

Original Article

The Child and the Music

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Children begin by “hearing”, and then trying to “sing” what they have heard. And what children gain at each stage does not simply end with musical knowledge and technique, but is a more psychological or intellectual asset. We think that indeed is where the great aim of music education lies.

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Introduction

The various abilities and talents that children have do not develop independently, but influence and develop in relation to each other. As long as music uses sound as material, it inevitably cannot be considered in isolation from “hearing”. However, if asked whether “hearing/listening to music” is purely sensory behaviour, it is not always so. Ultimately, more than being an issue of hearing, it has more of a psychological, or an intellectual significance. Therefore, “how one hears” becomes an important topic. And seen from the aspect of music as a mode of expression, at the most basic place, one could say there lies the act of “singing.” So music education would be founded firstly on “hearing/listening” and then on “singing.”

I. Hearing

The ability to “hear” is from infancy already working at quite an advanced level. Even before becoming con-

scious of it, people grow up hearing a variety of sounds. The “world of sound” that reaches our ears now, is not necessarily moving in a good direction. The discordant noise that swirls around our urban streets, the mechanical noises that infiltrate our living space, our world is overflowing with sounds that tease our ears. In exchange, there are fewer opportunities to hear the calls of insects and birds, the sound of wind rustling in the trees and other sounds that whisper sweetly to the susceptibility of children. We cannot but feel apprehensive about the kind of impact this sort of environment has on the growth of children. At the least, I feel that it is becoming all the more important for them to “hear/listen to” music.

i Cultivating hearing power

In this instance, “hearing power” means the power of feeling and accepting what is conveyed when listening to music. It does not indicate the physical hearing power, and does not mean the ability to simply discern between high and low sounds, or harmony. Generally, in the same way that the first sound that a newly born infant distinguishes, is the sound of its mother’s (care giver’s) voice, children lend their ears towards things they feel are of importance, and respond sensitively to sounds that are personally precious. In that sense they could be said to have very selfish ears. Therefore, the act of “hearing”

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music is not something that for children can necessarily be done naturally. In other words, we must think about what can be done with children who “do not want to listen”, to lead them into a “listening” stance.

From a listening stance to a habit of listening

Many instructors, who are involved in the musical education of infants, give “preparation of the environment” as the first priority in leading children into a “listening stance.” For example, “creating an atmosphere where they can relax and listen to music,” and that the “instructor himself or herself must like music, be healthy and focused.” There is also the idea that “in order to make children think that “listening is fun” and “they want to listen,” they must talk to the children at their own eyelevel and give the lesson rhythm.” Where “creation of the learning environment” is concerned, it is emphasized that this is a role for the instructor in particular.

Cultivating “hearing power”

There is no need for repetition, but music is founded in “hearing.” However, if asked what it is one hears in the music, there would probably be a hundred different answers from a hundred different people. And ultimately it might be what is heard by each individual person’s sensibility. However, the fact that the mode called music has become established as common joy among people has a more essential, hidden significance, which is separate from the dimension of being differently received by different people. In other words, music is a means of communicating scenes, sentiments and at times thoughts, and regardless of the intentions of the composer or performer, cannot fail to produce a message.

1. Imagining scenes, and feeling the nuance of the music.

How do children, who have no pre-conceptions of music, begin to listen to music? And what do they discover by listening to music?

Musical sounds always definitely have nuance, and the person hearing them receives certain images from them. The listener’s heart should always be reflected in those images.

2. From “the part I like” to “development of sensibility”

For children, to be interested in something, is in other words to like it. In music as well, as they accumulate experiences in listening, they will notice one melody, a particular sound effect, or rich harmony, and find a part that appeals to them and about which they will say, “I like this bit.” Children who have found a part that they like,

will give opinions about it, such as, “This music is fun, because the melody comes out differently each time,” “It’s pretty because it has unusual musical instruments,” “It is interesting because it starts off all bright and strong, and then it goes soft and gentle in the middle.”

I think this evidences the fact that the students have become able to engage positively in music, they do not just stop at music for appreciation but extend this also to music played by the teacher, and the music of fellow students. Furthermore, they become influenced by such things as articulation, dynamics, phrasing and timbre, and try to express these themselves. Also, in order to bring their own performance close to the target music, they begin to listen carefully to both sounds and to practice them.

Amongst all of these things, it would be very desirable for the children’s listening stance to broaden and deepen naturally. However, it is necessary, not only to let the children grow naturally in accordance with individual susceptibility, but at times to borrow the powers of the instructor and make them look at values that they had not yet become aware of. How rich would life be, if just as we look at flowers and are emotionally moved, we could hear music and be moved? The lives of people, who see a flower and thinking nothing of it walk straight past, are completely different to the lives of those who feel something and stand still. The same can be said of music. At the moment when children look as if they are about to pass on by, we must call, “Stop a moment!” and encourage them to take note. I think that we have the role of expressing this, in order to share the emotion with the children.

This can be said to be about sensibility. Sensibility it thought to be the ability to notice and feel the worth of truth, goodness, beauty etc. This “noticing” in particular, is an important point. It can be said that the point here is not to passively feel, but to polish the sensibility to actively notice and discern things. Therefore, in order to stimulate children’s sensibility, it is essential to teach them the joy of “noticing.” When they have discovered new enjoyment by viewing or listening in a way they were not previously aware of, children’s range of sensibility can be said to have broadened a step further.

3. The road to learning music

The process whereby children acquire a sense of pitch (so-called absolute pitch), is swayed by a great many conditions, and it is true that there are individual differences in the timing and degree of learning. Children

who autonomously and enthusiastically experience it, grow from an early stage, and it is inevitable that children who have trouble concentrating are slower. There are many instances of children whose reaction during infancy was poor, who have begun to develop a sweet sense of pitch during childhood. In the case of such children, it is understood that although it did not show on the surface, the groundwork had been prepared.

The outcome of educating a sense of pitch ultimately does not appear as something visible. It is something that is born from the stance of "listening", and as a result, could be said to be an "ability to hear" more things, and more profound things. A sense of pitch is said to be "not only the ability to understand good notes, but also to have a spiritual eye, and an ear for discerning true beauty, " and what this leads us to would be matters of "sensibility".

ii The effect "power of listening" has on growth

People often find enjoyment in the things that interest them, or things they are confident of, and this is said to indicate their positive stance towards tackling them. That behaviour draws out the strength further and deepens the self-confidence. Also, having a good ear, is to have one's senses open to the outside, and it might also be said that it can be a positive basic stance to have when facing a variety of things. However, the real effect on growth that is brought on by nurturing the power of listening is thought to lie in a slightly different place. The power of concentration, the power of observation and the power of discernment are cultivated.

- The ability to distinguish between good and bad is increased. In particular, the feeling of wanting to head in a good direction becomes stronger.
- It promotes character building.

These things could be clearly said to be the product of the basic stance of "listening". One could say that listening carefully to what people say, means that one would be most careful in the various aspects that should be important in human growth. For children, who are not blessed with opportunities to acquire this as a basic stance, school lessons, for instance, would be nothing other than painful.

Also, the power of listening becomes a power for observing people's feelings, when personal relationships are treasured. That is because, for getting to know the spirit being expressed therein, there is nothing better than

listening to music.

II. Singing

Children's experience of singing begins firstly with listening to the tune. By getting a taste of the tune, their emotional senses are awoken and then heightened into a desire for concrete expression. Also, listening carefully to a tune also has the aim of catching the lyrics, the height of sounds, the flow of the melody, the tempo and rhythm, and clarifying the image. The development from "listening" to "singing" is the operation of experiencing what one has felt by way of giving expression to it, and this has particular significance during the initial stages of experiencing music. In other words, it lays the groundwork for musical sensibility, musical sense, and ability for expressive performance, or it polishes it up. Since the act of "singing" has an exceptionally strong relationship with physical growth, great care must be taken with the state of child development. In the infant years, when the speech apparatus is still developing, it goes without saying that one does not seek perfection in singing, but rather places emphasis on cultivating the senses to nurture an interest in music. In the juvenile years, on occasion, children who have exceptional aptitude and interest appear.

i Singing expression

From before being able to form words, not only such basic emotions as comfort, discomfort, joy, and anger, but also such feelings as being happy or frightened are sprouting in the minds of children. Expression of these begins as communication between the child and the mother and before long develops into communication through language. "Singing" like "speaking" is a vocal expression. In "speaking" the delicate nature of feelings becomes apparent, and in "singing", by adding the element of musical expression, it can be said that a more vivid expression becomes possible. Also, to "sing" is to experience the bodily sensation of the spirit entrusted to the song, and on occasion this also becomes an experience of empathy, where the spirit of the song unites with the individual's own spirit. Therefore, especially in infancy, singing a great number of songs that express not only such feelings as "sad" and "lonely," but also such positive emotions as "happy" and "fun" are seen to be extremely effective in nurturing children's sentiments. In

the initial stage of singing experience, the important point is to start by getting them interested in the tune, and then lead them into showing a desire to "sing". Therefore, it is necessary to choose songs that will arouse in children the will to sing and to prepare an environment in which they can relax and sing. Children are basically attracted by the rhythm and rhyme of the lyrics, and the fun of pronunciation, and begin to take an interest in "singing".

Then they gradually become aware of expression to suit the atmosphere of the music. Technically, of course, not a lot should be expected. That pitch and breathing are not controlled is only natural at this time. However, if it has been possible to encourage them to sing leisurely and energetically, the children's senses and susceptibility will be certainly polished.

Children who, in infancy, accumulated singing experiences which stressed "sing what you feel", become increasingly accurate at controlling their voices when they are on the point of moving into their juvenile years, and as their comprehension of the words deepens, they begin to show a stepped up power of expression. Also, since little by little they experience technical instruction in vocalisation and articulation, it seems that in many cases the voice itself becomes used to and better at singing. Furthermore, In the latter half of the juvenile years, for example when sol-faing a melody which has no words, it becomes possible for them to give expression that is full of feeling and is well modulated based on individual musical interpretation. "Song" is thought to be the music itself. For instance, if expressed instrumentally, without voice, unless the "song" is in one's heart, would it not be rather difficult to convey the feeling?

ii Teaching singing

A song is an expression that unites words and music, and is also a form of expression that uses the entire body. Therefore, it incorporates a wide range of elements that need to be learned. At the same time, for children, since it is a way of easily expressing feelings in a straightforward manner, many things would be absorbed from there as well.

The images that spread out from the lyrics

Imagining begins with picturing scenes or situations in the mind, and ends with feeling the feelings contained therein. Children broaden their imaginary worlds and have their hearts moved by the various scenes that appear in the words to songs.

From songs "to sing" to songs "to have people listen to".

One basic conduct of music is to link the performer and the listener by way of joy and empathy. With "singing", the act of "singing all by oneself" and "singing for oneself," for instance, seems to have something lacking, or to be incomplete.

To feel empathy with the song, and feel the joy of singing is a wonderful thing. However, when that joy stops at being the joy of one person alone, sometimes, the possibilities for further improvement close down. Also, however technically brilliant a performance might be, the true worth of the music cannot be detected in expression that does not reach the hearts of others. Songs "to have people listen to" are songs that are sung aimed at the hearts of the people listening. By being conscious of wanting to sing such songs, children will not only nurture a musically expressive stance, but will also learn the feeling of valuing the link to peoples hearts.

iii The effect singing has on growth

Through the experience of "singing," children learn and acquire many things. The aim or effect might of course be "to become able to sing well", but over and above that, there is the cultivation of musical sensibility, senses and powers of expression. Also, attendant on this, we cannot disregard the accomplishment of human growth.

Development of cognitive powers

The development of linguistic function is greatly related to the intellectual development of children. Particularly in infancy, there is something spectacular about the speed and energy with which children acquire language. Memorization of words rich in imagery through "singing" is thought to be very significant at this stage.

Lyrics, which are the words of a song, is "poetry" written with deeply meaningful words, and by being expressed together with music, evoke an even richer expression. Therefore, the experience of singing numerous songs of good quality will lead to nurturing children's sentiment and susceptibility. Conducted particularly frequently from the juvenile stage on, the reading of song lyrics aloud as "poetry" has varied significance. Being conscious of the resonance, rhythm, intonation and accent of the Japanese language does not only provide groundwork for "singing" as a form of musical expression, it also provides an opportunity to cultivate a sense

of linguistics. Also, reading the "poem" with an awareness of its relationship with the melody, would also trigger receptivity to the "spirit" enclosed in both the words and the music.

Furthermore, when reading the lyrics with the view to expressing them as "song", it is important to firmly recognize the meaning of every single word. If there were a word that you did not know, and you sang it without knowing the meaning, your expression would inevitably be lacking something.

Mental Development

We often come upon the scene of a small child being led on by the music he or she can hear and then bursting into song. This characteristic manner of singing involves adding voice only to the ends of the words of a song wafting out of the television set or something. They sing spontaneously, without encouragement from anybody. It is a scene that naturally conveys the well-being the child is feeling. This is thought to truly be the starting point of "singing". Expressing emotions and feelings in a straightforward manner can be said to be intrinsic behaviour of small children. Therefore, when engaging in the initial stages of singing education, rather than losing that outpouring of energy, I want to treasure it as the source of desire for spontaneous expression which would be nurtured in the near future.

Music has the power to heighten and broaden joyous feelings even further. Small children sing simply with a feeling of "fun". This is because they already sympathise with the music. Being able to directly feel the enjoyment of music early on by way of musical experience in the initial stage is a happy thing, and pouring cold water on it by bringing in "correctness" has no meaning what so ever. In infancy, singing what one feels in a straightforward manner like this nurtures spontaneous powers of expression. In this situation, the children's mental language development does not necessarily always progress steadily along a flat path. At times, they must surely have painful things in their hearts that worry them. That sort of situation is not a happy one for the teacher either.

Development of power of musical expression

Children, who have built up a solid singing experience, become able to learn a higher level of singing expression, by experiencing the harmonious expression of voices, in other words by experiencing group singing. In other

words, they are required to have the power to unite with accurate pitch and voice quality, and to hear the resonance of the whole.

Many teachers have stated that the experience of singing a lot of musically excellent songs, will have an enormous impact, exceeding the framework of singing expression and over and above instrumental performance expression.

The flow "listen → sing → play" is thought to be the most natural and effective way of building musical experience, but the role played by "singing" in this, has even more varied aspects.

In other words, "singing" can be expected to produce such effects as learning by experiencing the basics of music; acquiring powers of expression and cultivating creativity.

Without a doubt, these elements are nuclear things in musical experience, and it is not difficult to imagine that at the stage of "playing", they are utilized as basic powers.

Conclusion

The basic requirement for all forms of performance expression is "the song". Therefore, how "singing" is to be positioned in children's experience of music is thought to be an extremely important topic to question. "Singing" is seen as a form of musical expression that is relatively easy for children to experience. However, depending on the nature of that experience, the effect it has on the children's growth and development will be completely different. If children are able to experience an excellent song under appropriate instruction, children will always enjoy "singing" and would be able to learn the joy of music. Furthermore, if this were conducted at the appropriate timing, and following solid procedural steps, the contribution to the cultivation of children's musical sensibility, sense, powers of expression and creativity would be great indeed. And then more than anything, they would get to know the joy of "singing", and I think that living with "song" for spiritual support will bring power and peace of mind to the children's future.

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