



Issues and Ideas:

## Perspectives in Pedagogy

Rebecca Johnson, Editor

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### This issue's contributor:

**Lorna Lutz Heyge, Ph.D.,** teacher, author and teacher educator in the field of early childhood music, has published pedagogical materials in the United States and Germany (Schott Publishers), as well as in cooperation with native authors in several European, Asian and African countries. Dr. Heyge serves as chair of the Music in Early Childhood Committee for the National Conference on Keyboard Pedagogy, and is Founder and Chairman of Musikgarten®. Her most recent publication is *Music Makers: At the Keyboard, an introductory piano method for groups of young beginners.*

## Teaching the young child: An interview with Lorna Heyge

As the director of a Community Music School, I find that parents are actively seeking musical experiences for their very young children. Many of them call the school seeking classes as soon as the child is born, and once enrolled they are delighted with the impact that music is making on their child and the family.

Classes for young children are very attractive options for independent piano teachers because they can sometimes be

offered during school hours, and a class usually generates a larger tuition income than a private lesson. But how does one begin? Is it necessary, or even feasible to have to create all of your own curricula and find all of the materials? Fortunately there are several very fine methods available for the teacher of young children. I have asked Lorna Lutz Heyge, one of the pioneers in this area, to share her background and philosophy of teaching with us. ▲

### The interview

**RJ: Lorna, thank you so much for taking time from your busy schedule to chat with us! Tell us about your early training and how you became involved with teaching young children.**

**LH:** My life has been full of the good fortune of excellent education, fine teachers and significant mentors. After my college years, primarily at Eastman, I pursued four years of graduate training in Germany. I set my sights on becoming a college teacher of organ, and I did this "grown-up" job for 3 years!

My first exposure to music for young children came in the early 1970s. The German National Association of Youth Music Schools was conducting extensive research to construct a curriculum for introducing young children to music. I was invited to become part of the project and to lead the efforts in the English Language. Much to my surprise, while teaching young children I began to see solutions to the problems which my college organ students had experienced. Observing children learning through singing and moving was an eye-

opener for me. I had always considered piano lessons as my musical beginning; yet there were other important early musical experiences, such as listening to my mother sing in the car, playing singing games with my friends at every possible party, and making music actively as a regular part of our kindergarten day. I saw that these experiences laid the foundation and were a necessary pre-requisite to formal music education.

Now launched into the musical world of young children, I was fortunate again to be introduced to the world of child development through Audrey Sillick, a well-known Montessori Teacher Trainer, but more significantly, a woman of great wisdom about young children and how they learn.

In 12 years of working with her in Canada, I learned about children and came to a much better understanding of the significant role music should play in the total development of children. Thus I had acquired a foundation upon which I have built a solid holistic program of music learning.



Years of studying, and then teaching, have brought many opportunities to gain wisdom from observing colleagues and students. My practice has constantly evolved through experience. I lead a pedagogy study group that has met 4 days each year since 1988 to examine trends in the field, for there are constantly new developments in the understanding — and misunderstanding — of children. Connections to other fields, whether it is neuro-science, environmental education or health education, greatly enrich and broaden our thinking. One of our greatest teachers will always be the observation of children. Mentors have helped us develop and understand this skill, and fortunately the children show us directly what they understand and what is missing.

**RJ: What educational and musical principles have guided your work?**

**LH:** There are a number of concepts and principles that I have found to be vitally important:

- **All children are musical.** Children are innately musical and have an inborn ability to sing and move rhythmically. Research and experience tell us that the



earlier a child is in an environment of active music-making, the more likely it is that the child's inborn musicality will be awakened and developed.

- **Music-making belongs in the family.** The *time* to start experiencing music is in

early childhood; the *place* is in the family. Home is the first and most important school for children, and involved parents are the most effective teachers. Music offers parents the simple joys of being together and playing with each other, and encourages them to trust their own natural instincts.

- **Music meets the needs of children.** Music-making is active and joyful! Psychological studies tell us that a child's primary learning motivation comes from being in a pleasant and non-threatening environment. Songs, rhymes and dances for musical play are time-tested activities which come from our culture and naturally attract children through their beauty and their possibilities for movement and imagination.
- **Music makes a difference.** Music improves overall development, decreases learning problems, and enhances brain functioning — all in a learning environment that fosters the building of community. Through music we touch the whole child and can make a positive impact on the child and family.

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- **Movement is essential to learning — and especially to learning music.** The human body needs to move in order to develop rhythmic acuity and expression. Without sufficient movement experience, children do not have the foundation in body control and expressivity to play an instrument. Best of all, movement is exhilarating, energizing and thoroughly enjoyable for children.
- **Listening is the most important sensory channel for learning.** Focused listening is a casualty of our hectic lives. The very best training for listening requires an emphasis on singing, chanting, and body movement; these link the auditory and vestibular levels of the listening ear. Listening is critical for building the necessary musical connections that allow “music in the head” to be carried to an instrument.
- **Children deserve only the most worthwhile music.** The songs of childhood are remembered for life. They must be *worth* remembering — songs of musical, textual and cultural value.

**RJ:** Unlike other fields of music, the training of teachers and the development of materials for early childhood music have taken place primarily in the private sector. In this area you are the founder of several movements. What would you share with us from this experience?

**LH:** First I would comment on how much the field has evolved. In the 1970s the approach to early childhood music was good but overly cognitive. In the 1980s we were especially concerned with developmentally appropriate early childhood practice and learned about the deep need for movement in music instruction.

The 1990s, sometimes called the decade of the brain, introduced us to exciting neuro-science research and practice. Our horizons expanded constantly, and our field was especially well suited to adopt holistic practice.

In this decade we see a deeply changed society; a society confused about family, education and community; a busy, lonely society. In our day “edutainment” passes for education. Ours are very challenging times for teachers and parents, as well as for trainers of teachers, authors and publishers. Our society values *things*, makes a political potato of education, and gives hardly more than lip service to arts education.

Presently we have a solid body of knowledge about children and how they learn music; our biggest challenge is to educate the adults — both parents and rising teachers — about how children learn, why music is vital, and about children’s development in its totality. Our challenge is to bring music to a society that has forgotten their singing voices; to spark the adults’ musical being, when they have so little active music-making experience.

**RJ:** Yes, music has become a spectator sport. How can we begin to change this troubling trend?

**LH:** Teacher education is vital. Allow me to mention some of the major challenges in teacher education today:

- **Preserving the passion.** Teacher education and parent education need to be at

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the center of our attention. Fortunately many young persons want to teach. We search to find ways to help them keep their passion while we help them gain the many skills they will need for the difficult work that teaching is today — and enable them to earn a living doing it. Passion is what the young often bring us, and without passion there is no place to go! We are challenged to harness that passion so that teachers can be effective and not burn out.

- **Filling in the gaps.** Because the society in which they have grown up is lacking in active music-making and a true understanding of childhood, young teachers come to us unprepared for the broad aspects of teaching young children. You cannot be *overeducated* for working with children! Since the children’s lives are whole, the adults who work with them must approach them holistically. This requires knowledge and experience in many fields, together with fine powers of observation.

- **Creating quality, effective teaching materials.** In my opinion, good teaching materials need to offer a balance of structure and flexibility of *only worthwhile materials*. Structure gives the young teacher a secure place to start; flexibility offers the teacher a place to grow with experience and study; quality materials make it worthwhile for both teacher and students. In today’s entertainment society we must fight for good materials. It is possible, and it is worth the fight! Parents, with our help, learn to appreciate high quality materials. Parent education — and stamina! — are necessary.

**RJ:** After 35 years in this field, what are your passions?

**LH:** I am passionate about children and music! Sitting on the floor with children is a wonderful way to spend your life with music. I have the gift of meaningful work and hope to pass it on! Working for the good of children is more important than ever before.

- **Through music we can help foster Community.**

I recently heard an architect talk about what messages our houses send to the world. Houses fronted by garages rather than porches tell us that “3 cars live here.” Houses with privacy fences and elaborate entertainment centers tell us “I have everything I need here; leave me alone.” Houses full of computer programs and web access that take us around the world at the flick of a mouse tell us “I can work and play on my lonely island; everything I need is here.”

As much as we all enjoy the advances of technology and increased wealth, we suffer (mostly unknowingly) from the lack of connection. How wonderful it feels to us as adults to join others to make music. Let us not deny our children this same opportunity.

*Ring Around the Rosey* — children singing and moving together, falling down, getting up and doing it all over again — is the wonder of music and connection!

- **Music is for ALL children.**

As music teachers in this society, we work predominantly with the twice-blessed children, those whose parents seek music experience for their children, *and* have sufficient income to pay for it. We must strive to widen the circle of children who can benefit from music.



Through the Foundation for Music-Based Learning, I have spent many years bringing music to various Head Start settings. I have seen success on three levels: the teaching itself is a joy for all; what we observe (qualitatively) is that the children make advances in motor, language and social skills; what we measure (quantitatively) through a project conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Center for Early Childhood Research (UNC-Chapel Hill) shows that a well-constructed, well-taught music and movement program has a significant affect on children's communication skills. Communication skills are directly related to language development and literacy — a critical concern for our children today.

Through a recent opportunity to train teachers in South Africa, I worked in a township with teachers and children from several daycare centers for AIDs-effected families. South Africa was an immensely joyful experience for me. *Music does work.* Music brings joy to all involved, and allows the children to start from the place of their natural talent. Music brings them learning, order and discipline — needs of the whole world. I hope that in future years I can devote more time, energy and resources to making music available to more children.

• **Movement and listening are two of children's greatest needs today — and music is an ideal vehicle for getting this experience.**

Children today sit in front of computers, televisions, videos; they sit in car seats, being toted from hither to yon; they play inside because of the lack of safe neighborhood playing-on-the-street opportunities. When do they learn to control their bodies and develop coordination, comfort; rhythm and grace? Children's natural urge to move is frequently overlooked and is vastly underestimated and undervalued in our present way of life.

Children today live in a noise-filled society. There is always sound: iPod/DVD/TV/radio. When do the children focus on a single sound source, give it attention and perceive it? When do they listen to silence, to themselves, to their thoughts, to the music in their heads?

A good teacher + children + a repertoire of singing and dancing games is a formula to develop the movement and listening skills children need.

• **We need a common repertoire of shared music.**

While writing my first publications, I sought listening examples to expand the children's exposure, e.g., a piece by Luciano Berio. Today I am more likely to choose an "old chestnut," such as "Für Elise," or Debussy's "Clair de lune," for these pieces are quickly becoming *endangered* tunes.

We need a common repertoire. Without it we cannot celebrate the bond music creates in us. We need a common repertoire of songs, so that every piano teacher in America can have the joy of being the magical person who shows the child how to play the tune s/he loves, the tune friends and family know and love. I call this the "Jingle Bells effect."

I have come to deeply admire the wisdom of Shinichi Suzuki, who gave students a set repertoire and advised them to keep an active performance repertoire starting at the elementary level. When Suzuki students come together, they always enjoy playing together. I listen attentively when I hear elders talk about starting the school day with a singing assembly. Making music together is powerful for the spirit and the mind — to do it we need something we all know!

• **We must take the needs of parents seriously; they seek the best for their children.**

We have good news for parents, administrators and politicians. Music is joyful, important to good health and learning, and doesn't require a lot of expensive hardware! In our time of "edutainment" and "infotainment," "in-depth" TV reports that are two minutes in length, and other smoke-screens called education, parents need to hear our message that singing, dancing and talking with their children is very nutritious brain food — one of the best educational advantages they can give their children. Parents need an antidote to the never-ending barrage of commercial messages.

Our responsibility is to constantly work at understanding how children learn — and to be able to communicate that message to parents. "Trust me," is not enough!

**RJ: Through your research, your wealth of experience, and your publications, you have contributed so much to how we teach young children. What final words do you have for our readers?**

**LH:** Large challenges bring wonderful opportunities! We witness the growing body of parents who are seeking ... seeking something which they know instinctively is missing, seeking for their children and for themselves. We music teachers can rejoice in our profession and our opportunities to bring beauty, learning, and community to children and families. ▲

*In the next issue:*

How do your teaching approaches and relationships change as long-term students get older?