

# Children's Songs

## Fekete Istvan

According to the physical and spiritual progress of children we can distinguish between well specifiable age-groups. In accordance with the Hungarian practice syllabuses are made for day nursery, kindergarten and school age-groups which take into consideration the developmental stages and individual abilities inside the group.

The same principles, which are used in the selection of kindergarten and school songs, apply when we select children songs for church purposes. This article concentrates on musical and prosodic considerations talking about lyrics.

Mainly we concentrate in this article on the singing activities of the 0-3 years old age-group, but there will be times when we make a reference to older children. Family and Church can cooperate in this very open age to arouse children's interest in music and in imitation, to give them pleasure by playful singing and singing together. In this very young age we can prepare musical education in Church together with other communities (such as day nursery, family programs) and we can establish good musical taste. Children pass on readily to each other proper knowledge and behavior that is based on sound biblical foundations. Well established musical education - together with a playful mood, happiness, and an intimate relationship - these children will pass on gladly in their adulthood to their children. Preparing this way together to the kingdom for which Jesus thought us to pray:

*"Thy kingdom come"* (Mat. 6:10 ).

Stories from the Bible need to be presented in harmony of the understanding of a growing mind.

"Greater attention should be given by religious teachers to instructing the people in the facts and lessons of Bible history and the warnings and requirements of the Lord. These should be presented in simple language, adapted to the comprehension of children. It should be a part of the work both of ministers and parents to see that the young are instructed in the Scriptures.

Parents can and should interest their children in the varied knowledge found in the sacred pages. But if they would interest their sons and daughters in the word of God, they must be interested in it themselves. They must be familiar with its teachings, and, as God commanded Israel , speak of it, "when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Deuteronomy 11:19. Those who desire their children to love and reverence God must talk of His goodness. His majesty, and His power, as revealed in His word and in the works of creation." 1

"From the earliest times the faithful in Israel had given much care to the education of the youth. The Lord had directed that even from babyhood the children should be taught of His goodness and His greatness, especially as revealed in His law, and shown in the history of Israel . Song and prayer and lessons from the Scriptures were to be adapted to the opening mind." 2

This receptive age is the initial phase of musical education in the Church, which is formed by parents and teachers together. This is when further musical education can be established. For this reason we have to pay attention to the followings:

we have to provide to children musical material according to their development. and we have to choose from the most valuable material.

We can rely boldly on research results in church service. These thorough investigations examined the development of musical abilities of children, stating what kind of musical material should be given to the different age-groups. "Remaining faithful to the principles of Kodaly, we choose the best and valuable material: folklore, play of adults with children, folk songs to listen to, lied for setting the atmosphere." 3

Musical abilities - sensitivity, ear for music, singing, sense of rhythm, sense of form -, during activities, or during listening to singing, improve without separate practicing.

Bible classes for children require complex preparations. Often teachers of children classes cope with the task. The presence of parents needed especially in the youngest age. As soon as the little child can be taken to the church we have to arrange for activity for them. This way they can learn the songs together (coupled with movements) and they can repeat them at home. Children and adults can find a great pleasure in this.

1 E. G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 504.

2 E. G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 69.

3 Forrai Katalin: *Enek a bolcsodeben*. p. 9. Editio Musica Budapest , 1994.

This article above all will mention musical considerations in connection with this complex task. Taking into account musical considerations on their own would need special preparations, so the teacher, if he has a possibility, should ask for help of a person who is skilled in music who - for the time of teaching - would engage the attention of children. Sometimes the use of musical instruments is possible, too.

What musical considerations should be taken into considerations when songs are taught?

Since we talk about short songs, children can memorize them easily so there is no need to teach them line by line. Singing should be woven naturally into the course of activities or the telling of Bible stories. This way singing will become a part of teaching.

Children join in the singing spontaneously. First they only listen to the song then, as they grow, copy and hum it. In the beginning they pronounce certain sounds specifically. But parents and teachers act correctly when they teach accurate speaking. Set a good example; speak to children with words pronounced correctly. This applies to musical notes, too. The most attractive for children is singing. They are interested in musical instruments played on by the beloved person. Artificial music (such as tape recorder, television) is alien to the nature of children because that is impersonal; mere listening and watching never establishes a contact.

The characteristics of children's songs:

Repetition - rhythm, motive, melody.

Playful singing can be pleasure on its own, but real joy comes from repeated singing. So we have to repeat the song many times.

Certain motives are repeated several times in one melody. Children can memorize easier simple structures of rhythm and melody:

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Is - ten ré - gen al - ko - tott Min - den e - gy es vi - rá - got.

The rhythm of certain parts of the melody can alter according to the rhythm of the lyrics. This will not cause difficulties neither in singing neither in pronunciation. But the variation of the rhythm reminds them to the right pronunciation customary in speaking:

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írt ritmus:

énekel ritmus:

A-gya-got gyűj két láb-bal, Ke-verd ősz-sze poly-vá-val!

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For-mát hozz a tég-lá-nak, Majd a na-pon meg-szá-rad!

The rhythm of children songs is simple, generally consists of eighth notes and quarter notes. Though the example shown above contains sixteenth notes too, but this does not cause any difficulty because of the shortness of syllables. Children sing it with pleasure because of the rapid rhythm. You can see from this example too that the first note of the measure in children's song is always stressed and there cannot be a pause on the stressed places. This is always true in a Hungarian song.

Stress

People learning music often meet variations of stress placed in different places of measure. Musical stress generally is placed on the first note of the measure, and children's songs apply this principle. The place of musical stress was determined parallel to the development of modern music writing. Leopold Mozart explains in detail the music and playing:

"9. The stress of the expression, the accent or the forte in most cases falls on the *stressed* or *dominant* note. Italians call this note 'nota buona' (=good note = stressed part of the measure). But these *stressed of good* notes should be distinguished noticeably. These distinguished notes are the following: the note starting the quarter in every measure... So the first note should go on stressed until a change occurs.

10. Though good notes can be highlighted with a little forte, stress should be applied in these cases moderately."

The order of stress of Hungarian lyrics belonging to the music was worked out by researchers of folk music, according to the rules of language. "The thoughts and guidelines of Zoltan Kodaly, emphasized and explained in his writings, apply in every area of musical education."

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Hungarian language has its typical stress and rhythm. These characteristics should be kept in singing too. For this reason we should choose songs that meet these conditions. If children's songs follow the stress and rhythm of the spoken language this will have an effect on children's speech too: this will improve pronunciation. The first syllable of the words in Hungarian generally is pronounced louder. Other syllables of the word is never stressed.

In German and English singing upbeat is frequent, since in these languages the second or the third syllable can be stressed too. In translating these songs we should pay attention to avoiding that the syllable belonging to the upbeat cannot be unstressed, and the first note of the measure should be stressed: 6

Fordította: Fekete István Horst Gehann

Das will ich mir schreiben in Herz und Sinn  
A szí-vem-be ré-gen fel-ír-tam én

Other rules of prosody should be taken into consideration creating the harmony between music and lyrics.

Accompaniment, orchestration, harmony

Musical instruments can create an interest in bigger children. Live music is the most effective. Children can see - know and love - the person playing the instrument, and resulting from this everything that means music for them is formed in them. Grown-up people and students of music, who have at least 2-3 years of practice, can help in learning songs. We can often find only the melody of the song in the children's songbook. It is worth to play a simple accompaniment with the melodies, so have the small ones experience the joy of playing music together. One or two musicians are sufficient: an instrument playing the melody (recorder, violin), a piano (organ, harmonium). Lot of people like synthesizers but representing Biblical topics and worship purposes cannot be fulfilled with it - it wasn't designed for that purpose. It arises anxiety in children. Church organ is the most useful from among electronic instruments because it was modeled after real church organs and can substitute it well.

We should use classic and simple harmonies with songs. Complicated harmonies should be avoided by changing the key.

### Movements while singing

Children have an excessive need for moving. Most of the songs can be performed by movements. And the adequate movements should be taught by the teacher of children who has to do the movements together with them. This way songs will become the most appropriate method of discipline and satisfying their need of moving. This way children can memorize everything they hear. Children Bible lessons conducted this way will make them the next time more calm and will make their attention more active. Children need worship just as grown up people need it:

*"Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts', let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. "* - Joe. 2,16

If songs are taught together with movements that will not mean that later they will also move while singing. During the process becoming adult they will adapt themselves naturally to the customary worship. Paul's words are valid in this case:

*"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. "* - ICo. 13,11

### Tempo

In selecting the tempo we should pay attention to the abilities of children bearing in mind the differences between fast and slow. We can indicate to the eurhythm by walking.

Melody of songs for children is derived from the intonation and stress of everyday language. Melody is higher if stressed and lower if unstressed. Natural intonation noticeable in speech can be expressed in the smallest age by simple motives consisting of two notes (*s-m*). The youngest age- group sings this easily and clearly and we can sing the song together with them. Children repeat these songs joyfully and many times.

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magyarul:



Há-rom an-gyal jött el Áb-ra-hám - hoz

németül:



Drei En-gel kam zu Ab - ra - ham

Children time after time can try sing new notes. After *s-m* (flat third) comes *la* first. We can help this way the clear singing of three notes. Songs consisting of *d-r-m* (major third) have a different character. These songs are the next step in teaching children how to sing. Pentatonic scales consist of these notes, *d-r-m-s-l*, and are the most frequent among children's songs. Later, at around the age of eight, children learn how to sing clearly *thefa* note. We shouldn't force them to sing it clear earlier than this, because after a certain time they will be able to sing it between *m* and *s*.

They often try to play the melodies on an instrument (e.g. piano) when they have an opportunity. In these instances it is useful to encourage them, but we have to try to teach them thoughtfully the proper use of the instrument. This can establish the love of music, too.

## Form

It is important in establishing musical sense of form to feel the length of the smallest unit of music - the motif. This small "building block" of music has an effect not only on sense of form but on clear singing and skill of musical creativity. By using these, children's perceptibility, imagination and thinking will be improved. Its essence is, in 4/4 measure, to make them feel the four unit audible in time and to join it with movements and with visible distance. It is inaccurate to strengthen stress by counting, by beat, or by giving instructions to move (e.g. stamp their feet). Children have to feel and express on their own the stress found in music. By making them feel the forms, we can help them to be able to feel the form of more complicated pieces of music.

## Theme

Bible classes in church prepare independent understanding and studying of the Bible. In this our goal should be to teach proper forms of behavior. Studying individually with children will refer them to the personal relationship with Jesus, which is the most important part of Christian life.


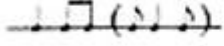

We can approach the various Biblical themes according to the developmental phases of children's life. We should choose Biblical stories for the smallest ones which do not include violent acts and do not talk about death. 7 Songs should not include ideas about spiritual life which are complicated and inconceivable for them.

## Singing of adults - only for listening

Parents and teachers should make an effort to sing only songs that are adequate for the age of the child. It should have simple rhythm, simple lyrics and narrow range, etc. These guiding principles are authoritative when we expect them to sing the song.

Of course, we can sing songs - only asking them to listen - which exceed their abilities, but never ask them to sing it with you.

Let us see in the following chart the characteristics of songs, intended to be sung by certain groups of children, according to Katalin Forrai: 8

	Kiscsoport	Középső csoport	Nagycsoport
	3-4 év	4-5 év	5-6(7) év
Hangterjedelem	3 - 4 (5) hang	3 - 6 hang	3 - 6 hang
Abszolút magasságban	d - h	c - c'	c - d'
Megtanulandó énekek	10-14	12-15	20-26
ritmus			

Az óvodai csoportokban egy év alatt megtanulandó énekek száma			
	Kiscsoport	Középső csoport	Nagycsoport
s-m	3-4	2-3	2
l-s-m	3-4	2-3	2
mrd	2-3	2-3	1-2
s-m-r-d	2	2-3	2-4
d-l.-s.	1	1-2	0
m-r-d-l.	0	1	2
s-m-d	0	1-2	1-2
r-d-l.-s.	0	0	2
m-r-d-l.-s.	0	0	2
l-s-m-r-d	0	0	6-8

Since children classes are not held five days a week, but most of the times only once, we have to pay attention to the number of songs taught to them.

May God bless the teachers, composers, song writers and editors.

7 Mihalec Dora es Mihalec Gabor: Gyermekszombatiskolai foglalkozasok (0-5 évesek számára). Advent Kiado, Budapest

8 Forrai Katalin: Enek az ovodaban. Editio Musica Budapest, 1974, Tizenkettedik kiadas, p. 11

4 Leopold Mozart: Hegeduiskola. (1756) Tizenkettedik fejezet, 9. 10, bekezes. Magus Kiado, Budapest , 1998. ' Forrai Katalin: Enek az ovodaban. Editio Musica Budapest, 1974, Tizenkettedik kiadas, p. 11 ' Hangzik ajo hir, Gyermekenekek, 6. Advent Kiado, Budapest , 1994