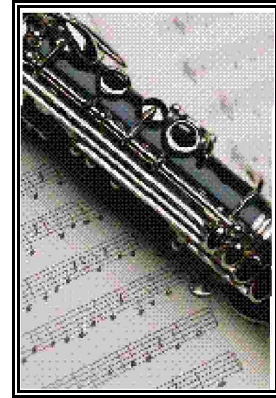


Choosing Music Lessons for Your Budding Musician

Have you played some of the old-fashioned, energetic card games with your children like “Slap Jack,” “Snap,” “War,” or “Rummy”? All of these games have something in common: they develop a quick reflex or a strong connection between a child’s thought and reaction of their hand.

By transferring that same principle to the connection between thought and speech, you have a child with a witty and quick tongue. A corresponding game? How about: “Blurt” or “TriBond”? (We always and only use the Bible versions of these games.) These games strengthen the links between thought and speech.

You may have a future musician in your house if you can identify your child as being gifted with one or both of the above because you have a child with a quick sense of reflex.



The Makings of a Musician

Becoming a musician involves the training of a quick link between reading notes written on a page (or hearing a sound) and the quick reflex of being able to reproduce that same sound on an instrument of any kind.

As a parent, you have many avenues for developing a budding musician’s talent. You can provide private music lessons on any number of instruments, introduce children to a choral/orchestra experience, or enroll them in a music class.

Choosing an Instrument

How do you go about choosing the correct instrument and teacher for your child? Many parents choose to begin their child’s musical instruction on the piano for the following reasons: there are quite a few piano teachers available; the cost of lessons is less than the specialized instruments; and if you can read notes as a result of playing the piano, you can play any instrument. Often a parent will offer the reward of learning a specialized instrument of their (child’s) choice if he/she learns the basics of piano first. That proves to be an incentive, and many children go on to reach their goal.

Choosing a Teacher

In choosing a teacher, you should be aware of a few things. First, look for a teacher who supports and teaches the style of music your family enjoys and the kind you want your child to learn. A teacher will prove to be a very strong influence in this area simply because a teacher will teach the kind of music

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he/she loves: classical, church music (hymns as well as praise and worship choruses), etc.

Choosing the Method

Second, be aware of the teaching method that the teacher utilizes. Two major teaching methods are the traditional approach and Suzuki. The traditional method teaches students how to read music and play what they read. After this basic foundation, different teachers may lead their students different ways. Some continue teaching more and more difficult (to read) music while others branch off into instructing them in creativity: learning to play by ear and understanding and using chord patterns in improvisation (the “fancy stuff” as the students call it).

Choosing the method of instruction is as important as choosing the instrument and the teacher.

The Suzuki method teaches a student mainly how to play by ear, and thus a difficult sounding piece of music can often be played by a very young musician. In my 16 years of experience in teaching piano, I have found disappointment in the “long run” for those learning by this method. They feel handicapped because they can’t really read music well. It is easier for a student to go from reading music to learning to play by ear than it is for a student to go from playing by ear to reading music. For a “playing-by-ear” musician it is frustrating to have to try to read the notes he/she isn’t “hearing.”

Other Opportunities

Another opportunity for a budding musician is to be involved in a choral experience. This could be an orchestra designed for children, or in any group function where they make music together. Many churches and schools provide this experience free-of-charge to their students through offering a handbell choir or a vocal choir, which can also provide the same experience of “making music together.”

When to Start

I have heard of music classes for kindergartners. Although I have not looked into them, I have received students who began their music “careers” in a program for kindergartners. I must say that, from what I have seen, children gain no more than if they had waited and begun their music education at age six on an instrument. The “sponge” age for a child in music training seems to be between 7 ½ and 10 years of age. If they begin at age 6, by the time they reach that absorbent age, they will have reached a prime place in their learning materials.

- Holly Hageman (Copyright March, 2002; January, 2003)

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