or even earlier. There are conflicting views on whether these benefits are long-term or simply temporary.

But in my view, all in all there is without doubt real value to be gained by infants experiencing music.

Quality music matters

For me, it's not only classical music, but music in any style which is of high quality, that's good for children. The great classical composers such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and many others, have stood the test of time and we can have confidence in their quality and appropriateness for our children. In my professional work, however, I take a broader view of what makes fine music. I incorporate jazz and popular pieces, so long as they are written with conviction and style, performed with passion and sensitivity and recorded with skill and nuance. Here too, perhaps the safest judge of quality is also the test of time: from Gershwin to the Beatles and Queen, from Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra to Mariah Carey, there are "classics" in every musical genre. They add to the rich palette of music our babies can enjoy and from which they can derive benefit. We must be careful, though, when selecting, to ensure that the music truly is of the highest quality, and doesn't simply reflect the highest marketing budget! Choosing music for our little ones to listen to is a responsibility, and although in time they will grow to develop their own tastes and preferences, for the early years, clearly, their musical experiences will be shaped by the adults in their lives.

Taking part counts as well

To me, of equal importance to listening is participating in musical activities on a regular basis. Musical involvement, at any age, strengthens and enriches us physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially, across each and every one of our faculties. It's hard to find a substitute amongst other pastimes that can engage and enhance us in such a broad sense. Supporting this, studies show that people with even a small amount of childhood musical training continue to show positive effects in their general lives long into adulthood. Indeed, unless a child is one of the tiny minority who plan to go on to study music at a higher level, or to make a living from it, in many ways the achievement and even the enjoyment experienced through musical participation is actually not the most important thing. Developing an appreciation of good music and awakening musical and artistic sensitivity are valuable lessons, but it's the education in self-motivation, self-awareness and self-confidence arising from musical training that is priceless for an individual's future success in any discipline.

It's never too early

My own son is too little to be learning an instrument or taking part in any structured music-making, however he does go to a class for toddlers where singing, dancing and clapping along to music is encouraged. I make music a part of his life as much as possible. It's never too early to introduce music to a child: studies have shown that while still in the womb babies are able to respond to music and even have preferences! I'd like to think that giving my son a musical upbringing will help his development long term—plenty of studies say that it will—but if it doesn't actually make him brainier, from personal experience I know it will enhance his life in a multitude of ways. Anything beyond this is a bonus.

Further information

For more information about the benefits of good music heard throughout pregnancy, early life and into adulthood, visit babymusic.com

