

Getting started with teaching your child music



# TEACHING WITH Little Musician™



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# GREETINGS FROM THE FOUNDER OF BRILLKIDS

Thank you for purchasing Little Musician!

It brings me great joy that your child will be able to experience Little Musician, as it is something I am extremely proud of.



## How Little Musician Came About

Let me tell you a bit about why Little Musician was created.

Even though I have had a fair amount of musical training and experience myself (including many years of playing the piano and composing songs and musicals), when it came to teaching music to my daughter Felicity, I was often at a loss as to what to do.

Unlike reading and math, where there were established and proven methods of teaching babies and toddlers, there was no baby/toddler music program for me to follow, or even a particular method to use as a guide. We tried some music classes when she was a toddler, but though they were fun for her, it didn't teach many of the things I wanted her to learn, things which I knew she had the ability (and desire) to learn.

## Incorporating Early Learning Methodologies

After creating Little Reader and Little Math, therefore, I started working on Little Musician, incorporating a lot of the early-learning and right-brain philosophies that were the foundation of those two programs, except the area concerned this time was music and musicality.

Little Musician is everything I wished for when Felicity was a toddler. In fact, it has become even more than what I wished for, because back then I wasn't even familiar with many of the things with which I am now familiar regarding what can be taught to little children.

## The Importance of Solfège and Singing

One such area was solfège (do, re, mi, fa, so, etc.). Solfège goes hand in hand with singing. One thing I feel very strongly about is that far too little emphasis is given to singing in today's musical education. Rather than developing the most important instrument our children have -- their voice boxes -- we instead just focus on having them learn a musical instrument, such as the piano. With solfège, not only do we cultivate their voices, but we develop their *musicianship* as they learn about music notes in a way that goes much deeper than say, traditional piano training, does.

I wrote about this at length on the BrillKids Blog, in a piece titled "**Why I Avoid Classical Piano Training for My Daughter**". I have included that blog post in the Appendix, and I recommend that you read it.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that solfège is featured heavily in the Little Musician curriculum. I firmly believe that a mastery of solfège and the development of a child's singing ability would prove to be enormously valuable in developing the child's musicality, regardless of what instrument (if any) the child may choose in the future.

### Last but not least...

As I always emphasize, the number one rule of teaching is to have fun doing it. Results should never be the focus of lessons. Instead, treat lessons primarily as a time for bonding, and enjoy the learning experience with your child.



**KL Wong**

Founder, BrillKids Inc.

# PREFACE

By Gregory Blankenbehler, M.A. Mus.

## Common Myths

There is an unfortunate, persistent myth in many of our cultures today that music is simply a medium of entertainment, and that it is best left up to those lucky few who are born with talent. But a growing consensus of research is showing something quite the opposite: music education makes people smarter, healthier, and more successful in life, regardless of whatever “talents” they are born with. Recent studies have shown music study to cause greater physical development in the brain,<sup>1</sup> and up to 27% higher math,<sup>2</sup> 57 points higher SAT<sup>3</sup> and 46% higher IQ scores.<sup>4</sup> It has also been shown to have a strong correlation with improved reading and test-taking skills, better behavior, decreased anxiety, and higher grades in school.<sup>5</sup>

The myth of the “born musical genius” is also being disproven as research is showing it is *nurture*, not nature that accounts for most of the musical skills that leave us in awe. It is well known in the field of child development that there is a crucial window between birth and about 6 years old during which a child makes extraordinary progress in language development. Not only does a child learn all of the structure and fundamentals for their own native language at this time, but if they are taught a foreign language during this window they can also speak that language like a native for the rest of their lives. The potential to learn and develop incredible abilities is almost without limit during this once-in-a-lifetime formative window, and is accordingly used to an advantage by early education programs such as Little Reader and Little Math.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Schlaug, L. Jancke, Y. Huang and H. Steinmetz, “In vivo morphometry of interhemispheric asymmetry and connectivity in musicians,” Proceedings of the 3rd international conference for music perception and cognition (Liege, Belgium, 1994) pp. 417-418.

<sup>2</sup> Amy Graziano, Matthew Peterson and Gordon Shaw, “Enhanced learning of proportional math through music training and spatial-temporal training,” *Neurological Research* 21 (March 1999).

<sup>3</sup> College-Bound Seniors National Report: Profile of SAT Program Test Takers. The College Entrance Examination Board, Princeton, NJ, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Rauscher, Shaw, Levine, Ky and Wright, “Music and Spatial Task Performance: A Causal Relationship,” University of California, Irvine, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> For a list of additional studies on the benefits of music, go to <http://littlesingers.info/parents/why-study-music-studies-showing-amazing-benefits-of-music-education/>.

## The Role of Parenting

What is not perhaps as well understood is that musical abilities operate in much the same way as language, and that they are learned and developed almost identically. The amazing “language-learning window” opportunity from birth to 6 is also a window for unequalled musical skills development. Shinichi Suzuki, founder of the Suzuki method and one of the foremost experts on child music education, understood this concept and promoted the study of music by very young children (ages 3 and up), calling it “talent education.” He believed that extraordinarily skilled musicians were made, not born, and he proved it by taking in hundreds of common, every-day children and training them to be some of the finest violinists in the world. Suzuki’s philosophy is well summed up in his own words: “The purpose of [music] education is to train children, not to be professional musicians but to be fine musicians and to show high ability in any other field they enter.[...]There is no telling to what heights children can attain if we educate them properly right after birth.”<sup>6</sup>

Recently, researchers have discovered that absolute pitch recognition ability (often called “perfect pitch”) is not simply a rare super-human ability that only a few are granted through lucky genes, but a language skill that nearly all babies are born with. Most babies are born hard-wired to develop perfect pitch, but most do not receive the right stimulation to develop and retain the skill for the rest of their lives.<sup>7</sup>

Since formal music lessons typically do not start until about age 6, at the close of the “language-learning window,” very few children have been afforded the kind of music education that allows for extraordinary skill development. Mozart and Bach are notable exceptions. Both had fathers that were active composer-musicians and were exposed to the rudiments of music every day from even before they were born. Both were also the younger sibling of another family member who studied the keyboard, and heard every single exercise and song well before they could play them. Both became child prodigies, far surpassing their older siblings, and are now known as the two most famous composers ever. Were these two musical geniuses simply born with more talent than anyone else? Perhaps they were born with some helpful predispositions, but their success cannot be attributed to just that. Mozart and Bach had the unusual opportunity to receive an extraordinary education in music from the day they were born, and that is what caused them to be extraordinary composer-musicians.

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<sup>6</sup> Shinichi Suzuki, *Nurtured by Love*, 2nd Ed., Athens OH: Senzay Publications, 1983, pp. 79, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Sadie Dingfelder, “Pitch Perfect,” *American Psychological Association* 36:2 (Feb 05), p 32.

For more information on Perfect Pitch, see my article at <http://pitchperfectmusic.org/articles/perfect-pitch-recognizing-notes-thin-air/>.

So, since we are not all composer-musicians ourselves, must we give up now on our children ever receiving this kind of music education? Not at all. Technological advances today allow children to receive musical exposure and training that before was only available to the very lucky (or rich). The classics that before could only be heard by assembling a large group of expert musicians can now be played any time of day with the touch of a button. Never before in history has such a wealth of “nutritious” music been available to so many so easily.

## Enter Little Musician

Effective early music education goes far beyond simply putting on a “Mozart for Babies” CD. The Little Musician software program by BrillKids is the closest thing I have seen yet to an easily-accessible early music education of the kind that gave us musical geniuses like Mozart and Bach. Designed to be used daily with children starting at about 6 months, Little Musician teaches musical skills in the same way that children learn language. With the help of a parent (who needs no more musical skill than simple dedication), babies are exposed to the rudiments of melody, harmony, rhythm, and meter in a structured and compelling manner that slowly but powerfully builds their musical language skills. Before the child has ever even begun studying a musical instrument they can identify a melody or chord in solfège, read pitches and rhythms on treble and bass clef staves, point out the correct key on a piano for a given note, and identify musical instruments, famous works, and the composers that wrote them.

Little Musician is designed to be a pre-music-lessons music education. Instead of focusing on musical performance as later instrumental lessons do, it simply teaches children to correctly hear and understand musical language. Using the 900-year-old system of solfège, students learn to recognize and identify individual pitches, intervals, and chords. (Even in the testing stage, parents have been reporting that their children have developed perfect pitch through the program.) From day 1, they also learn to read those pitches on the musical staff. By piecing together basic melodic and rhythmic patterns common to the western musical tradition, children not only learn to correctly read and sing music, but they also become true composer-musicians that have an innate sense for good music and can create their own. The program also teaches them about different musical instruments (from the violin to the banjo) and composers (from Vivaldi to Gershwin) and well-known songs (including many classical masterpieces and children’s songs).

Having passed through the curriculum of Little Musician, any child will be ready to make much more effective use of private music lessons and become exceptionally successful. Besides having already learned how to hear and read music correctly, they will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience that will make their playing much more artistic and natural. And most importantly, they will love playing music!

Music has been languishing in our world because too many of us think of it as frivolous entertainment. But recent research is showing what our societies used to know, and what the ancient Greek philosophers taught: high-quality music is education of the highest degree. It promotes mental development and helps students do better in math and reasoning. It teaches aesthetics, history, and cultural appreciation in a way that no other subject can. It promotes appropriate behavior, balanced emotions and healthy relaxation. As one of the most powerful forces in the world (think about the influence one popular song can have over millions), music has the potential to raise us collectively to a higher level of thought and action. But just like any language, it is a learned skill. May we all promote its effective study and use.

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*Gregory Blankenbehler is a recognized expert in singing and music education for children, and is the author of the popular [Singing Lessons for Little Singers](#) method series.*

*With over 25 years of experience training, performing and teaching music, he has performed in Italy, England and France and holds advanced degrees in Music and Education. He is the music director of [John Adams Academy](#) and maintains a large studio of voice and piano students in the Sacramento, California area. He can be reached at his homepage, [www.GBMusic.me](http://www.GBMusic.me).*





# INTRODUCTION

## The Importance of Early Learning in Music

The easiest and most effective time to teach a child anything is often during the first few years, especially between the ages 0-3. It's widely accepted that young children are able to learn multiple languages in those years effortlessly, and the younger they are exposed to those languages, the more effortless learning seems to be.

We believe this holds true for teaching the language of music, at least in terms of developing a good 'musical ear'. Even if this development in the child's musicality does not immediately translate into the child's ability to express herself musically (through singing or playing musical instruments) due to limitations imposed by the child's age and physical development, we believe that a solid foundation can nevertheless be built from a tender age.

## The Promise of Little Musician

For many parents, the thought of teaching music can be rather daunting, especially to those who have had little or no background in music. Parents who wish to develop their children's musical abilities typically have no choice but to send their children to learning centers with music classes, and this often can only be done from around the age of 3 to 5, thereby missing out on the crucial early years.

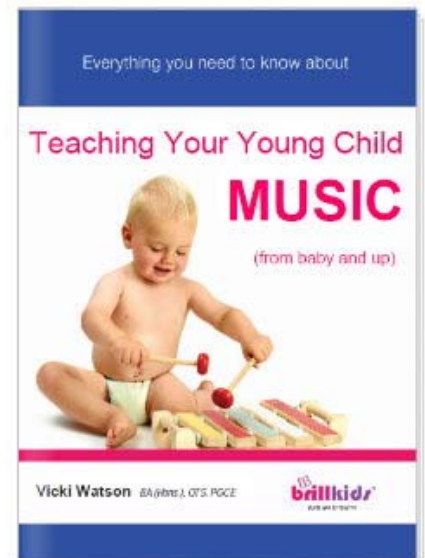
Little Musician was created to empower all parents to help develop their young children's musicality during the early years - the period when learning can be effortless. No musical knowledge is necessary on the part of the parent, as information is presented in a straightforward, factual manner with no explanation necessary for the child to grasp the crux of the lessons. All that is needed is for the parent to interact and have fun with the child.

## About Teaching Your Young Child Music

If you're new to the topic of teaching your young child music, you may want to arm yourself with knowledge on this important subject before beginning to teach. For that reason, we've enclosed a special "Teaching Your Young Child Music" booklet, designed to provide all the information you need.

In case you don't have time to read the whole booklet, you may want to skim the chapters that interest you most.

If you think your young child is too young to learn music, or wonder why anyone would specifically teach music, just read: **Why Teach Your Child Music?** Many would argue that the best and indeed the easiest time to teach your child music is while they are young! Young children love to learn. They are naturally creative and inquisitive, keen to explore the world around them in all its facets. Music is no exception!



To learn more about why you should teach your child music, turn to **Chapter 1** of the [Teaching Your Young Child Music](#) booklet.

## Basic Music Terminology

While you go through this booklet and as we explain how Little Musician is used, you may come upon some terms which you are unfamiliar with. Not to worry, we've included a list of words and their definitions for you to refer to in such cases: visit **Appendix 1** of this booklet to learn more about [Basic Music Terminology](#).

# GETTING STARTED WITH LITTLE MUSICIAN

Your Little Musician Learning System already comes with a built-in curriculum. This curriculum - organized as daily lessons - allows you get started with teaching your child immediately after installing the software. The curriculum includes different kinds of lessons, which we will discuss in **Chapter 3** of this booklet.

## Step 1:

### Install the Little Musician software and content.

The very first thing you need to do is to install the Little Musician software. Please refer to the enclosed Quick Start booklet to install Little Musician on your computer.



When you open Little Musician for the very first time after completing the installation process, Little Musician will perform a system check to see if your computer has the required system specification it needs to run smoothly. This System Check Wizard will test to make sure your speakers are working properly. Be sure your audio system is turned on. Once you've completed the System Check Wizard, your Little Musician should be ready for use.

## Step 2:

### Activate your key.

When prompted, key in the license key given to you. If you bought this product online, you may find this in the BrillKids Official Invoice emailed to you.

## Step 3:

### Read the Beginner's Tutorial.

There is a very useful Start Guide accessible from within Little Musician. To access it, click on the Start Guide button. It is very important to run through the **Beginner's Tutorial**. Don't skip this step!

For questions not covered in the Quick Start booklet or Start Guide, please see the comprehensive Little Musician FAQs section on our website:

[www.BrillKids.com](http://www.BrillKids.com) > Support > Little Musician

For more detailed information about your learning system, please refer to the Little Musician manual. You can access the manual from within Little Musician.

You can also get technical support through the forum:

[Forum.BrillKids.com](http://Forum.BrillKids.com) > BrillKids Software > Little Musician – General Discussions

If you have other questions or concerns, please email us at:

[www.BrillKids.com](http://www.BrillKids.com) > Home > Contact Us

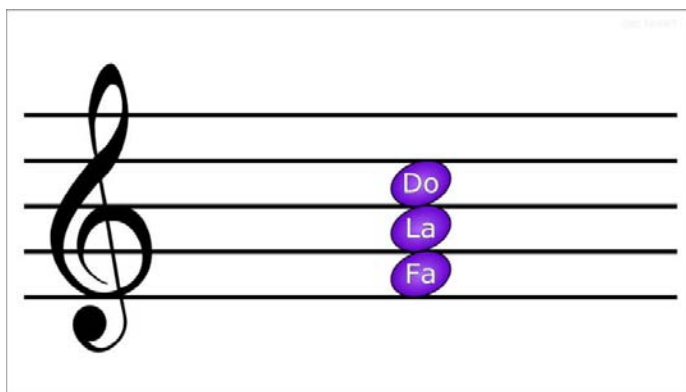
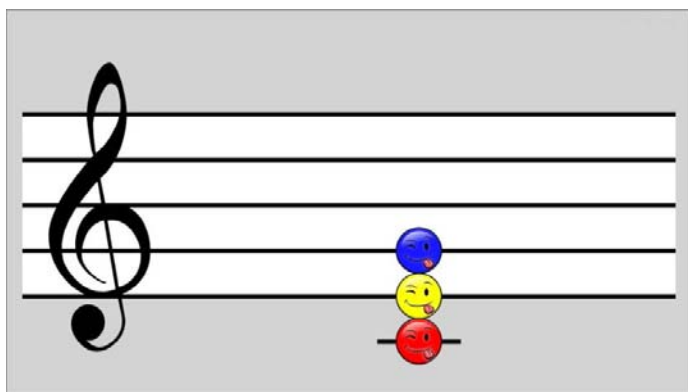
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## THE LITTLE MUSICIAN CURRICULUM

Little Musician contains many different types of lessons, covering many different aspects of music. In Semesters 1 and 2 of the curriculum, you will see these types of lessons - more than once a session in some cases:

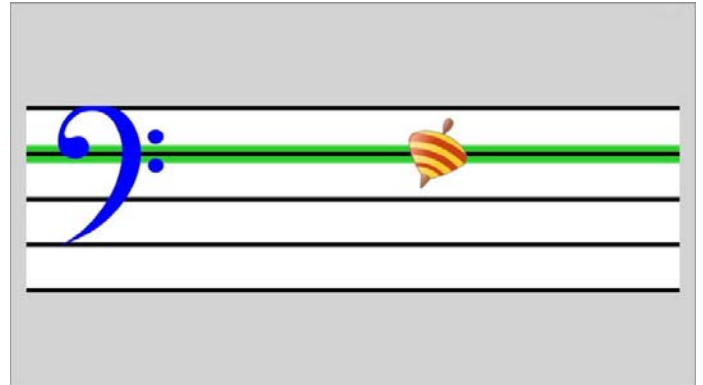
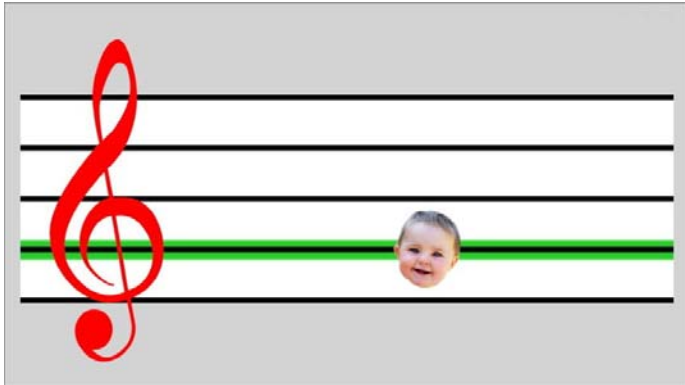
### Chord Recognition

There are nine chords that we want your child to be able to recognize instantly. (For you musicians, these are the C, F, and G chords, in root, first inversion and second inversion.) The chords are played with instruments, and sung out in solfège. Examples are “domiso” for the C Major (root) chord, and “falado” for the F Major chord. Together, the nine chords cover all the notes of the C Major scale (white keys). This is similar to the Eguchi method used in Japan, which some consider to be the best way to foster ‘perfect pitch’ and which apparently has produced a very high success rate.



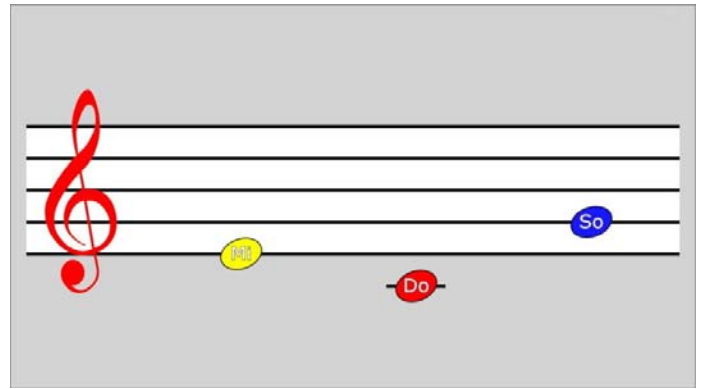
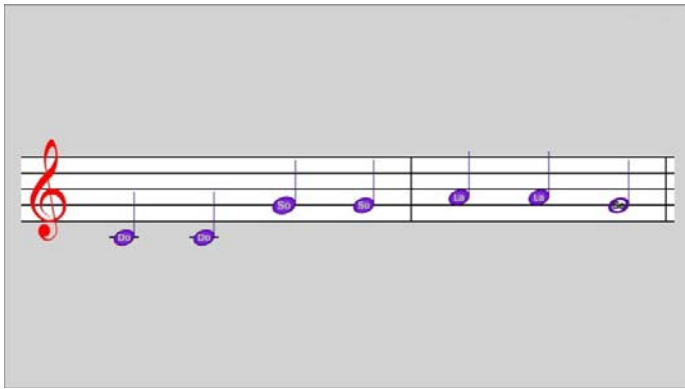
## Note Sounds

This is the most basic of lessons, and lets your child associate pitch with the written note on the musical staff. It's a good way to show how higher pitched notes are written higher and lower pitched notes lower. Random instrument sounds are used each time.



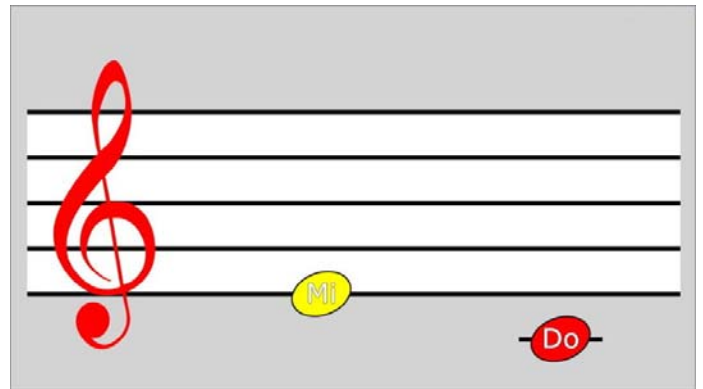
## Solfège

These lessons teach individual notes in solfège (e.g., Do, Re, Mi), with notes shown on the musical staff. Your child will start associating pitch with the note position on the musical staff, as well as with the relevant solfège syllable. Semester 1 focuses purely on C Major. Semester 2 introduces solfège in F Major. Lesson slides are forwarded manually because we want to encourage you to take your time to interact with your child. During the lessons, it's very important to sing out the note you hear, and - if possible - encourage your child to sing it out, too.



## Exercises

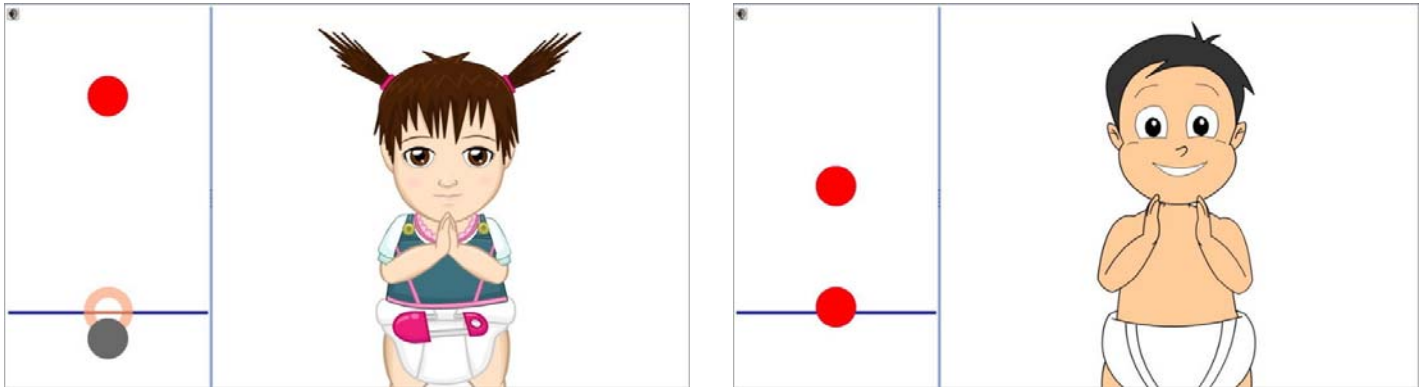
These are exercises which help train the ear (Hear and Sing), and help to promote sight-reading of notes (See and Sing). Hear and Sing exercises train both chord recognition, as well as individual note recognition, encouraging your child to listen to the chord or note, and sing it out in solfège. See and Sing exercises show notes on the musical staff and encourages your child to sing it out in solfège, similar to how your child would read out words or sentences.





## Clap-Along

Clap-Along lessons are designed to give your child an introduction to rhythm and beats. During these lessons, children songs (such as Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star) are played, and your child is encouraged to clap along to the beat. Different beat rhythms are introduced as the curriculum progresses.



## Music Knowledge

In these lessons, your child will get to learn more about how music is made. First, your child will be introduced to different musical instruments (e.g., violin, trumpet, and clarinet) - she will hear what they sound like and see how they are played. Second, your child will learn more about famous classical composers (e.g., Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven) and some of the famous pieces they composed.

violin



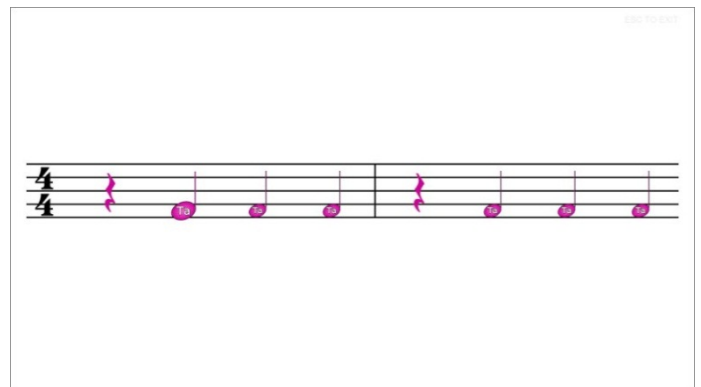
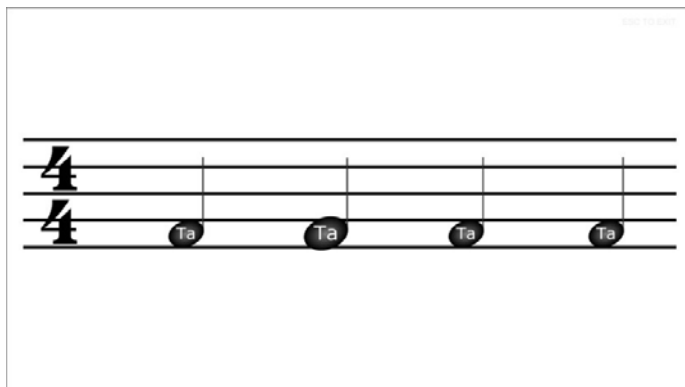
# Music Appreciation

The aim of these lessons is to expose your child to classical music, and through the exposure, let her gain familiarity with (as well as appreciation of) classical music. These lessons include clips from fifty of the most popular classical pieces, such as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Handel's Hallelujah Chorus.



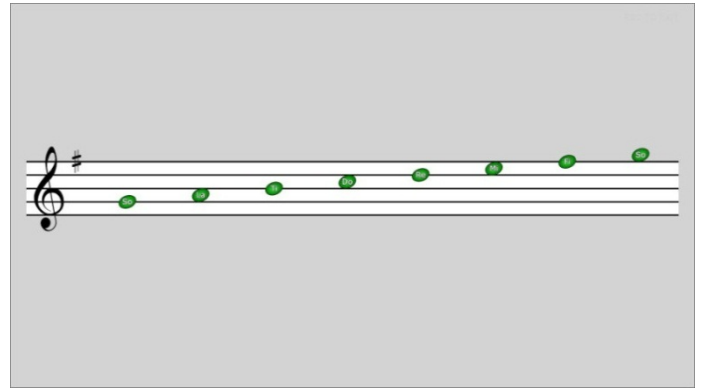
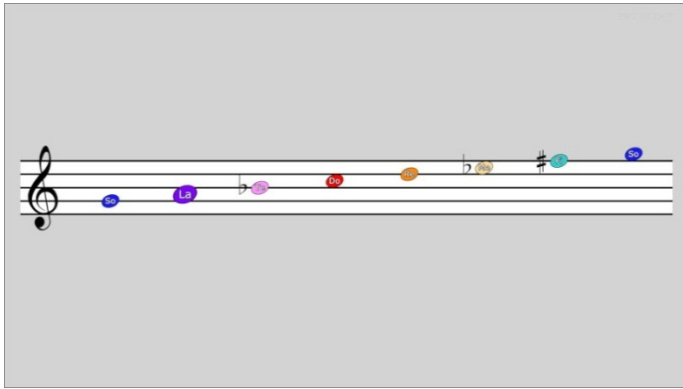
# Rhythm

Rhythm lessons will introduce your child to rhythm syllables, such as "Ta" for quarter notes/crotchets, and "Ti" for eighth notes/quavers. Rhythm syllables are a good way to learn how music notations on the musical staff indicate different lengths of time, and therefore how rhythm is notated. Rhythm lessons start from Semester 2.



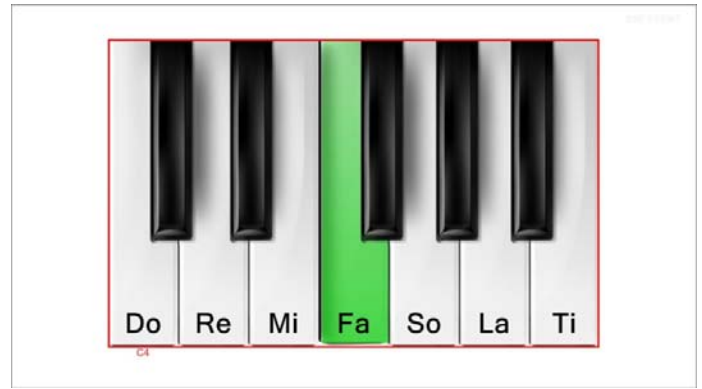
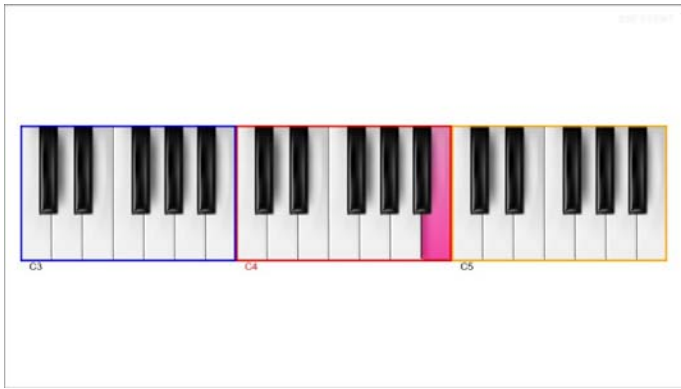
## Scales

Through these lessons, your child will see and hear different scales in different keys. Lessons cover both major scales as well as the different minor scales (harmonic, melodic and natural), and are played out using instruments as well as with solfège voices. Scales lessons start from Semester 2.



## Keyboard

Keyboard lessons will introduce your child to the keyboard, showing how the different black and white keys of the keyboard correspond to the different solfège notes and music pitches. Instead of perceiving the keyboard as an overwhelming sea of black and white keys, your child will see them in distinct groups made up of lower to higher octave patterns. Keyboard lessons start from Semester 2.



## Rainbow Colors

You will notice that many of the lessons show either notes or icons using a rainbow-color scheme, where C (Do) is shown in red, D (Re) in yellow, and so on. These colors give your child a very strong visual representation of the pitch, which will help her remember the note she hears through association. Color coding is particularly useful for training the ear and to help develop perfect pitch. The use of colors will slowly be reduced in Semester 3 onwards (and eventually disappear altogether) when the emphasis of the lessons shifts from ear training to sight reading.

## Flash Lessons

You will notice that on some days, the slides in some of the lessons may flash past very quickly. For those unfamiliar with the right-brain education, this is the 'flash method' where information is delivered rapidly. Right-brain educators such as Dr. Glenn Doman and Prof. Makoto Shichida believe that very young children are able to use their right brain ability to absorb information at a rapid rate without needing to slowly process the information with their logical left brain.

## The Structure of the Curriculum

The Little Musician curriculum spans a period of two years, with four semesters of six months each. Based on a five-day week, each semester comprises 130 days of lessons.

Each day's session is made up of a number of different lessons. For example, a day's session in Semester 1 contains the following lessons:

- Chord Recognition 1
- Music Appreciation (short)
- Note Sounds
- Solfège 1
- Music Knowledge
- Chord Recognition 2
- Solfège 2
- Exercises
- Clap-Along
- Music Appreciation (long)

# 4

## USING LITTLE MUSICIAN

### Session frequency

The Little Musician lessons are designed to be shown to your child once a day. You may choose to show the lessons again another time in the same day if you believe it is appropriate given your child's interest and attention span. If that is the case, we recommend that you do not do so immediately after the first session.

The curriculum is designed to be shown during weekdays, in case it's not convenient for the parent to teach on weekends, and also to make it easier to incorporate into a regular routine. Weekends may be used to catch up on any lessons missed during the week.



### Just 5 Minutes a Day

As mentioned earlier, each day's session comprises several lessons. The length of each lesson varies from a few seconds to over one minute. The entire session lasts for around five minutes, depending on how long you interact with your child.

Sessions are deliberately kept short for two main reasons:

## Short Attention Span

Young children's attention spans are typically fairly short, often lasting no more than 5-10 minutes. It is far better to keep the child's enthusiasm for the long term by letting her keep wanting more, than to have the lessons drag on and feel like a chore.

## Consistency is Key

We wish to make it as easy as possible for you, the parent, to be consistent with the lessons. Which parent does not have five minutes a day to spare? What matters the most in the long run is whether you continue doing the lessons on a regular basis. Five minutes a day is far, far more effective than twenty minutes once every few days.

## During the lesson

The most important thing to remember is to interact with your child. Here are some ideas:

- After solfège voices have been played, repeat them by singing out the notes again, and encourage your child to sing along if possible.
- During lessons that require manual forwarding of slides, take your time to sing back or talk to your child about what is shown. Go back to the previous slide or repeat the slide if necessary (clicking the right mouse button and mouse-wheel, respectively).
- Talk and comment about what you are seeing whenever possible. For example, if you see a picture of a viola, you could comment, "That sure looks like a violin, doesn't it?".

- During Clap-Along lessons, help your child to clap along, by holding her hands, or even her feet sometimes!
- During Music Appreciation lessons, encourage your child to be the conductor of the music. You could also try to identify instruments that can be heard in the pieces being played, or encourage your child to dance or move to the music and clap along to the beat!
- During the Exercises (e.g. Hear and Sing), prompt your child by asking, "What note is that?" before advancing to the 'answer' slide. You could even take a guess yourself - "I think it's a Fa... Let's see!"
- Consider using the different associations described in the next Chapter ("Taking It Further").

Lastly, you will notice that the "Music Appreciation 2" lesson, which contains a longer version of the musical piece, is always placed as the last lesson in the session. If your child does not want to sit still and just listen to the music, it is perfectly fine to let her wander around as the music continues to play.

## After the lesson

If your child is still interested in continuing after the lesson is over, the first thing you may wish to do is to browse around the "Resources" section. Here, you will find embedded YouTube videos of instruments, composers and music appreciation pieces. Browse according to the day of the curriculum you are on, or according to the different categories.





In addition, you could also do the following immediately after the lesson:

- **Play the lesson again.** It will not be exactly the same anyway, as many elements are either random (like instruments), or rotate (like voices and pictures).
- **Play the next day's lesson.** We only recommend this if your child already knows a lot of the material already.
- **Play specific lessons from the "Play & Edit" screen.** For example, you might want to try out more Hear and Sing exercises, or explore more music instruments under Knowledge.

## Other Activities

If have piano or keyboard, play chords like domiso often, and sing out domiso after playing. If not, use the "Free Play" feature in Little Musician to play out the chords.

Remember: sing, and sing often! By singing freely, you are encouraging your child to also see singing as a natural and care-free activity, instead of something to be shy or embarrassed about like so many adults feel today.

Lastly, you may also wish to try out the music activities, listed in our **"Teaching Your Young Child Music"** booklet.

# 5

## TAKING IT FURTHER

### Chord Toys

The Chord Recognition lessons contain nine chords which help to develop your child's sense of pitch, and associations to these chords are made using the rainbow color scheme, the position of the notes on the staff, and the solfège name of the chord.

If you wish, we would encourage you to make it even easier for your child to remember the chords by providing additional associations to the chords.

You could add another powerful association by using a toy for each of the nine chords, thereby adding a physical aspect to the associations. Simply choose a distinct toy or object for each of the chords, and *stick to it*.



*An example of chord toys provided by a Little Musician user, showing Domiso, Falado, and Sotire.*

## Here are some guidelines to follow in choosing the toys:

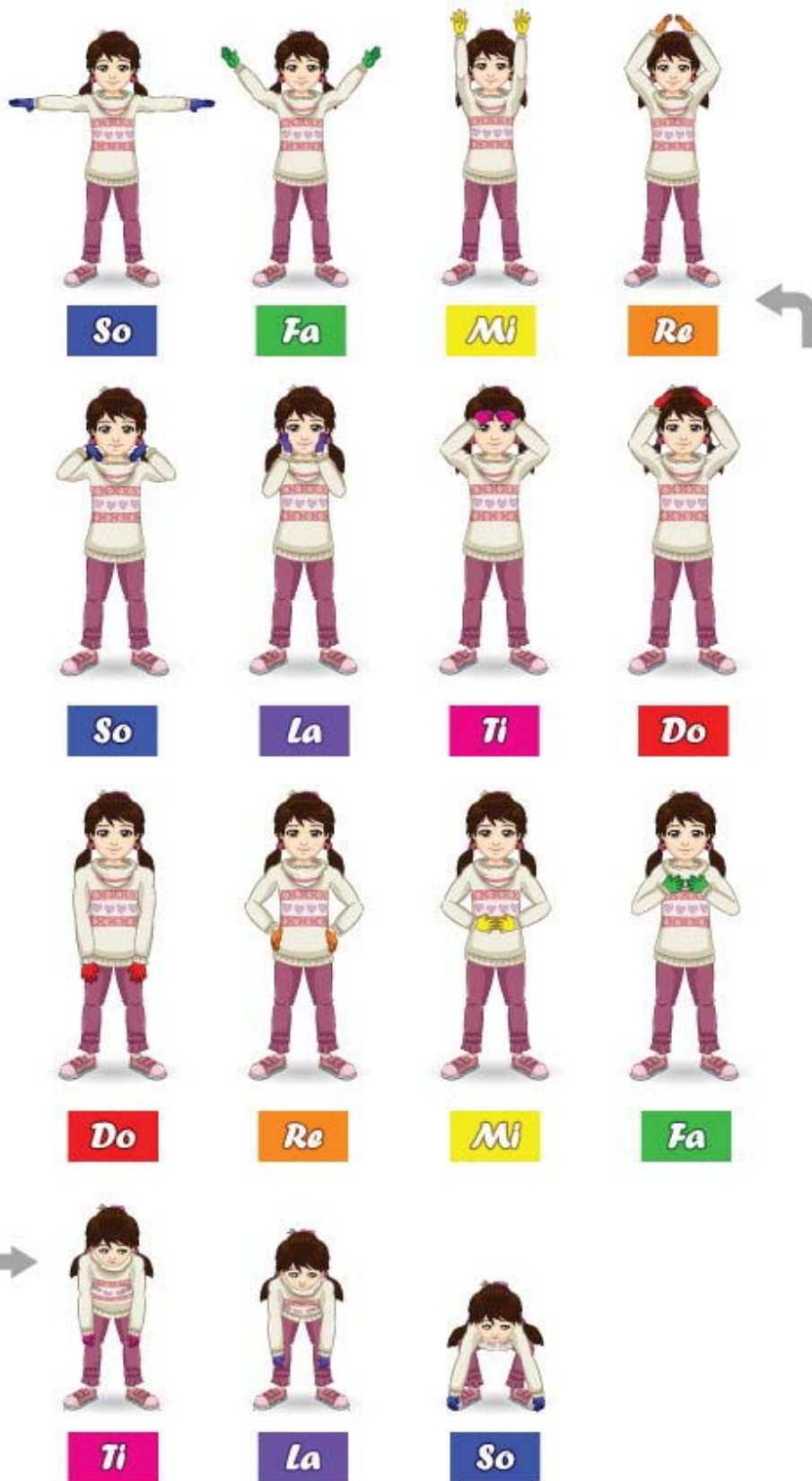
- Each toy should be as unique as possible, especially in its shape.
- For convenience, keep the toys relatively small in size so that together they are easy to handle and do not take up too much space.
- It is preferable that the toys use neutral colors such as black, white, grey so there is less conflict with the rainbow color scheme that are used in the Curriculum for the chords.
- Show the 3 chord colors on the toy in some way. For example, you could apply color stickers on the toys, or sew color buttons onto them in the case of soft toys.
- You may also wish to label the toys with the solfège names (such as 'domiso') to make them more easily identifiable to you.

During the lesson when a chord is shown, take out the corresponding toy and let your child feel the toy and interact with it. Play the chord sound again if necessary.

## Solfège Actions

Perhaps an even more powerful association you could use for remembering notes and chords in solfège is through hand actions and corresponding parts of the body. Unlike the Curwen solfège hand signs system used by some today which requires finer gross motor movement with the hand and fingers, the system used here is designed to be suitable for even infants and toddlers, and require only gross motor movements with the arms and hands.

In this system, each solfège syllable corresponds to an area of the body (or areas around the body in some cases), and the child simply puts her hands on those areas as each solfège syllable is sung out. Please see the chart on the next page for the different body areas:



These solfège Actions cover two octaves from a G ('So') to another G ('So') two octaves higher. Most lessons in the curriculum cover the C octave, so the solfège actions start from the lap ('Do') to the crown of the head ('Do').

To use this system, encourage your child to gently tap on the appropriate body area whenever you hear or see a note in solfège. For example, when 'Do' is played, help her use her two hands to pat her lap as you sing out 'Do'. Similarly, when the chord 'Domiso' is played, help her use her hands to pat her lap, belly, and chin in sequence as you sign out 'Domiso'.

# 6

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What age is Little Musician suitable for?

Little Musician was largely designed with infants and toddlers in mind.

However, like with Little Reader, the suitability depends not so much on the age, but on the level of familiarity the child already has with the musical concepts being taught.

We have therefore seen children from very different age groups enjoying Little Musician. In fact, even *adults* who were previously unfamiliar with music concepts appear to be benefiting from it.

### What if my baby cannot talk/sing yet?

Even if your baby/toddler is not able to talk or sing, you should still sing out to your child and encourage her to sing along as best as she can. Listening to a 'live' voice is much more effective than just listening to recorded audio that's played out through computer speakers.

### What if I can't sing in tune?

Of course, it would be preferable that your singing is in tune. However, your singing is very likely to be better than you think it is, and the advantage of 'live' singing probably outweighs any pitch inaccuracies that you might have. If in doubt, sing, and sing shamelessly! Who

knows, you may even improve your singing the more you do it! At the very least, you are giving your child the message that singing is a natural thing that is nothing to be shy or embarrassed about.

### Can this replace music classes?

No. Little Musician is *not* a substitute for music classes, especially where learning a musical instrument is concerned.

However, we expect that Little Musician will likely make it easier for your child to learn an instrument since many of the musical concepts that are required in the learning of the instrument will already be familiar to your child. Having a better-developed ear for music and note recognition will certainly also help with any instrument your child may choose to learn.

And lastly, Little Musician may also serve to give your child a much wider understanding of music in areas which may not be covered in the music classes.

### What type of music classes would you recommend?

We like music classes that encourage singing in addition to the learning of music instruments. Classes which use solfège will most likely do that.

Group classes may also have an advantage over private classes if they incorporate group activities like ensemble playing or group singing, or give your child opportunities to perform in front of the other students.



If the course involves exams and grades, we would recommend you find out how much time is spent on practicing set pieces with the goal focused on doing well in the exams, and how much time is spent more on understanding and enjoying the instrument or enjoying music. If the course is more exam-centric, then consider whether this may help to diminish (or even completely kill) your child's enjoyment of music and playing the instrument.

## Why does Little Musician seem unconventional in many ways?

There are many ways that Little Musician is unconventional, especially when compared to classical music training. For example:

- **No Note Stems** - Most of the lessons omit the note stem and show only the note head. The reason for this is that the aim of the lessons is to highlight how the positioning of a note on the musical staff (higher/lower) corresponds to its pitch. We believe there is greater clarity and focus when do not deal with note stems and note values. To teach note values, we use dedicated rhythm syllable lessons that are introduced in Semester 2.
- **Different colors and icons for note heads** - As discussed in Chapter 3 (Understanding the Curriculum), we primarily use rainbow colored-notes for easier solfège association. We also substitute fun icons like baby faces in place of note heads to make lessons more enjoyable and fun for the child.
- **Accidentals instead of key signatures** - Our general preference is to show accidentals beside the note instead of showing the key signature, in order to make the accidental more obvious to the child.
- **Other markings and highlight effects** - You will also notice that we often highlight or use colors to emphasize certain things. For example, when notes are played, we often

show a green highlight of the entire line or space of the staff in order to make the note's position more obvious.

Other things you may also wish to note:

- **Solfège system** - For those familiar with solfège, we chose to use "So" and "Ti" instead of "Sol" and "Si", although you will be able to change this manually. We also use different syllables for black keys, such as "Di" for C#. Lastly, we chose to use the Fixed Do system over Movable Do as this is more consistent with our efforts to teach note and chord recognition.
- **Note Names** - In Semesters 1 and 2, we do not use note names (C, D, E, etc.) at all. As mentioned, the focus is on solfège, so as to encourage the singing out of the notes. Note names will be introduced in Semester 3.
- **Treble/Bass Clef** - In Semesters 1 and 2, we also focus primarily on treble clef when the musical staff is shown, and not the bass clef. Bass clef has more prominence in Semester 3.

## There are problems with the sound!

Those of you with older / slower computers may experience problems with some of the lessons playing back smoothly, in particular, the Rhythm lessons or songs presets which play out voice audio in real time. These lessons require a lot of computer power which older computers may not have.

The sound quality of the instruments you hear also depends on the quality of your computer's sound card. Computers with old or low-budget sound cards may reproduce instrument sounds (such as during the children songs) that sound unrealistic or 'computerized'.

# APPENDIX 1

## BASIC MUSIC TERMINOLOGY

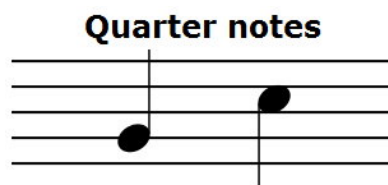
**Staff** - This refers to the five horizontal lines and four spaces that each represent a different musical pitch. This is commonly shown in two sets showing treble notes above, and bass notes below.



**Clef** - This refers to the symbol at the beginning of the staff that indicates the name and pitch of the notes on that staff. Generally, they indicate whether the notes are treble (denoted by the treble clef), or bass (denoted by the bass clef).



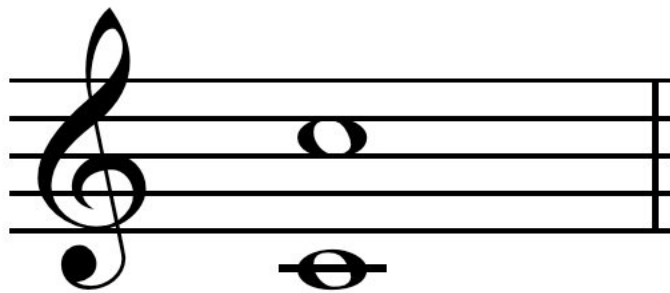
**Note** - This could mean either the musical notation to represent the pitch and relative duration of a sound, or to represent the pitched sound. Here is an example of two notes on a staff:



**Chord** - This is a combination of two or more notes, generally in harmony with each other and played together or close together.



**Octave** - An example that serves to illustrate this concept is the interval between one C (or Do) note and the next C (or Do) note that is above or below it.



**Scale** - This is a sequence of musical notes in ascending or descending order.

**Solfège** - This is the system commonly used to teach sight-singing, where each note is sung to special syllables such as do, re, mi, fa, so, la, and ti.

**Pitch** - This is generally used to indicate how high or low in frequency is a note.

**Perfect Pitch / Absolute Pitch** - This refers to a person's ability to identify or reproduce a given musical note without any external help or reference.

## APPENDIX 2

# WHY I AVOID CLASSICAL PIANO TRAINING FOR MY DAUGHTER

POSTED BY KL WONG ON THE BRILLKIDS BLOG ON MAY 13, 2011

I would like to 'set the scene' a little by explaining my musical background, my approach to giving my daughter musical training, as well as some of the thinking that went on behind the creation of Little Musician.

### *My Musical Background*

I started learning the piano at the age of six, along with my two older brothers. Like everyone else I knew learning the piano, I was taught the traditional way: learning how to read and play sheet music, and most of the time learning pieces for the purposes of piano exams. I took exams all the way up to Grade Five.

During those years, despite good exam results, piano was not very enjoyable for me. At one point, I even made up my mind to quit. But, because I never managed to pluck up the courage to tell my mother of my decision (I was ten!), I carried on with it.

I consider myself lucky to have continued because, after attending boarding school in England (age thirteen), I actually started to enjoy playing the piano. One major reason was that I stopped taking exams. Under the guidance of my teacher there, I learned to play pieces that I truly enjoyed, like pieces by Gershwin. (I just loved the rhythm and jazzy feel!) I continued taking lessons until I left for university at eighteen. I would say I became quite good at it, often winning school competitions and playing at school recitals.

## *Classical Piano Training for Felicity*

Now that I'm a dad, would I put my daughter, Felicity, through the same classical piano training? My answer: No.

Firstly, I would take a long hard look at any system which focuses largely on getting exam results. I feel that this can really take the joy out of playing the instrument. Sure, the training and practice will make you a better pianist, no doubt. But what I'm far more interested in is being a better musician.

So, what did my classical piano training actually teach me? In terms of practical playing skills, I learned to look at notes on a page, and to play them on a piano keyboard. I learned to play many such pieces very well. I received great applause and admiration when I played those long and difficult Grade Eight Gershwin pieces, especially since I often played them from memory.

But what about when I had no sheet music in front of me? Or, what happened when, with the passage of time, I could no longer remember the pieces? What was I actually able to play?

The answer: NOTHING!

Surely, I don't mean that literally, right? How about a simple tune like "Itsy Bitsy Spider"? Come on! If I could play all those piano concerto pieces that well, surely I could play "Itsy Bitsy Spider"!

Nope. I basically wouldn't have a clue how to play it! Sure, I could give it a good guess. But it would involve a little hunting and pecking, and a lot of praying that I'd play the correct note.

You see, for all those years, I was taught (and taught very well) only how to translate notes on a page onto the keyboard through my fingers. I see a note, and I know which key to push. And even if it's a difficult piece, if you give me some time to practice, I could do it very well. But if you don't show me the notes on paper, then how am I supposed to know which keys to push? Just from knowing what the melody sounds like? Sorry, doesn't help! I can translate the music notes that I SEE onto the keyboard, but not the notes that I HEAR (whether externally, or internally in my head).

That's because, even though I can reproduce a very complicated piece of music in my head (complete with all the different parts), I basically have no idea what those notes are. I was simply never trained that way.

### *Introduction to Solfège*

I always admired people who could just improvise and play any tune on the keyboard. This was especially so because I sometimes played in a band and composed music, and not being able to do that was a severe handicap. It dawned on me, when looking down at the keyboard, that despite all those years of learning the piano, I basically didn't really KNOW it at all! I could operate it mechanically, sure, but without any deep understanding of it.

Many years ago, I had a Filipino singing teacher who could also play the keyboard. He never took any piano exams, and could never play some of the pieces that I could. But he was someone who really understood the keyboard. He understood it as well as he understood his own voice. The keyboard was like an extension of his body. Just name him any song, and he'd be able to play it even if he had never played it before. A song was too high to sing to? No problem! He'd just transpose it down instantly.

So I asked him how he did it. And that, sadly, was the first time I heard about solfège (or "solfeggio", as he called it).

“What’s that?” I asked.

“You know, like: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So...” he replied.

“Oh, from ‘The Sound of Music’?” I asked. “Yes! I know that song!” I commented enthusiastically, though I still had no idea how a song from a popular musical could help.

My ignorance on the subject was plain to see. Since the day he enlightened me how solfège works (and that solfège did not ‘come from’ that song!), I have always kept in mind the importance of learning solfège.

### *Yamaha Music School*

Fast forward many years to when Felicity was born. I was already thinking of how to train her musically. I knew only one thing. Classical piano training (at least, the way I was taught) was not the best way to help her develop musicality.

I had heard many good things about the Yamaha Music School, so I enrolled her at age three, in the “Music Wonderland” course. It wasn’t really about learning the piano. It was more concerned with music appreciation and exposure. One year later, the piano-playing began with the “Junior Music Course”. In her first lesson, Felicity was taught to play “Middle C”.

Except it wasn’t called “Middle C”.

It was “Do”.

The other striking difference between this course and traditional piano lessons is that singing forms a big part of it. In fact, the sequence is this:



- LISTEN
- SING
- PLAY

Yep, playing comes last.

By labeling each of the notes with solfège syllables, students read and reproduce music by singing out the notes. It's only after that that they play the notes on the keyboard (often while singing).

In the Yamaha Junior Music Course, there is a huge emphasis on learning solfège. In every class there would be solfège singing exercises, like what you see here:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiNrltqxnBE>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryN9yNsX5A8>

(As an aside, here's something interesting to note for all of you familiar with the right-brain flash card method for teaching babies skills such as reading and math. Often, when Felicity's Yamaha teacher plays out the notes, it's all very fast, and the children are expected to repeat or guess the notes very quickly following her demonstration, with no time to think or analyze. This reminds me of the right-brain flash method where information is delivered rapidly in order to be accessed directly using the intuitive right brain without the logical left-brain's interference. Maybe whoever designed these exercises in Yamaha compared notes with Shichida?)

## *The Most Important Instrument*

You see, solfège is designed for singing. Compare singing “C, D, E, F, G” (See, Dee, Ee, Eff, Gee) with singing “Do Re Mi Fa So” and it should be obvious which system is more practical for singing.

And that’s one of the great things about learning solfège: It encourages the use of the most important instrument that we will ever have - our VOICE. Frankly, I’m now astonished that a lot of music education completely ignores this vital instrument and, instead, just focuses on teaching traditional instruments like the piano and violin.

Ignoring the voice seems to go hand-in-hand with ignoring solfège, and I think that has partly got to do with the fact that many music teachers today themselves were never taught solfège and therefore would not be comfortable (or even know how) to teach solfège. And I think that’s such a pity, because teaching children to sing solfège is so easy and natural – which little child has reservations about singing out loud, even if it may not be in tune? If using the voice was encouraged and fostered from childhood, I believe children would grow up to being less self-conscious about singing. (And I would probably invest in karaoke bars!) Anyway, just by sitting through so many of her Yamaha classes, I’ve already picked up a lot myself, and can easily ‘map’ most melodies into solfège now. So, too, can Felicity, to some extent. When she sings a tune, I would sometimes ask her, “Now sing that again in do re mi.” (She has never heard of the term ‘solfege,’ even though she knows all the syllables.) She would do so, sometimes with amazing accuracy.

When I show Felicity a simple piece of written music, she can often sing out the melody. Some of you may have seen the video where I wrote out words like “clap” on a doodle board and Felicity (at 12 months) would read out the words. Now, in a similar manner, I would place black dots (representing notes) on a magnetic board with the musical staff lines, and she would sing out the notes for me.

## *Like Teaching Children to Read*

That brings me to an interesting metaphor that I've noticed about teaching solfège.

Imagine looking through a musical score and being able to 'read' it (by singing it out, or having the melodies reproduced in your head) as easily as you're able to read a book (aloud or in your head). Knowing solfège is like being able to read words.

Conversely, not knowing solfège is like not knowing how to read out words. It's like all you're able to do when encountering words is to type them back out on a computer, and let the computer read the words out for you. In both cases, you have become dependent on that machine / instrument to be able to hear the words or music. By having focused on training our fingers to operate an external instrument instead of training our own musical instruments (our ear and voice), we've effectively outsourced the most crucial part of musicality, with dire consequences.

And similarly with writing. Knowing solfège is like being able to write out the words that you speak or hear. When listening to music, you know what notes are being played (at least relatively), so you're able to write them out. Without solfège, the chances are, you'd be quite lost. It's a bit like listening to someone talk but not being able to take dictation because you have not mastered the alphabet.

I am, therefore, thoroughly convinced as to the benefits of solfège towards developing musicality and a good ear. That's why I consider any musical training (for any instrument) that does not include the teaching of solfège to be severely lacking.

## *Don't Get Me Wrong*

Just so that I'm not misunderstood and people don't go away with the wrong impression, let me say a few more things about my beliefs:

Not all classical piano courses were created alike. It may well be that the teachers I had were simply not very good and if I had had the fortune of having had a better teacher I might have a different view or experience. I must say, though, I thought I had good teachers at the time although I now quibble with their methods.

Classical piano training, even though it has the shortcomings mentioned above, did give me other benefits. From it, I got a solid grounding in music theory, great dexterity with my fingers, and good hand-eye coordination.

Even with classical piano training without solfège, one can still be reasonably musical and develop a good ear (though in a different way). Despite not knowing solfège, I, for example, still managed to compose musicals in college as well as pop-songs that were sung by Asian pop-stars, among other musical accomplishments I'm proud of.

I'm not saying that classical piano training cannot help a student acquire skills such as playing by ear, or having a deep sense of understanding of music. Indeed, I know of people who were trained classically, without solfège, and who can play by ear. It just appears to me much harder to do so than with a solfège-based system. I believe those people I mentioned had natural talent that enabled them to do so despite not having the benefit of solfège.

I'm also not saying that learning solfège is a panacea for all problems. Solfège itself has problems. For example: Should one use the 'fixed-do' or 'movable-do' system, and how do we apply solfège syllables to accidentals (like C sharp and E flat)? However, these problems (to me) are minor compared to the benefit that solfège brings.

Solfège is probably not the only way to develop a good ear and musicality. However, it's the easiest and most fun way that I know of.