

Using a Paper Puzzle and Stories to Teach Children Music

Flavia de Souza

My ideas about Teaching Music to children

In my opinion, every child is eager to learn and most children are curious about music from a young age. It is best to nurture this curiosity correctly from the beginning.

For me the basics are extremely important like it is important for most things. For instance if we learnt the alphabet letters wrongly we'd end up unable to read properly. I also believe that what we learn when we're young, whatever impressions we get from smells, sound or taste, remain with us until we become adults.

I think that it is very important to have a good feeling about music from the beginning because music is actually a very difficult and challenging subject to learn let alone absorb. It requires discipline, concentration, co-ordination of the fingers, hand independence, and a listening ear. Listening is, in fact, of primary importance because through careful listening one is able to differentiate between pleasing sounds and the discordant, the varying nuances and their colours besides discerning mistakes in one's performance. Listening to music invariably provokes a response from the listener.

I do not teach children in the usual 'conventional' way, by starting the child straight away on the piano from the first lesson. I teach everything that is necessary to read music away from the piano and these essentials - notes, basic rhythm and its varying beat - are taught in a series of stories, and puzzles, which I conjured up over the years. By using stories and paper cutouts, learning music becomes fun and interesting for the beginner.

This method of mine has developed after about seven years of teaching experimentation with children and student teachers. There are also simple exercises which I have written to complement the lessons. In this way all the stave notes, spanning three octaves from the bass clef to the treble clef, are taught together with simple rhythm patterns which eventually include a basic dotted rhythm. Observing and teaching children at different age levels has allowed me to understand certain recurring, common difficulties which have, in turn, given me my answers as a teacher.

It takes about three to four months for the essential basics to be taught and assimilated before the child starts at the piano. I find that having learnt the musical alphabet away from the piano, it is easier for the child to recognise and identify the notes at the keyboard, to relate to the rhythm, to use the fingering for each hand and to play simple music pieces.

About the Author

FLAVIA DE SOUZA, recipient of French government scholarships, graduated as a concert pianist from the Paris Conservatoire and the Ecole Normale de Musique. As Cultural Awardee, she has visited Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth in 1986; in 1991, Vienna and Salzburg for the Mozart Bi-centennial celebrations; and twice to Norway, in May 1994, for the Bergen International Music Festival and in 1997, for the International Chamber Music Festival in Stavanger and the Millenium celebrations in Trondheim. Since 1988 she has focused more on teaching. Besides several masterclass seminars in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong, she teaches at her own music studio, the 'Atelier de Musique' and has developed her own ideas about music teaching, including a unique basic course for young children. Outside teaching, she is a freelance writer and music critic.

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