

Making Music A Happy Habit

By Alice Walsh

EMILY BULLERWELL IS only five years old but already she is in her third year of music. Since music requires lots of practice, most mornings

she can be found sitting at her piano. Emily doesn't mind, however, because, for her, music has become a happy, positive experience. She was introduced

to musical notes at the age of three, taught to her in the form of animals and other characters. For example, C is a creepy-crawly critter; F is a fireman named Fred while D is a dancing dinosaur in his den.

At five, she learned the meaning of words most young children cannot even pronounce: "fortissimo", "crescendo", "treble cleft" and "bass cleft".

Emily belongs to a unique music program, Music For Young Children which was created here in the Atlantic Provinces. It was written in 1980 by Frances Balodis of Dartmouth, N.S., and especially designed for children three to eight years old.

MYC was not written for the elite or for the super-talented (although these children can be found in the program), but for the average child. "I wanted a positive music program that helps develop the happy habit of learning music," says Frances, a registered music teacher and special education consultant who has worked professionally with children for more than fifteen years.

She felt that private piano lessons were not stimulating for young children on a long-term basis and was not satisfied with available programs when it became time for her own two pre-schoolers to be introduced to music. During this time she was teaching a Yamaha music program in Nova Scotia and worked diligently at promoting the concept of very young children learning music.

She believes that three years of age is the prime time for developing a sense of pitch and teaching patterns of music. "At three they know eighty per cent of what they know at seventeen," she says. Where a child of nine or older is too self-conscious to experiment, three-year-olds



Frances Balodis created music for young children in 1980.

Belle Hatfield photo



Emily Bullerwell is only five years old, but she is learning the meaning of musical words most young children cannot even pronounce.



It is important that parents take part in the program so that they will have a better understanding of what their children are experiencing.

are "little musical sponges who take in concepts and are willing to experiment."

Ignoring the traditional belief that children could not play the piano until they knew how to read, she set out to create her own program. She began teaching the basic concepts of beat and rhythm through symbols and hands-on experience. Quarter beats were intro-

duced to the children as rabbits while half-beats were introduced as turtles.

"I wrote MYC with the idea that I wanted children to be able to take music lessons and develop a love for music." Her ideas came from many years of private teaching. She began instructing piano at the age of eleven to a neighbor girl and, since that time, has been in-

involved in everything to teaching in the public school system to teaching private piano to teaching junior choirs.

In Winnipeg she worked as a reading consultant in a child guidance clinic and this gave her insight into dealing with children who had problems. She began writing down her ideas in March, 1980, and, by September of that year, she had written books for all levels of MYC. She also developed a course which included teacher training and teaching seminars.

She decided that her program would not only include the piano, but drums, cymbals, bells and tamborines. It also introduced children to singing, rhythm, ear training and sight theory. It is a program designed to give children a background in music that will take them to any instrument.

The children meet in groups of four to eight for an hour a week. They usually enter the program as beginners and can continue to take MYC for five years. Not only does the program allow for social interaction and development, but it encourages listening awareness, develops self-confidence and sharpens the imagination.

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In the first year, Frances introduced sixty students into the program and, in the following year, more than 300 were registered. Seminars were held for music teachers, school teachers or anyone who was interested. Many of the MYC teachers are school teachers, piano and organ teachers and nursery school teachers.

Marlene Knowles of Bedford, N.S., attended the first seminar. A nursery school teacher, she entered the program with the intention of taking it back to the nursery school where she worked. Today she is a MYC teacher as well as an area co-ordinator. Her job, among other things, is to help train other MYC teachers. Every week, forty children, many as young as three years, meet with their parents at her home in Bedford.

Children like Emily Bullerwell, who would normally be watching TV or playing with toys, are now busy practising music. But when C is a creepy-crawly and D is a dinosaur in his den, even the most unmotivated child is eager to practice. □