

# Family Music Night : How Learning Together Can Lead to Music Magic

By Wendy Hellyer, B.A. ,M.A. in Music and Director: Hellyer Performing Arts Center

My fondest memories are of the many times my family or friends would sing and play instruments together - certainly at Holidays but at other times as well. Some were professional musicians, but all shared their talents (big or small) to make "music magic".

"Music Magic" is the joy and inner satisfaction that we derive from singing or playing together. Sometimes the joy is in the musical perfection achieved - like the first time you got through the entire piece without a mistake. At other times it's the spirit of unity and love we feel when we all sing "Let There Be Peace on Earth" together.

Musicologists now know after two decades of research that children learn music as they learn language - that is they hear it and see it in action before beginning to imitate the sounds and comprehend the meanings.

Besides imitating the sounds we make to them, children imitate our behavior. That is why one of the key components of a successful early childhood music program is including the parents in the classes - not as observers, but as participants who share the joy of music with their children. The parents don't have to be great singers or dancers - but be willing to sing or dance along with the class material. This 'modeling' establishes a music example for the children - but more importantly it establishes a happy emotional environment for the children. Therefore music (with all its benefits to a child's mental development) is associated with happy times and shared family experience.

How sad to lose this when the child is old enough for music lessons! And yet the majority of families stop singing or making music together when the children reach first or second grade.

Some parents, however, are ensuring they continue sharing music by taking lessons along with their children. In the Suzuki method of teaching violin or piano, for example, parents are required to be part of each child's private lesson. The teacher will often demonstrate a fingering or bowing exercise that the parent's must learn in order to help the child practice at home each day.

Others do not use this form of 'direct' teaching but rather have a lesson of their own on the same or a different instrument. While not directly teaching the child at home, their own willingness to practice in order to master a skill and share in the child's success when they master a new musical task is a model that encourages patience, discipline, and diligence. These are the very qualities needed to succeed in any endeavor! The added benefit of music is the fun and emotional enjoyment gained from playing together in a loving and emotional 'safe' family setting.

In this age of "Hi-Tech" we need a lot more "Hi-Touch" to raise caring and emotionally secure children. A recent TV ad suggested turning off all TV's, CD's and computers one night a week in order to hold a family game night where everyone learns to think, play and have fun. An even stronger case should be made for moving the old family piano back into the 'parlor' and having a family music night where everyone can share in the fun of making "Music Magic".

