

Written using American musical terminology, *Improvisation Games* is jargon-free, approachable and adaptable for music education ranging from primary to university studies. This book is highly recommended to anyone who wants to expand their understanding and utilisation of improvisation to enhance and entertain their own and others' musical creativity.

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**Infant Musicality: New Research for Educators and Parents** by Johannella Tafuri, edited by Graham Welch and translated by Elizabeth Hawkins. Farnham: SEMPRE/Ashgate, 2009. 193 pp. + CD, £12.99, paperback. ISBN: 9780754665120.

In the Italian city of Bologna, a group of mothers with their babies and growing children attended weekly music sessions and kept diaries, notes and recordings of their children's musical activities. The *inCanto* project, as it was named, was an ambitious undertaking led by Johannella Tafuri working with her colleague Donatella Villa. The project studied musical development among a group of children recruited in the final stages of pregnancy until they entered formal schooling around the age of six. The premise on which the project was founded was that all children can sing in tune if they are taught in an environment which includes live singing, positive encouragement and the right strategies to teach singing in tune. A further premise was that all children are attracted to music and that the abilities to move, sing and play in time will develop earlier in relation to their peers among children who live in an enriched and continuous musical environment.

Written to address a broad audience from academics, educators and parents,

*Infant Musicality* is not intended to be a research report in the formal sense, but rather tells the story of the whole project and explains its major outcomes. In the first part of the book the project's outcomes are presented from two points of view; that of the researchers presenting their findings within the more formal conventions of research, and also that of the parents who offer more personal and descriptive accounts. These chapters are preceded by a useful review of literature on musical development from birth to three years.

The project claims to be the first research to study the development of certain musical abilities through the observation of skills gradually learned by the same group of children taking part in a programme of activities. This set programme was central to the project. It consisted of the group sessions, together with the expectation that parents would continue and encourage these musical activities at home; all the while keeping records. The parents were asked to complete diaries prepared by the researchers and submit these at regular intervals. The diaries contained a number of set possible responses from which to choose, imposing a level of control, therefore, on the data that emerged.

Regular attendance and record keeping call for a level of commitment that, unsurprisingly, not all the original group of recruited children and their parents maintained. There were, of course, the usual reasons why parents unavoidably left the programme and numbers tailed off as it progressed from an initial number of over 70 fluctuating with time to a fairly consistent 30. A certain kind of parent would have been drawn to the programme in the first place, needing to be able to give the level of devotion and organisation the parents' accounts tell us it required. These, in my view, were likely to have been a quite narrow band of parents whose values and

aspirations for their children accorded with those of the project. Certainly if names and photos in the book are to go by, these were white, two-parent families whom we can safely assume to be middle class.

The study generated a wealth of data from the parent diaries, the recordings from home made at key intervals and information collected from the sessions themselves, including specific tests of musical ability such as beating in time. The data have been analysed to provide detailed discussion of the focal musical abilities: learning to sing in tune; to sing spontaneously; to play in time; and more. The reporting in this chapter is densely detailed and benefits careful reading and revisiting. The use of percentages tends to veil the fact that the actual numbers were often quite small. For example, the diaries returned in the first year are listed as varying between 53 and 31. In addition to the analysis and discussion of findings there are many careful notations of musical vocalisations and these, together with the CD of recordings, offer an invaluable source of direct examples.

Interestingly it is the first three years – or to be precise the later months of pregnancy up to the age of three – that the researchers decide have the most decisive influence on the abilities they were studying. For this reason the reporting in the book is confined almost exclusively to this period. In particular, the researchers feel able to assert that the first three years represents the decisive time when the ability to sing in tune is established. By the time the children reach three and a half years old, 25 out of the 35 children (71%) can sing in tune: a higher average than that documented in other studies. According to Tafuri the activities of the next 3 years can confirm or contribute, but they do not appear to have the same decisive effect as the previous period. However, before the first three years are declared a sensitive period during which

certain musical skills must be set in place, Tafuri herself draws attention to the instability of the children's musical responses, particularly singing in tune. This lack of consistency she attributes to the song, the context and many other factors such as the child's personality. The belief in determinism – that the first three years will impact irretrievably on later behaviours – is currently strong in early years practice, not just in music, but overall. My hope is that these mentions of developmental instability and malleability, tucked in among the other claims in the text, will temper the conviction which abounds, that the earliest start is necessarily the best – and therefore the only – start. What soon follows from such ideas is the belief that to miss this early opportunity is to leave the children musically deprived. What we cannot know is what the progress in these musical skills might have been if the children started at a later age with a similar intensive programme and similar parental commitment. In the absence of comparative groups, such claims need to be heard with caution.

The programme of musical activities in the group sessions was central to the project. In the second part of the book, some of the pedagogical guidelines that were discovered to be effective are presented. The activities described are conventional to early years practice – singing, playing instruments and moving. They range across a spectrum from adult-led, structured activities, to creating opportunities for children's own improvised and spontaneous contributions. There is much down-to-earth good advice here and a wide variety of different approaches and description of responses. The message is clear; that thoughtful, analytical and well-designed pedagogical practice even from the first months is important. Tafuri argues convincingly that this type of more intense and elaborated involvement with carefully designed, age-appropriate musical

activities will support and enhance those aspects of musical development emphasised by the programme. However, when the daily musical experiences of the young children we work with are rapidly changing, both as a consequence of the increasing cultural diversity of populations and the influx of digital music in to the home environment, we may need to move on from the traditional (and Italian) conceptions of musical parenting conveyed in this project.

Studies conducted in a single culture, particularly where the researcher is part of that culture, may not sufficiently consider the role played by culture nor too the impact of a particular historical time when certain beliefs about childhood and parenting prevail. Contrasts with another period – the Pillsbury Foundation Studies for example of 1937 onwards when children from the age of 18 months to around seven years were studied in an experimental nursery explicitly established to study children's innate musicality in an environment completely separate from their parents – assist in the process of highlighting these cultural and historical characteristics. Cultural differences in values translate into different ways of dealing with young children, of

understanding the parenting and educating role. It influences, for example, whether mothers adopt traditional and intuitive ways of musical parenting, or seek out and accept the incorporation of 'expert' versions of musical upbringing. The expectation that accompanies these expert versions is that parents should seek to speed up and intensify their children's learning in key, valued domains; an expectation that ties in with contemporary Western, middle-class parental anxieties about doing the best and the right thing for their children.

These caveats aside, the detailed documented experiences of one group who had chosen to be part of this project are enormously valuable to research and practice in this field. The book needs to be read with awareness of its implicit ideas about what kind of musical development is to be valued and what kinds of pedagogical and parental processes are effective to achieve this; but this is worthwhile reading for all those concerned not just with early years music, but with music education across its breadth.

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