



Prologue

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“Can you put on Gems Boin? We are going downstairs to dance,” quipped my three-and-a-half-year-old grandson who just came home from kindergarten school. He had brought home with him his best friend, a girl who lives next door. Barely able to speak Norwegian, he had already picked up how James Brown afforded a good soundtrack for a sort of movement practice called dance, which he often enjoyed doing and which, sometimes, drove his grandfather to exhaustion.

Children today, similar to their parents, may live in an environment saturated with music, especially in their daily consumption of children’s television. Often, they are a captive audience of their parents’ musical preferences of popular music from the 1980s and 1990s. My grandson, for instance, has probably heard more Duran Duran and Tom Waits than I have. Furthermore, his daily hour(s) of children’s television watching may have most likely exposed him to a dozen of different musical genres, as well as tons of animated cartoons scored with “mickey mousing” music and episodes with scary synthesizers, birds, and happy animals singing and dancing. He is familiar with the rules of musical expectancy, how to increase the suspense, color actions, and create fascinating moods with sounds and music.

In the moment, he is probably no more aware of the soundtracks than I am. However, the coupling of sound and image has laid the ground for much tacit knowledge about the relations between different kinds of instruments, rhythms, tempi and digital signatures, and a host of social practices and actual versus virtual realities.

This opening anecdote may illustrate how children from early on not only learn “how to do things with music” but also to identify which music they can appropriate for different uses. What may interest us, of course, is the kinds of music and the values that are transmitted. We may be concerned with how children’s musical skills in singing and listening may be affected, and we may take caution in introducing live music, instruments to try out, and a space for focused listening.

Some may be concerned with the increasing globalization or digitization of the soundtracks we offer our children. Popular musical forms have colonized the market for children’s music, and securing a

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place for musical diversity is certainly a challenge. Children will always enjoy singing and dancing to music, and their abilities to learn new tunes or listen intently to music may still be intact despite hours of unfocused listening.

However, we must remember that music consumption is contextualized by commercial interests and values. Music socialization is socialization into a global market, a first lesson on global capitalism, on the values of individuality, as well as individualism and dreams of stardom. At the same time, the development of a musical agency may afford rich possibilities for utilizing music as a tool to create a personal and social musical identity, a space for reflexivity, and possibilities for personal and social change.

Growing up in a contemporary cross-cultural environment, my grandson will soon learn how music is not only about listening and dancing. The world waiting for him is full of music that points to identities—to ethnicities, social classes, history, times and places, authenticity styles, gender, and politics. He needs to learn to choose from a musical gamut of aesthetic affordances so that he can engage in creating an active musical agency.

We, researchers in children's music, need to prepare ourselves for this situation. What is important to know? What are the consequences of our insights? What recommendations do we give to parents and educators?

Author presentation

Even Ruud, professor emeritus, University of Oslo and the Norwegian Academy of Music. Ruud is trained as a musicologist, music therapist and certified psychologist, and he has been working interdisciplinary within musicology, music therapy and music education. Ruud has been using approaches from the humanities and the social sciences to advance new knowledge within different musical contexts. He has done research into music therapy theory, popular music and music video, music and identity, and music, health and life quality. Many of his books and articles are translated and published internationally.