



## Keynote from the IOSFS Convention 2021

### For the Love of Children: Music, Enculturation, and Education

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#### Introduction

Across a wide spectrum of settings and circumstances, children are actively engaged in the acquisition of musical repertoire, knowledge, and values. Within their families and communities, and from infancy onward, children are involved in various informal processes of enculturation that operate in lieu of (or in tandem with) formal teaching and learning in schools, studios, and other institutional contexts. Their clear sense of agency is at work, too, in determining what music they will use, remake, or discard from all the influences that permeate their lives. I acknowledge the growth of disciplinary attention to children's musical composite as well as to their perceived beliefs, interests, and needs, particularly through the emergence of an "ethnomusicology of children" that considers children's musical identities as the product of family, peer, and mediated forces. Teachers have much to gain from the work of ethnomusicologists who define and describe children for their musical expressions and interests outside direct adult influence, as well as tethered to adult stylistic ideals.

There is much to be said about children's musicality, and their musically expressive practices, and my own platform for remarks here is built from some years of research in children's musical development as well as folklore (childlore), ethnomusicology, and of course straight-ahead music pedagogy. I hope to be forthcoming in these remarks, open and easy, informal and a bit unreserved, and to drift a little from one topic to another. I hope that will be of interest to readers, and that you might be as intrigued as I am on these matters of children's music enculturation and education, and of the intersections between ethnomusicology and education. The various ruminations may appear at times loosely connected, but the points are nonetheless there for reflecting on the reasons why we do what we do in music "for the love of children".

#### Wisdom of an Ethnomusicologist

Within the field of ethnomusicology, in which scholars study music in culture, one of the most influential thinkers of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Bruno Nettl (1930-2020), an American scholar whose research spanned the nature and extent of music in Native American Indigenous communities (principally the Blackfeet) and in Iran and southern India. He was central in defining ethnomusicology as a discipline, and in offering his wisdom within recommendations for what should constitute a comprehensive musical education for students in schools and universities: "Each system of music education should include three components—(1) the study of Western classical music, (2) the study of local music traditions, and (3) something of the music of the rest of the world" (Nettl, 2002, 2013, 2015). This recommendation is in many ways already in full-flowered realization in the classrooms of Orff specialist teachers, as we teach Western European art music, folk, traditional, and popular music of continuing and newcomer communities. Of course, we are drawn to growing the repertoire so we continue to pursue our search for a grand diversity of musical possibilities.

Back to Bruno Nettl, influential scholar, whose works on art, folk/traditional, and popular music are numerous and profound, and which include his keystone work, *The Study of*

*Ethnomusicology* (in three editions, 1983, 2005, 2015), along with *In the Course of Performance* (1998), *Encounters in Ethnomusicology*, and *Becoming an Ethnomusicologist* (2013). He had a particular interest in the research on music in children's lives, and occasionally he would slip into his scholarly papers, observations of children's music-making, the importance of music in families, and his interest in how music is taught and learned to children and learners of various ages and experiences.

In May 2015, I received from him a letter of thanks for an essay I'd written for his festschrift, *A Thing Called Music* (2015), on "Music in the Culture of Children". Professor Nettl tacked on his ethnomusicological musings on research that needed to be done on the topic: "I regret that I didn't do more with children's musical culture in my fieldwork. There would surely have been a lot to learn in my visits to the Blackfeet, in Iran and India. Life was too short, and I'm not sure I knew the right approaches...." He remarked that children's musical interests and behavior were not really considered by ethnomusicologists as a component of culture as a whole, and that they were considered as not yet musically evolved or direct imitators of the music they heard from adults. He had earlier written a beautiful foreword to the first edition of one of my books, noting that "an 'anthropology of children's music' (is necessary because)...in order to understand the character of a musical culture, one must understand its subcultures...such as that of children".

### **Musical Children with Agency**

As we who teach music engage with children on a daily basis, we come to know them well, including their musical interests and inclinations, their behaviors and values. We consider their circumstances as young listeners and learners, and we recognize the general characteristics of children (at large and in music), noting their individual penchants and proclivities at various ages and stages of development. We do our best to meet the challenges of musically educating children in groups even while we tend to their discrete interests. We also acknowledge that children are drawn to music which may not always match the music that adults may impose upon them, nor the hard-and-fast rules of a school curriculum as to what they should musically know and how they should know it.

My own awakening to the reality of children's agency, and to their capacity to speak for themselves, to act deliberately, and to shape their music and musical lives, occurred well into my teaching career and largely through my involvement in the ethnographic project, *Songs in Their Heads* (1998, 2010). It was then that I learned, over a period of 24 months of systematic field experience, details of how music *happens* to children. Children talked to me about music and showed me what they could do musically. They vocalized freely in song and rhythmic chant, and engaged in all manner of rhythmic movement as they listened, sang and played. I gave children latitude, the freedom to steer the conversation about music and the engagements in music that they wished to share. I captured their ideas in dialogue with me, and wrote up narrative tales of their musical involvements. All along the way I wondered why I'd not known the fuller extent of their musical interests, or their creative capacities, or their agentive control of themselves and their interactions with others. In my own years of teaching music to children, I was quite occupied instead with making it through a lesson plan within a restricted time, or of meeting curricular mandates, or of preparing children for yet another performance. That's what we do, right? And yet when we are at liberty to truly listen to children (as I was in this research), we give them voice, and we learn of the music in them, and of their musical hopes and dreams.

Each of the following quotes are further contextualized and interpreted in the book, but in fact all of them are enticing and probably somewhat understood by those who are involved in children's musical experiences.

Darryl, age 5: *"I love the feeling of music."*

Carrie, age 6: *"Some music helps the stories along".*

Nathan, age 7: *"Every morning, when I wake up, I have songs in my head".*

Andrea, age 9: *"Music is something is sometimes happy, sometimes sad, and probably in-between, too. All the time, it's there, and I need it."*

Lateesha, age 10: *"Music gets me going and gives me strength."*

Alan, age 10: *"I just get up on the stump (in the back field), and I think there. And I sing as loud as I can. No one can ever hear me. It feels pretty good."*

Jonathan, age 12: *"Music moves and it makes you move."*

In a fleeting sweep of the findings of the *Songs in Their Heads* project, I learned from the children that music holds high appeal for their attention, and is at the wellsprings of their very being. The children, ranging in age from 3 to 12 years, demonstrated to me the very real presence of songs in their heads. They knew the "stuck-in-the-groove" variety of folk and popular songs, and the music that was "given" to them by their parents and teachers. They had a repertoire of songs they learned from their siblings, and from their friends in the playground, the schoolyard, the cafeteria, the school bus, and in their homes and neighborhoods. They were keen followers of the media, and media music had seeped into their musical language and aurally acquired repertoire. Children also knew the songs that only they could sing—their very own music—fashioned by them from their individual experiences. They were touched and challenged by this music, even when they may not always have had words to describe what it meant to them or why it powered them. Amid all of the music they mentioned experiencing, children referred to their attraction to music and musical experiences that amuse, excite, and represent them. Their stance on music in their lives was indication of their agency at work, as it was they themselves who seemed to determine the music on their playlists and in their lives.

### **Musical Enculturation and Informal Music Learning**

As Orff specialists in the musical education of children, our expertise is in fostering children's musical knowledge, skills, values, and creativities. We work to inspire the imagination of our young learners, and to contribute to the development of the whole child through creative music and movement. We steep our lessons in rhythmic speech and movement, and provide active engagement in singing, speaking, moving, playing, and listening. In recent years, as we discover the diversity of learners in our classrooms and in the musical world, we fashion experiences that bring myriad musical cultures into the experiences of our children (Campbell, 2018).

Yet while we are committed to children's musical education within the school curriculum, it seems essential that we have full awareness of children's enculturation, that gradual process

by which they learn the music of their environment. According to highly influential anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits, (1895-1963), enculturation is the means by which “an established culture influences an individual, group, or organization to the extent that the target adopts the particular culture’s values, norms, and behaviors and the target finds an accepted role within the established culture” (160, p. 93). Further, enculturation is the passing on, typically from adults to children, of behaviors and ideas that sit at the core of familial and community identity. Others of the time of Professor Herskovits contributed similar views on the critical importance of enculturation for the transmission of culture (Margaret Mead) and music (Alan P. Merriam). All were anthropologists intrigued with the similarities by which music and language were transmitted from adults to children in places as far-flung as the southern Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa.

We wonder, as music teachers: Do we really know who our children are musically, prior to and alongside the formal plans that we enact for their musical development? Do we know what music surrounds them when they are elsewhere than in school? After all, cultural transmission, including language, stories, songs, and every folkway and “foodway”, occurs naturally where children live and learn every day. Children receive and absorb the cultural views and values of adults within their environment in ways that are often indirect and even subconscious, and whether or not they choose to embrace those cultural values, they nonetheless know them. Family soundscapes range from rock to pop, hiphop to country, Mozart to mariachi, Sondheim to salsa, and gamelan to gospel (and more), and children who are raised in a particular musical ambiance will come steeped with a style they can call their own, or at least that they claim as their family’s favored music above all other styles (Campbell and Lum, 2019). Our knowledge of children’s musical enculturation at home, in families, through the media, and in their various neighborhood involvements is essential if we hope to shape a program of musical study that fits and extends their experience.

Through formal music learning children acquire musical knowledge and skills in various institutions and formalized settings and situations that include school music programs, community ensembles, and private music instruction. It is deliberate, goal-directed, and sequenced, and with the intention of leading learners to a greater musicianship that will serve them in the music they make, create, and respond to. Informal music learning is of course not systematic, nor meticulous, nor bound to developing notational literacy or a heap of performance skills. In some ways, informal music learning is not so far removed from the process of musical enculturation. Both suggest that music can be learned in ways that do not feature calculated and purposeful teaching, and that musical habits can be taken in and developed without full awareness of music’s permeation. Children learn music informally, for example, when they “pick up” guitar chords and strum from watching an older sibling or an adult in the family, and where interest and observation can lead to opportunities to try out techniques and patterns, and to be heard and helped along. Likewise, informal music learning can happen when children notice the ways that parents sing, dance, and listen to music, such that these behaviors then seep into children’s own ways of singing, dancing, listening, and responding. It involves an absence of conscious efforts to teach-the-music, and both involve egalitarian, undirected, and often nonverbal means of sharing-the-music. Enculturation begins at birth and continues across the lifetime, while informal music learning may arise at a time when children’s developmental level allows them to be able to imitate what they observe (Campbell, 2018). As well, enculturation involves a complete absence of conscious efforts by adults to teach-the-music, while informal learning

sometimes features adults in the family who enthusiastically but still casually take on some of the trappings of a teacher's way of demonstration and commentary.

### **Towards an Ethnomusicology of Children**

An intrigue with children's natural musicking, their musical enculturation, and their agency or "voice", has evolved into a subset of ethnomusicological study that is directed toward the music they make, and what they have to say about music in their lives. *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Musical Cultures* (Campbell and Wiggins, 2013) is one manifestation of this emergent interest, as are monographs by ethnomusicologists on musical children in Bali (Downing, 2019) and Nicaragua (Minks, 2013). John Blacking's pioneering effort to study Venda songs by children from the northeastern Limpopo district of South Africa (1967) was in a class by its own, and was unparalleled for its time. But while it is considered unprecedented and unique in its focus and analytical frame that was both musicological and sociocultural, it did not trigger further research. Rather, it stood alone for decades, not thought to require replication there, among the Venda children (or frankly, anywhere else in the world). Not until 2009 was there a return to the Venda communities of South Africa for ethnomusicological fieldwork, when Andrea Emberly turned the tables to shift away from top-down adult study of children and to instead allow children themselves to document the music that they considered important (Emberly, 2009). Notably, the study of musical children arose at a time when anthropologists and folklorists at large have recognized that children's own experiences and perspectives had been overlooked in studies of childhood and youth (James, 2007; Schwartzman, 2001). Like Emberly's work, research on children's culture at large gradually gave emphasis to the firsthand knowledge of children.

Ethnomusicologists are now studying children as a means of understanding the larger expanse of music in culture, so that rather than focusing only on adult musicians, they can come to grips with the wellsprings of music in human life, how it is transmitted and acquired, and even sustained. Research by ethnomusicologists on identity, heritage, music cognition, and socialization at large and through music has led to long-term preservation of musical expressions, national and local policies concerning music and heritage, and well-being as it is linked to musical arts and cultural practice. Recently, music educators have contributed rich insights, too, to understanding children's musical cultures, often applying ethnomusicological procedures of fieldwork observations and interviews, too, in their research endeavors (Koops, 2019; Marsh, 2008). Many of the songs and rhythms found in research on children's musical cultures can be heard on recordings by fieldworkers, such as in the collections of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings that include *Songs for Children from New York City*, *Latin American Children's Game Songs*, *German Children's Songs*, and *Songs for Children/Songs by Children*.

An ethnomusicology of children has arrived in the field with the intention of addressing who children are musically, what they know and can do, what brings them joy, self-esteem, and fulfillment, and how they learn their musical world. Of the principal themes and supporting strands of inquiry, published research seems to collect around three broad topics: (1) Engagements with culture that include socialization and identity, and subthemes of updating traditional children's practices, cultural identities, and personal journeys; (2) Music in education and community development; and (3) Technology's impact, its uses and responses as they influence children's musical engagement and interests (Campbell and Wiggins, 2013). Ethnomusicologists are examining childhood for maturational, social, and cultural factors, even as they are pursuing an understanding of music in childhood relative to

enculturation, consumerism, peer pressure, exploitation, and cross-cultural and transnational phenomena. Through analysis of, for instance, children's expressive interactions in a singing game, including the process by which it is taught and learned from one child to another, and how it is practiced and performed, ethnomusicologists are discerning details on music's function in human life.

### **Informed by Research**

The straight-ahead question "So what?", arises, in the midst of knowing the wisdom of scholars, as we wonder what bearing this has on our everyday teaching-learning practices. Several points below serve to clarify the connections between research and practice, and to underscore the relationship there is between researchers in the humanistic social sciences of anthropology and ethnomusicology, and teaching musicians.

- Acknowledging children's enculturative influences. We do well to keep our attention on the music that happens in families, the music that children enjoy with their peers, and the music of powerful media forces that are directed toward children. A music teacher's offerings are consequential in how musical children can become, but the influences of children's musical growth are multiple and surely deserving intelligent interface with what can transpire in school music classes.
- Searching for sources of outside-school music. When it is not readily apparent as to what may constitute children's culturally familiar music, it's appropriate to ask the children, their parents, community members who may know children in their engagements on playgrounds, community centers, churches, after-school programs, children's "scouting" and social clubs. Once it becomes clear as to the sources of children's musical stimulation, it's appropriate, too, to invite into music classes those who function as music-sources, including camp counselors, choir directors, scout leaders, and those who work in parks and recreation. They can stop by or zoom in, for a one-on-one chat, and children will enjoy their school visits, too, in which they might demonstrate with children some of the music of outside-school circumstances.
- Integrating enculturated music. As the sweep of children's musical experiences becomes known, it lands in the teacher's lap to configure ways to integrate the music into the school music curriculum. In schools where there is a significant presence of international and multicultural populations, there is likely to be a treasury of songs, singing games, rhythmic grooves, folk dances, and instrumental music from which to select in crafting a diverse program of musical experiences. We need also to consider carefully the possibilities for greater diversity among children and their families than may at first meet the eye, such that an all-White student body may nonetheless have distinctive musical involvements that range from Western classical to Country (Western), and everything in between. Meanwhile, the music from families of children in an all-Black school might well constitute a rainbow of flavors from across the African diaspora—from African American hip hop to Afro-Jamaican reggaeton, Nigeria's juju and fuji, Tanzania's bongo flava, Afro-Cuban rhumba, and the African-seasoned son jarocho of the Mexican state of Veracruz. These genres and many more may constitute the music that children know from their enculturated and informal music learning experience,

and can become through integration the substance of spirited school music experiences.

- Commending children's agency. The question of curriculum was once *carte-blanche* for teachers to determine. After all, teachers were the learned ones with sophisticated understandings through academic studies, and with additional study of child development, instructional theory, and pedagogical methods and materials. Certainly, teachers of times past had full authority as to what music should feature in the classroom, and just how it ought to be experienced. We've come a long way to knowing now that if children believe that they are exercising agency, this facilitates their independent learning. Against a top-down, old-hat approach with a neoliberal backdrop of standardized music and learning objectives, an emergent curriculum inclusive of children's interests is one that then fosters children's agency. An interest-based curriculum is a recognition and celebration of children's own interests and values, and may well be the most meaningful way to commend them for their curiosity and creativity.

### Afterword

We who have made the commitment to musically educate children know the daily joys of doing so, as well as the challenges of puzzling through ways to reach the children—every last one of them, each with their particular needs and interests, hopes and dreams. We are bound to the belief that we can enhance their lives through the musical experience, and that we can inspire them and carry them along on the wings of a melody or a rhythm to a place of peace, fulfillment, and even pride in self and the group with whom they are musicking. We stay close to the children, the music, and the pedagogical practice that we have honed, and we devote our ideas and energy to the process of shaping children musically (as well as holistically through the music, too). Yet we also benefit from the occasional excursion we take into research and scholarship that may be relevant to our professional practice. In this case, I suggest that the work of ethnomusicologists in study of children's natural musical expressions, and their experiences in music beyond the scope of curricular aims and sequences, adds dimensions of understandings to our design and delivery of a relevant musical education of children. *Avanti!* For the love of children, we do well to give our attention to children's enculturative and agentic knowledge that is beyond direct adult influence as well as tethered to adult stylistic ideals, will guide us in nurturing children to become all that they can musically be.

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