



**M**usic is all around us: at the gym, in the shops, in the car, on the radio, on the television. Sometimes it is easy to simply stop listening! And yet listening is essential in all education, particularly a musical education – even before birth. The Suzuki school of music believes that exposure to music in the womb can play a pivotal role in many aspects of development. Its philosophy states the following:

- every child can learn;
- ability develops early;
- environment nurtures growth;
- children learn from one another;
- success breeds success;
- parental involvement is critical;
- encouragement is essential.

A foetus can hear from six months-old, although the quality of the sound is obviously affected by the surrounding amniotic fluid and the mother's heartbeat. Therefore, 'mums to be' can be encouraged to choose a beautiful recording (not a poorly played version) of a piece of music and listen to it once every day whilst resting. It doesn't matter how complex the piece is – Bach, Vivaldi or Mozart are ideal. It should be around five minutes in length, with a speed roughly equivalent to a resting heartbeat (approximately 72 beats per minute). If the same piece is listened to during labour this can have a calming influence on both mum and baby, and post-labour it will serve as a familiar, soothing aid to sleep.

Studies have shown that children who experience pre-natal listening can recognise

# from the TOP

Parents and carers have an instrumental role to play in babies' early musical learning, says **Sam Dixon...**

and remember the tune they heard. They often show an enhanced sense of pitch and rhythm, and are capable of picking up new tunes quickly. Some researchers believe that musical elements are as significant in the development of language as phonetics. Reports from the Suzuki school showed the "early development of highly organised and remarkably articulate speech of those children who have been exposed to prenatal music stimulation".

## Involving parents

By involving parents and those carers who are with the children in the earliest stages, the groundwork for future learning and development is laid. As early years educators, we are the first step on the educational path, so we have a great opportunity to spread the word about ideas like those outlined above. Why not consider handing out an information sheet about pre-natal listening to pregnant mums who already have a child in the nursery, or displaying it on a notice board?

From birth up until two years of age, babies' musical exposure and stimulation should continue in music groups and at home. Interaction between parent and child is the key to success, so perhaps you could suggest local baby music groups or organise a pre-school

interactive music session to show parents how they can replicate elements of it at home.

Singing to and with babies is a vital part of the groundwork process. Reading poems out loud provides a starting point for rhythmical sound. Some parents/carers are timid

about singing and need reassurance that, at this stage, no great talent is required! Familiar tunes (*Frère Jacques* or *London's Burning*, for example) can be used to improvise literally anything that mum and baby are doing together. Dad doesn't need to be Pavarotti; gentle, attentive singing is all it takes. Nursery rhymes are good and folk songs will help make up a more interesting repertoire. There are plenty of 'sing-a-long' books and CDs available, but don't just leave it to the recording; it's the joining in that counts! Good recordings of classical orchestral and vocal works will train and prepare the ear. But live, shared singing is a bonding, affirmative experience that will sow the seed for a love of music, and confirm that music is something we do, as part of our everyday lives.

To find out more about Suzuki music teaching ideas visit [britishsuzuki.org.uk](http://britishsuzuki.org.uk)

## find out more

Sam Dixon is the creative force behind [songchest.com](http://songchest.com) – a website packed with music resources for the nursery age up. A range of themed action songs are available to download for just 99p, or in a traditional songbook format. Why not try the *Shape Songs* songbook, which brings seven shapes to life through a combination of illustrations, music and dance.



Each tune's time signature reflects the number of sides of a particular shape, and the collection has been selected to support the early learning goals.

