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Songs in Their Heads
One of the people, an older woman, came forward.

"Welcome," she said. "Haere mai." She took the young woman's arm and led her forward to meet the others. "I see you found your way here, then. We've been expecting you. Did you get any help on the way?"

"Yes," said the young woman. "Yes, I did. They all gave me their music."

"Oh, how nice!" said the older woman. "And what did you do with it?"

"I don't know," said the young woman. "It went into me. It filled my head. It changed me."

"No," said the older woman. "It didn't change you. What did you do as you came to us?"

"I sang a song."

"Was it the music you had heard?"

"Yes, No."

"It was your song," said the older woman. "The song only you can sing. That's what music has done for you. It has helped you find yourself."

—from John Drummond, *Music for Life*
I hadn’t expected Nathan’s comment, and it stopped me cold. It was freely volunteered as I walked through the gate to the schoolyard at Vista Elementary School, and I found myself in conversation with him. What songs? Where had they come from? How did they sound, and what were the words? What did they mean to him? Was music so integrated within the life of this child that he could be asleep with, and awakening to, these songs? I was from that moment on intrigued with the notion of children like Nathan in every schoolyard with songs in their heads, in possession of music and ideas about music that I had naively assumed could only happen through formal training—in school, in private lessons, under the direction of experts. Were these the songs of the musically gifted? Or do all children carry within them musical gifts—songs, musical “urges,” and thoughts about music—at the edge of their consciousness?

I began to wonder whether music may be more central to children’s lives that it may seem, at least from the perspective of adults—“outsiders” to their culture. Perhaps the issue was not so narrowly the content of songs they knew (although that could be of interest) but whether music—live or mediated—was of much importance and use to them. Despite my many years of teaching music to children, I had precious little information on music’s place in their lives. It had been a long while since I had my own inside track on childhood, and the nature of children’s thoughts and values; my own childhood was now a blur in the distant past. If I
was to expect to communicate with them, to reach them where they musically are, then I needed to listen to and watch them in an open and receptive, yet focused and uncluttered way.

Coincidentally, I stood at the periphery of that same Vista Elementary School’s yard a year later, fulfilling my time as a teacher assigned to playground duty, and found myself listening to the children. As they ran past me, calling and shouting to one another, I heard distinctive pitches, then phrases and full melodies. I saw patterns in their movements, alone and together, that were both rhythmic and regular. Were these the natural musical behaviors of children? Or some combination of their musical enculturation (music in the home and mass-mediated music) and schooling? What melodies and rhythms were prominent? Just how were children using music in their play? It occurred to me then that while I poured experiences into them in their weekly music classes, I had seldom observed children in their own undirected play for evidence of their music—natural or acquired, songs or song segments, even rhythms without pitches—but their music, nonetheless.

A theme was emerging, and with this project I took aim—at children for who they musically are, and at teachers and parents responsible for who their children musically can become. Through a combination of what I’d hoped would be nonreactive, unobtrusive observations and interviews with children in rather freeflowing conversations, I decided that I would direct my efforts toward knowing children, their music, and the meaning of their musical behaviors, thoughts, and interests. It was a rational decision to cut to the quick, to consult with children as the primary sources of what I needed to know. I would go from and return to my own perspective as teacher and parent, and figure ways of fitting what insights children might offer on their musical lives into thoughts about their education and schooling. The mission set and the course laid out, the mysteries of musical children began to unravel themselves to me.

The Serious Business of Musical Play

Clearly, music happens to children. Some of it may be hidden, untapped, and yet spinning within them. Yet much of it is “visible” and surely audible. It shows itself in the songs they sing and in the rhythms and pitched inflections of their play—on swings and slides; in the toy cars, wagons, and bicycles they ride; through the stories they enact with stuffed bears, dolls, and the imaginary drivers of their tiny race cars; and in the jumprope chants, hand-clapping rhymes, ball games and stick games, and ring and line games they play. Children think aloud through music. They socialize, vent emotions, and entertain themselves through music. Their bodies stretch, bend, step, hop, and skip in rhythmic ways, while their melodic voices rise and fall, turn fast and then slow, loud and then soft. Their music can be “seen” and heard in their playful behaviors, some of it a realization of the songs in their heads. It is almost as if children exude music.
John Blacking (1973) posited that music is not an optional relish for life but a phenomenon that lies at the foundation of society. He maintained that music-making is "an inherited biological predisposition which is unique to the human species" (p. 7), a trait that emerges early and often in the lives of children and adults alike. Yet if the music children think and do is one of the key features of their childhoods, it frequently goes unrecognized by adults, overlooked by the very people who most want the fuller development of children as thinkers, "feelers," and doers—now and in their maturity. Children's engagement in music frequently is paid minimal attention by teachers and parents, even when it may be the rich repository of children's intimate thoughts and sentiments. They have opinions about music, perspectives about where and when they listen and "do" music, and for what reasons. They have decided what music is, what it is not, and how much of it to allow into their lives. Music may be the treasure children prize for their own personal pleasure, and a tool for their use in understanding the world in which they live. Music may be their own expansive and expressive thinking at work, a means through which to develop thoughtful reflections of their experiences. But we have seldom taken time to tap either the musical thoughts or the natural musical behaviors of children or to seek systematically the function of music in their daily lives.

If music is a childhood constant, then it must be meaningful to them. This book is about music and its meaning in children's lives. It explores their musical interests and needs, based on their expressed thoughts and actual "musicizing" behaviors. It is a blending of songs they sing, rhythms they make, and roles music plays for them. It is a search for how music is personally and socially meaningful to them, and what values they place on particular musical styles, songs, and functions. Its "stories" are intended to present children as individuals, each with a unique set of personal experiences, who reflect on their relationship to music and their musical choices, and who also behave musically—in musical collectives of children—while at play. This volume provides glances into the musical lives of children—children of various ages and stages, classes and cultures—and it may also give a more complete picture of children and music in our society. Importantly, it upholds the position articulated by Christopher Small (1977) that "music is too important to be left (only) to the musicians," as music is already in the possession of children prior to schooling or specialized training.

Charles Seeger long advocated the use of folk music in the classroom—"music that people have in them already" (in Dunaway, 1980, p. 168), for this music summarizes the beliefs and values of individuals, their communities and cultures. The music children have within them, as well as their thoughts about music, are starting points for understanding their values, their knowledge, and their needs. Their voices, as much as the voices of experts, should help to determine something of an educational plan for them, for this is how a musical education can be in touch with their lives and experiences. Through our astute observations of music
that happens to children, we are better situated for considering instructional interventions and enrichments for them.

A Cross-Disciplinary Interest

The images of musical children presented within these pages builds upon the work of ethnomusicologists, folklorists, sociologists, and educators that have come before. Some have centered their study on an analysis of the musical content of children’s songs, while several key studies have sought out the social and cultural significance of music in children’s lives, and the manner in which they acquire, create, preserve, and transmit music. In his classic study of children’s play songs, Constantin Brailoiu (1954) examined their rhythms for the parallel components in Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. He noted quarter- and eighth-note durations that, while extremely simple in principle, were combined by resourceful children in almost unlimited variation. John Blacking’s detailed analysis of children’s songs among the Venda of South Africa (1967) is a much-acclaimed examination on the subject of musical children, with its review of musical (and social and cultural) patterns and their relationships to the music of adults. Nearly a generation later, Bruno Nettl (1983) issued a call for the scholarly study of children’s music as a means of understanding the central repertory and style of a society (p. 332). He noted the significance of children’s songs as a musical subset for gaining a wider view of a particular culture as well as understanding something of certain universal properties in children’s music—including short forms, restricted scales, and repetitive rhythms (1990). As ethnomusicologists consider the premise that a society may be musically divided according to age and maturation, repertoires and musical behaviors of children open for examination.

Indeed, the occasional convergence of ethnomusicalological and educational interests have enlightened and have begun to shape a more comprehensive understanding of children, music, and society at large. Educators have just begun to apply aspects of the ethnomusicalological (and ethnographic) method to children’s songs and musical play, in an attempt to discern the complexity of both children’s performance practice and the contemporary musical environment in which they are enculturated. Pragmatically, implications for educational practice often follow collection and analysis, with suggestions for the development of curriculum that honors children’s demonstrated musicking. Studies of musical play have been directed toward children in American urban schools and playgrounds (Campbell, 1991a; Harwood, 1987; Merrill-Mirsky, 1988; Riddell, 1990), British-Canadian children (Osborn, 1988), Jamaican children (Hopkin, 1984), Portuguese children (Prin, 1995–96), Ghanian children (Addo, 1996), Australian inner-city schoolchildren (Marsh, 1994, 1995), and children in an aboriginal Australian Pitjantjara settlement (Kartomi, 1991).
One classic descriptive study of children’s musical explorations was the Pillsbury Project (1978). Initiated by Gladys E. Moorhead, an educator, and composer Donald Pond in 1937, young children at the Pillsbury Foundation School in Santa Barbara, California, were introduced to an environment enriched by an array of percussion instruments (including Indonesian saron [xylophones], Chinese and Japanese theater drums, and various gongs and bells) and tracked for their interest and interactions with them. The children learned as they engaged in creative play, sometimes with their teacher but often through their free explorations. Their musical ideas were recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and reported. The children’s expressive output varied widely and was sometimes particularly complex. In a review of the school some thirty years after its closure, Donald Pond retrospectively remarked that children appeared to have a predilection for building sound-shapes, for improvising alone and together, and for using polyphonic rather than harmonic structures in their expressions (1981).

The efforts of folklorists to study the traditional songs and singing games of children has been increasingly apparent since the late nineteenth century. Lady Alice Gomme’s work on traditional children’s games (published in multiple volumes from 1894 through 1898) preserves rhymes and rituals in England, Scotland, and Ireland that were already historical relics, “survivals of primitive custom” (p. vii). Her American contemporary, William Wells Newell, contributed his Games and Songs of American Children in 1883, with an expanded edition published in 1903. Both Gomme and Newell are credited with providing the foundation and impetus for the extensive interest in the literary content of children’s lore through the next century. Roger D. Abrahams (1969), Simon Bronner (1988), and Brian Sutton-Smith (1976) have examined the games, rhymes, songs, chants, and other playful interactions of children; their literature is now so strong that they are sometimes distinguished as specialists in “childlore.” Peter and Iona Opie (1985) richly and in intricate detail accounted for the singing games of children, tracing some to medieval carols and courtship dances and to variants in the far corners of the English-speaking world. These accounts of childlore and “childsong” have been important in initiating one strand of the present search.3

The Lomaxes—John Avery Sr., his son, Alan, and his daughter, Bess Lomax Hawes—worked “in the seams” between the fields of folklore and ethnomusicology to document folk song in various regions and contexts throughout the United States. From cowboy songs (1910) to ballads (1934, with its twenty-second printing in 1968), these songs were sung by adults to children and, as well, by children to children. Ruth Crawford Seeger’s seminal book American Folk Songs for Children (1948) was a result of her transcriptions of songs from the Lomax recordings that she deemed appropriate for use with young children. In collaboration with Georgia Sea Island singer Bessie Jones, Hawes prepared a volume that would document the musical lore of African American children living on the islands off the southeastern American coast (1972). While some choose to study the literary
content of children’s songs, the Lomax-Seeger-Hawes efforts were directed toward understanding the musical reflections of children as an important segment of American society.

In 1994, my colleagues and I took a slightly different tack on a collection of children’s songs with the publication of Roots and Branches. Rather than recording children at play, we tapped the memories of sixteen adults by inviting them to remember songs from their childhoods; these were recorded, transcribed, and described by singers from as many cultures (Campbell, McCullough-Brabson, and Tucker). For us, their contextual descriptions were as important as the tunes themselves. It was startling to observe how their remembered games and animated gestures seemed to magically shed years from their lives as they became—while they sang—like the children they once had been.

The issue for many folklorists and educators has been to determine the musical and textual properties of children’s songs, and certainly one component of this text is to build upon and extend this knowledge. Yet these pages are more centrally devoted to the critical need for a fuller knowledge of children’s sense-making of their musical worlds, and of their personal worlds through music. At the brink of the millennium, the questions flow. What do children musically do, on their own and unassisted by adults? Are they engaged in musical play in ways typical of a generation or two ago? Do they “make up” their own music in active ways, or do they seek out the mediated music of tapes and videos to stimulate or dull them? How do children acquire music, and what parts of this repertoire and activity do they value enough to retain? Is music meaningful to them? From the very young to the prepubescent, and regardless of the socioeconomic levels and lifestyles of their families, children’s musical impulses may be more similar than different, with more to unite than divide them. But this is mere musing at the moment, and the impetus for seeking, gathering, and telling the tales of the children who are willing to share them.

The work of Charles Keil and his colleagues Susan D. Crafts and Daniel Cavicchi (Crafts, Cavicchi, and Keil, 1993) in their Music in Daily Life Project was an important springboard to this volume. Their intent in the presentation of forty interviews, including six children, was to reflect upon the idiosyncratic musical worlds in which people live. They applied the art of semistructured and unstructured interviews as means of understanding “the unique configuration of ways to be ‘into’ those musics that emerges from each interview” (p. 211). They sought to understand how people use and enjoy music, and how music is persuasive and powerful to them. From a sociological perspective and a bona fide interest in the human need for and use of music, they presented a picture of music in the daily life of (mostly) adults. Their project continues, even as this one followed one of its tangents.

Another launch to this volume was the set of ethnographic tales told by members of an ethnographic seminar conducted by Bruno Nettl in Community of Music
(Livingston et al., 1993). They presented in rich contextual description the lives of musicians working in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Using record stores, jazz clubs, country-western bars, practice rooms, and sidewalk cafes as their settings, they probed musicians and their audiences to determine what repertoire and practices were alive and well in that midwestern community. Through a variety of ethnographic techniques, they gained insights into the roles that music played for people in these contexts. As I read these tales, I found myself wondering why groups of children have not been much studied in similar ways for their own musical "works," practices, and thoughts. In their array of neighborhood gatherings and school assemblages, they, too, constitute a community worthy of careful examination for the music they make.

The Contextual Study of Children and Their Music

An understanding of children’s musical worlds to which this work orients itself requires knowledge of music, children, and research method. While there is a body of research on children’s perception and cognition of music and their musical skills, knowledge, and attitudes, much of it is antiseptic, dry, and disconnected from children-as-real-people. It is often devoid of context and without the flavor of children in their “real-life” dimensions of talking about and “doing” music. Further, this literature is associated with stages of child development that are inevitable, rather than allowing consideration of the unpredictable waywardness of the everyday child. In these conversations and cases of musical play, aspects of the ethnographic method are alive and well, particularly in the contextual descriptions of children and their music, the application of strategies in nonparticipant observation, and interviews that bordered on those utilized in phenomenological research. The lived experiences of individual children were sought, such that I was able to go to children with questions about musical uses and meanings but could also abandon these issues as will when their streams of consciousness led us elsewhere (Stewart and Mickunas, 1990). In the spirit of (and through techniques espoused by) Howard Becker (1986), Clifford Geertz (1973, 1983), and John van Maanen (1990), the aim of this project was to give voice to the children on their musicking and musical thinking. I suspected that individual children and groups of children would reveal to me much about themselves but that they would also provoke thinking about the nature of musical children as a whole.

I sought “slices of life” through techniques that would allow me to identify and discuss important musical values and meanings in the world of children. From semstructured and open-ended, “free-flow” interviews and mostly nonparticipant observations, I produced fieldnotes, audio- and videotaped records and their transcriptions, and musical notations. These data form the substance of the cases and conversations that follow, the results of sixteen months (more or less) spent listening to the children. Yet some of my comments and reflections spin also from
my many years as a teacher of music to children, from thousands of hours I have 
gladly spent listening and watching them, talking to them, making music with 
them. Other reflections are linked to some of the literature that exists at the in-
terface of music, education, anthropology, ethnomusicology, and folklore and are a 
result of my attempts to corroborate my own experiences with those of others who 
have put their research and ideas into print. The text that unfolded within and at 
the periphery of the collected data offers an amalgam of impressions, a bit of 
theory, my own brand of teacher's intuition and instinct, personal convictions 
based on my experiences with children, and conclusions based on examination of 
these parts; it is a cross between the product of ethnographic research and straight-
forward reporting that emanates from observations of children in the "field" of 
classrooms, and at large in the world beyond. I was "condemned," as Clifford 
Geertz called it (1973; p. 13), to a dialogue between the foreign culture (children) 
and my own adult culture. Any broad profile or summary extrapolated by the 
reader from these pages is undoubtedly bound to be more than the sum of data 
gathered for this project, and I take full responsibility for shifting out of a more 
 scholarly mode (when I do) in an attempt to provide a realistic, if even a home-
 spun, sense of musical children. In these pages instead is a weaving of the children 
described, the literature cited, and the equally influential realities of well over 
twenty years of my experiences as a teacher of music to children.

I would be remiss were I not to note three books of recent vintage which, 
while not relevant to the subject of children and music, were nonetheless vivid 
models of contextual description of music in culture, and of musical communities. 
Henry Kingsbury's Music, Talent, and Performance: A Conservatory Cultural Sys-
tem (1988) is his dissertation of detailed observations of a major East Coast con-
servatory, in which he profiled students and their teachers in lessons, in ensemble 
settings, and at practice. Ruth Finnegan wrote The Hidden Musicians: Music Mak-
ing in an English Town (1989), providing glances at the various ways in which 
people in the town of Milton Keynes, England, were engaged as musicians—in 
choirs, rock groups, symphonies, jazz bands, chamber music ensembles, and 
school groups, among others. Bruno Nettl's Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusico-
logical Reflections on Schools of Music (1995) is a view of the society of musi-
cians encompassed within a school of music at one of the major state universities 
in the midwestern American "heartland." These works were in mind as I pursued 
my conversations and gathered my fieldnotes, and they gave further direction to 
my pursuit of music as it is contextualized in children's lives. Their authors freshly 
define and extend the meaning of culture and led me to the realization of children 
as one large age-culture, but also as separate school and playgroup cultures. Along 
with Charles Keil's somewhat phenomenological approach to individuals as "idi-
cultures" (1994) and the premise advanced by Bruno Nettl and his seminarians 
(Livingston et al. 1993), that there are musical ethnographies to be fashioned from 
a host of contexts, these writings gave weight and direction to the current project.
In Pursuit of a Trilogy

The following trilogy presented here argues for recognizing the quality of children’s natural musical selves in their somewhat unadulterated (although not unabridged) forms, as a means of developing a more meaningful musical (and general) education for them.

“In Music: Children at Musical Play” comprises brief ethnographic descriptions of music children make while engaged in play or in social interaction with one another. Their vocalizations and rhythmic movements and the manner in which they infuse songs and musical fragments into their play are documented. Musical notations fill out and amplify these cases. The settings I have selected for description include those in school (the schoolyard, a preschool play yard, a school cafeteria, and the music room itself), and several locales beyond school (a school bus and a well-stocked, premier, and popular toy store). I have sought out children’s interactions with musical or, minimally, “sound,” objects—and have listened and watched carefully for the musical nuances of their vocalizations, gestures, and full-body movements. From mostly nonparticipant, “fly-on-the-wall” observations, I attempted to write narrative tales of children who use music unknowingly or intentionally, but mostly beyond the direct influence of teachers or other adults. As in the case of the conversations, my commentaries are intended to highlight particular expressions and actions that demonstrate the musical nature of children who play and think aloud in musical ways and to consider how these observations compare to what we profess to already know about their musical behaviors.

“On Music: Conversations with Children” divulges the substance of my dialogues with children from ages four through twelve and offers their views of music and its meaning to them, in their own words. It probes the music they know, listen to, sing, and play regularly, and also that which they discard. Again, notated examples of some of their own musical expressions offer further description of their music and musical thinking. Sometimes explicitly and in concrete times, and other times in inventive and imaginative fashion, the musical thoughts and preferences of children are conveyed in dialogue form, much as they had occurred in the classrooms, cafeterias, hallways, schoolyards (and clothes closets!) of our conversational meetings. Seldom did I adhere rigidly to put questions or concerns during these meetings; rather, I attempted to allow the spontaneity and freshness of children’s own flow of ideas and to preserve them here. While there were global issues I hoped to raise with the children, I had decided at the outset to press gently—and to release—if a child did not appear interested or comfortable. My brief commentaries follow each dialogue, as I ponder aloud some of their striking thoughts that confirm, challenge, or add to the knowledge on children’s musical selves.

Part III, “For Children: Prospects for Their Musical Education,” summarizes some of the distinctive features of children’s music, musical practices, and thoughts
about music. Their own natural musical behaviors, and those developed through their interactions with family members, other children and adults within their neighborhood community, and the media, are discussed as initial, midway, and resultant products of how they musically are: These reflections lead to further musings as to how formal instruction can be made more relevant when emanating from our knowledge of children’s musically enculturated skills and knowledge. While the first two sections allow the voices of the children themselves to be heard, the third part recommends some ways of applying the views of musical children to our teaching and child-rearing practices. It is the practical part of the text, yet it does not offer lessons per se. Rather, it calls further attention to children’s needs and interests in music and muses about some of the pathways adults—teachers and parents—can take in nurturing them. The intent of the trilogy is woven through the three sections, with its crux embedded in this final section: the development of an awareness of children as incipient musicians all, awaiting the intervention and stimulation of strong instructional programs.

Listen to the children, I kept telling myself, so as to learn who they musically are. That was my goal as I launched this project, and my advice to those eager to know children’s musical reckonings and reasonings. For teachers, and parents, too, who make music with children, hoping to develop their musicking abilities, the dialogues and descriptions that follow portray children’s musical selves, from the songs in their heads to the music they make out loud. They direct pathways toward the realization of children’s individual and collective musical potentials. Embedded within the words of children are the seeds for more appropriate instruction relevant to their needs, just as wrapped within their behaviors are the telling signs of what they can musically do. From these revelations of songs, rhythms, and musical reflections can come not only a deeper perspective of the musical nature of children but also the basis for their more effective musical education.
1

In Music: Children at Musical Play

Narrative Tales

In the nooks and crannies of home, school, and neighborhood, and even within the times and places reserved for musical study, there is a steady current of children’s own music-in-the-making that underlies the various activities in which they engage. Sometimes they are unaware of this musicicking, as it flows almost in a stream-of-consciousness way from their voices and bodies. Yet it is also made by children with the full intent of preserving a song, rhythm, or game buoyed by music. This music may even be their concentrated efforts to make up music that expresses their thoughts in musical ways.

Ethnomusicologists have examined music-in-the-making in cultures both foreign and familiar, abroad and at home. In the early life of the discipline, much of the research occurred elsewhere, often in exotic settings almost anywhere but at home. Scholars once flew off for India, Java, the Congo, the Pacific, and the Native American lands to seek out the meaning of music in culture and as culture. Then, with the growth of urban populations and the rise of the subdiscipline of urban anthropology (along with the dissipation of funding for research in isolated rural fields abroad), it became fashionable by the early 1970s to “do ethnomusicology” at home in the cities and suburbs of North America (Nettl, 1992). A flood of works began to pour forth on blues, gospel, jazz, polka, mariachi, country, and rock music in American contexts. Western European art music is the “last bastion” style now undergoing examination by ethnomusicologists (Nettl, 1995); techniques once reserved for the music of the Chopi or the minority peoples of China are now being applied to the study of the musical cultures of urban American cultures.
(Nettl, 1978), small cities (Finnegan, 1989), conservatories (Kingsbury, 1988), and schools of music (Nettl, 1995).

Yet there is still another "bastion" to be challenged, and to be understood through field research. The musical culture (or cultures) of children have been largely overlooked and under-researched by ethnomusicologists and has rarely been studied ethnographically by educators. The former may view children as naive subjects for their research, as their typical thrust is to know the central music of a culture as it is typically perceived, conceived, and performed by adults. Research in education, on the other hand, has been largely devoted to the study of children in formal instructional settings, where experimental and behavioral procedures so characteristic of educational research in the past are applied to determine the effects of one or another treatment on knowledge and skill acquisition and on attitudes toward music and its instruction. This research is grounded in the supposition that children learn music at school, and while it does not deny children's musical development and learning outside of school, it has all too seldom sought out issues or raised questions beyond the classroom. The possibilities for the ethnographic, even ethnomusicological, examination of groups of children as their own individual musical cultures loom large. The challenge beckons, and it is tantalizing.

Thus, I began my probing of children's informal musicking. As I watched and listened to children gathering in various settings, I asked a basic research question: "What (musically) is going on here?" It seemed that Bronislaw Malinowski's advice (1922), recently professed by Nettl (1995) as an approach to ethnographic research, was well worth heeding: to note "the imponderabilia of everyday life." Thus, as I became aware of how children dressed, what children ate, how a room was decorated, and who interacted with them, I made notes. As children spoke, sang, gestured, danced, and became rhythmic in their vocalizations and their movement, I "wrote it down." I decided that maybe the little things were worth looking at and could inform me later as I sat back to ponder the "imponderables."

The six settings of children at musical play, all located within a large American metropolis, represent just over half of the eleven settings I had systematically observed over a period of about one year (in one case, over several years.) Some settings were abandoned early on because of my inability to gain further access to them for a sufficient number of repeated observations. One was set aside because of insights already gained through observations of other settings, and two more were abandoned because of the sparsity of musical "moments."¹ The communities from which these descriptions are drawn are both urban and suburban and represent various strata of lower- and middle-income classes (and a few that are undeniably affluent). The girls and boys in these settings range in age from preschool to prepubescence and hail from a variety of social and ethnic-cultural backgrounds. Just a few of the same children with whom I conversed in Part II appear among the children described in these group settings, but for the most part they are not the children featured in these observations. In fact, most children described in these cases make their only appearance here in this section, and not beyond it.
My approach to these cases of children at musical play shows signs of classic ethnography, yet none of them arise from the characteristic three-way union of observations with interviews and "material culture," that is, a review of written documents. My intention was not to produce "ethnographie à clef." Rather, the descriptions emerge almost exclusively from my nonparticipant, nonreactive observations and may be seen as akin to the field experience observations that educators make in evaluating teaching and learning in school classrooms. I fully intended to act as an anthropological "fly on the wall" and to attempt to know something of their musical and social worlds from what I could see and hear—but without becoming a participant in their musical play. The teacher in me sometimes yearned to join in with the children, but, true to the traditional field experiences of education majors (and also due to my promise to teachers and caretakers to be unobtrusive), I remained on the periphery. In all but one case (where I only "field-noted" children's behaviors and remarks), I audio- and/or videotaped children for later recall and analysis. Not all of my taping served me well, however, so I abandoned several blurred and hazy (if not indecipherable) dialogues on tape and often resorted to my jottings and field notes to guide my writing and reflection. In all instances, I revisited the same setting (and for the most part, the same group of children) four or more times. Children were generally aware of my presence and were sometimes curious enough to question me about my purpose. Some inquired as to what I was writing and why I was writing and examined my tape and video recorders; several even peered over my shoulder to read what I had noted in my book. Whatever I experienced, including children's verbal remarks to me, I made note of for my own contemplation later. I jotted down my observations and typically "wrote up" my field notes and impressions within a few days' time. I took notes from the tapes and listened to or viewed certain segments repeatedly to aid me in notating music or analyzing what had transpired.

I have chosen to write these observations as narrative tales, basing the text on careful analysis of field notes but attempting to use standard literary conventions to keep the interest of the reader. Of the types of ethnography which John van Maanen (1988) described, my narrative tales may come closest to the realist sort: "author-proclaimed descriptions" and "explanations for certain specific, bounded, observed cultural practices" (p. 45). The field notes were the building blocks, however; these tales are not fictionalized essays but real children in real settings, making real music. Would that I could emulate John McPhee's approach to writing nonfiction (Howarth, 1976); I might then have shaped my observations in his style of "the literature of fact," turning my observations into the literary genre he has fashioned. But lest we would become lost in a too-dense collage of poetic descriptions, I tapered the extent to which elaborate modifiers and word-heavy images were fit into the text. From lavish texts that might sideswipe important facets, I have in multiple revisions come to a more controlled (though perhaps not so very literary) set of descriptions.

Each narrative tale is infused with my occasional asides and remarks, my personal reflections of children's use of music, notes on the content of their songs,
chants, and rhythmic movements, and the process by which they preserved and transmitted these "pieces." Norman K. Denzin's image of crafting a bricolage is a fitting one (1978), as in the end I hoped that the various notes, transcriptions, and comments might offer a portrait of children's musicicking at a particular time and place. I attempted to restrict my comments to the children observed and rarely refer to what children do or believe at large within these tales; at this stage, I think it valuable to locate any of my statements of belief in particular events and persons observed. Frequently, I remind myself that I am seeking understanding of children through these tales, as a dialectic of experience and interpretation. This is the stance of James Clifford (1988), and I have attempted to make it mine.

The Tales

The Horace Mann Schoolyard

I initially wondered whether the steady drizzle would prevent the children from taking their noontime recess in the schoolyard but learned later of the school policy that stipulated that indoor play was reserved only for times of fierce cold or stormy weather. I could hear them over a block away, an even, high-pitched package of continuous sound. By the time I pulled into a parking space in front of the Horace Mann School, I could see the children running, skipping rope, climbing the slide and the monkey bars, and huddling in colorful groups at the periphery of the playground. The soccer field was soggy and thus empty, so the blacktop of the schoolyard proper was crowded with bodies that bobbed and bounced.

As I approached the gate to the fenced yard, two small boys, probably in second or third grade, greeted me. "Hey! Are you a substitute or something?" "No, I'm just here because I'd like to learn about some of the things you and your friends do at recess." "Go for it," one of them said, thumbs pointing upward, and then they walked away. At this first visit, I found myself besieged by questions relevant to my role and purpose. I explained simply about my interest in the music they made as they played, and I saw the children chatter, curious about the tape and video recorders slung over my shoulder, and my rather fancy leather-bound notebook. "What are we? Your guinea pigs?!" one of the older girls asked. Her friend elbowed her. "Hey, if she wants to look, let her look. Maybe we'll be famous," she said as she eyed my tape recorder. (By the third visit of five observation sessions, the children had come to take me for granted, a part of the schoolyard "furniture." I realized that even when I moved from one location to another, I had passed into obscurity as they became centered again on their own activities.)

The Horace Mann School

Horace Mann School is located in a working-class neighborhood within the limits of a large metropolitan city. The 400 children enrolled there are largely Euro-
American. There are 48 children of Asian descent, mostly of Japanese and some of Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds, and 35 African American children. Over three-quarters of the children’s families are intact, with both father and mother present in the home. In the greatest number of cases, both parents work, often in professional and managerial positions. There are few bilingual families, and most children are at least third-generation Americans.

The school’s neighborhood comprises postwar bungalows and ranch homes, many framed by neatly manicured lawns and flower-and-rock gardens. A few high-rent apartment complexes form the neighborhood’s southern boundary, with views of the lake and mountains. There are several small shopping centers in the vicinity, each with a grocery, pharmacy, video store, and assorted specialty shops. Within walking distance of Horace Mann School are six churches and one synagogue, all of which attract a fair share of worshipers on weekends.

The children at Horace Mann dress casually but carefully. Boys wear collared shirts and full-length pants, usually black or blue cotton or jeans. Several of the younger girls wear dresses, but by third grade, most are in cotton or corduroy pants with odd or matching shirts or sweaters. Many of the younger girls display rather elaborate bows or clips in their hair. Tennis shoes are de rigueur footwear for all children, and hightops are especially popular with the older boys. There is no official dress code in the school, yet an unofficial one is noticeably in play.

While the brown-brick school building itself was built in the late 1940s, the schoolyard itself appears far newer. The leather swing seats in the playground are bright red and blue, and there is a sprawling cedar and steel complex of platforms, large tubes for tunneling, climbing ladders, and a spiraling covered slide that occupies nearly one-quarter of the yard. There is various play paraphernalia in use at any given time: basketballs, volleyballs, baseballs and bats, tennis balls (but no rackets) in sight, a badminton set, plastic jump ropes, and a somewhat flimsy set of plastic horseshoes. One hopscotch and two four-square designs are painted on the blacktop, and two basketball hoops are attached to the outside wall of the gymnasium. It seemed that no stones were left unturned in an attempt to provide for the recreational needs of children.

At Play

In my grand sweep of children’s play behaviors at the Horace Mann schoolyard, I heard and saw a tremendous variety of sounds, movements, styles, and interactions. Some children made use of school equipment, particularly jump ropes and basketballs, and the swings and play complex were always occupied. On days when the ground was dry enough, groups of older children (chiefly grades four, five, and six) occupied the field to play loosely organized games of soccer or baseball. Yet many children played without “props,” in games of tag and make-believe—enactments of stories they knew from books, TV, and videotapes. Some
strolled in groups of two and three, telling jokes, and talking excitedly about what they did the night before or planned for the evening to come. Freestyle movement was also common, from running, which, while prohibited, was nonetheless very much in evidence, to skipping and hopping that had no apparent link to games.

Children tended to play in same-age and same-gender groups, and often in same-class groups as well. Girls from one fourth grade, for example, formed two small groups and one duo but did not mix with the girls from the other fourth grade, who formed their own play groups. Likewise, third-grade girls jumped rope in two groups, defined by the class to which they belonged. Boys on the blacktop engaged in more aggressive play than girls and often made bodily contact with each other, sometimes pretending to fight and occasionally fighting “for real.” Girls’ play involved formal games with ordered sequences, turn-taking, and a greater use of words as compared to boys’ penchants for shouting and noise-making. Both boys and girls exhibited continuous motor activity, but while boys typically used their whole bodies, the movement of girls often showed an isolation of one or two body parts, such as clapping and stamping.

The play activities during the noon hour were heavily laden with sing-song taunts, calls and cries with definitive pitches, and a wide array of rhythms conveyed through clapping, patting, stepping, and tapping. The supposed childhood “ur-song” was occasionally—though not regularly—evoked. This entailed the singing of a descending minor third (sol-mi), to which a rising fourth was sometimes added. This pattern was frequently given to name-calling or the giving of directions or to signal the end of a game like hide-and-go-seek.

Other pitch patterns featured intervals of the second, fifth, and octave. Their occasions varied, including the call of one seven-year-old girl to her friend,

the chant of a rhyme learned in class by two second-grade girls,

and the heartfelt singing of one six-year-old girl as she pumped on a swing.
These melodic chants appeared to be spontaneously generated but were likely to have been influenced by earlier musical experiences.

Two third-grade girls jumped out a hopscotch pattern on the painted blacktop, singing familiar songs as they jumped. I heard segments of a TV theme, a few commercial jingles, a verse of “Oats, Peas, Beans, and Barley” (an Anglo-American singing game), and many repetitions of “Sansa Krama” (a singing game from Ghana). Children were playing with the music they knew from their various experiences in and out of school, sometimes preserving intact and sometimes altering in small ways the text or musical content of these melodies.

At the monkey bars, two fifth-grade girls were perched at the top, talking. Below them, one girl was jumping, her arms raised to reach them. She was chanting:

\[ \text{Jump down! Jump down!} \]

Her friends soon joined in, adding to her rhythm:

\[ \text{huh - uh huh - uh} \]

Together, these two phrases formed a hocketed, holistic pattern.

On one occasion, four eight-year-old boys spent close to ten minutes in the rapping of a rhythmic rhyme. As one leader spoke several phrases, the other three boys produced a rhythmic ostinato with their voices as a background “track” to the words.

\[ \text{Group} \]

\[ \text{Solo} \]

\[ \text{Hey! You and me, that’s how it’s gonna be. We be} \]

\[ \text{walking, talking, power to the people ranges.} \]
Each boy took his turn at rapping the phrases, and each led the chant before assuming the part of the rhythmic background. As they rapped and sounded their background ostinato, the boys thrust themselves into some of the characteristic moves of the MTV rappers they might have seen.

On the swings, two third-grade boys were laughing and shouting “go, go, go.” They were pumping their legs with great energy, each contesting for the highest arc, the most quickly. Next to them, two third-grade girls were swinging at the same high speed, screaming “teach-er” repeatedly, a raised pitch on the first syllable, and the second descending a minor third. (There were no teachers present, so the meaning of that call was unclear to me.) Four sixth-grade girls were standing near the swings, laughing and talking in an animated fashion, their hands and arms flying, their torsos twisting. One moved her feet sideways in a pattern that ended in a hop, and was soon followed in mirror image by the others:

Singing Games

Several jump-rope chants and songs, counting-out rhymes, hand-clapping songs, and singing games comprised the formal, more complete displays of musical play. Peter and Iona Opie, both renowned for their thorough examinations of children’s lore since the mid-1950s, claimed that singing games (some apparent since antiquity) were in their “final flowering” prior to their abandonment by children to TV and other technological attractions; they wondered aloud whether the singing game tradition would still be alive in the next century (1985, p. 29). In the Horace Mann schoolyard, there was little evidence of its fading from prominence.

The principal participants in ring (circle) games and in hand-clapping and jumprope activities were first-, second-, and third-grade girls between the ages of six and nine. By the fourth grade, girls played more rarely, perhaps just often enough to remind them of the repertoire they had learned at a younger age. Jump-rope and hand-clapping activities, accompanied by rhythmic chants, seemed to peak in popularity in third grade, although there were jump-rope groups of girls from grades two through five in the Horace Mann schoolyard. Counting-out rhymes preceded games and operated as a means of determining teams or “sides.” Examples of these genres are found below, in “Miss, Miss” (jump rope), “Blue Bells” (jump rope), “Eeny Meeny” (counting-out), “Hey, Little Walter” (ring game), “My Sailor” (hand-clapping), “Little Sally Walker” (ring game), and “Jump In” (ring game/impersonation).

Along with “Blue Bells,” “Miss, Miss” is a jump-rope rhyme that requires no pitch-matching to perform. Both were chanted rhythmically, loudly, with accents and occasional rises and falls of the speaking voice. The third-grade children who presented this version of “Miss Miss” kept a very strong beat with their plastic-covered rope and articulated with precision the accents and the rests between the words of the chant.
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Miss, uh, Miss, uh. Pretty little miss, uh. When she misses, she misses like this.

Two third-grade girls jumped rope, facing each other and holding hands, as their classmates chanted the words to “Blue Bells.” The “yes, no, maybe so” could have been a remnant from another chant, but here it served more as a bridge between the first (“Blue Bells”) and second (“Ice Cream Soda”) sections. In the last two phrases, several of the chanting classmates added a “stamp-clap” motion as closure.

Blue-bells, cockle-shells, Ee-vy I-vey over.

I like coffee, I like tea. I like the boys and they like me.

Yes, no, maybe so. Ice cream, soda, cherry on top.

How many boy-friends do you got?

A group of nine girls and five boys from a fourth-grade class gathered in a tight circle one afternoon to choose sides for playing “Dungeon,” a type of game that combines hide-and-seek and tag (tagged players are sent as prisoners to a “dungeon,” hence the name). In choosing teams, players placed their right feet in the circle, and a designated counter tapped pulsively from one foot to the next while singing “Eeny Meeny.” This clapping chant knows many variants, with this minor tetratonic melody a resemblance of one encountered by Carol Merrill-Mirsky in Los Angeles (1988, p. 139).

Een-y meen-y min-e-ye moe. Catch a ghostie by the toe.

If he hol-lers let him go. Eeny meen-y min-e-ye moe!

Two second-grade girls sang “My Sailor” while alternating between patting each other’s vertically positioned hands on beats one and three and clapping their
own hands on two and four. They saluted on “sea” and “see.” In subsequent verses, they substituted “neck,” “chest,” “belly,” “knee,” and “shin” for “see,” tapping and slapping these various body parts. “My Sailor” is a popular melody that has been clapped or bounced with a ball in many English-speaking countries for at least sixty years (Opie and Opie, 1985, p. 468).

A group of second-grade girls formed a ring to perform “Little Sally Walker.” This historic verse and its game is classified by the Opies (1985, p. 167) as a “wedding ring,” in which one player is invited to crouch down in the middle of the circle until she chooses a new center-person on the word “best.” (In the original wedding games played by girls and boys, the boy chosen by the girl was to become her husband—or, at least, her kissing partner.) The version on the Horace Mann playground has been fairly well-known to African American girls for at least thirty years; another version collected in Los Angeles by Cecilia Riddell is strikingly similar (1990, pp. 301–4). Its many variants are found in the British Isles, and in the Caribbean as well (Opie and Opie, 1985, pp. 169–70).

“Jump In” was performed by nine children (seven girls and two boys) from a first-grade class. They stood in a ring and moved freestyle (stepping from one foot to the other, or swaying, or nodding) as they sang the minor third interval and chanted. With each repetition, a new child became the focus of the chant, claiming what she or he wanted to “be” (singer, dancer, teacher, spaceman) at the appropriate time. The other children gave a response to this “call,” then watched while
the lead child impersonated or danced the roles she or he claimed during “until the day I die.” This was followed in imitation by the group in the final phrase.6

In another ring, there were eight children from a second-grade class who were tiptoeing and spinning as they sang. They sang “Hey, Little Walter” in a “spooky” timbre, quietly and almost in a whisper. The song was a parody of “Wade in the Water,” a well-known African American spiritual, its verse followed by a whispered chant that mixed triplets with pulses and their eighth-note subdivisions. Each phrase had a distinctive movement to it, with children tiptoeing into, then out of, then back into the circle (with individual spins in place at the close of each phrase), and the last phrase a “free-fall-out” wiggling, spinning, and wild gesturing of the hands. At the chanted rhythm, children joined hands in the circle and moved clockwise on tiptoes, looking dramatically this way and that for “little Walter.”

Skillful Musicians

In these more formal means of children’s musical play—these games and activities—there are several noteworthy structural features. The melodic ranges of chil-
Children's own songs tend to fall within their speaking range, often from about G or A to just over an octave above (b). The few melodies that I had heard before in larger ranges were condensed by the young singers, modified by range and sometimes tonality, too. Pitch was invariably established by the leader of the game or activity, or by the loudest (or louder) child. Songs and chants of this nature are more frequently arranged in strophic form, with each verse sung to the same melody; several showed this trait ("My Sailor," "Jump In"). All these songs fell into simple duple 2/4 or 4/4 meter.

In every instance (including musical interactions observed but not described here), the songs and chants were accompanied by rhythmic movement. The rope kept the pulse in jump-rope songs, which was embellished by the players who created accents and occasionally jumped twice as fast as the pulse. In "My Sailor," the girls clapped hands steadily to match the song's pulse. Likewise, the counting-out rhyme ("Eeny Meeny") featured pulse-keeping by way of the counter's tapping of each child's foot while singing. In several of the activities, the hands and feet were often involved in clapping or stepping movements that matched the song's pulse or perhaps some of the melodic rhythms.

In just five hours, on five separate visits, I had experienced a rich musical spectrum at the Horace Mann schoolyard, from musical utterances, calls, cries, and shouts to the highly stylized singing games. Whether consciously created and practiced according to the "rules" of a song's tradition, or arising from the sheer need to express or communicate, more than an earful of children's musical moments could be had for the listening. Beyond knowing a shared repertoire, it was obvious that they were enjoying the playfulness of performing together; there were smiles, laughs, "arms around," and bouncelike, buoyant expressions.

In my fourth session, a fifth-grade girl came to me as I was sitting on one of the steps to the school, changing a battery in my tape recorder. She had been sent by her classmates to invite me to join them in learning one of their new hand-clapping patterns, a series of quick pats, snaps, claps, and slaps to an old rock-and-roll song called "Rockin' Robin." "We thought you'd been working pretty hard, running your tape recorder and writing fast notes and all, and that you might learn more about our music if you did it." In my subsequent struggle to learn the song and its movement, one matter became vividly clear: that schoolyard music, while seemingly whimsical, can require skillful listeners, singers, and players to do it right.

The Lakeshore Zebras

Because children's musical interests and abilities are already clearly evident by the time of their entrance to kindergarten (Moog, 1976; Scott-Kassner, 1992), I was curious as to what music—and how music—fits into their daily lives prior to schooling. I was drawn like a sleuth, a true bloodhound, to the pack of wee ones who wandered the rooms and playgrounds of the Lakeshore Child Development
Center. This was no cut-and-dried investigator’s assignment which I had imposed upon myself, however, and to which I would need to drag myself reluctantly to complete. Through two years as a volunteer music teacher at the preschool, I had become enamored of the educational program, the teachers, and the youngsters. Yet beyond the realm of our music sessions, I had not had occasions for carefully noticing the music which children embrace and use by themselves, beyond their teachers’ intervention. I came away from eight mornings of observations one June with new eyes and ears, as I learned from the Lakeshore Zebras—a group of three- and four-year-olds—just how incessant and integrated music was within their playful lives.

The Lakeshore Mission

Lakeshore Child Development Center (LCDC, or “the center”) is located in a gentrified section of the city, in a neighborhood of homes that hang on bluffs overlooking the city and its waterfront. The community was recently rated as one of the most affluent in the country, with household incomes averaging $130,000 per year. All but three of the children enrolled at LCDC live within a two-mile radius of the preschool, well within the perimeter of this prosperous community. Their parents can well afford the monthly fee of $750 for full-time toddlers, $700 for the older, out-of-diapers crowd.

Nineteen years ago, the center was founded by the current director and two of her colleagues, all graduates of the early childhood education program at the nearby university. They recognized the need for an “educationally substantive” preschool and child-care facility in the area, so they established themselves in an office space at the end of a rather posh set of specialty shops. They grew from just one to four interconnected offices which they converted into three “pods” of children, and a combined office, kitchen, and storage area. There are grassy play yards on two sides of the building, each with climbing equipment, picnic tables, scooters, and tricycles. In the larger of the two yards, there are also two swings, a sandbox, a small vegetable garden, and several mature trees to which a wooden ladder had been nailed.

The pods were named at their inception for animals of the zoo, and membership in them is determined by age. The Pandas comprise eight children between twenty-four and thirty-six months, the Zebras are eight children who turned three by the first of September, and the Lions are the ten four- and five-year-old prekindergarten children who will enter public or private school the following year. The children are engaged in activities and eat lunch, play, and nap in their separate pod areas, but the playgrounds are the “commons” onto which children from all pods can converge.

The LCDC staff claims as their mission the provision of “high quality educational and recreational experiences in a safe and supportive environment.” The
parents' handbook explains that the center's program "allows for children to learn and grow at their own unique pace" by undertaking activities that are appropriate to children's interests and individual levels of development. These activities are concrete and community-based, with many opportunities to develop conceptual knowledge through hands-on experiences in school and on field trips. The wide and varied activities offered at LCDC span the gamut of the academic and pre-academic knowledge domains in the arts and the sciences, with special attention given to the development of "language skills, number concepts, large and fine muscle coordination, and cooperative play in music and art activities."

Paula, the director of the center, explained that she, her three certified early childhood education teachers, and an afternoon teacher's aide are intent on offering experiences that emanate from a developmental perspective. She asserted that they gear their program according to "typical textbook stages" of children's developmental knowledge and skills, but she quickly added that they "make a point to seek out each child's strengths and needs" and are sensitive to where he or she individually lands on a developmental continuum. Paula remarked that during weekly staff meetings, she and her teachers meet to design experiences relevant to the needs of individual children and to determine how they might coordinate activities within and across pods according to particular themes. In units such as "alone/together," family and community, animals of the rain forest, or "spring things," the teachers spin ideas for integrating music, painting, storytelling, movement, and creative dramatics to reinforce centerwide themes they have selected.

Thus, even though the toddling Pandas might be channeled toward the discrimination of colors and shapes while the prekindergarten Lions focused on prereading and -writing skills, the broader themes allow for a sense of unity across the pods for the sake of sharing resources and experiences (visitors, videotapes, and field excursions) that enrich and stimulate children at their individual levels of learning. Weekly movement classes by a trained dance educator and my own weekly music sessions are also prepared with the center's developmental and thematic considerations in mind.

Musical Times with the Zebras

The eight Zebras are at home in their bright green room with one door opening to the center hall and another to the play yard. Katie, Sarah, Robbie, Lana, Eric, Tyler, Clara, and Molly are the Zebras, and by June they are all in their late threes and early fours. After nearly a year as Zebras, they will graduate to the Lions group at the end of the summer. There are large prancing zebras painted across two of the walls of their room, a sink in one corner, a long table with seven chairs just a few feet from the sink, two play corners (one with dress-up clothes and the other set up with Legos, erector-set parts, a train set, and some puppets), cup-
boards and shelves lining another wall, and a large space for movement and free play in the center of the room. I located myself in various places in the room and outdoors as they played in one spot or another, taking my tape and video recorders with me as I went. Their teacher, Tanya, carried on with her program of activities as if I was not there, all through the eight mornings I spent with them.

On my first visit, Eric wanted to know what instruments I had brought for them to play. He was soon joined by Tyler and Clara, who sat down expectantly in front of me awaiting a sing-and-play session to begin. Eric started to sing “Oranges and Lemons,” one of our recent favorites, and soon Tyler, Clara, and Sarah chimed in. When I explained that I was here to watch and listen to them play, the children retreated for awhile (although they returned sporadically to tell me a story, ask for my help, tattle and blame one of their little friends for some mishap, or share their projects).

Most of the activity during the month of June was happening outside in the play yards. I turned my attention to the four girls at a picnic table who were painting lacy paper doilies. “I’m going to wear a dress of these doilies at a party,” piped Katie. “I’ll be dancing” (she vocalized on loo and la a melody in triple meter that resembled an eighteenth-century minuet) “and my lacy pink and yellow dress will flutter in the wind. You know, a beautiful princess.” Her friends seemed to know exactly the image she was conjuring up for them, for they nodded in agreement as they blotched their doilies with tissues that spread and smeared the paints in various images.

“Let’s go to the pet store,” suggested Clara to Sarah. The two of them trotted in through the open door to the dress-up corner of the Zebras’ room. As Clara pulled on a large flowery hat and Sarah wrapped herself in a multicolored scarf with fringes, they talked together.

Sarah: “OK. I’d like a dog for my little girl.”

Clara: “You’ll have to take Meeko instead.” She handed Clara a stuffed raccoon.

Sarah: “Can you paint with all the colors of the wind?” She intoned the words much like the melody to the popular ballad from Pocahontas. “That’s not Flit, you know.”

Clara: “No! Meeko’s my friend, on the riverbank. He’s just at the end, Meeko, my friend.” Sarah danced the raccoon in the air as she rhythmically chanted her spontaneous rhyme. Tanya later verified that it was spontaneous, possibly prompted by the focus she had recently given in their “circle time” to rhymes and rhyming words.

Robbie had dumped a large basket of colored blocks out on the floor. With a cowboy hat and oversized boots on, he clumped across the floor telling no one in particular that “I’m going to catch a mouse in here.” He held the basket out, calling “here, mouset” in a sustained sol-mi pattern. He soon abandoned the mouse-catching for a wheel-rolling activity, to which he chanted
In the garden one morning, Tanya was picking green beans, and Lana, Eric, Tyler, and Molly were with her. Tanya sang a triadic melody to “Where are you, bean?” that set off a series of the children’s recitative-like comments. As Lana groped for a bean to pick, she repeatedly chanted:

Eric’s voice rang out a full octave:

Tyler followed with another large melodic leap:

Molly and Lana formed a small chorus with Tyler, repeating this leaping tune. One melodic phrase led to the next, each one utilizing the triad of pitches that Tanya had initiated in her opening phrase.

An old blue and white painted wooden wagon proved quite popular with the children. Katie sat enjoying a ride in it one day as Molly pushed her over the humpy ground, vocalizing up and down a minor third on ah. There were no words to her arhythmic tones, just a songful expression of sheer pleasure. Robbie ran up to them with a stick he was holding diagonally across his chest like a guitar, and as he pretended to strum, he sang:

Katie and Molly turned sharply away, and as they did so, they both took up Robbie’s melody.

Late one sunny morning, Clara, Sarah, and Lana were playing in the sandbox. They had all taken off their shoes and were hovering over small plastic pots that they had filled with sand. At Sarah’s request, Tanya sat a pail of water at the side of the sandbox, and the three girls were quietly scooping up water with their shovels and dribbling it into their pots of sand. The cool water and the grainy wet sand aroused their musical utterances. As Clara patted the sand with her shovel,
she chanted the word “crunch” in a syncopated pattern. She took a breath, and then added words and pitches:

First you get a shovel, then you get a pail. Crunchy, crunchy, cr-u-u-u-n-ch.

Sarah was digging her hands into her pot of sand and water, using Clara’s rhythm for her spontaneous song.

Feel-ie, feel-ie, sandy. Sandy, sandy, feel!

Robbie took the same rhythm as he hammered a stick into the sand with his shovel. The scene was idyllic, the little girls looking like those from a pastel-colored beach scene in an impressionistic painting. I hoped that the mood would hold for awhile, but in the next instant Molly had jumped with both feet into the pail. Clara, Sarah, and Lana all called for Tanya, their voices rising and then falling in complaint. As Tanya diverted the children’s attention by complimenting them on their “neat and tasty-looking” sandpies, Molly stood firmly in place, happily expressing herself in song:

I love to stay in the wa-ter. The colder the better it is. It’s happy here, happy water here.

Inside the Zebra pod one chilly day, Katie, Eric, and Tyler were building a small city of Lego blocks. Eric had constructed a gas station, he claimed, and was in the process of building a high chimney atop it. On doo, he alternated from do to sol in a straightforward, steady-beat pattern. He had set the pitches for the children’s chant that followed. When Tyler attempted to add another block to Eric’s chimney, four inches of it came tumbling down. Katie gasped, wagged her finger in Tyler’s face, and then chided him:

If you drop it, pick it up.

Katie’s chant became like a mantra as Eric soon added his own voice and wagging finger to it, the two of them singing to Tyler, who by then was rebuilding the chimney. Nearly an hour later, while the children sat around the table eating their
lunches, Molly dropped a pickle out of her sandwich. Tyler sang the very same mantra melody that had been sung to him, adding a “tag” ending to it.

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{If you drop it, pick it up with your mouth!}
\end{align*}
\]

In between mouthfuls of yogurt, cheese, ravioli, and cookies, a litany of silly “tags” were sounded by various children: “with your spoon,” “with a stone,” “with your nose,” “with a shovel,” “with a banana.” They were singing and laughing, and quite unaware of their amazing ability to imitate Tyler’s (Katie’s) melody so accurately. I found myself in awe of these young children, of their skillful listening and capacity to reproduce music, of their spontaneous addition of partial phrases to a “root phrase,” and of their retention of a melody for earlier play until now.

Long on Music

Musical spontaneity ran rampant among the eight Zebras at the Lakeshore Child Development Center where, unchecked and unhampere (and not redirected) by adults, children frequently interspersed music throughout their playful activities and social interactions. They vocalized their own invented rhymes, chants, and tunes, and their rhythms were as visible in their movement as they were audible. Their melodies consisted of seconds (as in the sandbox songs of Clara and Sarah), thirds and broken triads (as in the “bean” songs), and leaps of a fifth (as in Katie’s signal tune of dropping and picking up). In straightforward pulses and subdivisions (notated as quarters and eighths), and occasionally through triplets and syncopations, their voices rose and fell with the words they used to communicate to their friends, to think aloud, and sometimes to express their feelings to no one in particular.

There were unusual musical moments throughout the children’s meanderings, with the meters of Molly’s water song among the most noteworthy. That she would move her melody midstream out of a lilting 6/8 feeling is indicative of a change in her manner of thought and expression, from a melodious reflection to a declaratory statement—perhaps not unlike the turn a sopranino may take out of an aria to a recitative. But the metric shift of the melody to a definitive sense of 3+2+2 is of further interest as a stunning example of the manner in which text presides over melody in children’s music-making. Metric shifts in music may be perceived by musicians as an advanced concept to be developed late in a student’s pedagogical sequence and as a phenomenon that can only be accomplished by sophisticated musicians who perform complex works by Igor Stravinsky, Olivier Messiaen, and Györgi Ligeti. Yet here was a preschool child who had demonstrated the concept with ease and nonchalance, and with considerable feeling. It is striking that later, once out of her childhood, Molly may encounter metric shifts in the
music her studio teacher or ensemble conductor assigns her. She is then as likely
as anyone else to struggle with it intellectually, never remembering that she had
once expressed it so naturally. If, through training, the musical sensitivity of chil-
dren like Molly could be captured and reinforced, their natural musicianship might
then be retained and used as the basis of greater musical knowledge and skills.

I pondered Paula’s assertion of “typical textbook stages” of children’s de-
velopment and could not help but wonder whether a certain few textbooks (and
plenty of actual instruction) might require the sort of revision that could reflect
the considerable perception and performance abilities which the LCDC Zebras had
demonstrated. These youngsters were exuding music in more ways than I could
have fathomed, and much of it seemed to be their own creative expressions—
inspired and nurtured as they were by the musical experiences they have already
known in their short lives. It seemed clear to me that they were “long on music,”
in that many of their daily doings were wrapped up into the musical expressions
they could demonstrate. I knew that as a result of what I had observed, I would
need to find ways of bringing children’s musical utterances and complete songs
into my future music sessions with them. I vowed that somehow, I would find
ways to blend their music with my music.

The Rundale School Cafeteria

As teachers daily gravitate to the faculty lounge for their lunchtime salads and
sandwiches, they deposit their classes of children at the gateway to the Rundale
School Cafeteria. Even a first-timer like me had no difficulty locating the cafeteria,
following her nose to the source of the scents of charcoaled cheeseburgers, fried
potatoes, cucumber salad, and banana pudding; indeed, by late morning, the
aromas permeate the halls. At the cafeteria’s gateway, the scents seemed more
institutional, made less pleasant by the spilled milk from a previous lunch that had
gone undetected and had soured far off in one corner or another.

An initial peek over the turnstiles brought the cafeteria’s bright yellow, blue,
green, red, and orange tables into focus, each connected to matching benches that
ran the table’s length on the two sides. Against a closely cropped brown carpet,
they appeared like the paints on an artist’s neutral palette. There were basketball
hoops hanging at two ends of the room, and a raised stage lined the far side and
was framed by two doors, each crowned with a red-lit Exit sign. A microphone
stand was placed center-stage, its wires plugged in and ready for use.

The children filed through the turnstile entrance, passing a table where a
stocky woman sat with a cash box. Beyond her, three women in the kitchen were
working in assembly-line fashion to fill Styrofoam and plastic containers with the
daily specials; they were talking and laughing as they worked. The children paid
their lunch fee: $1.35 for a lunch pack of hot and cold food, or twenty cents for
white or chocolate milk. The line moved quickly as the children offered their
prepaid lunch tickets or small change to the cash box woman. They picked up
their purchases and headed for a table designated for their class. They seated
themselves, most already wearing their sweaters and jackets, many of which were
made of rain-repellent material and had hoods.

Rundale is a suburban school in a bedroom community for upwardly mobile
professionals who commute to two larger cities north and south of it or who regularly
fly out to their appointments from the nearby international airport. There are
older homes at the hub of the old town center of Rundale, but spanning new
subdivisions of homes and condominiums stand on land given up by farmers as
recently as a decade ago. The school is like most of the suburb: contemporary,
colorful, and still growing.

I spent four lunch hours in the Rundale School cafeteria (literally an hour
each time), watching three shifts of children arrive, eat, and depart for their lunch-
time recess in the playground. My location was a table nearest to the door that
was reserved for slower eaters; when the bell signaled the start of the lunch
group’s outdoor recess, those few children who were still finishing their meal
joined me at this table. I held no discussions with children but recorded on paper
and occasionally on audiotape those musical behaviors I could manage to see and
hear. Since I chose not to “rove” much, I undoubtedly caught only a small fraction
of the musical sounds and interactions there may have been.

Music at the Meal

For each shift, there were two classes of each grade level who filled about twelve
tables. They made their way, walking at various tempi, skipping, trotting, gallop-
ing, hopping, “clomping” loudly, or walking on tip-toe. They sat side by side,
shoulder to shoulder, twelve children to each table. Many of the children wiggled
throughout their meal, several in a regular rhythmic manner. Some of the little
ones whose legs were too short to reach the floor swung them back and forth in
the space beneath the table. They bobbed their heads rhythmically or manipulated
lunch boxes, cardboard lunch packs, foil tins, or milk cartons across their table
space in recurring patterns. There was no music piped into the cafeteria, but evi-
dently some internalized music may have been driving them to emit sounds, move-
ments, and gestures that were as regular as the clock’s ticking (though not in the
same tempo).

A glance down one table of first-grade children offered a snapshot of the
polyrhythmic texture of their movement. One little girl was pulsively rotating her
sandwich on its Saran wrap in half-circles in front of her. The next girl was tapping
at top speed the base of two carrots on the table. Next to her, a boy was
bouncing the bottom of his milk carton on the table in a syncopated pattern:
\( \uparrow \downarrow \uparrow \downarrow \). Still another boy was waving his cookie, a wafer that he
had bitten in the vague shape of a truck, drawing a slow figure-eight in front of
him and his friend. One girl was loudly sucking her lollipop in a rhythm-  

mic pattern, thrusting her head upward before each lick. Several others at the table were nodding or shaking their heads, stretching their arms repeatedly, or twisting in their seats. Another boy was playing out a pantomime of strumming on a guitar. Quite remarkably, a few children were producing regular rhythmic gestures with their arms or head even as their feet swung independently of these gestures, their various body parts creating polyrhythmic textures of sound and movement.

Although most of the children’s interactions contributed to the undiscernible din of sounds (made louder yet “dinnier” by the barnlike acoustics of the space), the gist of some nearby conversations was notable. Two third-grade girls compared the sizes of their apples, while two boys commented on the Toy Story illustration on the cover of one of their lunch boxes. Two fourth-grade girls were gesturing wildly while they described to each other some of the swimming strokes they knew. Several fifth-grade boys recalled play by play the events of a recently televised boxing match, punching and jabbing the air as they went. One boy was enacting a particular strategy; “And then he did this, . . .”

\[\text{Music notation}\]

In response to the demonstration, three of his friends began to push at each other, bringing a monitor swiftly to the scene to separate them.

More rhythmic segments were evident to me than vocalizations, perhaps because of the “live” nature of the space (and my choice to stay situated in one place throughout the periods of observation). Yet pitched segments did resound, from minute melodic fragments to whole melodies. One older girl called to her friend, “Yoo hoo,” singing it loudly as a descending minor-third interval. A third- or fourth-grade boy was singing repetitively on da:

\[\text{Music notation}\]

Two small girls were piecing together a hand-clapping song, singing in between their bites of food:

\[\text{Music notation}\]

One second-grade girl alternated between sol and mi as she sang:

\[\text{Music notation}\]
Three girls were singing bits and pieces of favorite songs: “Doo Wah Diddy Diddy,” “Step Back, Sally,” “Colors of the Wind” (from Pocahontas), “Can’t You Feel the Love Tonight” (from The Lion King), and themes from Mr. Rogers (“It’s Such a Good Feeling”), Jeopardy, Friends, and Lamb Chops Play Along.

The rhythms of two older boys were particularly notable for their complexity and interlocking patterns. Finished with their lunches, they were waiting for the sound of the bell to usher them out to the playground. One sat straddled sideways across the bench and used it as the “drum” for an ostinato pattern he tapped with two plastic forks:

![Music notation]

Meanwhile, his friend was devising a longer pattern that he pounded with his fists and hands on the table. He played the accented beats with his fists and then opened to the palm of his hands.

![Music notation]

Together, they played this rhythm for several minutes, while several children at their table bobbed their heads as an expression of interest and approval. A monitor was ambling her way toward them just as the bell signaled their recess; she stopped, perhaps to think about whether to proceed with an admonition or to let them go. While she was still considering her next move, the boys were already racing out the door.

**Monitors of Sound**

The volume of the children’s voices increased as they settled into their meals, as they were energized by the starch, sugar, and protein they were consuming. By midway through the period, the children were very animated. Some were turning from one side to the other, gesturing with their hands in elaborate ways, shouting to their neighbors seated down the table or at other tables scattered through the room. Some of the gestures were playful, while others were clearly teasing and even hostile or rude. Since the teachers were at lunch in the faculty room, it was the monitors who were charged with keeping some sense of order in the Rundale School cafeteria. As one monitor remarked, “We are their surrogate teachers and parents for 20 percent of their day.” She added, somewhat begrudgingly, “We ought to be paid like them,” referring to the teachers.

There were three women who served as monitors during the lunch periods. All were in their later thirties or early forties. All were mothers, but none had children at Rundale. They wore slacks and sweaters, covered by light blue denim aprons. They greeted the children, helped a few of the younger ones open their
milk cartons, guided them to filling one seat after the next at the tables, and circulated through the small maze of lunching children at their tables to “keep the peace.” Two of the monitors also served time at playground duty, while the head monitor was there to supervise a small cadre of fifth- and sixth-grade children who helped with cleanup at the close of the lunch hour.

Occasionally, the head monitor stepped up to the on-stage microphone. She sternly reminded children of the extent of sound she was willing to accept. “May I have your attention.” The talking quickly faded, and sounds of the ventilator, a dishwasher in the kitchen, and some distant cries from the school playground could be heard. She continued: “I hear too many loud sounds, even shrieks from cute little girls. I want you to lower your voices. I want indoor—not outdoor—voices. No shouting, no singing, no playing the tables like drums. If you can’t keep these rules now, you’ll sit and think about them during your recess.” As the children were dismissed to the playground by the buzzing of the bell soon afterward, I was struck by two overlapping thoughts: (1) the complementary activities of eating and making music—one social event quite naturally stimulates the other, and in many communities and contexts the combination is not only acceptable but encouraged, and (2) the extent to which these musical behaviors were seen to be disruptive by those in charge, and thus needful of restriction. The Rundale School children were criticized for their participatory, albeit scattered and somewhat incidental, musical behaviors in the cafeteria, while in many cultures people typically sing, play, and dance before, during, or following their meals. I could not help but wonder whether children’s behaviors could somehow be harnessed and viewed in a more favorable light, such that their musicicking could be accepted as a positive feature in their daily lunch experience.

On another day, the head monitor again focused on children’s singing and drumming in her advisory words from the stage. Several groups of children were called down for the music she perceived as chaotic and disruptive. “You guys are way too loud. It’s not too hard to lower your voices. You’re not to be talking from table to table, or singing.” She pointed to a group of fifth-grade girls. “That group of girls over there: leave the singing for music class, or stay after and see me. And guys—James and BJ—you better keep that drumming down, or you owe me recess.” The compartmentalization of music was reinforced here: It was seen as having its appropriate time (the music period) and place (the music room). Understandably, too many different musics at once are chaotic in a group of seventy or eighty children, but I found it intriguing that no one had considered a way of bringing music into the realm of mealtime as a means of focusing attention, coalescing behaviors, and socializing children in an orderly fashion—particularly due to evidence of its widespread coupling by children with their lunchtime socializing.

After the second announcement, one of the monitorial assistants wheeled around and winked at me, saying, “This must be a bad day. We don’t usually