

# BEYOND A JOY OF MUSIC: GIVING YOUR CHILDREN THE MUSIC TRAINING YOU NEVER HAD

*by Jarrod Richey, Geneva Academy*

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An essential part of training our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord must be saturating them in music. Many Reformed Christians have an awareness of this concept, but do not fully understand what it means to not only transmit a love of music to their children but effectively equip them to be musicians themselves. The hope is that this will be an encouragement to dig deeper into what it means to raise trained musicians who re-echo the gospel around us in creation.

Many Christian parents have raised a generation that loves to sing and make music simply by saturating their children with music in their homes. Often times these same parents have had little music training but have picked up on a love of music in their own lives that overflows to their children. Let's say that Johnny was saturated with music in his home growing up. His mom played the piano and would teach some private lessons in their home in the afternoons. Maybe his dad would play everything from Beethoven to Chuck Berry's "Roll Over Beethoven" on his CD player in the car or around the house. This is a wonderful start to fostering a love of music in our children. This has been the seed for some talented musicians in our churches. These children are given a taste of the fun and joy that music can bring.

Pair that with a good Christian work ethic and many of these Christian students persevere in learning to play the violin, piano, or trumpet.

While the above scenario is a blessing, it is not the most transformational scenario for training musicians moving forward. We are thankful for the many homes in which this scenario was how they came to love music and sometimes pursued it themselves. Yet, it must be our job to rediscover what it means to train our children in music. Music education must again come to mean *doing* music and not simply knowing *about* it. For in making and tasting foods, we can truly and confidently begin to say that we like them. We are not so passionate about foods which we observe others preparing and eating if we have no personal experience in enjoying them. But, when it comes to music, there is a modern tendency to equate music education with giving someone an *observational* experience and not necessarily a *recreational* one. In other words, we want our children to be able to do music for themselves and not just know about it from a textbook, recording, or live performance.

So how do we train our children to be musicians again? Where do we start in a vast sea of music and musical opportunities available to us? I would simply

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say, “Sing!” That is the one thing that we are all equipped to do from birth. It is the instrument that can best be cultivated from a young age to adulthood. But when I say, “sing,” I am not just saying, “sing in the car, sing in worship, or even sing in the shower.” Rather, make it a priority to have your children be trained in music by teaching them to sing first and branching out to other instruments from there as desired. This can be accomplished through a number of different avenues. I am convinced of the effectiveness of a certain approach of music training called “the Kodály method” that seeks to train all people to use their own instrument and be able to read, write, and sing music on a page. The twentieth-century Hungarian music composer and music apologist, Zoltán Kodály, believed that through structuring and sequencing music curricula to fit children’s ages, students could become musically literate and still possess the joy of music through the process. This curriculum is taught in many schools across the country and in Europe. It aligns particularly well with Christian and classical Christian educational philosophies. If you are looking for a school or music system for your children, the Kodály method is a good option.

It is great to have your children in music classes in the homeschool co-op or local Christian school that lets them listen to the music of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. It is important they hear these songs that they are not going to be exposed to otherwise. But think how much more transformational it is to give them the tools to recreate music and not just observe it from a recording played for them in your home. Imagine their ability to understand the world and the Triune God in light of a musical understanding. Think of what an understanding of music structure can bring when your children are not only able to hear prolonged tension and delayed resolution in cantatas and symphonies but also hear it in light of the grand story in which we live. Imagine how with such an understanding, they can re-echo the gospel

in new ways like the great composers and hymn writers of the church have done in times past. Think of the new settings of Psalm tunes that can be written. Think about several generations being able to learn music from an early age in a similar way that they learn the English language. Think of a time when few people have not had music training growing up and they can no longer dismissively say, “I’m just not gifted in music.” Rather, think of a baseline of music education in our Christian culture that allows us to be more like our musical Creator in his world that is full of music. Imagine the singing abilities of our congregations on the Lord’s Day if the majority in attendance can read any music put before them. Imagine the multitude of ways the glories of God’s goodness can be echoed and resounded through our great-grandchildren’s settings of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Imagine moving from glory to glory in compositions like Haydn’s *Creation* or Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* to greater compositions that stand on the shoulders of these great composers. Imagine our great-grandchildren growing and maturing in their faith and understanding of God’s creation and that leading to faithful stewardship of music.

Give your children the Scriptures and give them the catechisms. Give them the gift of story and where they are in the great story. Don’t be content with simply their joy of music in its hearing. But do your best to see that they possess the ability to consciously create and recreate music to the glory of God as a resounding testament of this faithfulness from age to age.