
Music Making at Home

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Orff UK committee members offer some ways to make music at home without special equipment or musical instruments. The activities are designed so that children from age 3 upwards could explore and play independently or with a grown up. They inevitably involve a fair amount of noisy play so you could find ways to reduce this. Some ideas: make a sound explorer's tent under a table with a sheet or bedspread; if you have an outside area (balcony, yard, garden) use this for noisy play (if the neighbours don't mind!). A bedroom is more sound-proofed than other rooms.

Exploring sounds around you (5 to adult)

Things you will need: sheet of paper (the bigger the better), crayons or similar. Anything that makes an interesting sound from around the house (kitchen implements are good) wooden and metal objects that can be rattled, scraped or tapped, musical instruments including toy instruments (perhaps avoid toys that make sounds by pressing a button)

- Sit or lie in one place (if indoors try sitting near an open window) for 30 – 60 seconds (depending on the age of the children) with eyes shut. Listen to all the sounds you can hear close by and then further away (in the background).
- After 30 seconds try to remember what you heard in the order you heard them and perhaps write them down or draw a sound 'map' with pictures or marks to describe each sound. Have a look at this site which describes almost the same activity <https://www.sharingnature.com/sound-map.html> and this, with examples <https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/information/creative-activities/sound-maps.htm>
- Talk about how sounds are different. Use words that describe the sound: low, short, harsh, gentle etc., words that name what makes the sound: a small bird, the wind, cat, the fridge, a door shutting, baby crying etc., and words that sound like the sound: purring, squeak, bang, rumble, tweet.
- Explore objects and your own voice to find sounds that are similar to the sounds on your sound map.
- See if you can read (or remember) your map and play the sounds in the order that they happened.
- Remember to have silences when you play your map (if there was silence!).
- Now that it is your piece of music you can repeat sounds or overlap sounds to make it more interesting and give it a beginning, middle and end.
- You could record the finished piece on a phone or perform it to someone else.
- For older children (upper KS2 and KS3) the listening exercise could also include making a recording on a phone then uploading the sounds to Audacity or Garageband. Create a piece of music by playing around with the different possibilities

(changing pitch, repeating, layering etc) i.e. using the sounds as samples. Have a look at this <https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/articles/c127c7d1-a459-4f82-8c2d-38e27b940b72>

- For all ages: find some examples of music using everyday objects and sounds around us on YouTube or Spotify (or other streaming service)

For example:

Driving in My Car -Madness	Blackbird – The Beatles
The Lark Ascending – by R. Vaughan Williams	Cantus Arcticus – by Rautavaara
City Life – by Steve Reich	

Sounds around the home (4+ year olds)

These ideas also use found sounds around the home. He begins by exploring the possibilities of familiar and readily available technology, on mobile phones. Readers are invited to check-out David’s online guide to musical sound-sources around the home at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DivKb5Pjq8Q>

Resources: a mobile phone with recording app (any). Most mobile phones have a voice memo/recording app as standard. If unsure, search the internet for, “How to record on [name of phone]”

One person (perhaps with an adult) goes secretly around the home recording sounds. For example:

- Running tap
- Light/other switch on and off (ensure hands are dry)
- Rattling tins of food
- Gently opening/shutting door
- Tapping table-top
- Drawing curtains

Play back the recording to someone else and see if they can identify the sounds.

If it is hard to identify the sounds, an alternative is to list the items and see if the other person can identify them in the correct order.

More difficult:

Use an app to record, such as 'Music Mike Create' available from the Apple Store (fairly intuitive); or 'Audacity' - <https://www.audacityteam.org> (less intuitive – but great), so that the sounds can be changed/distorted.

Declaration of interest: Music Mike Create was designed by David Wheway

Sounds for story-telling (7-11)

This activity uses recorded sounds from around the home for story-telling. Children can tell a story using the recorded sounds – or they can record the story, and add the sounds in additional tracks later, using sequencing software such as Audacity.

Children could also find story and retell it with sounds to create atmosphere and drama.

It might be interesting to create a story just using sounds (with no spoken words), and see if someone else can tell what the story is about.

Musical Clutter

I find I am constantly picking up things of the floor, as my daughter leaves a trail of destruction in her path through the house. My current collection includes:

Straight objects: string, hair clips, pencils of differing lengths, craft pipe-cleaners, Lego

Round objects: bobbles, toy tea-sets, hair doughnuts

Small objects: furry craft pom-poms, polystyrene eggs

Such objects provide a range of opportunities for composing:

1. Children can put them into a particular order – to explore and create patterns and sequences. noticing shape and symmetry in their ideas.
2. Children can explore different sound sources, including found sounds, homemade instruments, (thanks to Andrew Maud for the following useful link - <https://takelessons.com/blog/musical-crafts-and-activities>), voices and body percussion, or their own musical instruments.
3. They can sequence their ideas in layers – music for solo drum, music for two voices, music for violin and cheese-grater.
4. Children can work alone or with others – recording sounds and adding layers using Garageband or Audacity.

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5. These ideas can be drawn or the objects laid out on paper They could be set out on the floor, or even outdoors on the grass. Then maybe more than one person can read and play the piece.
 6. You could limit the number of objects, re-order, have rules (straight objects only)

The lockdown period provides a useful time for us all to consider the creative, inventive and interesting things we can do with children at any time, Exploring and playing with sounds encourages attentive listening, imagination and musical thinking as well as the skills of manipulating sound materials and discovering how we can shape sounds into musical ideas.