

Letter from the Editors

Nurturing Children’s Musical Lives by Building Bridges

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Young children—from birth to the age of eight—encounter and experience music in a variety of situations and ways. Their musical lives can be described as a complex tapestry of exposure, informal, and formal learning, but also as a continuous wandering among various areas and situations. These areas and situations refer to the diverse cultures children live in or encounter, including those of peers, surrounding adults, family, community and educational settings. They also include a variety of learning modes—formal/informal, classroom/individual—aiming at diverse goals; musical, academic, social. Our task as researchers and practitioners is to facilitate that wandering by building bridges between different locations and modes, as a way of nurturing young children’s musical lives. This was the aim of the 14th Early Childhood Music Education Seminar of the International Society for Music Education (ECME-ISME) held in August 2011 at the Beijing Normal University in China, attended by participants from twelve countries and five continents.

This special issue of *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology* hosts papers developed from presentations—research papers, reflective practice papers and workshops—at that seminar. ECME-ISME seminars are held on even years, and provide opportunities for researchers and practitioners from all over the world to present and discuss their work; to learn, share, understand, and experience new insights, ways, materials, strategies, knowledge; to reflect on the state of early childhood music education, and networking. The papers in this issue represent this wealth: age range, research and practice, research methodologies, theoretical frameworks and cultures.

One result of the networking and reflecting on the state of early childhood music education research is “MyPlace, MyMusic: An International Study of Musical Experiences in the Home among Seven-year-olds,” represented in this issue by Susan Young’s paper. During the ECME-ISME 2008 seminar, it was noted that older children within the early childhood age range, i.e. between six- and eight-years-old, were not the focus of research. Inspired by “A Day in the Life” project, which studied two-year-olds and their lives from seven different countries (Gillen & Cameron, 2010), Susan Young (University of Exeter, UK), Elizabeth Andango (University of Kenyatta, Kenya), and Beatriz Ilari (at that time from the Universidade Federal do Paraná, Curitiba, Brasil, and now at the University of Southern California) proposed a study on the lives of seven-year-olds around the world. They invited colleagues they had met in previous ECME seminars—among them Claudia Gluschkankof (Israel), Sven-Erik Holgersen (Denmark), Theano Koutsoupidou (Greece), Jennifer Leu (Taiwan), Chee Hoo Lum (Singapore), Jèssica Pérez (Spain), Diane Persellin (USA), José Retra (Netherlands)— to collect data and research together. The project is still at work, and the present article “describes the background, method and some broad interpretations arising at this stage of the project. Conceptually, the project is aiming to move beyond ideas of universal or globally applicable models of musical development that have prevailed in music education, and to generate rich discussion around the idea of musical childhoods. We suggest that a revised conception of

musical childhoods holds important benefits for rethinking the bases of music education in early and middle childhood” (Young).

Elizabeth Andango’s article—“Musical Contexts as Bridge-Builders in Early Childhood Music Education in Kenya”—focuses on the same age range as the previous one, aiming to understand the ways urban middle-class children from Kenya perceive their participation in music activities in the three main contexts in which they are mostly active: the home, the school, and the church.

These two articles serve as an amplifier for children’s thoughts on music and music making, as their voices are seldom heard within the music education community (see Campbell 1998 on children’s expressed thoughts and musical behaviors in US schools).

Vocal expressions of young children have been studied from different research paradigms (e.g. Björkvold 1989/92; Burton 2002; and Moorhead & Pond 1941/78 on invented songs; Rutkowski & Trollinger 2005; and Stadler Elmer 2000 on vocal abilities). In her article “Exploring the Lives of Songs in the Context of Young Children’s Musical Cultures,” Australian Amanda Niland suggests a new direction, that is, to explore the processes through which new songs—composed by the researcher who is the music teacher—become part of three- to five-year-old children’s existing musical cultures. To do this, she employs a methodology derived from practice-led research in the arts, ethnography, and *portraiture*.

Systematic research on one-to-one music instrument teaching is a relatively new field of study, and naturally focuses on adolescents and young adults (e.g. Beheshti 2009; Gaunt 2008; Zukhov 2007). While teaching piano to young children is a widespread practice, it is not a subject that is systematically studied. Lauren Kooistra makes a significant contribution to this field in her article “Piano Exploration for Young Children in an Informal Educational Setting.” She shares with us her reflections on the strategies she developed when challenged to teach piano privately to a soon to be four-year-old girl. She draws on the philosophy of informal learning, and focuses on the collaborative relationship between the teacher and the child. This innovative study includes video-clips, enabling the reader to interpret the data through his or her own eyes.

The last two articles are based on workshop presentations given by two teams. Each team based its practice on a different theoretical framework. Donna Brink Fox (USA) and Liu Liu (China)—“Building Musical Bridges: Early Childhood Learning and Musical Play”—view play as the main learning medium in kindergarten (see Brennan 2004; Hughes 1999; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson 2006). They suggest that musical activities are constitutive of social and construction play experiences and “offer examples that illustrate how these types of play are naturally embedded in music learning” (Fox & Liu Liu).

On a different note, “What Are We Going to Plant in the Musical Garden of the Early Years?” is the last article, written by two Israeli colleagues: Veronika Cohen and Michal Hefer. They analyze the responses of very young children to musical activities that involve exposure to complex music. The pedagogy is based on Edwin Gordon’s theory, especially when singing activities are concerned (Gordon 1997) and Veronika Cohen’s approach to music listening, which is widespread in Israel (Cohen 1997). “The movements of the toddlers suggest an unexpected level of sensitivity to underlying structure and subtle rhythmic changes, as well as a sense of preparation and arrival to climax” (Cohen & Hefer).

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We hope you enjoy this special issue as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

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Guest Editors

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