

## **Chapter 2**

# Listening to Music

## **Chapter 2. Listening to Music**

The first goal of a music program for young children is to enable them to enjoy listening to the tremendous diversity of music that has developed throughout history and around the world.

Music has form and structure just like spoken language. This underlying structure of music is naturally absorbed by young children in the same way they absorb the grammatical structures of their spoken language. In order to do so, children need to be exposed to music when they are young. It appears that just as each language has its own rhythm and structure, so does the music of different regions. Children should be exposed to these variations so that they develop the ability to understand and appreciate the different forms of music. Just as the young child has a unique ability to absorb the sounds of all the oral languages of the world, young children also have a unique ability to absorb the complex sounds and patterns of different kinds of music. It is important that this period of development not be missed.

For young children, under six years of age, the best music program is one that provides the conditions that enable children to absorb music. This is accomplished by allowing the children freedom to listen, dance and sing to music.

In 160 languages around the world, the word for music and the word for dance are the same. Throughout time, music and dance were inseparable. As researchers observe the brains of individuals listening to music, they see that the motor areas of the brain are active. This suggests that young children should have the opportunity to listen to music with their whole body by being allowed to dance to music as they listen. For this they need space in which to move and dance freely. Ideally, the space for

dance should contain a wall sized mirror so the children can see themselves as they move.

Children will also need a way to choose the music for listening and dancing. This requires a music library that they can use independently. A computer or mobile device can provide a visually organized library of music. In this way, children can point to music they want to hear and they can listen to the music in good quality through good speakers or headphones.

And so, for moving to music, children either need a designated space located where the music won't distract other children who are working, or a designated time when children can choose to dance without being disruptive, or the opportunity to listen to music through wireless headphones or earbuds so they can move about without disrupting other children.

Personally, I think it is ideal if children can have the freedom to get up from work and choose to listen quietly to music at a listening station, or get up and move and dance to music in a provided space with wireless headphones or earbuds. One benefit of having space for free movement is that children really enjoy dancing and moving together. They like to take hands, and twirl, or jump, or otherwise move together. There are many aspects of development that are facilitated if children have opportunities to synchronize their movements with each other and to music at the same time.

Sometimes children just like to sit quietly and listen to music. That is a important option. It is wonderful if a listening station can be set up specifically for that purpose. For these occasions, it works well to set up a music listening station where children can choose to go to listen to music by themselves, with a friend, or small group of friends.

For this kind of music listening, it is a good idea to set up an area where children have access to a music library for quiet listening through stereo headphones. The volume should be preset so the children can't turn the sound up too loud. Children enjoy having their conscious attention drawn to sound. They enjoy listening to the different sounds produced by music. Children can learn a lot about music just by the way selections are organized.

As children grow older, starting around the age of 5, children begin to enjoy sitting with a group listening to music together. It is best to keep these group listening sessions to 5 or 10 minutes. The teacher uses these sessions to help children develop the knowledge and skills that will help them enjoy the music. For example, they can learn what a composer was trying to accomplish with a piece of music. A composer could be trying to describe a scene, tell a story, express an emotion, communicate an idea in a song, provide something to dance to, or just create some interesting sounds to which to listen.

Then when the children get even older, and they have developed an interest in a wide variety of music, children will become interested in engaging in research to organize their own library of music. They can conduct research to find the different periods and styles of music, the different leading composers of each style and period, and the most interesting compositions written by the composers. They may decide to organize the music along timelines, or geographically on maps, or into categories. This can be a group project where the children decide how to divide up the work.

The important thing is for children to have an opportunity to be exposed to a variety of high quality music. A general rule for selecting music is to choose music that has survived the test of time. In general, it is a good idea to select the "classics" for any given style or period of music - the best of renaissance, baroque, classical, romantic, impressionistic, modern, jazz, rock, folk, popular, and traditional music from other

cultures. Select the best quality recordings and performances that are created for adults rather than those created for children. Avoid the stereotypical ideas of what people think children will like. Children come with fresh minds. They have yet to form judgements. The sounds they will hear in music are new to them. They can become quite absorbed in listening to sounds. Don't destroy their sensitivity by thinking they will only like raucous sounds. Provide a variety of music that includes subtlety and nuance, and a variety of moods, as well as music with interesting rhythms.

Since there is so much available music, we have to carefully consider what to use within the limits of time. Keeping this in mind, it is a good idea to focus on music that children might not normally have a chance to hear. Children probably have opportunities to hear the popular music of the day. So, that is not a priority.

When teaching Junior High School, I recorded the top ten off the music charts, played the music for the students, and conducted a survey to collect information. On the survey, students indicated that they thought the top ten represented every type of music that has ever existed. However, upon hearing that there were other kinds of music, they were very interested in learning more. My classroom was packed wall to wall with students coming in during the lunch hour just to listen to other kinds of music on a good music system. They were fascinated by everything. As they began to get familiar with more music, they wanted to hear organ, they wanted to hear harpsichord, they wanted to hear Bach, they wanted to hear Beethoven symphonies. So, don't limit young people with preconceived ideas about what we think they will or will not like.

I found the same thing when I set up music listening stations for preschoolers. In a lab school at the University of Massachusetts, I set up two listening stations separated by a divider. I would put a different kind of music in each station so I could see what music the children would

choose. For example I might put a picture of people dancing over one of the stations and place rhythmic music suitable for dancing in that station while placing a picture of someone resting under a tree in the other station. In this second station I placed quiet, peaceful music. For example, I might place some quiet Mozart. I then watched to see what children would choose. To my surprise, I found that they were just as likely to choose Mozart as anything else. In fact, their listening choices defied stereotypes. There was a four year old who had been kicked out of every other program and his parents hoped we would take him. On his first day we could see why other programs had rejected him. He was getting into trouble everywhere, both inside and out. Finally, to get away from an adult who wanted to find something constructive for him to do, he ran into the quiet music listening station and put on a pair of headphones and began listening to Mozart. He became very absorbed and spent the rest of the morning quietly resting on a cushion listening to the music. He was calm the rest of the day. The next day, when he came back to school, the first thing he did was go straight to the quiet music listening area and put on the same tape again. He never caused a disturbance again.

Meanwhile, in the same program, I'll never forget two young two-and-a-half-year olds who discovered one of the listening stations and put on a tape of Beethoven's 6th Symphony. After listening to it all the way through they put it on again and were half way through it a second time when their parents came to pick them up. The two boys insisted they wanted to finish listening to the symphony. The parents were not in a hurry and so they visited with each other while waiting for their boys. However, when the boys were finished the boys wanted to share the music with their parents and insisted they wanted the parents to listen to the music with them. So, I let each boy take a tape home so each could listen to it with their family. Fortunately, I had made backup tapes in case a tape got damaged and was able to provide each family with a tape. From that experience, I learned to create a lending library. In the following years I often had younger siblings come to class, remember

music their older sibling had brought home, and request to listen to the music and check it out to take home.

And so, if given an opportunity, and free choice, young children will be interested in a wide variety of sounds they haven't heard before. If they are older, and it is before they are exposed to a variety of music, they may initially, want that with which they are familiar. But, don't let them be limited by what they know. Broaden their horizons. Provide them access to the range of music. The music can be organized by style, by period, by composer, by where it is from, or by anything else that makes good sense.

While having the opportunity to listen to new music, children also love to listen to the songs and pieces they are learning to sing, dance, or play on a musical instrument. They like to put on headphones and sing along with songs they know. It is very valuable to provide model performances of pieces children are learning, and give children an opportunity to independently practice with the model. It is also helpful if two or more sets of headphones can work with a music system at the same time so children can listen together.

And so, it is beneficial to provide a music library for independent listening, as well as for movement and dance. For these purposes it is helpful to provide an area where children can sit and listen to music, as well as an area where they can put on some music without disturbing others, and have space to move about and dance. They will need an audio device, computer, or simple sound system, that they can easily control and choose the music they want to hear. Headphones need to be comfortable, durable, and provide good sound quality. These days, headphones, or ear buds, can be wireless. With these, wires don't get tangled and they are wonderful for enabling children to dance and move to music without disturbing others. However, it is also beneficial to have a good sound system with good speakers so that children can enjoy dancing and moving to music together. I like to have a good sound

system hooked up to a large screen TV so I can share video with good sound as well. With this, you can show children examples of people dancing, singing, or playing different forms of music they may not otherwise get a chance to see. On YouTube you can find people dancing renaissance and other forms of dance, and show Leonard Bernstein conducting a Beethoven symphony, or Lang Lang or other famous musician play the piano, or other instrument. Children learn by watching good models.

Young children love to explore. They like to be in control. They love to try things and make choices. They love to learn how to do things independently. They like to learn how to use things. They love going to a music station and choosing music to which to listen. And so, a music listening station needs to provide these opportunities.

So, what do you use for a music station? Technology has evolved and changed over the years. When I was little, my parents let me listen to 78 rpm records. I had to learn how to place the record on the turntable and place the needle carefully on the record. I needed to learn how to replace the record back in the record jacket and back into the rack. It was relatively easy for a young child, as a non-reader, to find a particular recording because there was only one piece recorded on each side of the record and I was able to figure out which record and side I wanted by looking at the record labels.

Later, when I started teaching, I didn't want students handling my records, and so I recorded music onto reel-to-reel tapes. However, finding stuff on reel-to-reel tape was a problem.

When cassette tapes arrived, that made things easier. I recorded only one piece on each tape so selections would be easy to find. I put a picture on each label so children could easily identify the tape they wanted. I had to teach them how to place the tape in the player and press the play button. That worked pretty well. I provided a selection of tapes from which they



could choose. If they damaged a tape, it was not an original, and so I could make another copy. Fortunately, the children never damaged a tape.

When CDs came out, they held many tracks of music. This was fine for older students, but the multiple tracks only labeled by numbers made finding a particular piece difficult for younger children. So, I copied the music and made my own CDs with only one track per CD. I put a picture on each CD for a label. Fortunately, blank CDs were cheap. The students liked putting a CD in the drive, listening to the one selection, taking it out, and then trying a different CD. That worked well for the children, but it took me time to make the CDs. I would make about 6 selections available at a time. I would generally set those out for a week, make new ones on the weekend, and then set some new ones out for the next week.

Today, we can not only buy CDs, but we can access entire unlimited music libraries over the internet. As of this writing, the most commonly used music libraries are provided by Apple Music, Amazon Music, Google Play, Spotify, Tidal, and Pandora. Some people like to find music on Google's YouTube. Each has different advantages and disadvantages. Each has a different interface. And, each contains a lot of music. However, none of them contain everything. So, a person may have to go to one library to find a particular selection and a different library to find something else.

Currently, some libraries provide several options for use. Some provide free access to the library, but you have to purchase the pieces you want. Some provide free access to the library, and, if you are willing to listen to and see ads, you can listen to the music for free. In addition, some services provide an unlimited library if you pay \$10.00 a month for an individual, or \$14.00 a month for several users. The exact prices vary according to the service. Some of the libraries provide instant streaming. Some libraries allow downloading to your device.

Unfortunately, the interfaces for these libraries don't work well for young children. Young children like to explore and tinker. These libraries are designed to provide a lot of choices to older listeners. As a result, young children can easily get lost and wander out of the program, or away from the options you try to provide for them. Therefore, these services are good resources to help teachers access and find music, but ideally, the teacher will then collect the music and organize it for the younger students to use.

Adults can make these libraries more easily useable by young children by organizing playlists for the children. Spotify, for example, allows a user to create playlists, change the playlist cover, and download the music so it is available offline. On a tablet like an iPad, for example, the teacher can then set up a set of listening options for young children that are simple to use and minimize distractions. In Spotify, I accomplish this by creating a playlist for each composer, and replace the playlist cover for each playlist with a picture that I think will communicate the content to a young child. For example, with each playlist representing one composer, the composer's picture can then be used for the playlist cover. You may be able to use the original album cover if it contains a picture of the composer, or you can use Spotify's pictures of composers, or you can use pictures of composers provided by Wikipedia. Then, the next step is to place the set of playlists into a folder, label the folder for the musical period, and then download only that folder to a tablet like an iPad. Then, turn Spotify to Offline and turn wifi off in the tablet settings. The result is a relatively simple and safe interface.

And so, with an iPad or other tablet set up as a listening station, a young student can take the tablet anywhere in the room and listen quietly with a pair of headphones.

To make things clear, easy to use, and to minimize distractions, the first iPad I bring into the classroom is set up only as a music listening station.

At first, it may only contain one playlist. I only use the particular iPad as a music listening station. In addition, for very young children, I only put the one activity on the iPad. The result is that there is nothing else available on the iPad and children understand that this iPad is for music listening. As the children get older, and familiar with using the iPad for music listening, eventually, other music activities can be put on the iPad. In the beginning, however, there are a number of benefits to introducing young children to just one activity on the iPad. It creates a clear focus and purpose. And, it becomes self limiting. When children finish with the listening activity, they move on to something else that doesn't use an iPad. The iPad doesn't become the point of interest. Children choose to pick up the iPad because they want to listen to music. This does not mean that there can't eventually be other iPads in the classroom. However, I start with only one iPad, and it is set up for music listening. Once the function of the iPad is clearly established, I then can bring in a second iPad to serve a different function. Since iPads come in different colors and sizes, a second iPad can visually indicate that it serves a different purpose. For example, a second iPad could provide electronic phonetic books for reading and serve as a reading library. One iPad serves as a music listening station while the other serves as a reading station. In this way, for young children, I find it most effective to set up each iPad with its own designated purpose instead of using an iPad as a multi-purpose device. This also means, that for young children, that I do not set iPads up with one per child. I set the classroom up with one iPad for each specific purpose. So, I might have only one or two in a classroom. One for music listening, and one for dancing, or reading. Children need to be active. They need to be able to move about and work with their hands. By limiting the number of iPads in the room, and what you can do with each of them, the iPad becomes a tool like any other material in the room, and children use it like any other material. The focus of the activity is the educational purpose that it is designed to serve. In this case, listening to music is the point of interest, and the iPad replaces the function served previously by the phonograph or CD player.

As a result, the children can use an electronic device like an iPad, or computer, with a friend, a small group, or by themselves. When they are ready to do something different, they put it back where it belongs and it becomes available for someone else to use.

Older students (upper elementary and above), once they have learned about digital safety, digital citizenship, and have proven themselves to be responsible, can make a more extensive use of technology and go on the internet and utilize any of the music services such as Spotify, Apple Music, or Amazon Music. These libraries become wonderful resources for older students to use to research and build their own music libraries.

— — —

If you prefer not to use an internet music service with young children, there are some other options that can be used for providing access to music for listening. One of the most practical solution for teachers wanting to organize a music library for young children is to work from CDs, or to purchase music files online and download them.

You can find CDs which are organized in a variety of useful ways. For example, there are collections of CDs where each CD is a collection of a compositions by a particular composer. These go by titles such as “The Essential Mozart,” or, “The Best of Mozart,” or, Mozart’s Greatest Hits.”

You can also find collections that contain selections of popular compositions by many of the recognized composers covering several periods of music. So, for example, you can find “100 Best Classical Composers,” or “A-Z Classical Music,”

Some music collections are organized by musical period such as “Dances of the Renaissance.” or the “Ultimate Baroque.”

These are all useful ways to purchase a musical collection. You can find such collections and purchase CDs online from any of the online music retailers.

If you purchase a CD for each composer, most composer CDs come with a picture of the composer on the cover. That makes it easy to put each CD in its jewel case and set several jewel cases out next to a CD player. The children can look at the covers select a CD, put it in the player, and start listening. They may listen a little, take the CD out, put it back into its case, and then try a different CD. They like the process of selecting a CD, putting it in the player, putting on headphones, listening, and then putting the CD away and taking out a different CD. They like mastering the process. They like developing a sense of competence and independence by practicing the process. That becomes part of the value of the activity.

If you choose the above method of providing a listening library, you will need to model for each child the process of handling the CDs carefully. It is important that they learn how to open a jewel case, lift out and hold the CD by the edges, open the CD player drawer, carefully place the CD with the label side up into the CD player drawer, and close the drawer. In a later lesson you can show them how to watch the track numbers as pieces play so they can return to a particular selection again. It is important that children always return the CD to the jewel case and never set the CD down outside of the jewel case or player. It is also important for them to learn to not touch the bottom side of the CD

I like to use the music services online to find and select music that I want to use. Then, I can either purchase CDs of the music I have selected, and then set a few CDs out at a time next to a CD player, or I organize the music I find online into playlists which I download onto an iPad. Both methods work.

To find music, it is useful to look up a list of important composers online through resources such as the Wikipedia, or by using a Google search. Then it is easy to read about the composers and see a listing of their important compositions. With that information, it is then helpful to use a music service such as Spotify, Amazon Music, or Apple Music to find the music and listen to different recordings of it. Older students will also find it interesting to listen to the differences between various performances and recordings. By using a music service, a person has a chance to hear different interpretations of tempos, phrasing, and balance between parts. In addition, it is possible to notice the differences in the way performances are recorded and engineered. The acoustics of the hall, the type and placement of microphones, the quality of sound from the musical instruments, and the sound design of the mix all make a big difference in the resulting listening experience. Students will be amazed at the difference in the listening experience from one recording to another of the same piece. In one performance the musical piece may be very exciting while a different performance of the same piece may be very dull and uninteresting.

In any case, I find the music services are extremely helpful for finding and choosing specific musical performances to use. I then purchase the music to use, unless I choose to create and then download playlists as I described above. However, it is important to realize that those downloaded playlists will only work while you remain subscribed to the music service from which you got the selections unless you already purchased the music.

— — — — —

Next, it is important to think about the criteria to be used for selecting music for children. .

It is not practical to try to do everything at once. The best place to begin is by choosing the most recognized composers from the different periods

of western music. Later, this can be built upon with different styles of music and music from other regions of the world.

\*\*\*\*

To begin, it important not to overwhelm the children with too much at a time. So, you need to select a simple organizational scheme. For example, you could begin by selecting important composers and their best compositions. You could then group the composers by musical period. You could then present one musical period at a time in chronological order. It is probably a good idea not to introduce more than 6 composers at a time for each period. You can then keep each period available as you introduce the next period. Eventually, you will have all the periods available and then can add new composers to each period. You can then begin to add different styles of music to each period. For example, for earlier periods, you can introduce choral, opera, ballet, etc. For modern music you can introduce jazz, musicals, rock, country western, folk, popular, and others. It is also important to add music from other parts of the world.

Below are listed some key composers for each musical period. I've put an asterisk by the name of the composers of each period that are recommended for the first introduction of each period. Choose 6 out of each list.

#### For Renaissance

William Byrd

\*Arcangelo Corelli

\*Francois Couperin

Orlande de Lassus

\*John Dowland

Orlando Gibbons

\*Jean-Baptiste Lully  
\*Claudio Monteverdi  
\*Thomas Morley  
\*Michael Praetorius  
Jean-Philippe Rameau  
Thomas Weelkes

### For Baroque

\*Johann Sebastian Bach  
\*George Frideric Handel  
\*Johann Pachelbel  
\*Henry Purcell  
\*Domenico Scarlatti  
\*Georg Philipp Telemann  
\*Antonio Vivaldi

### For Classical

\*Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach  
\*Johann Christian Bach  
\*Fernando Sor  
\*Muzio Clementi  
\*Franz Joseph Haydn  
\*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

### For Romantic

\*Ludwig van Beethoven  
Hector Berlioz  
Georges Bizet  
\*Johannes Brahms  
\*Frederic Chopin  
Cesar Franck  
\*Franz Liszt  
\*Felix Mendelssohn  
Modest Mussorgsky



Jacques Offenbach  
Sergei Rachmaninoff  
\*Gioachino Rossini  
Camille Saint-Saens  
\*Franz Schubert  
Robert Schumann  
\*Bedrich Smetana  
Johann Strauss I  
\*Johann Strauss II  
\*Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
Giuseppe Verdi  
Richard Wagner

For Impressionism

\*Issac Albeniz  
Manuel de Falla  
\*Claude Debussy  
\*Gabriel Faure  
\*Ravel  
Ottorino Respighi  
\*Erik Satie  
Alexander Scriabin  
\*Jean Sibelius

For 20th Century (Orchestral)

\*Leroy Anderson  
\*Leonard Bernstein  
Benjamin Brittan  
Anton Bruckner  
\*Aaron Copland  
\*Antonin Dvorak  
\*George Gershwin  
\*Edvard Grieg  
Gustav Mahler

Sergei Prokofiev  
Sergei Rachmaninoff  
Arnold Schoenberg  
Gunther Schuller  
Dmitri Shostakovich  
Richard Strauss  
Igor Stravinsky  
\*John Williams  
\*Ralph von Williams

For you to have something with which to start, and to save time having to research, you can use playlists that we have organized from Spotify.

The playlists are listed on webpages at:

[www.montessoriworld.org/MusicEducation/Playlists](http://www.montessoriworld.org/MusicEducation/Playlists)