

The Eternal Power of Music

The spiritual benefits of turning your kids on to music
by Marlene LeFever

Antonio Stradivarius once said, "God needs violins to send his music into the world, and if my violins are defective, God's music will be spoiled."

We labor over instruments more precious than Stradivarius violins—our children. And yet we often miss out on the chance to "tune" our children in to the ways in which they can contribute to the music of God's kingdom.

The elementary years mark the beginning of a child's awareness of his place in the social and academic pecking order of his world. How many times has an insensitive teacher jokingly separated children into the Robin Reading Group and the Buzzard Reading Group? The Buzzard kids get stuck with the "underachiever" label and eventually develop a negative self-concept. Then there's the parent who looks at her child's low grades and bemoans, "I don't understand it. I was always so smart in school." The child hears, "You're no good at school."

Through these negative messages, children begin to believe that they have little to offer the world and certainly nothing to offer to the kingdom of God. That's why removing labels is a key responsibility of anyone who loves kids.

One label remover, surprisingly enough, is music. While almost any area of success will help children form more positive attitudes about themselves, many educators believe that developing musical abilities is one of the surest, most effective ways.

Neuroscientists now believe that music is our first intelligence to develop. A key part of that intelligence is lost if children don't start developing their musical skills before age 10.

Developing that intelligence does much more for a child than help her carry a tune. Early, long-term musical instruction has been shown to have a positive impact on children's complex reasoning, memory, and intelligence. We also know that musical and mathematical abilities develop at the same or very near the same place in the brain. Children who take music lessons

score higher than their playmates in spatial intelligence, which children need to visualize the world accurately, work mazes, and draw geometric figures.

However, the real motivation for exposing your elementary child to music goes much deeper than math scores and piano prowess. A child who believes he has something to share with the world will be much more likely to look for ways to use that gift in God's service. A child who believes he has the ability to do something well, whether it's play the piano or solve a math problem, is a child who understands that he is fearfully and wonderfully made.

—Marlene LeFever is the Director of Church Relations at Cook Communications. Her most recent book is *Flowers from God: Affirmations for Sunday-School Teachers* (Cook).

Joyful Noise

Here are some easy ways to bring music into the life of a child:

- Encourage your church to start an elementary choir. This can also be an effective outreach to other families in your community.
- Collect articles about the importance of music to the child's developing brain and self image and post them on a church bulletin board. It's possible that God meant for our worship, no matter what our denomination, to be strongly musical.
- Consider that Psalms mentions "sing" and "song" 115 times.
- Play quality Christian music of all styles at home. Add a tape and compact disc section to the church library.
- Play music in the background during your family devotions or family night, or build devotions directly around music. (See *Devotions from the World of Music* [Cook] by Patrick and Barbara Kavanaugh)
- Affirm children's musical events by emphasizing praise, not performance. When children participate in praising God, they should feel like smiling, not experience fear or pressure.
- Start a music-lesson fund at your church. The abilities sharpened by music should not be limited to children whose parents can afford lessons.

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