



MUSIC TOGETHER®

MUSIC TOGETHER OF THE GREATER ROCKFORD AREA

MusicNotes, MTGRA Newsletter for Parents and Children

Bongos Collection, Issue 2, 2008



Who is Johnny Brown??

And what is his comfort?!

An historic look at the song

Our featured song for this newsletter is "Little Johnny Brown." This is a centuries old ring game and song collected by Bessie Jones. Her grandfather had been brought from Africa as a slave to the Georgia Sea Islands, just off of the coast of Georgia. Bessie, who was born in 1902, learned a large and rich collection of children's songs and games from him. In the late 1940's Alan Lomax met Bessie and began to document these songs. How fortunate we are that he did, because we now have recordings and videos of music from distinct culture from another century. To help document this material, a book titled "Step It Down" was written with Bessie in the 1970's. It is still the best source available for African American children's music, and can be found in many libraries and book stores.

Bessie is quoted as saying, "You've got to time it right to play it right." She insisted that the comfort (comforter) be spread down on the fourth line of the verse so that there was no awkward time to be filled in by the child in the center. The folding of the comfort (usually represented by a man's handkerchief or bandana) is ceremonial: one corner is folded to the center, and then the opposite corner is folded, then the side corners, leaving a much reduced square of cloth. The player walks around to a different corner of the handkerchief and stoops down to fold each corner. The original game then calls for the player to dance over and "take it to your lover," who is the next person in the circle. The player then does a free dance while everyone sings "show him/her) your motion." Now the player follows the directions to "lope like a buzzard." The last thing is to "give it to your lover," where the player hands the folded handkerchief to the new player, who goes to the center of the ring and the game starts all over. If you want to see how it was done, just go to YouTube.com and enter "little johnny brown bessie jones." From there look for a video of Bessie Jones and the Children from Downtown Community School performing the game. Look carefully in the background of this 9 minute video, and you'll see a very young Pete Seeger playing the banjo!

Children of all ages played this game together, and we're sure they improvised like we do when we shake it high, low, left, and right, or put it on our heads, or jump like a bunny, or??? Go ahead - have some fun and "lay that comfort down!"

Quick Thoughts about our Movement Activities

We have used a lot of movement in class. Movement expresses music and helps us to understand many musical concepts. Here is a basic outline of movement types that we have used in class. Once you, the caregiver, have an understanding of these principles, it might be easier to create your own adaptations at home!

Movement as an Expression of Music

- Expression of the lyric—motions are related to the words or are reflective of the lyric or mood of the lyric (Eensy Weensy Spider or Open and Shut them)
- Expression of the form—motions are reflective of the sections of the piece (Shoo Fly) or even the phrases of the piece (Lil Liza Jane)
- Expression of the meter—motion is reflective of the beat structure (walking Through the Woods)
- Free Dance—personal creation based on personal choice. Can reflect lyric, structure, or beat of the piece. Is created in real time.

This information is strictly for adults. Please don't share this knowledge with your toddler, but keep in mind that you are teaching your child musical concepts while you are moving! Have fun creating new movement!

Featured Location

Midway Village Museum Center



This month we are featuring Midway Village Museum Center. Music Together holds classes at the Chamberlain Hotel in Midway Village on Thursday mornings at 10:00 am. We chose the Hotel because of its homey feel and fantastic location within the historic village at the Museum. If you have never had the pleasure of visiting Midway Village, join us for a class there someday! You will fall in love with the place!

Good Tunes

What we've been listening to lately

November is a great time to listen to American patriotic music in honor of Veteran's Day. I personally love John Philip Sousa's marches and think that all people residing in Illinois should be aware that a vast library of Sousa's compositions is housed in Champaign-Urbana at the University of Illinois. It's a treasure for all musicians. Here's a link for more information: <http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/students/r-rosas/souscoll.htm> Since November ends with an American Holiday, Thanksgiving, it is appropriate to continue to listen to American composers. I love Aaron Copland, Scott Joplin, William Billings, George Gershwin, and many others. I also love to integrate new music into my listening and try to find composers who are still alive and writing and listen to performances of their music as well. Supporting today's artists is important! It is a perfect time to listen to American music and celebrate our rich musical identity.

Upcoming Events

Donut Day

Donut Days

Donut Days is the week of November 3 through November 8. Join us for donuts and cider after your Music Together class!

Preregistration is OPEN

Preregistration for the Winter Semester is open. This is the time to register for our Winter Semester of Music Together, which will feature the "Bells" Collection. There will be all new songs and activities to share with your family! We have several new class times offered and we hope these will fill. If you are considering returning, please register early. It helps us to plan our rental spaces and to secure our class schedules. Check out our new schedule on the website and reserve your spot today! Classes start January 12, 2009.

www.musictogethergra.com

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