Readermakers: Music in the Air

Marsha D. Broadway
Introducing READERMAKERS

In each issue of CBPR, the new feature column READERMAKERS will identify outstanding books for young people on a selected topic. Books for toddlers through young adults will appear with annotations and suggestions for use in the home, school, or youth organization. Good books should be part of everyday life and learning. These articles are designed to help busy adults quickly find some of the best informational books and literature to share with the important young people in their lives.

As READERMAKERS continues, you can help in two ways. First, please submit topics you would like to see explored in the READERMAKERS column. Second, if you have books to share, please submit a manuscript for review. Send your suggestions and manuscripts to READERMAKERS Editor, Children's Book and Play Review, 5042J HBLL, P.O. 26843, Provo, Utah 84602.

READERMAKERS: Music in the Air

Marsha D. Broadway, Ph.D.
Juvenile Literature Librarian
Brigham Young University

Toddlers and teenagers alike are strongly attracted to music, and the right book can build on that natural interest. From science to biography, books about music can help young minds explore their own creativity and musical abilities. These books are written to put music in the air.

Books discussed in this article are arranged in four sections: Songs for the Young, The Science of Music, Instruments of Music, and Musicians Young and Old. Each section begins with general suggestions for using the books. Book entries are then listed according to reading or interest levels; titles for the youngest audiences are presented first. Entries contain author, title, publisher, year of publication, ISBN (International Standard Book Number), age level, annotation, and suggested activities.

Look for these books at libraries and bookstores. Titles and names of authors should be enough information to help find the books at libraries, and most books should be available at your library, either on the shelves or through interlibrary loan. Many libraries also have sound recordings of these books.
Recently published books may be available at bookstores. Older books may be out of print and not available for purchase. If you wish to purchase a book that is not in stock at a bookstore, the publisher, date, and ISBN may help you identify the specific book you want.

**Songs for the Young**

The infant is often introduced to music through a parent’s lullaby, and Mom and Dad do not need perfect pitch to enchant their little ones. Songs bind parents to their offspring, and adults often fondly recall and repeat the songs of their childhood for each new generation.

Parents, nursery school staff, and elementary school teachers will find old favorites, unfamiliar traditional songs, and new tunes in these books. "Let's sing it again" will become a frequent refrain. Adding clapping, action, and dance to the songs will develop the motor skills of toddlers and preschoolers. For older children, consider adding creative dramatics.


**Activities:**

1. Teach the young child the basic order of musical notation by pointing to words and notes as you sing. (This method is usually the way toddlers learn the order of written language.)
2. Establish a regular time to sing with the child. For parents, it may be part of the bedtime routine; for nursery school staff, it may be storytime, good-by time, or before naptime.


**Activities:**

1. Ask young musicians to learn to play these songs for family sing-alongs or class programs.
2. Use the songs to teach children to identify insects and spiders and to know which ones to touch and which ones to avoid.

Drinking Gourd," a song of the Underground Railroad, to "Joe Hill," a ballad about a labor activist who was executed by a Utah firing squad, more than sixty American folk songs fill this collection. A brief history of each song is included.

Activities:
1. Enliven the American history curriculum by introducing these songs in classroom discussion. Besides adding emotion to historical events, music is an excellent memory device.
2. Sing these songs for a senior citizen group or at a retirement center or nursing home. An older audience is sure to hum, sing, clap, and tap along.


Activities:
1. Ask grandparents or older friends to sing these songs to your children and to tell how they learned such songs.
2. Use the songs in your home to teach values and to establish or to continue traditions such as holiday sing-alongs.


Activity:
1. Enliven the history of the Western migration and frontier experience with the songs that the pioneers, settlers, and cowboys sang.

The Science of Music
The science behind the sounds of music is an unexplored area for most young people. Fascinating facts surround the making of music. Entice both musical and nonmusical children with hands-on exercises that teach the scientific basis of sound and with self-made musical instruments that are creative and fun.


**Activities:**
1. Do the sound experiments and discuss the results.
2. Create a rhythm band of handmade instruments and play for a family reunion or school assembly.

Walther, Tom. *Make Mine Music!* Little, Brown and Company, 1981. ISBN 0-316-92112-2. Ages 10 up. From a gutbucket to an ear zither to body music, young people can make and play unusual instruments. Everyone can make music while learning what makes music happen. The dust jacket advises, "If you read this book, you'll see how everybody has music inside of them—and how letting it out is a lot easier and more fun than you'd think."


**Activities:**
1. Arrange a visit for a class or youth group to a local recording studio. How is the quality of professional recordings controlled?
The Instruments of Music

Books can help preschoolers recognize musical instruments and help older children decide what instrument they would like to play.


Activities:
1. Share this book with a child before to a televised concert of an orchestra and then ask him or her to identify the instruments by pointing to the television screen.
2. Teach the child to identify the instrument by sound instead of sight.


Activity:
1. Visit a museum that has a musical instrument collection.

Musicians Young and Old

The lives of musicians can inspire and amaze young readers. Through biography, a child can learn what it is like to be a musician today or can bring to life a classical composer.


Activities:
1. Arrange to visit a band practice session.
2. Visit a music store to check on instrument prices and care.
3. Attend a school band concert. Discuss what is expected of audience members and why. Indicate that talking and trips to the bathroom are reserved for intermission and after the concert. Talk to the young musicians after the concert about their experiences of learning to play an instrument.


Activities:

1. Discuss Mozart’s life. What unusual things did he do?

Stevens, Bryna. *Handel and the Famous Sword Swallower of Halle*. Philomel Books, 1990. ISBN 0-399-21548-4. Ages 6-12. This book is a thoroughly intriguing account of young George Handel, who had to hide in the attic to play his clavichord because his barber-surgeon father hated music. But through a bizarre accident with a knife and a miraculous feat, young George came to the duke’s court, and his life was forever changed.

Activities:

1. Discuss Handel’s childhood. Why was Aunt Anna important in Handel’s life? What might have happened if Andreas Rudloff had not swallowed a hunting knife?
2. Play one or two selections from Handel’s *Water Music*. Explain that the music is about enjoying nature. Talk about what a person sees, does, and feels when he or she is outside. Before playing the music again, ask the child to remember or create a story as he or she listens to the music. Let the child share the story.
22 Brigham Young University


Activities:

1. Select and play a work of each composer. Before you play the selection, ask, "Can you tell what someone is like by what they have written?" Discuss how words and music convey meaning and feelings. Ask the children to listen to the music and imagine what the person who wrote it was like. After hearing the music, discuss the children's ideas about the composer. Read the biography. Was the composer like you imagined? How was he/she different?

2. As the children read or hear the biographies, have them identify the musicians from the following facts about their childhoods.

**Musicians as Children**

1. I played violin duets with my father in church. – Vivaldi
2. I would play music softly to put people to sleep and then wake them with a bang. – Chopin
3. At age four, I began composing music. – Mozart
4. My family didn't think music was an appropriate activity for a boy, so I taught myself to play the guitar and flute by the time I was seven years old. – Foster
5. I played with my tin soldiers until I was thirty years old. – Brahms
6. Before I was born, my mother played the piano each day. I listened to Chopin and Beethoven for hours. – Prokofiev
7. I played the harmonica and danced jigs to entertain my classmates. – Guthrie
8. I hated music as a baby but when I was three I heard a fire siren and went to the piano to recreate the sound. I made music the next 89 years. – Boulanger
9. I was a lazy student and got kicked out of music school. – Satie
10. As a baby, I drummed on windowpanes, tapping out melodies. One day I tapped hard enough to break the glass and cut my hand. – Tchaikovsky
11. My mother saved my life when she climbed with me into the bell tower of the church when an invading army entered my village and killed everyone else in the church. – Verdi
12. People thought I was a deaf-mute because I hardly spoke. My father gave me piano lessons to reassure himself that I could hear.—Schumann

Finding More Books about Music

Only a few of the music books published for young people have been highlighted in this article. If you or your children are hooked on music, find related books at the school or public library. Librarians will be able to help identify the subject headings to use in the library’s catalog and to guide you to books for children or young adults. The following guidelines may speed your search:

1. To find a specific song, opera, or musical score, search by title in the card or computer catalog or use a song index if the library has one.
2. To find collections of songs, try these subject headings: Children’s songs, Nursery rhymes, Folk songs, Hymns.
3. To find books on the science of music or musical instruments, try these subject headings: Sound, Music—Acoustics and physics, Musical instruments. (The subdivision "Juvenile literature" after the subject heading is used with most Library of Congress subject headings assigned to books for young people. Ask your librarian if you should use it.)
4. To find biographies of musicians, consult names of individual musicians or musical groups in the catalog. For collective biographies, use Composers—Biography and Musicians—Biography.
5. To find books that focus on a certain type of music, use specific terms, such as Jazz, Folk music, or Rock music. Recent musical forms such as hiphop or rap may not have subject headings assigned. Ask your librarian for help with these terms.

Books for young people can put music in the air; but more important, they can put music in the mind of their young readers, giving them pleasure that can last a lifetime.