

# BE-BOP BABIES



**Can classes really create mini maestros . . .  
. . . or even help kids to read?**

By Michael Barry

In today's competitive world, parents are keenly aware of the pressure to provide their children with a well-rounded and stimulating education — starting in infancy. Anything that might give junior “the edge” when he grows up is now considered a necessity.

To address this growing need, we have seen a proliferation of creative educational programs for the very young. Some of the most popular — yet least understood — are the early childhood music programs. Parents who are considering one of these classes are faced with an array of choices. Certainly, they can do no harm, but the question is: How much good can they actually do?

Plenty, seems to be the resounding answer.

Although they may seem to have appeared overnight, these programs have been steadily building upon decades of research and development. Studies dating back to the post WW II era (Pillsbury studies 1937-1958) suggested that early exposure to music

other abilities. One of the most famous experiments in this arena was the University of California study in 1993, which coined the term “The Mozart Effect”. Initially, this terminology had little to do with children. The study, conducted by psychologist Frances Rauscher, involved not infants or pregnant women, but 36 college students. Subjects were separated into three groups, and, prior to taking standard IQ and spatial reasoning tests, either sat in silence, listened to relaxation tapes, or listened to a Mozart piano sonata. The group that listened to Mozart scored significantly higher on the tests. Although inconclusive at the time, the study did cause a stir, and before long, expectant moms were plunking themselves down in front of the stereo for nightly serenades of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

Perhaps of more direct significance to today's parents was a later study by Rauscher working with a

larger in musicians than non-musicians, theoretically providing better integration of the two hemispheres. Of course, this does not necessarily result in more able and intelligent individuals. Other considerations must be taken into account, not the least of which is the environment in which the child lives.

In many cultures, children are exposed to music throughout their early years and on into adulthood, both as listeners and active participants. In village and tribal societies, music is central to family and group activities. However, in more modern societies, musical development is often curtailed at a point, if it has been fostered at all, while other abilities are typically encouraged. Happily, this is changing, and this is where the early childhood music programs are showing their true value.

“Parents expecting their little one to emerge from any of these programs performing Tchaikovsky violin concertos at the ripe old age of 18 months will most certainly be disappointed.”

could increase a child's overall capacity for learning, and researchers learned that musical intelligence develops in much the same way as spatial, mathematical, linguistic and kinesthetic intelligence. For example, it's easy to see that language development, from the babble stage through more complex sentence structuring, is quite similar to musical development. Individual words and sentence fragments lead to more complex sentences and speech patterns, just like melodic fragments lead to more developed compositions or improvisations. Many composers, such as Ludwig von Beethoven for one, kept notebooks of melodic fragments that he would later develop into complete compositions. Hey, if it worked for Beethoven, then perhaps we should pay attention!

Researchers and educators eventually began to study the effects of music on the development of

group of 3-year-olds. The toddlers were given music lessons for a period of nine months, after which they showed significant improvement in mathematical and abstract reasoning skills, scoring an average 35 percent higher than another group that had not received lessons. A recent study by Martin Gardiner of The Music School in Providence has also shown that through systematic exposure to music, children lagging behind in reading levels can be brought up to par with their age group, even exceeding their non-musical counterparts in math skills.

Need some hard-core scientific proof? You've got it. It seems that the pyramidal tract, the major pathway of the central nervous system, is more structured in musicians, particularly those who started early. Also, the corpus callosum, which connects the right and left hemispheres of the brain, is significantly

So how does it all work, and what exactly are our little Mozarts learning? First of all, parents expecting their little one to emerge from any of these programs performing Tchaikovsky violin concertos at the ripe old age of 18 months will most certainly be disappointed. In fact, one of the main differences between a true early childhood program and instrumental methods for the young, like the Suzuki method, is that the early childhood curricula do not focus on instrumental technique. A one-year-old simply cannot handle an instrument. Infants and toddlers need only be exposed to the fundamentals of music in a systematic way to reap the benefits.

Most programs are organized into levels, the first of which expose the child to musical fundamentals. Parents or caregivers join their child in experiencing coordinated movements in time with music, and the children gradually learn differences in rhythm, pitch and timbre. Taking advantage of the child's natural ability to imitate, simple songs and melodies are introduced and quickly memorized. Toddlers will further internalize rhythm through movement and dance, and they will get acquainted with actual instruments

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## Be-Bop. . .

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through touch, sight and sound.

As the programs progress, more complex ideas are introduced, and ultimately children will have a repertoire of simple songs, and a familiarity with general musical concepts. They will enjoy their first co-operative experiences of playing in groups with classmates, instructors and parents. Additionally, most programs provide methods and tools for continuing the music experience at home.

While programs differ in content and structure, they all share a simplicity that enables the child to access their innate learning centers. The point is not so much to create a brilliant musician as it is to enhance a child's overall development and to create a natural, unforced relationship with music. Those of us who experienced obligatory music lessons with an old-fashioned, demanding instructor will certainly appreciate the value of this approach. And who knows, if you attend the program with your child, *you* may feel inspired to pick up that violin again!

Let's assume that you don't need all that much more convincing. You can clearly see the benefit of such a program, but the problem is, which one? Most areas have a number of choices available, and you will likely be influenced by schedule, instructors, location, and price. In order to help with your decision, here's a quick overview of the main contenders, in no particular order or preference:

### Music Together

Founded in the '80s by composer Ken Guilmartin, Music Together had some very specific cultural goals behind its method. As early as 1985, Guilmartin perceived that we had become music consumers rather than participants. Very perceptive, considering MTV had barely got its legs by then. His goal was to create participants in music making by teaching rhythm, pitch and melody — the language of music. If children were familiar with this language by age 3 or 4, as they would be with the spoken language, then teaching an instrument could begin. Teachers could then focus more on teaching the instrument, instead of first having to backtrack and teach the language.

Like most programs, this approach emphasizes the experience of rhythms through movement in time with music. Parents or caregivers are expected to act as models for the children to emulate, and there are CDs, songbooks and other tools to be used

at home. The goal is to establish musical competence (which is simply defined as the ability to sing in tune with accurate rhythm) — a skill which can then be applied to other instruments, as well as other areas of the child's overall development.

### Kindermusik

Kindermusik comes from a German program called "Musikalische Früherziehung" which began in community music schools during the 1960s. The program was eventually adapted for American families and renamed Kindermusik during the '70s. A decade later, the company began its affiliation with Music Resources International to train licensed Kindermusik teachers in the United States.

Holistic in approach, the music and activities of the program aim to develop a child's cognitive, emotional, social, language and physical abilities. Children experience movement and dance activities, with an emphasis on one-on-one interaction. The Kindermusik program also stresses the home as the best location for true learning with a series of award winning CDs, books and games to supplement the classes.

### Orff Schulwerk

Composer Carl Orff championed this system based on the way we learn language — that is, by doing it first and learning to read and write later. Using familiar folkloric music, rhymes, poems, and games, the children gain the natural abilities prerequisite to more advanced learning. This system employs wooden or metal xylophones and simple rhythm instruments, giving children the direct experience of making music. Like Kindermusik and others, teachers are required to obtain licenses before teaching the curricula. Translated into 18 languages, Orff Schulwerk has over 10,000 practitioners in the United States alone.

### Kodaly Method

Founded by the Hungarian musician Zoltan Kodaly, this method is divided into four levels of training. Right from the start, Kodaly uses the same methods of creating familiarity as the other systems do. The difference is in a greater emphasis on reading music. Rhythm symbols are introduced in the early stages, followed by hand signals to denote tonal relationships. While a bit more academic than other programs, children are quite receptive to the reading component since it is presented along with games and fun activities.

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## Where To Catch the Music

If you're looking to introduce your younger child to the wonders of music, here are some options throughout Manhattan:

### ABRONS ART CENTER

Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. (212) 598-0400

[www.henrystreet.org/abrons](http://www.henrystreet.org/abrons)

Early Childhood Program offers music classes for ages 10 months-5 years, integrating singing and movement using the Dalcroze and Orff-Kodaly methods. Suzuki violin lessons (one private and one group per week) for ages 3 and up.

### APPLAUSE THEATRICAL WORKSHOPS

St. Jean's Community Center, 184 E. 76th St.; Reebok Sports Club/NY, 160 Columbus Ave.; (212) 501-1434

Citibabes, 52 Mercer St. (212) 334-5440

[www.ApplauseNY.com](http://www.ApplauseNY.com)

Classes for actors-to-be ages newborn-18 years, including Broadway Babies (newborn-2 years), Sing-a-Long with Peter and Heather (1 and up), Broadway Little Stars (ages 3-4), Broadway Stars (4-5 years), and Princess Theater (3-5 years).

### CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Upper East Side locations (212) 717-1853

"Little Traveler" (ages 3-4) and "World Traveler" (ages 5-8) classes using songs, stories, movement, games, puppetry, and arts & crafts. Private piano and flute lessons. Summer program in Southampton.

### THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY CHORUS

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[www.childrensaidsociety.org/chorus](http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/chorus)

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### CHURCH STREET SCHOOL FOR MUSIC AND ART

74 Warren St.; (212) 571-7290

[www.churchstreetschool.org](http://www.churchstreetschool.org)

Dalcroze music classes for ages 16 months-12 years.

### DILLER-QUAILE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

24 East 95th St.; (212) 369-1484;

[www.diller-quaile.org](http://www.diller-quaile.org)

Early childhood music program for ages 5 months-7 years, including Music for Infants, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, Orff instruments, and more.

### DJONIBA DANCE & DRUM CENTRE

37 E. 18th St.; (212) 477-3474;

[www.djoniba.com](http://www.djoniba.com)

African drum classes for ages 3-5.

### THE EARLY EAR

48 W. 68th St., 110 W. 96th St., 353 E. 78th St.; (212) 877-7125

<http://theearlyear.com>

Singing, musical games, instrument play and more for ages 4 months-5 years.

### EASTSIDE MUSIC

48 E. 80th St.; (212) 346-3046

[www.eastsidemusic.com](http://www.eastsidemusic.com)

Music Together classes include songs, rhythmic chants, movement, and instrument play for ages newborn-4 years, plus Massage & Music for newborn-6 months.

### FRENCH-AMERICAN CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

154 W. 57th St.; (212) 246-7378

[www.facmusic.org](http://www.facmusic.org)

Private instruction in instruments and voice, including classes for ages 2 1/2-4 combining percussion, movement, songs, and early violin study.

### GREENWICH HOUSE MUSIC SCHOOL

46 Barrow St.; (212) 242-4770

[www.gharts.org](http://www.gharts.org)

Music Together classes including songs, rhythmic chants, movement, and instrument play for ages newborn-4 years, plus music and art classes for ages 2 and up.

### GYMBOREE PLAY & MUSIC

Chelsea, West Village, 327 W. 14th St.

(212) 255-5650

Midtown West, 780 Eighth Ave.

(212) 581-4830

Midtown East, 677 Lexington Ave.

(212) 838-4301

Murray Hill, 235 E. 38th St.;

(212) 867-0250

Upper East Side, 401 E. 84th St.; (212) 452-9814

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[www.handson4music.com](http://www.handson4music.com)

Classes integrating music, story, movement and instruments for ages 4 months-4 years.

### THE HARLEM SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

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## Be-Bop. . .

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Once a child reaches the fourth level, he will learn advanced concepts like syncopation, eighth and sixteenth notes, and pentatonic scales. Since one of the greatest stumbling blocks to continued enjoyment and proficiency in music is reading standard notation, this method certainly has advantages if a child chooses to pursue music further.

### Dalcroze Eurhythmics

The Dalcroze system is a physically active approach to learning music, which, like Kodaly, includes learning basic music notation and singing melodies in solfège (*do, re, mi*, etc.). Children start this method at around age 3 or 4, and continue until they reach 9 or 10 years old. There's even a special group of classes for adults.

Eurhythmics explores concepts that will eventually appear in written music, including rhythmic patterns, phrases, dynamic markings and articulation. Since it is dealing with slightly older children than other programs, these topics are entirely appropriate to the budding young musicians of these age groups. Dalcroze also offers courses to supplement the education of students taking other instrumental or dance lessons.

### The Suzuki Method

The Suzuki method is not an early childhood music program in the same sense as the others; it is really an instrumental method. Since there is such a universal image of adorable little violin players associated with this method, I thought it warranted some mention here, if only to distinguish it from other, non-instrumental methods.

Suzuki is typically a method for teaching violin, although piano and guitar adaptations are popping up as well. Since Suzuki has been hugely successful for quite some time, there are many hybrids and imitators, and many teachers incorporate some Suzuki techniques into their own methods.

Suzuki exposes children to recordings of the music they will be playing long before they ever touch a violin. When students actually do pick up the instrument, there is a great emphasis on the physical details of form and movement, a concept borrowed from the martial arts. Parents are expected to be extremely involved with the child's home study, and they will have to learn a thing or two themselves. While there are some Suzuki success stories involving children as young as 2, it is pretty universally believed that

any instrument is unwieldy and difficult until a child is a few years older, and the majority of success stories come from the 5- to 6-year age range.

### Variations on a theme

There are plenty of other programs out there under different names. In addition, there are colleges and community organizations, as well as established schools like Diller-Quaile and Juilliard, that offer early childhood music classes. While they may appear under different names, most of these programs are modeled on the concepts mentioned. If they've been around for a while, it is likely that they are doing things the right way.

When choosing a program, parents should look for instructors and environments that they are comfortable with. Typical programs run at least 12 weeks per level or session, with some as long as one year. There is often some involvement required of a parent or caregiver, and in some cases, this may be quite demanding. Prices vary widely, with community organizations on the lower end, and the schools and methods with some history priced quite a bit higher. In any case, you can certainly expect to pay at least a few hundred dollars per session. Keep in mind that there are also costs for CDs, music books, instruments and parent guides.

In my experience as a music educator, the more natural the child's experience, the more they will enjoy and practice music on their own. Even if your child does not become a concert violinist, they will reap benefits that go far beyond the world of music. Don't be surprised if you see greater skill in math and language, more coordinated movements, and greater ease in social interactions. Most of all, do whatever you can to help your child enjoy music. And don't forget to enjoy it yourself!

*MICHAEL BARRY is the director of the International Studio of Music, the American Institute of Guitar, and a lifelong musician, educator and producer. He can be reached at [Michael@ismnewyork.com](mailto:Michael@ismnewyork.com).*

## Where the music began

Young kids interested in music should pick up Amy Nathan's new book, *Meet the Musicians: From Prodigy (or not) to Pro* (Henry Holt, \$17.95). The book offers a peek at 15 members of the New York Philharmonic. Players of many different instruments are represented, from bassoon to viola, but what kids will

find fascinating is that not every musician was even gifted as a child. Most played sports, and had a host of other activities. Nathan also includes the pets the players had as kids, and their favorite books. The musicians offer practice tips, and the pros and cons of their chosen instruments.

## Great Music Resource

American Music Conference is a national non-profit educational association dedicated to promoting the importance of music, music-making and music education to the general public. For more information, visit [www.amc-music.org](http://www.amc-music.org).



## Where To Catch the Music

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(212) 367-8186; [www.jerryjoy.com](http://www.jerryjoy.com)  
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### MUSIC TOGETHER IN NYC

Soho, Tribeca, Battery Park City (212) 358-3801 [www.MusicTogetherNYC.com](http://www.MusicTogetherNYC.com)  
Music Together classes include songs, rhythmic chants, movement, and instrument play for ages newborn-4 years.

### MUSICAL KIDS

1296 Lexington Ave.; (212) 996-5898  
[www.musicalkids.net](http://www.musicalkids.net)  
Singing, movement, chanting, improvisation, and simple percussion for ages newborn-4, with classes offered in French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Hebrew, as well as English.

### 92ND STREET Y

1395 Lexington Ave.  
(212) 996-1100; [www.92Y.org](http://www.92Y.org)  
Music programs for children, including Music Together and The Music Room for ages 5 months-4 years, and Music Adventures for 4-6 years, all with singing, movement and introduction to instruments.

### THE RHINELANDER CHILDREN'S CENTER

350 E. 88th St.; (212) 876-0500  
<http://rhinelandercenter.org>  
Music, movement, art classes; ages 6 mos-4 yrs.

### THIRD STREET MUSIC SCHOOL SETTLEMENT

235 E. 11th St.; (212) 777-3240  
[www.thirdstreetmusicschool.org](http://www.thirdstreetmusicschool.org)  
Classes in music, art and creative movement for ages 19 months-5 years, including Preschool Musicianship for ages 3-5, plus a half-day nursery program.

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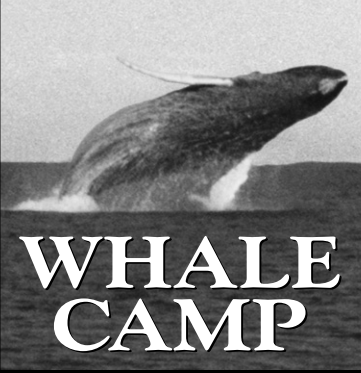


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