

MUSIC START

**A new early years resources pack from Youth Music
for families, child carers and children between 2 – 5 years
June 2008**

**Final report
Emma Hutchinson with Music House for Children
Piloted by families in three children's centres**

Music facilitator

Emma Hutchinson, head of Music House for Children.

Children's centres

Kintor Way
Church Hill
Hoe Street

Comments (based on returned evaluation forms from all three centres)

2 out of three suggested the story, illustrations and book was excellent.

1 out of 3 suggested this area was good.

All 3 suggested that the cd was good.

2 out of 3 suggested the instruments were excellent

1 out of 3 suggested that this area was good.

3 out of 3 suggested that the music leader was excellent. One commented that there was too much information for the children to take in.

All three centres suggested that they would use the pack regularly. One suggested that they would keep one at the centre for the children to use when they wished.

Training break-down.

I tried to break it down by presenting each practical section (reading, playing of instruments, body/singing activity with and without cd) into varied examples within the short amount of time given.

Layout of each centre session

Becontree Children's Centre

All early years staff (special needs, language, general staff, co-ordinators) attended a one hour overview and practical demonstration of book, cd, instruments and story.

A number of children and families attended a practical demonstration of the book, cd, story and instruments. This was followed by a discussion and question time. Total number of children and siblings (many under two) approximately 20.

Kintore Way Children's Centre

The afternoon was broken into sections of different groups of children enjoying a practical demonstration of the book, cd, instruments and story. Total number of children in each session was between 8 – 12 children.

Church Hill & Hoe Street Children's Centre

Sessions were broken up into the first session being with all families, children and siblings attending a practical session of book, cd, story and instruments. The following three sessions were very similar but working only with the children from different groups. Total number of children in each session was between 20 – 30 children.

Overall response from adults

They liked the look of the pack very much. Many thought it looked special and was nicely packaged. All spoke highly of the instruments. Most liked the book, although a couple commented on the complexities of some of the picture. With respect to the cd many adults commented on the complexities of music and difficulties of understanding/hearing the words, the difficulties and word meanings/association with the stories. There were also questions involving the relevance of the music to specific story sections and its accessibility to the age group.

Overall response from Music Leader – Music House groups

We trialled the book, cd and instruments with several of our own pupils at The Music House for Children's early years sessions. Ages ranged from 3 – 5 years.

I was aware of, and made concessions for the fact that this pack is aimed at children with or without siblings, so group sessions may present different angles.

Comments reported back from colleagues each of whom observed my practical demonstrations together with the children using different parts of the book, cd and instrumental uses:

3 – 4 years – 7 children.

Instantly interested in the instruments and the story line. Uninterested in the music – some looked a little vacant. They did not appear to engage with the music, however they enjoyed flying around as birds when asked to do so. The music appeared to be far too long for this age group. There was no apparent link (in this example) between instruments and the playing of music. In the camel song one child covered his ears with his hands. The words were difficult to hear in some of the songs, even though we tried to encourage listening and recognition in particular words such as 'run, run, run' (cheetah song).

4 – 5 year olds – 3 children.

Really enjoyed opening the pack and exploring the instruments. These children enjoyed 'swimming' although stopped before the song had finished (the dolphin track). They seemed to catch the pulse of this music and other tracks, although again, stopped well before it was completed.

They were more engaged than the younger aged group, although again, could not follow the song, nor the words.

3-4 year olds (new group) – 4 children

They enjoyed exploring the instruments. They engaged in the story by making bird songs and counting with the music leader. They could not sing along with the song, nor follow basic words. Some of the music seemed a little slow

in with respect to following either with the instruments and also moving physically, however they enjoyed exploring the different sounds.

There were bird movements that they enjoyed, however the children focussed only for a very short time.

“Big and Strong” (elephant section) was greeted with a positive response.

The children largely engaged with the story and making sounds with it.

4 – 5 years (new group) – 6 children

They really enjoyed exploring the different instruments. Making loud, quiet sounds and different sounds. The wake up song resulted in some interesting air guitar from a wannabe rock star. They enjoyed flying music, however the music leader had to stop the music as it was too long. They enjoyed playing to the dolphin music, however took a while to feel the beat. One child comment “this is a long one”. They were asked to sing about Coconuts and dolphins but they could not. They made bat sounds as asked by the music leader, however one child was frightened by the sounds on the cd. One child said that the music was too long. They enjoyed counting up the animals on the different pages. All the children ended up commenting on how long the music for each track was – this was voluntarily offered.

5 – 6 years – 5 children.

The children were not sure how to move like a monkey with the cd music. With the raindrop song they also could not beat or move in time to the raindrop music. With the bat music the children were unsure as to how to play along with it (with their instruments). The music was generally too long and the children lost interest. With the kangaroo song one child asked about the ‘funny noise’ (didgeeridoo) which was then explained. All waited in anticipation for hopping, then lost interest because it became too long and had no definite ending apart from slowing down – this they were unsure of doing.

All the children lay on the floor half way through “bounce bounce bounce”.

They enjoyed making drumming noises on the floor to the cheetah song. Again, they were tired out from running.

The music leader also had to stop...

They commented on how busy the music was, many losing interest and preferring to focus on pictures and being the animals.

Music leader comments

BOOK

Overall I suggest that the book is well laid out with the words and story line working with a simple and repetitive pattern – in line with early years delivery and age-related learning. Some of the grammar within the poetic context I wondered upon. This included:

“They swooped down, glided and delicately...” The words chosen were extremely difficult for this age group to repeat – particular those with English as their second language. The links between subject matter and secondary subjects were perhaps not necessarily required since it made some pages busy (I appreciate that with time at home, children may look at the pictures and absorb information in their own time). These included the grasshopper and cheetah, the coconuts and dolphins.

The pictures were bright and colourful with lots of things to count and observe. On observation children opened pages at random and exclaimed at particular animals.

MUSIC CD

As with observation of children and adult response I suggest that the music is inappropriate for the chosen age groups. The ambience of much of the cd is pleasant with strong links to multicultural influences relating to each different area of the story – e.g. the coconut and dolphins, camel dance and kangaroo songs (part of). However there were many layers of complexities with a distinct lack of simplicity in

Words – Elephant dance, Monkey song, reprise (different words to the beginning)

Beat – Elephant dance, Bat, Kangaroo hop. Many overall were difficult to hear – assumption was made that the general ambience of a song/piece of music was enjoyable or to be used as background to the story.

Dynamics – within some songs it was difficult to gauge loud and soft

Tempo – Kangaroo song – slow, then fast, then slowing down – no definition, at music, difficult to follow.

Sometimes the music was so busy and long the children simply ignored it.

There were some nice moments with the funky camel music and also coconuts and dolphins music where the children were doing ‘whirly dances’ with it. Within much smaller groups it was possible to encourage listening to specific areas to try to understand particular sounds. However children could not get a sense of the instrument since there were no pictures to demonstrate the lesser known instruments. A couple of adults asked what the didgeridoo sound was.

STORY

Largely this was received enthusiastically. The children engaged immediately with Chickpea, and Chiff Chaff, although a couple of children asked which one was which. I pointed out Chickpea on the back of the bag which they loved. They engaged in the repeated patterns. Unfortunately I was unable to assess the true success of the story as demonstrations were made in snippets together with music. Without music there was a real sense of interest together with pointing to the pictures.

INSTRUMENTS

These were well designed and stood the test of time and strength of use (bashing and shaking). The maracas made a sweet sound, the bell was a joy to hear during the story and in accompaniment to the bat music, coconut music and also areas where the children felt they could contribute independently. The wooden stick was used for this and also to hit the drum with. I demonstrated with different parts of the instruments and ways of making different sounds – to which they responded enthusiastically. The parents enjoyed this area since they felt they could contribute practically – something they appeared to want to do more of and also that they were surprised by their own enjoyment of.

The only query I would make regarding the instruments and as commented by one of the early years staff – was it necessary to have so many beaters when they would ultimately go astray within a home or nursery setting. The beater for the wooden circle with metal bell may loosen the ring over time, although created a pleasing sound.

Overall I all items combined worked together and independently when they can be dipped in and out of at any time by a child, child and adult or child and friend/sibling.

PARENTS/ADULT INPUT

They were all largely delighted at the opportunity of getting this ‘special gift’ for free. They loved the fact that it was a carefully devised musical pack aiming to bring families together. Arguably as a trainer this area needed to be nurtured more as I only did 2 short and very noisy sessions with families and children. I encouraged adults to engage through turning pages, wiggling with their child, playing instruments, commenting on the music and pictures. I

encouraged use of their voices (many different nationalities were present) in weird and wonderful ways to demonstrate movement, sounds of animals etc. I also encouraged body percussion linking to the movements and sounds of animals running, climbing, swimming etc. All of which evoked humour, integration and lots of response.

One observation was that several families tried to take at least three packs away for their siblings ('under five'). One stated that "their child would not share".

On this issue I would make a strong case for practical budgeting which would enable far more families across the UK to benefit from this pack. In addition with at least three instruments siblings could be encouraged (and should be) to share and engage alike – and with the parents. There was no time when I could see the benefits of having two packs or more per family, since this will ultimately become part of a pile of toys and cds (two or more for one house?) and subsequently no longer used effectively.

The three children's centres were overall delighted with the opportunity to learn more about music links with story telling, singing, creative thinking, moving and integrating with their children.

I hope that Sound Connections, Youth Music and the Music Start team sees these comments as a transparent appraisal taken from a number of documented responses and observations during trials, discussion and practical demonstrations.

Ultimately the real test lies in the use of the pack by the children in their own home space. In time it may be helpful if an evaluator was able to access or encourage response and feedback from different families enjoying these packs. From this Music Start would be able to assess not only the true success and development of music making within families across the country, but also the way forward.

Emma Hutchinson
Music House for Children
306 Uxbridge Road, London W12 7LJ
E: emma@musichouseforchildren.com