

## Choosing Songs for Children: Do You Believe the Music?

By Bobby Susser

### BELIEVABILITY

Whether it's colors, numbers, self-expression, self-awareness, socialization, communication, or any valid concept you may be attempting to introduce to children through song, the performance must be believable in order for children to learn and derive pleasure. The singer should sound honest, trustworthy, serious, encouraging, and stimulating. The song and singer should be well suited for each other. It is the teacher's and parent's responsibility to feel that the performance is being sung from the heart and therefore believable. The finest vocalist is not at all as necessary as the believability of the performance. The vocalist must believe the song or it's fake and not taken seriously because children are not fooled by insincerity. Songs that are not believable show no respect for children for they lack honesty.

### ENTERTAINMENT AND LEARNING

Songs may entertain and teach but we must differentiate because our primary objective is to teach. There is nothing wrong with recordings that only entertain children, if they are in good taste. However, some recordings that were meant to entertain are not recorded well, not sung well, and do not carry a positive message to children. Songs and their performances need to respect children. Ideally, in its unique way, a children's song should entertain and educate.

### ELEMENTS TO LOOK FOR IN CHILDREN'S MUSIC

The songs you choose to play in class or at home should have simple lyrics that are to the point, have positive messages, and melodies that are easy to sing for all children. Once these basic elements exist, sonically (the sound of the instrumentation), depending upon the song, may be very sophisticated. If violins are played pizzicato and they enhance all the other elements, then that is what would be appropriate. The same holds true for a tuba, vibes, french horn, etc. Singing down and playing down to children is just as disrespectful and dishonest as talking down to them. If the basic elements that I described exist in children's songs then sophistication will not only be accepted and understood by children, it will be welcomed and very often expected.

## THE BENEFITS CHILDREN DERIVE WHEN SONGS ARE BELIEVABLE

The English poet John Donne stated, "No man is an island." If we twist his line around and say, "Every man is an island," it becomes quite clear that communication is the bridge that connects all of us from the earliest of early childhood. The voice is our most personal musical instrument. And singing is one of the most natural forms of communication. We often say things in songs that we do not speak of in conversation. Singing songs helps children develop communication skills, self-expression, socialization, and the self. This prepares the child for a greater understanding of himself/herself, others, and the world he/she lives in as well as the many specific subjects taught in school.

## CONTRIBUTION

When choosing music for children one should ask, "Is this work a contribution?" what I mean by a contribution is do the songs stimulate children to learn and sing, are they pleasant and/or exciting to listen to, are the songs respectful of children, and are the songs and/or their approach original. If the answer is "yes," make the purchase for the children because they deserve the best of contributions. By doing so, you will have made your contribution. It is our responsibility to introduce as much as possible to our children in order to foster their development so the melody lingers on.

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