

Music makes sound children

Andy Gwatkin, director of music specialists Sound Children and Drums for Schools explains why everyone should be making music, and how Sound Children can help.



How did it all start?

Well, as Drums for Schools we'd for many years been making a range of drums and hand percussion instruments for schools and we'd been getting very positive feedback from nurseries and early years teachers, who liked the natural materials and tactility of our instruments and who encouraged us to make smaller instruments. We did this and then last year we decided to do it properly, working with early years music experts Orly Zalel and annA rydeR to produce a completely new Early Years range – and so Sound Children was born.



www.soundchildren.co.uk

What are you trying to achieve?

You may laugh, but even so I have to say it – we believe that music and music-making are miraculous – a general panacea that works both individually and socially, promoting intelligence, health, communication, creativity and well-being. We know this from first-hand experience – from seeing how music transforms people and groups, even the very youngest new-born, the most 'disabled', the most 'difficult' school pupils, those with dementia, and those in prison. We know that music touches and transforms everyone. And so we believe, quite simply, that if everyone could have the opportunity to make music, then the world would be a better place. That's where we're coming from: it's what drives us to do whatever we can to make music-making accessible, it's why the Sound Children approach starts with new-borns (and why we believe we should actually be starting even earlier) and it's why we do our utmost to make our music resources affordable. Music-making makes sound children and sound children make sound grown-ups – it's as simple as that.

What makes Sound Children different?

We're idealists on a mission and I don't think there's anyone else out there who's quite as committed as we are to music-making and to making it accessible. We don't really care about money, except in so far as we know we need it in order to be able to do the things that we need to do. Also we try to provide a complete solution, not just a box of instruments

but everything a setting needs for embedding music-making into the daily routine. This includes musical instruments and kits, practitioner support, video examples, a resource library and CPD training. And we must be doing something right as Sound Children has already won and been short-listed for a host of awards for innovative and educationally effective musical instruments and kits.

What are the similarities between the Sound Children approach and the Montessori method?

We didn't start out as Montessorians, but the Sound Children approach to Early Years music making is completely in tune with the Montessori method. Exploration is the basis of our approach and our music kits and music cards all encourage and support open-ended musical exploration and allow the children to lead the process. We know that musical learning happens only by doing and especially by doing together – and this applies to both children and the grown-ups, who often learn much more from the children – so everything is designed to make it as easy as possible for the children (and the teachers) to make music together. Also

Sound Children instruments are real, not plastic toys: they're just like professional instruments but scaled-down to suit smaller players. They're all individually made by hand from natural, sustainably grown materials and children instinctively appreciate the quality, and materials and the fact that they're not being patronised. Children also learn to respond in a more sensitive and nuanced way with these than with plastic instruments.

What next?

Well, we know from research that one of the biggest hurdles in EY music is the lack of musical confidence of EY practitioners (and incidentally this is true also of teachers in schools) and so we'll be looking at other things we can do to help demystify music-making and to show the grown-ups just how natural, easy and fulfilling it is. We're also going to extend and improve our support and training for practitioners. Our experts Orly and annA already give free advice and answer questions via the website and we've also got lots of really useful video clips there, showing music-making in practice and we'll be adding to these and also adding some intensive, hands-on training sessions, which will be available via Skype as well as at regional training centres. We'll also be adding to our library of Early Years songs and rhymes, music-making ideas, recordings and research into children's development and music-making – all these resources will be freely available via the website. Lots to do.

Sound Children is the Early Years division of Drums for Schools Ltd and provides a complete music-making solution for nurseries, child minders and parents. www.soundchildren.co.uk