

WORKSHOP NOTES FROM ISME CONFERENCE, July 2006

FAMILY MUSIC WORKSHOP

(Main topic: Community Music)

by Heather McLaughlin, Melbourne, Australia (heathermmc@gmail.com)

We can make our teaching more relevant, more enjoyable and more effective by being aware of the possibilities of multi-age music-making. There are benefits to our students, our school communities, and ourselves if we can include family music activities in our work. Parents who have participated in music activities are likely to be more supportive of the school music programmed. Family music activities can be suitable for all ages – from babies to grandparents – all in the same session.

Family music-making also has huge possibilities in the area of Community Music. Parents are often very willing to try activities for the first time, in spite of their lack of personal confidence or experience, if they are involved in an event along with their children. In most cases they find this a very non-threatening and enjoyable way to try activities they would not attempt otherwise – for example, part-singing in a group or circle dancing.

In this workshop session, typical activities suitable for a mixed-age one-off family music workshop will be demonstrated. Different cultures and languages are likely to have songs or other music which fills similar roles and would be more suitable than the English ones suggested.

Usually a workshop takes place with parents and children sitting together as family groups in a circle on the floor or a large room. The following progression is one which has been found to work in most situations with most groups:

1. Greeting song

e.g. “Hello Everyone” (sung to the tune of “Goodnight, Ladies”).

Hello everyone, Hello everyone

Hello everyone, We’re glad that you could come.

Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along

Merrily we roll along,

Over the deep, blue sea.

(Sway side to side for the first section; tap hands on knees, or bounce babies/young children on knees, for the second section.)

Once this has been introduced and sung a few times, it can be directed at individuals in the group – for example, beginning with the youngest child (often a baby) – “Hello, Jessica”. Adults are encouraged to harmonise, or the leader can harmonise once enough strong singers have picked up the melody.

2. Familiar song e.g. “Twinkle, Twinkle”

Adults and most children will join in for 2-3 times singing this with actions. A strong singing group can be divided into two parts to sing it in canon after four beats. Many babies and toddlers will do the actions, as they usually recognise the song.

3. Speech rhymes and finger plays, especially interactive adult/child rhymes.

e.g.

“Criss cross (draw a cross on the child’s back), applesauce (massage shoulders),

Spiders climbing up your back

Cool (blow around ear) breeze (other ear)

Tight squeeze (hug)

And now you'll have a shiver! (run finger up child's spine)

This rhyme works well with children sitting in front of parents, or little ones on the parent's lap. After a few times through, some children will happily reciprocate and do it on their parents' backs.

Other possible rhymes might be 'Round and round the garden' or for younger children, any of the bouncing rhymes such as "Ride a Cock Horse" or "This is the way the ladies ride".

4. **Body Percussion ostinati accompaniment with an instrument (or perhaps recorded music).** Simple patterns such as 'knees, clap', or more challenging ones such as 'knees, clap, click, clap' can involve everyone while a melody is played on recorder (Irish jigs are usually popular), violin, or other instrument. Small children will copy, older ones and adults can keep a strong common beat.

5. **Singing songs, often simple part-songs or rounds**

e.g. "Frere Jacques" seems very commonly known around the world, often with words in various languages. This can be started with the same body percussion pattern, first in unison, then in two parts, then more. Another good one which can have rowing actions added within families is "Row, Row, Row Your Boat". This works also as a round within itself, then against "Frere Jacques", so with enough strong singers it is possible to have eight parts going – four within each song.

6. **Playing tuned and untuned percussion instruments (xylophones, drums, tambourines).**

Instrumental activities which involve ostinati can accompany songs, for example "Frere Jacques" – drums and tambourines alternating on the beat, xylophones playing a simple bordun on D and A, triangle playing on the 4th beat of each bar, and rhythm sticks playing a pattern such as *ti-ti ta (rest, rest)*.

7. **Circle games**

e.g. "Santa Maloney" or "Everybody clapping (clapping, clapping, Everybody clapping, just like me)"

Getting everyone up in the circle for simple action games can encourage participants, including children, to suggest movement possibilities, and can be good preparation for dancing.

8. **Copying actions to music in the circle**

Actions led by the leader to some interesting music are easy for everyone and fun, and possible preparation for dancing to come. We used a great track, "Pata Pata" (South African piece) from Christoph Maubach's CD Step Back Sally (available from our sales list at vosa.org) to do actions in a circle for copying.

Depending on the situation, children or adult participants could have a turn at leading this activity.

9. **Folk dances**

Circle dances can often involve even very young children, who try the actions by copying bigger people).

e.g. We learnt the following simple dance to the "Frere Jacques" melody:

Step right, feet together, step right, feet together
Step left, feet together, step left, feet together
Hop into the middle (hands up in front like a kangaroo), hop back into place
Turn around and clap, turn other way and clap.

The Australian words we used were:

"Eucalyptus, eucalyptus,
Possums too, Possums too
Wallabies and wombats

Wallabies and wombats,
Kangaroo, kangaroo.”

The instrumental accompaniments learnt earlier for “Frere Jacques” were used with this.

Finally we made three concentric circles which sang and moved in canon.

10. Goodbye song

e.g. using the same melody as at the beginning (“Goodnight, ladies” tune):

“Goodbye, everyone
Goodbye, everyone
Goodbye, everyone
It’s time to say goodbye.

Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along
Merrily we roll along,
Over the deep blue sea.”

Family music workshops are a very satisfying way to encourage music-making for all ages, to introduce parents to activities used in a school music programme, and to build appreciation of what you do daily in music classes. Try one yourself soon!