



## Introduction: Children's music- an emerging field of research

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This special issue is about *children's music* (*barnemusikk*). Children's music is a broad term and may include music produced by adults for children (culture *for* children), music and musical practices that children and adults engage in together (culture *with* children), and the music children themselves make and how they engage with it in their own networks and relations (culture *by* children) (see Mouritsen, 2002, for a discussion of children's culture in general). The three threads of the definition of children's culture and, thus, of children's music, are arguably closely connected. For instance, consider a young child listening to a pop song for children on an iPad while walking rhythmically around the room and singing along to the music. This imagined scene involves music produced *for* a child audience. Moreover, the scene is taking place in a social setting in which adults have provided the child with a technological device that enables the child to listen to music. This means that both parties—child and adult—contribute to this scene of contemporary musical children's culture. Hence, one can describe the situation as culture *with* children. Finally, if the child's musical engagement is focused (moving and singing along with the music), the scene may be described as music *by* children.

For this special issue, we have chosen to concentrate our efforts on children's music as music *for* children, specifically, on music produced and marketed to a child audience (cf. Justdal, 2011; Ruud, 1983; Vestad, 2013). This narrower definition of children's music was arguably introduced by the music industry, which was in need of a term for defining and targeting a specific segment of the audience (Ruud, 1983). As Even Ruud (1983) pointed out several decades ago and stresses again in this issue's "Prologue", knowledge of the "new" children's music is highly needed as a resource for music education. The lack of research into this kind of children's music probably has to do with the skepticism against technology within music education for young children noted by Young (2009). She argues that technology should be seen as an ally:

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Hopefully music technology might be seen as an ally, not as something that threatens the "naturalness" of children's musical activity. Technologies offer the possibility of freeing up some of the limitations of making music with acoustic instruments. They can provide children with more creative, independent and open-ended ways of making music. (Young, 2009, p. 40)

In order to treat children's music as an ally for music education, research that contributes to a better understanding of music produced for a child audience is indispensable.

In this issue, we present approaches to music produced and made available to children through diverse forms of media: television, radio, and phonograms released as cassettes, CDs and Mp3 files. Historically speaking, the number of phonograms aimed at a child audience increased significantly during the 1980s in Norway (Dyndahl, 1986), but the history of children's records goes much further back, both nationally and internationally. The 1950s represent a turning point in the Norwegian setting, given the development of radio broadcasting in Norway. On the international scene, Bubble Books already were introduced to the American audience in 1924, and this publication is now acknowledged as the first book and record hybrid for kids (Smith, 2010a). Smith (2010a) notes that the publisher, the Victor Phonograph Company, referred to the children's market as "boundless and almost untouched," (p. 90) and thus, children were targeted as an important market segment long before the invention of the commercial television broadcasting of the 1950s. In fact, Smith (2010a) underscores that "the major phonograph companies actively sought to develop a children's market for phonograph players and records as early as the 1890s and 1900s" (pp. 91–92).

Despite its fairly long history, phonograms produced and marketed to a child audience have received little scholarly attention among media scholars: "The phonograph industry provides an important missing chapter in the history of the design and marketing of media products for children. Phonograph records have been largely absent from the scholarly history of children's media entertainment" (Smith, 2010a, p. 91). In recent research on children's media, Smith's chapter on phonograms (Smith, 2010b) was published in a book on consumer culture and provides one of the few exceptions to the rule (see Buckingham & Tingstad, 2010). Music—and children's auditory and sonic space in general—is otherwise on the periphery of studies on children and media.

From the perspective of television studies, Deaville (2011) addresses the pervasive presence of music in television for children and the lack of research on the topic. In the beginning of his book *Music in Television: Channels of Listening*, Deaville (2011) argues, "It should not come as a surprise if I were to suggest that many, if not most, readers of this book can trace their first experiences of music and screen media back to television (in all likelihood children's programming)" (p. 1). He calls for further research into television music in general and argues that television music is excluded from musicological attention due to the existing canonic divides. Further, he asserts that music in children's programs has received even less attention. An exception he mentions is a small body of research that targets the music of Sesam Strasse of the 1970s, the German co-production of the American Children Television Workshop's program Sesame Street. Another exception is Lury's (2002) work defining music in children's television as chewing gum for the ears.

The intersection of music produced for a child audience (culture *for* children), technology, and ethnographic approaches to children's everyday lives and musical engagement (culture *by* children) has been more extensively researched. From an ethnographic perspective, Campbell's (2010) book *Songs in Their Heads: Music and Its Meaning in Children's Lives*, first published in 1998, serves for many scholars as a first glance into children's musical everyday lives. Although the "headphoned listener" (p. 242) she mentions does not play a main role in the book, it is made clear that music technology and

recorded music play important roles in children's musical lives. In Scandinavia, adults' relationships with the phonograms of their own childhood has been researched (Paulsson, 2006), and so has young children's uses of phonograms in an everyday-life perspective (Vestad, 2013, 2014). Among the most recent contributions, one finds the work of Bickford (2017) on the use of transportable musical devices among children in elementary school. He argues that music listening is not a solely receptive but an *expressive* practice. By stressing the expressiveness of children's musical practices, he—at least to a certain extent—strengthens an aspect previously addressed in research on children's spontaneous singing (Bjørkvold, 1980, 2007; Knudsen, 2008); it is about *being in the world* more than about expressing taste. However, Bickford (2007) not only shows this rationale's legitimacy in contemporary children's musical media culture but also focuses on the fact that music listening cuts across the domains of schooling, media (entertainment culture), and childhood; they are "mutually constituted fields of meaning and power" (Bickford, 2017, p. 2). This rationale for researching children's music is in line with and supports the overall approach of this special issue.

As this short—and clearly not comprehensive—overview sketches out, children's music can be addressed in a number of ways and may belong to a number of research fields. Even the narrow definition of children's music allows researchers to define a number of research objectives, and several methodological approaches may be fruitful. The articles of this special issue aim to contribute to the emerging research field of children's music by examining music produced and marketed to a child audience from selected perspectives, including approaches based in television studies, popular music studies, music education, sociology of music, ethnography, and discourse analysis. Historical dimensions are brought out as well as contemporary ones. Thus, the topics, perspectives, and approaches presented here obviously do not constitute a complete set of possible productive approaches to children's music. The contributions, however, do expand the existing insights into children's music, and they provide new and valuable knowledge.

The three first articles, each in their own way, shed light on the history of children's music. In the first article, Jonathan Bignell offers analyses of examples of music from British radio and television from the 1920s onward. He develops the ideas based on television studies that children's music, as well as broadcasting for children, is shaped by adults' perceptions of children's needs and by conceptions of childhood. The article discusses different types of broadcast recordings and the various functions of children's television music. Based on his analyses of the music of specific children's television programs, Bignell argues that music contributes to the constitution of the social function of broadcasting for children and, moreover, that the various forms of children's music shape conceptions of childhood.

In the next article, Petter Dyndahl and Ingeborg Lunde Vestad examine children's phonograms released in Norway from World War II to the present. As in Bignell's article, the music's relations to conceptions of childhood are examined. However, Dyndahl and Vestad base their approach in sociological and music cultural theories. They discuss the pop-rockization of children's music and also point out contradictions between pedagogical and commercial interests in the realm of children's music. Their contribution includes an outline of three epochs in the development of children's music: The Early Years (1945–1959)—Traditional Children's Songs and Jazz; The Formative Period (1960–1985)—Pop Music Enters the Stage; and Continuity, Consolidation, and Change (1986–2016)—Popular Music Diversification.

The third article by Eirik Askerøi contributes a popular music studies approach to children's music. The broader historical frame outlined in the previous article by Dyndahl and Vestad is applied as a basis. Askerøi, however, provides more detailed readings of selected examples of children's music well known to a child audience, and these readings are to be understood as spot checks of different historical periods.

The concept of *musical moments* (Hawkins, 2009) serves as a basis for Askerøi's approach, but he also applies his previously developed concept of *sonic markers* (Askerøi, 2013). Based on the readings of the examples, he argues that sonic markers contribute to fictional narratives and narratives of the real, and he shows how these markers contribute to the youthification of childhood.

The two last contributions address the evaluation of music more specifically. John Vinge's article explores questions of quality and value in music for children, supported by social constructivism and phenomenological methodology. He makes a strong point that quality is performative and that it is "constructed in the active interplay between music as an aesthetic object and the listener's perception" (p. 2). The article's main question of what is good and bad children's music is discussed along the lines of two subquestions: the criteria for evaluation of children's music and who the evaluators are. The first section outlines the criteria from a theoretical point of view. In the final sections, he explores the ways in which various recipients and agents—that is, children, parents, teachers, producer's, and composers—assess quality in children's music. Vinge concludes that quality in children's music is an adverbial phenomenon; it is about "the ways in which it is good" (p. 13), and he suggests that diversity and variety are important aspects of good-quality children's music.

In the final article, Vestad and Dyndahl approach legitimation and canonization in children's music by an ethnographic and discourse-analytical approach. The similarity with Vinge's article is obvious, in that Vestad and Dyndahl also discuss the processes of evaluation as something that happens in the course of everyday life—that is, *in action*—and in that the evaluation of children's music is impossible to separate from the prevailing conceptions of "the child" and of "childhood." Overall, Vestad and Dyndahl find that the idea of a canon of children's music regulates the participants' choices of musical repertoires and practices. However, the traditional canon is contested, and parallel canons are formed. Four threads of legitimation of children's music are defined and discussed: to sustain and revalidate the "good, old stuff," the need for renewal of the repertoire of children's music, the inclusion of music that is not aimed especially at a child audience, and—similar to what is underscored by Vinge—the need for a wide array of genres and sentiments.

The Epilogue of the last article ties the pieces of this special issue together in raising questions about how teachers in schools and in early childhood education are prepared to handle the complexity of children's musical worlds and to support children's musical interests and engagement. In this issue, the authors have contributed with their advanced and valuable insights into particular sides of children's music. In addition, the contributions suggest specific topics and fruitful approaches for research in this field. It is with the hope that the special issue enhances the reflective awareness of children's music, and that it may serve as a foundation for a general discussion of what is important to know, as Ruud stresses in the "Prologue." Some consequences of the authors' insights are discussed in each of the articles. However, further research and other reflective efforts are needed in order to discuss properly the consequences of the knowledge presented here for classroom practices.

Finally, my sincere thanks to each of the contributors for sharing their expertise and devoting their time and effort on this special issue on children's music, and to the journal's editorial board, especially Jan Sverre Knudsen and Jon Helge Sætre, for granting us the opportunity to produce a special issue on this topic and for their helpful support along the way.

## Author presentation

**Ingeborg Lunde Vestad** is an associate professor at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences. Her research interests include music education, cultural theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, and children's media. She holds a PhD in musicology and music education from the University of Oslo. Her doctoral dissertation, *Children's Uses of Recorded Music: On the Constitution of Musical Meaning from the Perspective of Children's Culture* (2013), explores how musical affordances are discursively constituted in the everyday lives of young children. In addition to her continuing ethnographically oriented work on uses of music (phonograms) in parenting and early childhood education, her current research is about music in children's radio and television programs in a historical perspective. Vestad has contributed to international journals such as *Music Education Research; Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education (ACT)*; the book series *European Perspectives on Music Education*; and the *Nordic Research in Music Education Yearbook*.

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