

## Beyond the Mother Songs

A Froebelian approach to early childhood music for the 21<sup>st</sup> century  
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All the songs in the session are available to stream free at <https://stevegrocott.bandcamp.com/>

### **On Bonfire Night** – the best action song in the world

On Bonfire night at five o'clock  
I took my money to the firework shop  
I bought a rocket and it cost one pence and I put my rocket by the fence  
And my rocket went...Whooooooooooosh

On bonfire night etc.....  
I bought a whizzer and it cost two pence and I put my whizzer by the fence  
And my whizzer went  
Whiz - Whiz - Whiz - Whiz - Whiz  
And my rocket went... Whooooooooooosh

I bought a rip-rap and it cost three pence etc.  
And my rip-rap went...Rip - Rap - Rip - Rap - Rip

I bought a fountain and it cost four pence etc.  
And my fountain went  
Whoosh - Whoosh - Whoosh - Whoosh - Whoosh -

I bought a banger and it cost five pence etc.  
And my banger went - Bang - Bang - Bang - Bang - Bang

I bought a Roman Candle and it cost six pence ...  
And my Roman Candle went...Phut - Phut - Phut - Phut Phut - Phut - Phut - Phut - Phut -  
Phut - Phut - Phut - Phut

"Music is a hidden arithmetic exercise of the soul, unaware of its act of counting"  
This quotation from the mathematician Leibniz (1646-1716) perfectly expresses the intuitive grasp of mathematical principles that is involved in music making.

When moving with this song and lots of others children are physically exploring all kinds of shapes, directions and dimensions which can be described in mathematical language.

Something that practitioners may be less aware of is the mathematical nature of music itself. Children very rapidly learn to make the right number of sounds including the thirteen sounds for the Roman Candle – they are “feeling the beats and are helped in making the right number by the natural ability to perceive patterns and, in this case, group beats in fours.

The sounds in the song are very like the animal sounds in Old MacDonald Had a Farm – a sort of halfway house between a word and a sound. Children are strongly attracted to playing with these sounds and it is easy to see how enjoying that playful exploration gives a good scaffold for hearing, speaking, and later reading language – a good example of play being the work of children.

It is well worth looking up the Bouba/kiki effect where people of all cultures associate a spiky shape with the word “kiki” and a rounded one with the word “bouba”. This is just one demonstration of how prosody the musical elements of language carry meaning. There is, of course, also plenty of research into how a sense of rhythm is essential for language acquisition.

### **Focussing on the voice**

Have you brought your speaking voice ? - Yes I have, yes I have

*Whispering - squeaky - growly - shouting - calling - singing voices*

Have you brought your MONSTER voice ? - includes deep, loud, raspy and also a facial expression and whole body stance

*Two ways of thinking that can get in each other's way*

- A - technical language, labelling and detail (deep, loud, raspy or counting the jumps etc.) – a good mode to be in for practising and refining
- B - being in character, thinking holistically and being aware of context – good for performance and encouraging engagement

*This speaks to Froebel's concept of unity and connectedness where he talks about starting with the whole, exploring the parts and then focussing back on the whole.*

*Both are important ways of thinking but in life and as educators we need to be able to bounce between the detail and the big picture, the whole and the parts.*

### **Three Little Birds – a rhyme with a story**

Three little birds all fast asleep

One little bird goes

"Cheep cheep cheep - cheep cheep cheep - cheep cheep cheep"

Down comes the mummy with a big fat crumb and

One little bird says

"Yum yum yum – In my tum – Thank you Mum "

Two little birds etc...

*Many songs can be presented as a story. It can help to have a prop.*

*Falling asleep provides a precious moment of calm.*

### **The deliberate mistake has many positive possibilities**

- It wakes everyone up so that they are more actively involved in what is happening.
- It provides an opportunity for the children to be 'right', reversing the teacher/taught dynamic and giving them a chance to contribute and be the teacher.
- It provides a moment of joy - a very important motivating element in any kind of session.
- It stimulates critical thinking.

See a video of this and other children's songs at [https://youtu.be/ABrlvJ\\_sA9E](https://youtu.be/ABrlvJ_sA9E)

**Humour Music and Creativity** - this article goes into the various practical ways educators can use humour to enhance learning.

<https://musiceducation.global/humour-music-and-creativity/>

### **The clock song – exploring pulse and pattern**

What does the clock in the hall say ?

'Tick - tock - tick - tock'

What does the clock on the wall say ?

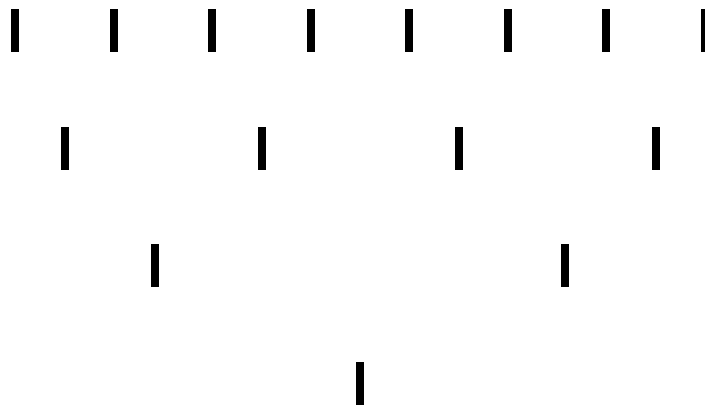
'Tick - tock - tick - tock - tick - tock - tick'

What do little watches all say?

'Tick - a - tick - a - tick - a - tick - a - tick - a - tick - a - tock'

And the grandfather clock goes - Boing - Boing - Boing - Boing

- *This song embodies the principle of pulse that underpins music*
- *All the rhythm sticks songs work equally well using just voice, body percussion, movement or a range of instruments*



### **The Choo Choo Song – music on the move**

Once there was a choo choo but he couldn't choo choo

So the story goes

Instead of saying "Choo choo" all he said was "Ah'choo !"

Because he had a cold in his nose

Ahhh – ahhh – ahhh –

CHOO-choo-choo-choo Ah'CHOO-choo-choo-choo

Ah'CHOO-choo-choo-choo Ah'CHOO-choo-choo-choo .....

It is easy to see how the four beat pattern is the same as the grandfather clock and the clock on the wall combined. When we put this pattern onto the whole body with a little skip every fourth beat we are embodying this pattern in an enjoyable way.

### **Freedom with Guidance - Jamming or Improvising**

This is about the opportunity for children to innovate. One of the underlying principles of both improvising and composing music is repetition with variation. This happens quite naturally given a little encouragement. Use songs and rhymes that everyone knows and encourage children to use them in different ways.

#### **What Shall We do on a Lazy Day**

What shall we do on a lazy day, a lazy day, a lazy day

What shall we do on a lazy day ? – All day long

Brush your teeth on a lazy day etc...

Stir the pot etc... Toot toot toot etc... Draw a picture etc... Do something good etc ...

The version on Bandcamp imagines you have a rhythm stick and use it as a toothbrush, spoon, trumpet or hammer. Of course you can use an imaginary stick too. I call this a coat-hanger song because, while the recording gives some ideas, they are only a few of the almost infinite variety of things you can do with it. You can make a story and act it out, you can ask people to work in pairs on ideas.

It can be useful to have categories in my mind such as “tools” or “musical instruments” or “be an animal”, which helps our ideas to flow.

#### **Jamming ideas include :-**

- The connection between speech and musical rhythm – we are able to perform a long rhythm sequence if we use the lyrics of a known song
- Form – for example *Coming Round the Mountain* has the same form as lots of songs such as *Happy and You Know It*, *The New River Train* and *Bonjour Mes Amis*. Children absorb these forms very quickly.
- Use the pulse ideas from *The Clock Song*.
- Use the voice ideas from *Have You Brought Your Speaking Voice*.
- Stop and listen and just do something minimal.
- Show off do your most attention-grabbing thing.
- Do something different – do something different – do something different

#### **The role of the leader – different levels of guidance**

- leading from the front – teaching a new song or modelling rhythms, dynamics, tempo etc.
- leading alongside – playing or singing to hold the form so the group can concentrate on exploring their own ideas
- leading from behind not giving any kind of steer but, for instance, providing instruments on a mat outside and observing how the children perform or respond

*An improvisatory approach seeks to include all ways of responding as a contribution. Some children just like to be present without doing anything at first.*

#### **January February March**

This is included in the workshop so people can experience how a whole-body musical approach helps to embed knowledge in our minds.

### **References and further reading**

#### **On music, communication, language and mathematics**

Malloch, S. and Trevarthen, C. (2009). *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Trevarthen, C. (2017). Play with infants: The impulse for human story-telling Ch.15 in Bruce, T. Hakkarainen, P. and Bredikyte, M. (Eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Play in Early Childhood*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis/Routledge

Young, S. (2006). Seen but Not Heard: young children, improvised singing and educational practice, in *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, Volume 7, Number 3.

Gopnik, A. Meltzoff, A. and Kuhl, P. (2001). *How Babies Think: The science of childhood*. London: Phoenix. This is very good on the topic of Infant Directed Speech otherwise known as “motherese”

Mithen, S. (2005). *The Singing Neanderthals: The origins of music, language, mind and body*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

James J. (1993) *The Music Of The Spheres: Music, Science and the Natural Order of the Universe* : New York Grove Press

Annie Murphy Paul (2021) *The Extended Mind: The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain*

The Bouba Kiki Effect

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bouba/kiki\\_effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bouba/kiki_effect)

### **On two ways of thinking**

McGilchrist, I (2009) *The Master and his Emissary : The divided brain and the making of the Western World*. New Haven and London : Yale University Press.

Claxton, G. "Hare Brain Tortoise Mind" (1997 Fourth Estate) which covers this and many related topics really well

Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York :Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

### **On Improvisation**

Poynton, R. (2013). *Do Improvise: Less push, more pause, better results*. London: The Do Book Co. This is relevant to musical improvisation and also to how an improvisatory attitude is useful everywhere.